INVESTIGATING ENGLISH MEDIUM INSTRUCTION PROVISION IN A KAZAKHSTANI UNIVERSITY: THE IDEALS AND REALITIES OF EMI LEARNING

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Abstract. *As one of the many non-Anglophone countries where English is taught as a foreign language, Kazakhstan is actively involved in the processes aimed at internationalising higher education. One way to achieve this is by increasing the number of English-taught courses, i.e. introducing English Medium Instruction (EMI) for non-linguistic courses. However, there are concerns about how effectively this process is provided in practice and how students and teachers themselves perceive it. This research paper explores some aspects of EMI provision in one private Kazakhstani university, examining the alignment and differences between the theoretical ideals and practical realities of EMI. Specifically, it aims to examine the students' and teachers' perceptions of EMI provision in terms of reasons of EMI choice, English proficiency, translanguaging, and personal concerns. Through this investigation, the paper sheds light on the challenges and opportunities faced by both instructors and students in navigating EMI provision within the context of higher education in Kazakhstan. The online survey among 176 students and 31 teachers, analysed in a quantitative way, reveals some discrepancies between teachers' and students' perceptions regarding EMI reasons, language competence and translanguaging practices. This indicates the need for revising and clarifying existing institutional and national policies regarding EMI provision taking into consideration the voiced challenges on the part of the teachers and students.*

Key words: *English as a medium of instruction, EMI provision, higher education, content teachers, students' perceptions*

1. INTRODUCTION

To date, a considerable amount of research has been conducted worldwide on English Medium Instruction (EMI) and its implementation and provision in higher education (Byun et al. 2011; Dearden 2014; Goodman et al. 2022a, 2022b; Macaro and Aizawa 2022; Kováčiková and Luprichová 2023). In this paper, EMI is defined as "the use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English" (Dearden 2014). This growing

phenomenon is also referred to as EME (English Medium Education) in higher educational institutions (HEIs). (Dafouz and Smit 2016).

Across the world, EMI has become one of the central pursuits of education since English proficiency, coupled with knowledge and skills in the specialty, open up broader opportunities for university graduates, including wider career perspectives, successful functioning in the international labour market, being confident multilinguals as well as access to an abundance of scientific and subject-specific literature (Curle et al. 2020, 3). As a result, in an attempt to pursue these goals and provide these opportunities, many countries have joined international organizations aimed at integration into a global world. Kazakhstan, a non-English speaking country in Central Asia, was no exception. By entering the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in 2010, it became one of the first countries in the region to sign the Bologna declaration (Analytical Report 2022). From a national perspective, EMI in Kazakhstan is a means to develop the country economically and politically (Dearden 2014, 15).

Since the introduction of the EMI format of delivering courses in non-linguistic majors, Kazakhstani HEIs have started adopting relevant policies, designing and launching numerous English-taught educational programs and developing various methodologies for the appropriate implementation. Moreover, the number of HEIs with EMI has grown considerably, from 42 in 2015 to 70 in 2020 (Tajik et al. 2022a). Given that the academic subjects are taught by content teachers who are not language specialists and for some part do not have an appropriate level of English language proficiency, this, in turn, along with the opportunities, resulted in the emergence of challenges that needed to be urgently addressed. Accordingly, a number of Kazakhstani studies emerged that sought to explore various issues related to EMI, such as opportunities and challenges of EMI adoption (Seitzhanova et al. 2015), the impact of EMI on academic outcomes of students (Nurshatayeva and Page 2019), translanguaging practices in EMI settings (Goodman et al. 2021), graduate students' struggles with academic English reading and writing and coping strategies (Tajik et al. 2022b), teachers' and students' perceptions of their EMI practices by focusing on the interplay between language management, language practices and language ideology (Yessenbekova 2022), multilingual graduate students' identity in EMI universities (Zhunussova et al. 2023), overview of institutional EMI policies (Gaipov et al. 2024). Some of the earliest studies described the measures implemented by Kazakhstani government to internationalize the higher education sector and suggested using the best practices of other countries for efficient implementation of EMI in local HEIs (Oralova 2012).

