

EXAMINING LANGUAGE POLICIES IN TEACHING THROUGH ENGLISH: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EFL TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN SAUDI ARABIA AND BEYOND

Abdulelah Alkhateeb

The Department of English Language, College of Applied Medical Sciences, King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences (KSAU); and King Abdullah International Medical Research Center (KAIMRC), Saudi Arabia

ORCID iD: Lesia V. Pikun

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7025-0342>

Abstract. *The implementation of the English language in teaching science-related programs is an inevitable approach that impacts most of the tertiary education systems in outer- and expanding-circle countries due to the internationalization of higher education. This study aims at answering the following queries: How do the current language policies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) tertiary education shape English medium instruction (EMI) practices, and what are the potential outcomes of these practices on student learning experiences and institutional effectiveness? The purpose is also to discuss issues related to language policy in four EFL tertiary education contexts worldwide that share a similar scenario of implementing the Teaching through English Approach (TtEA) through an analysis of the relevant literature, official documents, and an assessment of language policy practices. In this research, a document analysis approach is employed to indicate some of the language policies and recommendations from empirical research. The significant findings of this work address that an effective implementation of a bilingual curriculum program that enhances the comprehension of students and boosts their biliteracy skills is crucial for their L1 maintenance. Contextualized and clear institutional language policy practices, beliefs, and management will facilitate teaching and learning. Additionally, an appropriate EMI model that fulfills the academic needs of learners, teacher proficiency, and institutional objectives is essential. Another major result is that cooperation between subject and language instructors to deliver subject content is fundamental to achieving success. Incorporating English for specific purpose (ESP) courses in the early stage could also optimize student language proficiency and their comprehension. There is a persistent need for more inclusive and egalitarian language policies and practices in EFL tertiary education. Further exploration of English utilization as a medium of instruction in the classroom discourse in Saudi Arabia is vital to uncover the underlying challenges and effective solutions.*

Key words: *bilingual curriculum, English as a foreign language, language policy, teacher collaboration, teaching through English, tertiary education internationalization*

Submitted February 3rd, 2025, accepted for publication March 7th, 2025

Corresponding author: Abdulelah Alkhateeb, The Department of English Language, College of Applied Medical Sciences, King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences (KSAU); and King Abdullah International Medical Research Center (KAIMRC), Saudi Arabia

E-mail: alkhateeba@ksau-hs.edu.sa

1. INTRODUCTION

As globalization has become a prominent drive of the most prestigious academic institutions worldwide, the Teaching through English Approach (TtEA) has become an urgent requirement for higher education systems of numerous non-English-dominant countries (Alkhateeb and Alhasawi 2023; Shimauchi 2018). For instance, Saudi Arabia paved the way toward the “Englishization” of higher education through political and educational procedures, specifically in science-related majors, i.e., Medicine, Health Sciences, IT, and Engineering (Thompson and McKinley 2018; Alqarni et al. 2024). This process of Englishizing tertiary education is rapidly expanding in non-Anglophone countries such as Germany, Turkey, Japan, and Saudi Arabia (Al-Kahtany et al. 2016; Alhawsawi and Barnawi 2016; Alqarni et al. 2024; Galloway, Sahan, and McKinley 2024; Ikuya 2024). All Arabic-speaking nations implement English medium instruction (EMI) in their science-related programs at the tertiary level. Teaching in English is viewed by several language policymakers as a symbol of internationalization (Alqarni et al. 2024). Furthermore, the potential benefits of Englishization, particularly for students who transition from Arabic medium instruction (AMI) to EMI, are enhancing the employability of students, increasing the availability of international students, elevating institutional rankings, boosting the English proficiency of students, and promoting students with access to up-to-date educational materials (Alqarni et al. 2024; Galloway, Sahan, and McKinley 2024).

Tertiary education in Saudi Arabia and other English as a Foreign Language (EFL) countries utilizes EMI/TtEA for science-related major students. The accommodation of the English language in the Saudi education system is due to the oil industry and international business understanding, i.e., the establishment of the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO). Until the late 1980s, the Saudi-owned foreign-run of ARAMCO is perceived to be the leading force behind the economic advancement of the country (Khawaji 2022). The presence of a foreign workforce managing key sectors of the country has profoundly impacted Saudi society. Thus, the Saudi population views the English language as the key to success in securing prestigious job positions, as it serves as the driving force behind the industrial revolution in the country. This sociopolitical scenario happened in similar EFL countries, such as China, Japan, and various Gulf nations.

The accommodation of EMI imposes pedagogical and sociopolitical challenges on educational institutions and the community. One of the potential impacts of EMI proliferation in EFL tertiary education is degrading the Arabic language and local cultural heritage (Alqarni et al. 2024). This encompasses the marginalization of students’ L1, cognitive burdens, and the erosion of their cultural identity, as highlighted by Hopkynz and Elysa (2022). Students enrolled in EMI programs in non-English-speaking tertiary institutions encounter several challenges, including diminishing quality of education due to a lack of fluency and limited access to higher education for those with minimal exposure to English (Altbach 2019). The current study argues that because Arabic is the medium of instruction in Saudi K-12 education, students face significant hurdles when transitioning to EMI in higher education, such as English language proficiency and institutional language policies (Galloway, Sahan, and McKinley 2024; Ikuya 2024; Khawaji 2022). This work aims at discussing the variety of institutional language policies, implications, and recommendations for implementing EMI in tertiary education where most students are non-English-speaking. It will also offer considerations for implementing the TtEA effectively in Saudi universities.

2. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The current research examines the integration of the English language in tertiary education in China, Japan, Portugal, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). These countries were selected for analysis due to the similarity in the sociopolitical and sociocultural status of English to that of Saudi Arabia. The benefits of this analysis could help educational policymakers in Saudi tertiary education, particularly at KSAU, in implementing language policies that resonate with the academic needs of students and community services. The emphasis of KSAU is that it is a specialized university in health sciences, and it applies EMI in all academic programs. Additionally, it is the first university in the Middle East to specialize in teaching health sciences in a foreign language, English. The student demographics comprises entirely of Saudi nationals, the majority of whom speak Arabic as their first language and EFL. KSAU recruited national and international faculty members with high qualifications in the English language, as they must be graduates from one of the Anglophone countries or score seven in IELTS or its equivalent as proof of their English proficiency. The existing language policy I found on the official website indicates that all programs are offered in English. Hence, investigating the influence of implementing teaching through English in the four selected countries is informative for tertiary education in Saudi Arabia. I address this topic based on my firsthand experience of over 15 years in learning and teaching in EMI programs in Saudi Arabia, across two distinct educational institutions, namely, Imam Muhammed ibn Saud Islamic University and KSAU. I found that the verbal policy of English utilization in delivering teaching materials varied from one instructor to another. Initially, I clarify the differences between implementing the TtEA and teaching the English language and other terminologies that may cause potential confusion. Subsequently, I demonstrate the variety of institutional language policies, implications, and recommendations for implementing the TtEA in the tertiary education of the selected countries. I also propose how Saudi policymakers could design a prototypical EMI environment in Saudi Arabia through a comparison of EMI programs in four distinct EFL settings. Finally, I mention some considerations helping to an effective implementation of the language policy in Saudi universities and other similar EFL contexts.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the EMI issues is that it remains an ill-defined concept in English language teaching literature, with its implementation still evolving (Airey 2016; Alkhateeb 2021; Galloway, Sahan, and McKinley 2024; Zehir and Çelik 2024). It is sometimes misunderstood, particularly in distinguishing programs focused on teaching the English language from those prioritizing teaching through the English language. The former category encompasses various English language learning programs designed to teach both language skills and subject content, such as English for Academic Purposes (EAP), Content-Based Language Teaching (CBLT), English for a Specific Purpose (ESP), and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). The latter category comprises programs that prioritize subject content learning only, such as EMI. Curriculum developers in EAP, CBLT, and CLIL programs design the course to deliver two contents simultaneously, namely, linguistic and content knowledge. For instance, the course assessment measures both language and non-language learning outcomes. EMI is defined as “the use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population

is not English” (Dearden 2015, p.2). In EMI programs, the focus of the curricula is to deliver the subject content, not teaching the English language. This causes some obstacles for English language learners, and one of them is material comprehension (see Figure 1) (Alkhateeb 2021; Yuan Fang, and Hu 2024). Thus, the objectives, pedagogical methods, and program learning outcomes in EMI differ from those in EAP, CBLT, and CLIL. See Galloway, Sahan, and McKinley (2024) and Thompson and McKinley (2018).

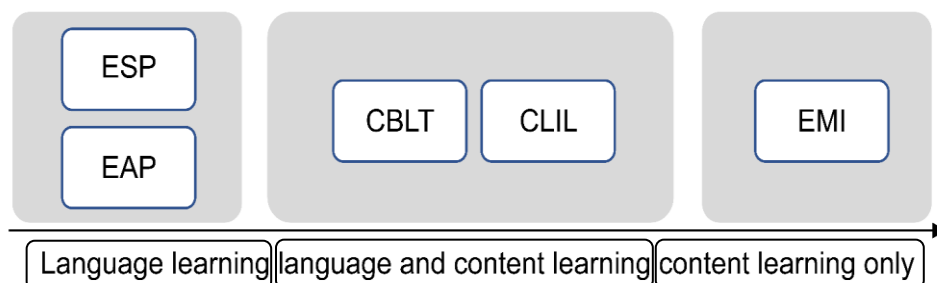


Fig. 1 Shows the continuum from English education to education in English (Shimauchi 2018)

EMI is viewed in literature from diverse perspectives. From a historical perspective, Wei Li suggests that implementing the TtEA is closely interrelated to linguistic imperialism or language colony that has its influence on the education system of the affected country (Phillipson 2013). Another understanding is the contemporary perspective that considers the TtEA as an instrument that provides access to international up-to-date knowledge (Galloway, Sahan, and McKinley 2024; Pennycook 1998; Sah and Fang 2024). From my perspective, I define the TtEA in the Saudi context as the employment of English to teach science-related subjects to an entirely Saudi student population whose first language (L1) is Arabic. In this context, students enrolled in EMI programs are exposed to and then assessed on content knowledge only. The rationale behind EMI programs, which aim to provide access to international knowledge, shapes current practices and policies in EFL tertiary education, particularly within Saudi Arabia.

3.1. Purpose of Implementing TtEA Around the Globe

In the preceding section, I outlined two perspectives on teaching through English. Understanding the historical and contemporary dimensions of this is crucial for creating an effective language policy and high-quality practice. The accommodation of the English language in diverse global contexts, EFL countries specifically, has been extensively emphasized at the national level. For instance, in Japan and China, the primary goals of implementing the TtEA are to globalize the perspectives of students, increase the presence of international students, and mitigate linguistic barriers to enhance educational outcomes (Shimauchi 2018; Yuan, Fang, and Hu 2024). Moreover, English as a Lingua Franca, particularly in the academic sphere, serves to undermine the notion of language varieties and help in determining which forms might be employed in tertiary education (Galloway, Sahan, and McKinley 2024; Seidlhofer 2004). In Saudi Arabia and other Arab states, one of the purposes behind implementing the TtEA in tertiary education is to fulfill the job market needs (Alkhateeb and Alhawsawi 2023; Alqarni et al. 2024). In Europe, the

internationalization and marketization of higher education are the key purposes of adopting the TtEA in several institutes (Galloway, Sahan, and McKinley 2024). Considering that the English language is considered in these contexts as a foreign language, most of them encounter similar challenges, such as the English language proficiency of students and instructors, thereby diminishing the role of L1 in the academic sphere and local community, along with other challenges that will be discussed later in this paper.