Notably, despite growing research into EMI, in Kazakhstan this issue is still in its infancy. This point was also highlighted by Tajik et al. (2022a) who explain that although EMI has become a popular topic of investigation worldwide, "there is a lack of systematic investigation of EMI practices in Kazakhstani universities" and "...very little empirical evidence on the effectiveness, quality, and practices of EMI" (Tajik et al. 2022a, 100). Therefore, it is believed that exploring the students' and teachers' perceptions of EMI provision at their university might assist in addressing the aforementioned problems and indicate the efficacy of current policies in terms of EMI. There is a need for a bottom-up approach to the EMI-related policies, hence, the experiences and perceptions of students and faculty can highlight the inadequacies and point to areas for further improvement of the current national, institutional, and departmental policies, mainly suggested by top-down initiatives.

Thus, this study aims to examine the students' and teachers' perceptions of EMI provision in terms of reasons of EMI choice, English proficiency, translanguaging, and personal concerns in one of the private universities in Kazakhstan, where most of the educational programs for non-linguistic majors are delivered in English.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

As a theoretical framework guiding the current study we refer to the "[d]riving forces behind EMI" by Rose et al. (2019), according to which certain aspects lead to success in EMI. The first force that drives the students is choosing the educational program or a university for a number of reasons in order to become a competitive and highly qualified specialist. The second driving force is their English language proficiency that will help them to be successful. Another aspect of EMI is translanguaging that can facilitate the learning and teaching process if utilized appropriately. Finally, identifying personal challenges and concerns in EMI can assist in overcoming them by informing the stakeholders responsible for EMI provision.

As a rule, the goals of EMI universities align with the reasons of students' choice both globally and locally and are closely associated with the national ambitious aims in pursuit of developing highly qualified human capital. For example, Korean universities view EMI implementation as "a major instrument for innovation in terms of internationalization" and as a "means of raising Korean universities' competitiveness in an increasingly global higher education market" (Byun 2011, 432). Similarly, Ball and Lindsay (2013) mention a number of primary objectives of EMI courses at the University of the Basque Country, among which "greater access to academic source material in their subjects" (Ball and Lindsay 2013, 44) and "subsequent possibilities in the labour market". Likewise, for Kazakhstan, EMI is sought after to prepare competitive specialists in various disciplines with the added bonus of linguistic competence based on proficiency in English: this then helps them to become mobile in the international educational space and in the labour market (Analytical Report 2022).

However, the proper provision of EMI requires appropriate command of English on the part of both teachers and students. Despite introducing English language education from the primary stage, Kazakhstan is among the countries with the lowest level of English proficiency. As of 2022, it was reported that 95% of Kazakhstani university applicants had low English proficiency of A1, A2 levels (Analytical Report 2022). These statistics suggest that secondary schools provide only basic foreign language skills, which are not enough at the tertiary level with its cognitively demanding academic tasks.

As a result, the EMI environment poses formidable challenges for non-English speaking stakeholders (Kováčiková and Luprichová 2023). For example, Tajik et al. (2022a) identified students' challenges of personal-psychological and sociological nature including various subcategories such as understanding content, language issues, academic reading. As for disciplinary faculty, along with similar problems which are partially rooted in the relatively "older age" of content teachers and inability to teach in English (Oralova 2012; Yessenbekova 2022), they also experience pedagogical challenges and a lack of resources (Seitzhanova et al. 2015).

In this regard, English for Specific/Academic Purposes (ESP/EAP) courses become crucial in assisting students to gain appropriate levels of academic language competence. As Williams (2015) states, universities should scaffold EMI through EAP courses. Likewise, Jinghui (2023) suggests collaborative work of ESP/EAP and EMI teachers as one of the

solutions to overcome the pedagogical and linguistic difficulties of content teachers. Such collaboration would benefit teachers in designing the lesson components and considering the issues of feedback as well as "in producing learning outcomes, assessment strategies and material that combine equally the teaching of language and content" (Alhasani 2023, 424).