3.2. Effects of the TtEA on Institutional Products and Indigenous Language(s)

The controversy surrounding the impact of the TtEA has persisted for decades, particularly in former colonies across Asia, Africa, and Europe. In the Arabian Gulf region, educators and social activists have become increasingly aware of the potential threats posed by the English language to local culture and identity, particularly its influence on the richness of the Arabic language (Alkhateeb 2021; Alqarni et al. 2024; Belhiah and Elhami 2015). The global proliferation of the TtEA has contributed to cultural erosion and the decline of local language use in science-related subjects, further exacerbating the gap between the affluent and the underprivileged (Alqarni et al. 2024). To my knowledge, I have not found a study providing statistics or case studies that illustrate the socio-economic divides exacerbated by EMI policies. Nonetheless, in the literature, Kumaravadivelu (2006) viewed English as a “Trojan Horse,” representing a concealed jeopardy to the cultural sovereignty of individuals. In this context, students enrolled in programs utilizing the TtEA are subjected to an English-only policy. Consequently, they may struggle to communicate with their local communities effectively. For instance, a Saudi doctor who completed an EMI program may encounter hurdles when explaining medical conditions to a patient who only understands Arabic, as seen in hospitals (Alsubaiai 2019). Alkhamees et al. (2022) confirmed the communication gaps between physicians and patients through their qualitative study by interviewing Saudi patients in hospitals in Qasim Province, Saudi Arabia. The sociocultural consequences of the dominance of the TtEA in tertiary education are not exclusive to the health sector. Nonetheless, it also impacts other sectors, encompassing education and research production. Altbach (2019) highlighted the effects of the TtEA and the diminishing role of students’ first language, stating that these include “the loss of alternative research methodologies and academic orientations, the loss of local language debate and dissemination of ideas, diminished quality in education from lack of fluency, and a barrier to higher education access for students with little exposure to English” (p.2). A more rigorous and scrupulous language policy for teaching science-related courses is required to elevate the status of the Arabic language in the community and to optimize student comprehension.

In the context of the growing trend of EMI, it is argued that the implementation of the TtEA is a strong indicator of internationalization. Nevertheless, this conception can have significant associations, as warned by Canagarajah (2005): “The need for English in other communities is assumed to be beyond dispute... that the local languages may have an equal or greater role to play in educational and social development is often ignored” (p. xv). That means that globalization eventually results in a decreased emphasis on other national and foreign languages. Thus, investigating theoretical and empirical studies that have explored the implications of implementing this approach in EFL tertiary institutions is crucial, specifically in terms of language policy. Additionally, it is essential to explore the effects on knowledge construction within institutions and student mindset (Alhawsawi and

Barnawi 2016; Doiz et al. 2011, 2012, 2013; Galloway, Sahan, and McKinley 2024; Ikuya 2024; Pun et al. 2023; Phillipson 2013; Shimauchi 2018). Several studies have underscored the consequences of teaching science content in a foreign language, noting that low English proficiency among students may hinder effective content comprehension (Alkhateeb 2021; Al-Bakri and Troudi 2020). This can lead to a decline in the overall quality of education and a discrepancy between policy and practice.

3.3. English Language Policy in Saudi Arabia

In Saudi Arabia, Arabic is the primary medium of instruction, except for some of the science-related majors where English is utilized as the medium of instruction. The Document of Education Policy in Saudi Arabia, Article 24, affirms that “the Arabic language is the official language for the entire education system in the country, except when there is a necessity to use other languages” (Ministry of Education 1996, p.9). Nonetheless, in the middle of the 20th century, the globalization of higher education, internationalization of the market, and business partnerships with foreign countries have influenced policymakers to introduce the English language into the education system in Saudi Arabia (Alhawsawi and Jawaher 2022; Galloway, Sahan, and McKinley 2024). The shift toward using English is driven by various factors, such as employment, accreditation, and establishing partnerships with foreign institutions (Galloway, Sahan, and McKinley 2024). In other words, the TtEA is considered a key method for enhancing the quality of education in Saudi Arabia (Alhawsawi and Jawaher 2022). Educators in Saudi Arabia are optimistic about teaching science-related majors in English, as it is considered prestigious and supportive of internationalization and scholarship (Alkhamees et al. 2022; Alqarni et al. 2024).

4. RESEARCH GAP

Several studies have investigated the influences of EMI in diverse perspectives in tertiary education, yet research on the impact of teaching through English in Saudi Arabia remains scarce. Belhiah and Elhami (2015) examined the perspectives of students and teachers regarding the EMI policy in UAE higher education. Similarly, Galloway, Sahan, and McKinley (2024) provided valuable insights into approaches to EMI policy implementation, the attitudes of stakeholders, and the need for ESP and English for specific academic purposes. The results they offered were that there are much-needed insights for evidence-informed EMI policy implementation, curriculum development, and teacher training (Galloway, Sahan, and McKinley 2024). Another study was conducted by Bälter et al. (2024), which investigated the academic performance of students through an experimental design involving a randomized control study ($n = 2,263$). Student participants were randomly allocated to an EMI course and an L1 (Swedish) course. They validated that students in the EMI course obtained much lower grades than the other group (Bälter et al. 2024). Nonetheless, to my knowledge, I have not found a similar study that investigated the Saudi context or the Arabic language. Hence, the present study presented a critical analysis of distinct higher education contexts in which the TtEA is implemented at the tertiary level. Exploring and analyzing the selected contexts will help in identifying effective strategies to rectify language policy practices in Saudi tertiary education. It will also establish an approach for effective transitions from AMI in school (K-12) to EMI programs at universities in Saudi Arabia specifically and other EFL contexts in general. Moreover, it will help

educational stakeholders in Saudi Arabia detect some of the language policy hurdles and find appropriate solutions. Accordingly, they could develop institutional language policies in tertiary education and enhance the practices of these policies.

5. RESEARCH QUESTION

This research seeks to answer the following queries: *How do the current language policies in EFL tertiary education shape EMI/TtEA practices, and what are the potential outcomes of these practices on student learning experiences and institutional effectiveness?* EMI programs are presently available at most universities in outer- and expanding-circle nations (see the Kachruvian paradigm) due to the internationalization of higher education and scholarship (Hopkynz 2024; Ikuya 2024; Galloway, Sahan, and McKinley 2024). Moreover, this work explores four countries that have implemented EMI/TtEA extensively in their tertiary education systems. In these countries, most undergraduate students come from a K-12 system where the primary language of instruction differs from English. Consequently, the transition from K-12 to tertiary education closely resembles the situation in Saudi Arabia. More details about the rationale behind selecting these countries are in the Results section.

6. METHOD

The method employed in this research is document analysis, used as an inquiry strategy to address the research question. The benefit of implementing this approach is to seize the opportunity to obtain detailed data in its natural setting. In this study, the document analysis approach highlighted the practices of implementing the English language in tertiary education systems in countries where the English language is a foreign language. Conducting a document analysis demystifies obstacles to collecting field data from distinct places where the English language influences the language policy of tertiary education systems in EFL countries (Sayer and Crawford 2017). Comparing aspects of implications thousands of miles apart is unrealistic for researchers with limited resources and time to attain their research objectives (Morgan 2022). Hence, I found that the document analysis approach allows me to infer nuanced understandings of language policies that may not be captured through other approaches, such as surveys or interviews. Furthermore, the official documents related to language policy in education profoundly influence the practices of language instruction. Thus, document analysis, whether an official document or empirical study, is informative to the target context, i.e., Saudi tertiary education.

A document analysis approach was utilized to collect data from several empirical studies that were carefully selected by the researcher to consider the factors of implementing current language policies. I consider four factors mentioned by Flick (2018) to minimize the inherent biases that may exist within the selected documents: (a) authenticity, (b) credibility, (c) representativeness, and (d) meaning. Authenticity encompasses the extent to which a document is genuine, while credibility involves the extent to which a source is free from error and bias (Dunne et al. 2016). Representativeness is related to the typicality of a document (Morgan 2022). Meaning involves the significance of the content of a document and pertains to whether the evidence is clear and understandable. The specific benchmarks were employed to assess the authenticity and credibility of the selected documents as follows: purpose, relevance, objectivity, verifiability, expertise, and newness. Considering the versatility of

documentary research, thematic analysis is an optimum approach for this process. Braun et al. (2019) identified three approaches to conducting thematic analysis: *reflexivity*, *reliability*, and *codebook* approaches. Of these, the reflexive approach is the most suitable for the purpose of the current study, as it is entirely based on qualitative methods. Reflexivity pertains to how the values and decisions of the researcher influence the results during the research (Bailey 2018). Put differently, the coding process evolves, which means that it is not determined at the beginning of the study. The data is interpreted on the basis of a researcher's ideas, commitments, and scholarly expertise. This coding process results in identifying themes that represent shared patterns of meaning (Morgan 2022). After selecting the four contexts that implement the TtEA, I have investigated and read empirical studies and official documents related to language policy.

I collected data for this study from several sources, encompassing policy documents, empirical and theoretical research papers, and meta-analysis papers. The criteria for selection are the context of the study, the aim or scope of the topic investigated, and the methods adopted for data collection. The following sources are the backbone of this work, and they fall into two categories: empirical research papers (Al-Bakri and Troudi 2020; Alhawsawi and Jawhar 2022; Alhawsawi and Barnawi 2016; Alkhateeb and Alhawsawi 2024; Galloway, Sahan, and McKinley 2024; Ikuya 2024) and language policy documents (Belhiah and Elhami 2015; British Council 2013; Coleman et al. 2018; Dearden 2015; Hopkynz 2024; Macaro 2018; Ministry of Education 1996; Sah and Fang 2024; and Spolsky 2004).

In terms of data analysis, I embraced manual data analysis. While manual analysis can be labor-intensive, the benefits of this approach allow me to attain a deep understanding, greater flexibility, and a richer context. Additionally, I adopted an *inductive approach* of the thematic analysis which means the data determines the themes. I also considered the *semantic approach*, focusing on analyzing the explicit content of the data. The specific steps taken during the coding process are *familiarization*, *coding*, *generating themes*, *reviewing themes*, *defining and naming themes*, and *writing up* (Braun et al. 2019). Considering that the investigated contexts have been implementing the TtEA/EMI for a long time, I have not encountered issues related to document availability. Another advantage is that I have access to the Saudi Digital Library through KSAU and Illinois State University Library resources as I am a member of these two organizations. Hence, I have not found accessibility to language policy documents discussed in the investigated context strenuously. I mentioned more details about the major theme and each source in the Results section.

6.1. Ethical Consideration

Although documentary analysis, the adopted method of this study, does not require ethical approval, I was careful to consider the ethical implications of using data. All selected documents, whether empirical research papers or official/theoretical documents, are from renowned scholars, and most of these scholars discussed issues related to the TtEA and EMI in their local context. Hence, the familiarity of the studied context and authenticity of data are not issues. Furthermore, I selected the *semantic approach*, which means that I quoted from the original documents the required pieces of information, and then I provided my elaboration on the selected quotation. My explanation and the original texts are segregated. Consequently, the ethical parts related to the representation of the authors' intentions and the contextualization of their findings are addressed.

7. RESULTS

Institutional language policies in EFL countries exhibit a similar approach to implementing the English language. In the present research, I analyzed official documents and empirical research papers that discussed institutional language policy in four distinct EFL tertiary education systems, where the majority of students are EFL learners. The purpose of this analysis is to understand how the TtEA influences the education system despite the indigenous language of native people. After outlining the institutional language policies of each country, I discuss the implications of utilizing English as the sole means of communication and teaching in the tertiary institutions of these four EFL countries. Subsequently, recommendations inspired by empirical research are suggested to offer solutions for language policy stakeholders in EFL tertiary education. These recommendations were proposed by renowned scholars in the field of teaching through English. The recommendations were inferred by the scholars after a deep analysis of the language policy and its implications on the local contexts.

In this study, the theme merged with the data analysis is the variety of implementing the TtEA in the four investigated EFL tertiary education systems. The research also explores a variety of institutional language policies, implications, and recommendations for implementing the TtEA/EMI in tertiary education systems where most of the students are non-English speakers. Four EFL countries are selected and presented one by one, beginning with China, Japan, Portugal, and then the UAE. The rationale for selecting these countries is that EMI is implemented intensively in their tertiary education systems. The second reason is that most of the undergraduate students are taught in the K-12 system by a language distinct from the English language. Hence, the transition from the K-12 system to the tertiary education system is like the Saudi context.