Another driving force to support EMI is developing clear guidelines concerning the proportion of using English and L1 (native or dominant language) in the EMI classroom. The latest study reported deficiencies in clear articulated institutional policies regarding EMI at a number of HEIs, with both full and partial EMI implementation (Gaipov et al. 2024) thus indicating an urgency of developing more explicit and practice-wise ones. This is crucially important to regulate the amount of languages the students are exposed to for achieving the ultimate goals of EMI stated above. Although there is an "English-only belief" among students and content teachers (Jinghui 2023), using L1 within reasonable limits and for certain purposes seems to be the right decision. This phenomenon is currently referred to as "translanguaging" which is defined in pedagogy as "the act performed by bilinguals of accessing different linguistic features or various modes of what are described as autonomous languages, in order to maximize communicative potential" (García 2009, 140). The latest research emphasizes that L1 should be used as a scaffolding tool in EMI classes (Goodman et al. 2021; Yessenbekova 2022), yet, clear guidelines and a detailed understanding of how translanguaging is used are still needed (Kim 2011; Pun 2021).

A recent study by Zhunussova et al. (2023) draws attention to multilingual graduate students' identity in EMI universities in Kazakhstan. Such studies recommend "to consider the local context rather than importing EMI without any adaptation" (Zhunussova et al. 2023, 2). The importance of local context is stressed in a number of studies (Rose et al. 2019; Jinghui 2023). In view of that, exploring undergraduate students' perceptions of EMI provision can inform policymakers and other stakeholders of the state of things and possible limitations in certain settings. The unique nature of each HEI should be taken into account when institutional policies are designed in order to adequately adapt them according to the needs of the particular context.

3. METHOD

In this regard, the current paper seeks to address the following research questions:

RQ 1. To what extent do students' and teachers' perceptions align or differ regarding the reasons to study in EMI programs?

RQ 2. What are the students' and teachers' perceptions of English proficiency in EMI classrooms?

RQ 3. What are the students' and teachers' perceptions of translanguaging?

RQ 4. To what extent do students' and teachers' perceptions align or differ regarding personal concerns in EMI?

Study Context

The research was carried out in a Kazakhstani tertiary context, specifically in an English-medium university offering a range of English-taught bachelor's and master's degree programs in education, social sciences, IT, humanities, and economics. The University under study strives to take a leading position in the international arena of higher education through teaching in

English, as well as training highly qualified specialists with all the necessary skills, knowledge, and competence to strengthen their position in the global labour market. The University operates a trilingual education system, according to which 82% of its educational programs are taught in English, 18% in Kazakh and Russian. The University employs graduates from leading global universities, including: Cambridge University (UK), Harvard University (USA), University of Southern California (USA), Columbia University (USA), and many others. The University has a confirmed EMI policy available for the faculty and students. Further, there are incentive schemes for the holders of international professional (TKT, TESOL, EMI, CLIL) and language proficiency certificates (IELTS, TOEFL).

Research Design, Tools and Sampling

In order to answer the above-mentioned research questions, the present study employed a survey design by collecting and analyzing quantitative data.
The surveys with two target audiences (teachers and students) were designed to elicit information on their perceptions regarding reasons for choosing EMI programs, command of English, translanguaging experiences and challenges they faced while teaching and studying EMI programs. The surveys were administered from December 2022 to February 2023. The University Ethics Committee validated the survey questions. Non-probability convenience sampling was used to recruit the survey participants. The total number of respondents was 207 comprising 176 students and 31 teachers. Participation was voluntary and anonymous.

The data was analyzed via SPSS version 29 to enable frequency and inferential analysis. In order to determine whether there is an association between two categorical variables, the Chi-square test of independence was conducted. Table 1 shows the demographic analysis containing the respondents' information:

Table 1 Respondents' Profile Statistics

Variable	Students (n=176)			Teaching staff (n=31)		
	Item	Q-ty	%	Item	Q-ty	%
Gender	Male	66	37.5%	Male	14	45.2%
	Female	110	62.5%	Female	17	54.8%
Age	18-20	161	91.5%	20-29	10	32.2%
	21-25	13	7.4%	30-39	11	35.4%
	26-30	1	0.6%	40-49	6	19.3%
	31+	1	0.6%	50+	4	12.9%
EMI Learning/Teaching experience	1-2 years	83	47,2%	1-2 years	13	41,9%
	2-4 years	47	26,7%	2-4 years	4	12,9%
	4-8 years	25	14,2%	4-8 years	5	16,1%
	8-12 years	10	5,7%	8-12 years	3	9,7%
	13+ years	11	6,3%	13+ years	6	19,4%