7.1. Variety of Institutional Language Policy, Implications, and Recommendations for Implementing the TtEA in Tertiary Education

In my analysis of official documents related to institutional language policy in China, I identified the following key points: (1) English is considered a foreign language in the country; (2) Teachers must speak English only in EMI classrooms; (3) The TtEA is implemented to elevate the university's status and global ranking; and (4) English serves as the lingua franca for international companies operating in the country (Jiang et al. 2016). Due to the implication of this approach (i.e., teaching through English), the language proficiency of non-native English-speaking teachers has become a dominant obstacle to the effective employment of the TtEA (Pun et al. 2023). Put differently, low proficiency in the English language of instructors may cause inconsistency between policy and practice. Another implication is that the TtEA is not adequately attained in terms of delivering materials and learning outcomes. For instance, when an instructor encounters some linguistic difficulty, the content will not be clearly explained to students (Ikuya 2024). Hence, some of the objectives of the courses may not be fulfilled. This results in a third implication within the Chinese tertiary education system: the limited use of English in the classroom (Jiang et al. 2016; Ikuya 2024; Pun et al. 2023). Consequently, students remain passive, and teachers are unable to engage them effectively in meaningful discussions. Classes that implement the TtEA are more likely to be teacher-centered than student-centered in their approach to learning (Alkhateeb 2021; Alkhateeb and Alhawsawi 2023).

In Japan, another Asian country, the institutional language policy is similar to China's, where English is considered a foreign language, and tertiary institutions prioritize the internationalization of education to attract international students (Galloway, Sahan, and McKinley 2024; Zehir and Çelik 2024). From these two policies, two implications were extracted. First, weak English aptitude is identified as the primary cause of the inconsistency between policy and its consequences. Second, delivering materials through the English language may be more strenuous (Galloway, Sahan, and McKinley 2024; Shimauchi 2018; Zehir and Çelik 2024).

Another country that was influenced by the TtEA is Portugal. The institutional language policy related to the TtEA stated three points: (1) Portuguese is the official language of the country at all education levels; (2) English is a foreign language; and (3) The TtEA is incorporated in science-related majors in tertiary education for the sake of equipping Portuguese students with the English language skills necessary for effective communication within a global workforce (Coleman et al. 2018; Dafouz 2011; Galloway, Sahan, and McKinley 2024; Macaro 2018). The previous institutional language policy implies that class/lesson preparations consume more time and effort from instructors to explain the same subject matter. Another implication is that students alter their learning/studying styles to accommodate the shift of language instruction in several ways: pre-class preparations, reduced class participation, and the process of notetaking. Considering that the English language is not their mother tongue, most Portuguese students find it difficult to participate in English within the classroom (Galloway, Sahan, and McKinley 2024; Macaro 2018). Research has confirmed that the incorporation of the English language into Portuguese education goes beyond a mere linguistic change; it is an inclusive alternation and affects both education and research (Galloway, Sahan, and McKinley 2024).

The final country examined in this research is the UAE. The institutional language policy of the UAE is that Arabic is the language of teaching in education. English is considered a foreign language. The TtEA is implemented in K-12 and tertiary education systems for science-related majors only (Masri 2019). UAE students study most science subjects in English, but they graduate from high school with inadequate English language proficiency to succeed in an EMI environment. Furthermore, most of the academic institutions there recruit monolingual Anglophone teachers, who typically struggle to interact with local students effectively (Hopkynz 2024).

The potential sociocultural considerations due to the implementation of the TtEA in EFL education exhibit the following. Alkhamees et al. (2022) in their qualitative study highlighted the communication gaps between physicians and patients in hospitals located in Saudi Arabia. The sociocultural consequences of the dominance of the TtEA in tertiary education are not limited to the health sector and impact diverse other fields. These effects encompass a decline in local language discourse and the dissemination of ideas, a reduction in educational quality due to language fluency challenges, a loss of alternative research methodologies and academic perspectives, and barriers to higher education for students with limited exposure to English (Alkhamees et al. 2022; Altbach 2019; Galloway, Sahan, and McKinley 2024; Ikuya 2024; Pun et al. 2023; Zehir and Çelik 2024). In the following section, more elaboration about the sociopolitical and sociocultural of TtEA implementation will be addressed.

Table 1 Summary of language policy and effects of implementing the TtEA in four EFL countries

China		Japan		Portugal		UAE	
Policy	Effect	Policy	Effect	Policy	Effect	Policy	Effect
English is a foreign language in the country.	Language proficiency of non-native English-speaking teachers has become a dominant obstacle to the effective employment of the TtEA.	The English language is considered EFL.	Weak English aptitude is considered the primary cause of the inconsistency between policy and its consequences.	Portuguese is the official language of the country at all education levels.	Class/lesson preparations consume more time and effort.	Arabic is the language of teaching in education.	Graduate from high school with inadequate English language proficiency to succeed in an EMI environment.
Teachers must speak English only in EMI classrooms.	The TtEA is not adequately attained in terms of delivering materials and learning outcomes.	Internationalization of education to attract international students.	Delivering materials through the English language may be more strenuous.	English is a foreign language.	Students alter learning styles.	The TtEA is implemented in K-12 and tertiary education systems for science-related majors only.	Institutions there recruit monolingual Anglophone teachers, who typically struggle to interact with local students effectively.
The TtEA is implemented to elevate university's global ranking.	Inconsistency between policy and practice.			Incorporating the TtEA in science-related majors in tertiary education for the sake of equipping Portuguese students with communication with a global workforce.	Most Portuguese students find it difficult to participate in English within the classroom.		
The English language is the lingua franca of international companies in the country.	The utilization of the English language within the classroom is limited.						

8. DISCUSSION

After presenting the institutional language policies and their implications in these EFL countries, it is essential to mention the recommendations inspired by the same researchers (Alhawsawi and Barnawi 2016; Alkhateeb and Alhawsawi 2023; Baker and Hüttner 2018; Bälter 2024; Belhiah and Elhami 2015; Coleman et al. 2018; Galloway, Sahan, and McKinley 2024; Hopkynz 2024; Ikuya 2024; Jiang et al. 2016; Macaro 2018; Shimauchi 2018; Pun et al. 2023; Zehir and Çelik 2024). First, a clear language policy should be well-defined for science-related majors. A well-defined language policy is vital for delineating the status and utilization of the English language within EFL educational institutions, such as in the Saudi context. This policy should encompass various aspects, involving language practices, language management, and language beliefs surrounding language use. By outlining specific goals and language planning, the policy can effectively address how English is taught, promoted, and integrated into the curriculum, while also considering the cultural context of the EFL country. It will help educational policymakers contextualize programs that implement teaching through English, and then they can integrate some courses in ESP to optimize student proficiency and maintain their local/cultural identity (Alhawsawi and Barnawi 2016; Alkhateeb and Alhawsawi 2023). Additionally, it should establish clear guidelines for educators and students, ensuring a consistent approach to English language education that fosters positive attitudes and effective communication skills. To achieve some of it, educational policymakers should develop a preparatory program that boosts student language skills before enrolling in their academic programs. Ultimately, such a comprehensive language policy will play a crucial role in enhancing the overall quality of English education in EFL countries.

Second, teachers have a crucial role in helping students shift from everyday language to academic language (Hopkynz 2024; Ikuya 2024). To achieve this, teachers must have high English language proficiency and teaching skills. Several scholars have discussed the language proficiency and teaching competency of EMI teachers (Alkhateeb & Daweli, 2024; Wang 2021). My focus in this context is on the English language proficiency of teachers, not classroom language proficiency or pedagogical competency. One of the most practical methods to assess language proficiency is the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe 2001). The target score is C1, which means that the user is proficient and that he/she could meet the minimum proficiency level in tertiary education (Klaassen and Bos 2010). The cut-off score corresponds to a TOEFL score of 83 or an IELTS band of 6.5 (ETS 2010; Wang, 2021). The assessment practices for the classroom language of teachers focus more on the English skills necessary for teaching rather than on general English language proficiency. Examples of such assessment practices encompass the Test of Oral English Proficiency for Academic Staff (TOEPAS) at the University of Copenhagen in Denmark (Kling and Stæhr, 2012), the English Medium Instruction Quality Management at the University of Freiburg in Germany (Dubow and Gundermann, 2017), and the Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (English Language) (LPATE) in Hong Kong (Education Bureau of Hong Kong, 2011).

Third, teachers in such settings should implement strategies that foster classroom participation and enhance material comprehension. For instance, code-switching, accommodation, and morphosyntactic convergence can promote greater student interaction in the classroom (Ikuya 2024; Pun et al. 2023). Teachers must also integrate effective content and language programs, such as CLIL, which facilitate both teaching language skill development

and content mastery (Bälter 2024; Galloway, Sahan, and McKinley 2024). Another strategy is to implement Translingualism. It should be welcomed in such a context where students can shift systematically from one language to another (Yuan, Fang, and Hu 2024). A key recommendation derived from these empirical studies is that the success of the TtEA depends on creating a cooperative and collaborative environment between content instructors and language specialists. This collaboration is essential for supporting students in acquiring subject knowledge and language skills (Bälter et al. 2024; Pun et al. 2023; and Yuan Fang, and Hu 2024). For further details and concrete examples of successful implementation of these practices in EFL tertiary education settings, refer to Alkhateeb and Alhawsawi (2023) for the Saudi context; Belhiah and Elhami (2015) for the UAE context; and Yuan, Fang, and Hu (2024) for the China context, as well as Ikuya (2024) and Pun et al. (2023).

Lastly, institutional language policymakers should reconsider the English language recruitment trends in tertiary education, which offer preference to monolingual *English* materials, to protect indigenous languages. One of the considerations to safeguard indigenous languages is a bilingual curriculum accommodation that delivers instruction both in English and the local language, aiming at enhancing the biliteracy skills of students (Alkhateeb and Alhawsawi 2023; Belhiah and Elhami 2015). In summary, the recommendations derived from the literature include a clear definition of the language policy for the TtEA, the role of instructors in facilitating class communication and content comprehension, a collaboration between content instructors and language specialists, a reassessment of recruitment criteria that prioritizes Anglophone teachers, and the protection of indigenous languages through the implementation of bilingual education.

8.1. Considerations to Implement the TtEA Effectively in Saudi Universities

I chose distinct *expanding* countries where English is utilized to deliver content within the classrooms of science-related specializations in tertiary institutions. As the previous section demonstrates, there are various recommendations, experiences, and solutions that could facilitate EMI implementation for Saudi English language policymakers. For instance, Alkhateeb and Alhawsawi (2023) and Belhiah and Elhami (2015) investigated how the TtEA is enacted in the Gulf region. They also validated that a bilingual curriculum would optimize the comprehension of students and their biliteracy skills. Another recommendation emerges from the Chinese and—to some extent—Japanese contexts. Studies by Bälter et al. (2024), Pun et al. (2023), and Yuan Fang, and Hu (2024) identified two key findings: first, the need to incorporate ESP courses to optimize student language proficiency and elevate comprehension of subject content and second, the significance of collaboration between subject and language instructors as a cornerstone for the effective implementation of English in teaching science-related subjects. The mechanisms through which this cooperation can be facilitated were elaborately indicated in Alkhateeb (2021) and Belhiah and Elhami (2015). In my view, the collaboration between subject and language teachers is an innovative approach for a successful EMI implementation because they play pivotal roles inside the institution/learning environment and in the knowledge growth of students.

9. CONCLUSION

The present research echoes Canagarajah's (2005) call to establish "more inclusive and egalitarian language policies and practices" (p. xxix) and calls for contextualizing language policies and educational practices that enhance rather than diminish local languages (Sah and Fang 2024). The key takeaways of this research for stakeholders in the EMI context are as follows: First, most of the EMI programs exaggerate the status of the English language at the expense of local/national language(s). Hence, the superiority of English may prevent indigenous people from inheriting their culture, encompassing language, to the new generations. Second, English language policymakers in EFL countries should realize the benefits of implementing bilingual education in teaching science-related majors because this type of education is sound and, at the same time, reinforces an equitable language hierarchy (Sah and Fang 2024). Third, educators could become aware of the necessity of constructing bridges between subject instructors with English language specialists by discussing such language policy issues and their implementation strategies in non-English dominant contexts (Galloway, Sahan, and McKinley 2024). Consequently, I see that EMI implementation in tertiary education necessitates urgent reform through the following: (a) effective collaboration between English teachers and subject teachers; (b) a contextualized and clear institutional language policy in terms of "practices, beliefs, and management" (Spolsky 2004, p.5); and (c) creating cohesive and coherent English language learning in K-12 that resonates with EMI requirements at universities.