The data reveal a relatively fair gender distribution among teaching staff, whilst the student body comprised more female representatives. Age is often a pivotal variable in considering various EMI aspects; it can be seen that two-thirds of the teachers are under the age of 40, while the majority of students (91.5%) are between 18 and 20. These indicators are important to consider in conjunction with another significant variables,

namely EMI learning and teaching experience, which is depicted in Table 1. The data analysis indicates a logical connection between the age group of 18-20 and the duration of EMI learning experiences, with most students falling within this age range. Specifically, the results suggest that the majority of students in this age bracket have accumulated less than five years of EMI learning experience, highlighting a potential relationship between age and the duration of English-based instructional methods. On the other hand, it may be possible that the respondents might not have factored into the response time they spent on learning the foreign language.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. To what extent do students' and teachers' perceptions align or differ regarding reasons to study in EMI university?

Table 2 below illustrates a convergence of perspectives between teachers and students on the importance of the reasons associated with attending an EMI university. Both teaching staff and students highlight the significance of EMI in enhancing English proficiency and preparing students for the international job market, as evidenced by high mean ratings (M=0.74, 0.66 and 0.77 respectively) and substantial agreement percentages (SD=0.425-0.498 range). The data suggests that 92 students (86.8%) view achieving confidence as a multilingual individual as the primary motivation for selecting an EMI university, whereas 114 students (83.2%) regard English proficiency as a more crucial factor. Additionally, 80 students (81.6%) are motivated by the desire to become international/global citizens, although teachers attribute slightly less importance to this reason with a (M= 0.58) compared to (M=0.47) by students. For instance, 18 teachers (18.4%) acknowledge this reason, indicating a lesser consensus among educators. On the other hand, both teachers and students recognize the importance of preparing for the international labour market, with 26.1% of teachers and 73.9% of students agreeing. However, while teachers rate this reason significantly high with a mean of (M=0.77), students assign it a lower importance rating of (M=0.44), suggesting a divergence in perceived significance. Even though these reasons still depict notable agreement percentages from both teachers and students, indicating their relevance, there are variations in mean ratings and percentages, suggesting varying degrees of emphasis placed on the reasons.

Moreover, in order to determine whether there is an association between two categorical variables (in our case variables are represented by reasons and respondents' status), the Chi-square test of independence was conducted. The findings indicate that the first three reasons are not statistically linked to respondents' preferences. However, concerning the desire "to enhance prospects of becoming an international/global citizen," although the significance level does not fall below .05, it suggests a moderate association, albeit not meeting conventional statistical significance criteria.

The last item stands out with a Chi-square statistic of 16.056 and a significance level of less than .001, denoted by an asterisk (*), indicating a highly significant association. This suggests that attending an EMI university to prepare for the international labour market strongly correlates with the respondents' preferences.

Table 2 Respondents' perspectives on the reasons students choose an EMI university

Items		Teachers	Students	χ^2	p
To become a confident multi-lingual	%	45.2%	52.3%	.533	.465
	Mean	0.45	0.51		
	SD	0.506	0.501		
To raise English proficiency level	%	74.2%	64.8%	1.045	.307
	Mean	0.74	0.66		
	SD	0.445	0.474		
To attend a university with global recognition and ranking	%	51.6%	43.2%	.759	.384
	Mean	0.52	0.44		
	SD	0.508	0.498		
To improve chances of becoming an international/global citizen	%	58.1%	45.5%	1.681	.195
	Mean	0.58	0.47		
	SD	0.502	0.501		
To prepare for the international labour market	%	77.4%	38.6%	16.056	<.001[*]
	Mean	0.77	0.44		
	SD	0.425	0.498		

4.2. What are the students' and teachers' perceptions of English proficiency in EMI classrooms?

The data in Table 3 below reflects several ideals that the University aspires to achieve in EMI environments. For instance, the majority of teachers (83.9%) believe that students do become more proficient in English by the end of their courses, indicating an alignment with the goal of enhancing English language skills among students and with a mean score of (M=0.84) indicating strong agreement among respondents. Similarly, a significant percentage of teachers (87.1%) express confidence in their own proficiency to deliver courses in English, albeit with a slightly lower mean score (M=0.81) compared to the previous question, highlighting an ideal scenario where educators possess the necessary linguistic skills to effectively impart knowledge through EMI. However, the data also reveals certain realities that exist within the EMI framework. Despite the optimistic outlook, there are notable proportions of respondents who express reservations. For instance, while the majority believe in student proficiency growth, around 16.1% of teachers disagree or are uncertain about this improvement. This suggests that there may be challenges or limitations in the actual outcomes of English language instruction. Additionally, while the majority of teachers express confidence in their own proficiency, there are still significant percentages who have reservations, indicating that not all educators feel fully equipped to deliver content in English.

Table 3 Command of English

Respondents	Question item	Yes	No	Mean	SD
Teachers	Overall, do the students at the University become more proficient in English by the end of their courses?	83.9%	16.1%	0.84	0.374
	Overall, do the students at the University have a suitable command of English to be active class members?	80.6%	19.4%	0.81	0.402
	Overall, do you have a suitable command of English to confidently deliver your courses in EMI?	87.1%	12.9%	0.87	0.341
	Overall, has your level of proficiency in English improved since you first started teaching through EMI?	80.6%	19.4%	0.81	0.402
Students	Overall, do you feel you have become more proficient in English as your courses at the University progress?	68.2%	31.8%	0.68	0.467
	Do you feel confident making contributions to class in English?	79%	21%	0.79	0.409

Conversely, in Table 3 it is evident that 68.2% of students feel they have become more proficient in English as their courses progress, with a slightly lower mean score of 0.68. There is a discrepancy between teachers' perceptions of student proficiency growth (83.9%) and students' self-reported perceptions (68.2%). While both groups generally agree that proficiency improves, teachers seem to have a more optimistic view compared to students. Moreover, 79% of students feel confident about making contributions to class in English, with a mean score of (M=0.79). To conclude, both teachers and students generally express confidence in English language participation, with teachers being slightly more confident in their own abilities. However, there is still a high level of confidence among students with a (M= 0.68) and (SD=0.467) indicating a generally positive perception of their own English proficiency and participation in class discussions.

4.3. What are the students' and teachers' perceptions of translanguaging?

Table 4 Percentage of course content in English

% of content in English	Under 50%	51% to 70%	71% to 80%	81% to 99%	100%	Mean	SD
Teachers	9	4	2	5	11	3.16	3.28
Students	12	35	41	67	21	1.715	1.121

The responses of both teachers and students regarding the proportion of course content conducted in English at the University are shown in Table 4 above. On average, teachers reported a higher proportion of courses conducted in English (M= 3.16), with a relatively higher standard deviation (SD=3.28), indicating more variability in their responses. A considerable number of teachers reported conducting all their courses in English (100%), suggesting a strong presence of EMI in their teaching practices. Conversely, students

reported a lower average proportion of courses conducted in English (M=1.715), with a lower standard deviation (SD=1.121), indicating more consistency in their responses. To conclude, in reality, there is a discrepancy between the perceptions of teachers and students regarding the proportion of courses conducted in English. This suggests a potential gap between the intended EMI practices by teachers and the actual experiences reported by students. The variability in teacher responses indicates that while some teachers conduct all courses in English, others adopt a more mixed approach. On the other hand, students' responses show more consistency, with the majority experiencing a significant portion of their courses in English (Table 4).

According to Table 5 below, which depicts the responses to the question "Do you make use of translanguaging?" teachers reported a moderate utilization of translanguaging (M=2.74), with a relatively higher standard deviation (SD=1.390), indicating variability in their responses. The most common responses were "Yes, quite often" and "Rarely," suggesting that while some teachers use translanguaging regularly, others do so infrequently or not at all. In contrast, students reported a higher level of translanguaging utilization (M= 3.44), with a lower standard deviation (SD=1.035), indicating more consistency in their responses. Since the University does not have a policy on the degree of translanguaging that is (im)permissible within EMI provision, it is quite possible and acceptable to be flexible for students to use either L1 or English in the same classroom. In this way, lecturers' and students' responses may differ.