It is crucial to analyze closely the function of language in the TtEA from a pragmatic perspective, particularly concerning the dual commission of language in EMI contexts, i.e., to transmit knowledge and to make meaning (Galloway, Sahan, and McKinley 2024; Pun et al. 2023). More investigation in Saudi EMI classroom discourse is essential to reveal the deeper nature of the current issues and to propose solutions (Alkhateeb and Alhawsai 2023). Finally, studies prove prominent implications for ESP provision in a context where low English proficiency may prove to be an obstacle to TtEA implementation (Galloway, Sahan, and McKinley 2024). In conclusion, the insights from this research could pave the way for future research efforts toward mitigating the obstacles of the TtEA, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of English language-mediated instruction in tertiary education for non-English native students. The limitation of this work is that the data/document analysis of EMI implementation is limited to four EFL countries. Some of the aspects of EMI that may vary in diverse EFL contexts are the role of the English language in society, the sociocultural and sociopolitical aspects that affect language policy in tertiary education, and the differences between K-12 education systems and those at the tertiary level. Thus, additional studies investigating and delineating these aspects through qualitative and quantitative studies are essential to address these gaps and fulfill data generalizability requirements.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENTS. *The datasets used and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.*

REFERENCES

- Al-Bakri, Sawsan, and Salah Troudi. "Effects of the English Medium Instruction Policy on Students' Writing Experiences in Content Courses in a Public College in Oman," In *Critical Issues in Teaching English and Language Education*, edited by Salah Troudi, 11-40. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

- Alhawsawi, Sajjadullah, and Sabriah Jawhar. "The Influence of Institutional Policy on Learning English as a Foreign Language: A Perspective from King Saud Abdulaziz University of Health Sciences in Saudi Arabia." *Journal of Research in Language and Translation* 43 (2022): 22-40.
- Alhawsawi, Sajjadullah, and Osman Barnawi. "English Education Policy in Saudi Arabia: English Language Education Policy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Current Trends, Issues and Challenges," In *English Language Education Policy in the Middle East and North Africa*, edited by Robert Kirkpatrick, 199-222. New York: Springer, 2016.
- Al-Kahtany, Abdallah, Sayed Md. Faruk, and Abdul Wahed Q. Al Zumor. "English as the Medium of Instruction in Saudi Higher Education: Necessity or Hegemony?" *Journal of Language Teaching and Research* 7 (2016): 49-58.
- Alkhamees M, Lea J, Islam MS, Alasqah I, Alzghaibi H, Alharbi MF, Albejaidi F, Mughal YH, Parker V. "A Qualitative Investigation of Factors Affecting Saudi Patients' Communication Experience with Non-Saudi Physicians in Saudi Arabia." *Healthcare* 11 (2022): 118.
- Alkhateeb, Abdullelah. *English Medium Instruction (EMI) at King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences (KSAU-HS): Students' Needs and Instructors' Attitudes*. Normal: Illinois State University, 2021.
- Alkhateeb, Abdullelah and Sajjadullah Alhawsawi. "Challenges in Incorporating English as the Medium of Instruction at King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences." *Arab World English Journal* 14 (2023): 110-123.
- Alkhateeb, Abdullelah and Talal Daweli. "Investigating composition instructors' written feedback practices at KSAU-HS of the academic year 2022-23." *Heliyon* 10 (2024).
- Alqarni, Omar Mansour, Hassan Saleh Mahdi, Jamal Kaid Mohammed Ali, and Samantha Curle. "English Medium Instruction in Saudi Arabia: A Systematic Review." *Language Teaching Research* 42 (2024): 21-37.
- Alsubaia, Hanan. "Linguistic Hegemony of English Language in the Medical Context of King Abdullah Hospital." *Arab World English Journal* 10 (2019): 323-341.
- Altbach, Philip, G. 2019. "The Dilemma of English-Medium Instruction in International Higher Education." WES WENR. July 10, 2023. <https://wenr.wes.org/2019/11/the-dilemma-of-english-medium-instruction-in-international-higher-education>.
- Bailey, Carol, A. *A Guide to Qualitative Field Research*. London: Pine Forge Press, 2018.
- Baker, Will, and Julia Hüttner. "We Are Not the Language Police": Comparing Multilingual EMI Programmes in Europe and Asia." *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 29 (2018): 78-94.
- Bälter, Olle, Kann, Viggo, Mutimukwe, Chantal and Malmström, Hans. "English-medium instruction and impact on academic performance: a randomized control study." *Applied Linguistics Review* 15 (2024): 2373-2396.
- Belhiah, Hassan, and Maha Elhami. "English as a Medium of Instruction in the Gulf: When Students and Teachers Speak." *Language Policy* 14 (2015): 3-23.
- Braun, Virginia, Victoria Clarke, Nikki Hayfield, and Gareth Terry. "Thematic analysis," In *Handbook of Research Methods in Health Social Sciences*, edited by Liamputtong, 843-860. New York: Springer, 2019.
- British Council. "British Council Regional Policy Dialogue 2: The Role of English in Higher Education: Issues," *Policy and Practice*.
- Canagarajah, Suresh. *Introduction. In Reclaiming the Local in the Language Policy and Practice*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2005.
- Coleman, Jim, Anna K. Hultgren, Wei Li, and Cyntia Tsui. "Forum on English-Medium Instruction." *Tesol Quarterly* 52 (2018): 701-720.
- Council of Europe. *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Dafouz, Emma. "English as the Medium of Instruction in Spanish Context: A Look at Teacher Discourses," In *Content and Foreign Language Integrated Learning: Contributions to Multilingualism in European Contexts*, edited by Y. Ruiz de Zarobe, J. M. Sierra, and F. Gallardo del Puerto, 189-210. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2011.
- Dearden, Julie. *English as a Medium of Instruction- A Growing Global Phenomena: Final Report, January 2015*. Oxford: Oxford University, Department of Education and British Council, 2015.
- Doiz, Aintzane, David Lasagabaster, and Juan M. Sierra. "Internationalisation, Multilingualism and English-Medium Instruction." *World Englishes* 30 (2011): 345-359.
- Doiz, Aintzane, David Lasagabaster, and Juan M. Sierra. "Globalization, Internationalization, Multilingualism and Linguistic Strains in Higher Education." *Studies in Higher Education* 38 (2012): 1407-1421.
- Doiz, Aintzane, David Lasagabaster, and Juan M. Sierra. *English-medium Instruction at Universities: Global Challenges*. Multilingual Matters, 2013.
- Dubow, Gregg, and Susanne Gundermann. "Certifying the Linguistic and Communicative Competencies of Teachers in English-Medium Instruction Programmes." *Language Learning in Higher Education* 7 (2017): 475-487.
- Dunne, Brid, Judith Pettigrew, and Katie Robinson. "Using Historical Documentary Methods to Explore the History of Occupational Therapy." *British Journal of Occupational Therapy* 79 (2016): 376-384.