Table 5 Translanguaging

Respondents	Yes, very often	Yes, quite often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Mean	SD
Teachers (n=31)	3	10	1	10	7	2.74	1.390
Students (n=176)	32	49	63	28	4	3.44	1.035

3.4. To what extent do students' and teachers' perceptions align or differ regarding personal concerns in EMI?

Table 6 below presents an overview of the concerns related to EMI respondents. Specifically, it highlights the percentage of responses and the results of Chi-square tests conducted to assess if there are significant differences in items provided.

According to the data, the Chi-square test reveals a significant association between respondents (teachers and students) and concerns about fluency in speaking ($\chi^2 = 5.161$, df = 1, p = .023). This indicates that there are differences in the levels of concern regarding speaking fluency among respondents. Moreover, significant associations were detected about overall proficiency in all four skills areas ($\chi^2 = 7.194$, df = 1, p = .007), low confidence ($\chi^2 = 14.264$, df = 1, p < .001). On the other side, there is no significant association between respondents and concerns about written English proficiency ($\chi^2 = 2.195$, df = 1, p = .138), suggesting that both teachers and students have similar levels of concerns in this area. The same is true of subject-specific vocabulary ($\chi^2 = 2.332$, df = 1, p = .127), comparisons with other students ($\chi^2 = 3.501$, df = 1, p = .061), as well as with "none of the above" option as an item ($\chi^2 = .040$, df = 1, p = .841).

Table 6 Respondents' perceptions on concerns and struggles

Items	Teachers			Students			χ^2	p
	N	%	% of cases	N	%	% of cases		
Overall proficiency in all four skills areas	8	15.7%	25.8%	35	19.9%	20.2%	7.194	.007*
Subject-specific vocabulary	3	5.9%	9.7%	60	34.1%	34.7%	2.332	.127
Low confidence	3	5.9%	9.7%	39	22.2%	22.5%	14.264	<.001*
Concerns about comparisons with other students/teachers	6	11.8%	19.4%	45	25.6%	26%	3.501	.061
Written English	8	15.7%	25.8%	66	37.5%	38.2%	2.195	.138
Fluency (speaking)	11	21.6%	35.5%	86	48.9%	49.7%	5.161	.023*
None of the above	12	23.5%	38.7%	31	17.6%	17.9%	.040	.841

* The Chi-square statistic is significant at the .05 level.

4. CONCLUSION

As this study has shown, there are some discrepancies between the ideals and realities of EMI provision at the private Kazakhstani University under investigation. On the one hand, the University, as a major driving force behind EMI, provides strong support by developing institutional policies, employing graduates of the world's leading foreign universities, setting high admission criteria for students and suggesting incentive schemes for the holders of international professional and language proficiency certificates. On the other hand, although the overall results reflect these endeavors, there are slight differences in how teachers and students perceive EMI provision in several aspects. Some important findings regarding EMI reasons are that while students aim to raise English proficiency, teachers perceive that preparing for the international labour market seems to be the most important reason for their students. Both teachers and students believe that students become more proficient in English by the end of their courses, which in turn aligns with the reasons they choose EMI. There is a variability of teacher responses in regards to translanguaging in delivering the classes, whereas students reported higher instances of translanguaging utilization. As for challenges, both teachers and students expressed concerns surrounding fluency in speaking.

These results indicate that in this particular context, in reality, there are ongoing challenges and potential gaps between the intended EMI practices by teachers and the actual experiences reported by students. In addition, the results point to the need for further improvements in this institutional context and offer some important insights into how this process is implemented in Kazakhstani HEIs. This also indicates the need to strengthen EMI support by revising and clarifying the existing institutional and national policies regarding EMI provision taking into consideration the voiced challenges on the part of the teachers and students. This paper reports preliminary findings of a larger research project aimed at exploring the practices of using English-medium instruction in the context of internationalization of HEIs in Kazakhstan.

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