- Education Bureau of Hong Kong. (2011). *Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (English Language) Handbook*. <https://www.edb.gov.hk> (10 December 2018).
- ETS. 2010. *ETS Linking TOEFL iBT™ Scores to IELTS® Scores - A Research Report*, https://www.ets.org/s/toefl/pdf/linking_toefl_ibt_scores_to_ielts_scores.pdf (20 December 2024).
- Flick, Uwe. *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. Sage, 2018.
- Galloway, Nicola, Kari Sahan, and Jim McKinley. "English for Specific Purposes in Surging English-Medium Instruction Contexts." *Journal of English-Medium Instruction* 3 (2024): 236-259.
- Hopkynz, Sarah. English-Medium Instruction in Higher Education in the United Emirates. In *The Routledge Handbook of English-Medium Instruction in Higher Education*, edited by Bolton, K., Botha, W., and Lin, B., 284-296. Routledge, 2024.
- Hopkynz, Sarah and Elyas Tariq. English Vis-à-Vis Arabic in the Gulf Countries: Bridging the Ideological Divide." In *Linguistics identities in the Arabian*, edited by S. Hopkynz & W. Zoghbor, 17-33. Routledge, 2022.
- Ikuya, Aizawa. "Tracking the First-Year Experience in English Medium Instruction: A Pre-Post Study of Transitional Challenges." *English for Specific Purposes* 73 (2024): 20-32.
- Jiang, Anne L., Lawrence J. Zhang, and Stephen May. "Implementing English-Medium Instruction (EMI) in China: Teachers' Practices and Perceptions, and Students' Learning Motivation and Needs." *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 22 (2016): 107-119.
- Khawaji, Ahmed. "Transition of English Language Teaching in Saudi Arabia: A Critical Evaluative Study." *Arab World English Journal* 13 (2022): 265-280.
- Klaassen, Renate G. and Madeleine Bos. "English Language Screening for Scientific Staff at Delft University of Technology." *HERMES* (2010): 61-75.
- Kling, Joyce and Lars Stenius Stæhr. 2012. *The Development of the Test of Oral English Proficiency for Academic Staff (TOEPAS)*. Centre for Internationalization and Parallel Language Use (CIP), University of Copenhagen. <http://cip.ku.dk/forskning/cip_publicationer/CIP_TOEPAS_Technical_Report.pdf> (25 December 2024).
- Kumaravadivelu, Bala. "Dangerous Liaison: Globalization, Empire and TESOL," In *(Re)locating TESOL in an Age of Empire*, edited by Edge J., 1-26. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- Macaro, Ernesto. *English Medium Instruction: Content and Language in Policy and Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Masri, Tghreed. "A Critical Examination of the Arab Undergraduate Students' of their Academic Arabic Proficiency in Three EMI Universities in the UAE." *English Language Teaching* 12 (2019): 21-31.
- Ministry of Education. *Education Policy in Saudi Arabia*. Riyadh, 1996.
- Morgan, Hani. "Conducting a Qualitative Document Analysis." *The Qualitative Report* 27 (2022): 64-77.
- Pennycook, Alastair. *English and the Discourse of Colonialism*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Phillipson, Robert. *Linguistic Imperialism Continued*. Routledge, 2013.
- Pun, Jack KH, Xuehua Fu, and Kason Ka Ching Cheung. "Language Challenges and Coping Strategies in English Medium Instruction (EMI) Science Classrooms: A Critical Review of Literature." *Studies in Science Education* 60 (2023): 121-152.
- Sah, Pramod K. and Fan Fang. "Decolonizing English-Medium Instruction in the Global South." *TESOL Quarterly* (2024):1-15.
- Sayer, Peter, and Troy Crawford. "Developing a Collaborative Qualitative Research Project Across Borders: Issues and Dilemmas." *The Qualitative Report* 22 (2017): 1580-1588.
- Seidlhofer, Barbara. "Research Perspectives on Teaching English as a Lingua Franca." *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* (2024): 209-239.
- Shimauchi, Sae. "English-Medium Instruction in the Internationalization of Higher Education in Japan: Rationales and Issues." *Educational Studies in Japan* 12 (2018): 77-90.
- Spolsky, Bernard. *Language Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Thompson, Gene, and Jim Mckinley. "Integration of Content and Language Learning," In *The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching*, edited by John Lontas, Margo DelliCarpini, and Shahid Abrar-ul-Hassan, 1-13. London: Willey, 2018.
- Wang, Changmi. "The Relationship Between Teachers' Classroom English Proficiency and Their Teaching Self-Efficacy in an English Medium Instruction Context." *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (2021): 611743.
- Yuan, Limin, Fan Fang, and Guangwei Hu. "Are Students Prepared and Supported for English Medium Instruction in Chinese Higher Education to Promote Educational Equality?" *System* 125 (2024): 103423.
- Zehir Topkaya and Çelik Handan. Introduction to Teaching English for Academic Purposes: Theory into Practice. In *Teaching English for Academic Purposes*, edited by Zehir Topkaya and Çelik H. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024.