

Utilizing English as the Medium of Instruction (EMI) in Medical Education Programs: A Case Study of the Faculty of Medicine at Universitas Malikussaleh

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ABSTRACT

The choice of language significantly impacts educational quality and the future success of healthcare professionals, necessitating a thorough examination of using English as the medium of instruction. This study examines the impact of using English as the medium of instruction in medical education. Through online surveys conducted via Google Forms, it gathers perceptions and attitudes of students and faculty members at Universitas Malikussaleh's Faculty of Medicine, who are part of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) classes. The research investigates challenges and opportunities linked to English instruction, as well as evaluates the effectiveness of language proficiency assessment and support programs. Overall, it underscores the importance of English proficiency, acknowledges challenges, and emphasizes international collaboration and diversity. Improving support programs and addressing language barriers are key to enhancing medical education quality.

Keywords: *EMI, Medical Education, Classroom Teaching.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Medical education is a challenging and complex field that necessitates straightforward communication and comprehension of complex ideas. In recent years, the use of English as the language of instruction in medical education programs has generated considerable interest and debate. English as a medium of instruction (EMI) has become a widely debated topic in education, particularly in higher education settings. Proponents argue that EMI can enhance students' English proficiency while also facilitating content learning (Macaro et al., 2017). However, the implementation of EMI requires students to have sufficient English proficiency to cope with instruction in English (Chou, 2018). The use of English as a medium of instruction has been adopted by many non-English speaking countries, driven by the desire to keep pace with the global trend and provide students with more exposure to the language (Byun et al., 2010; Paris et al., 2022). There are various perspectives on the impact of EMI on students. Some argue that EMI can lead to cultural alienation and propose mother-tongue-based multilingual education as an alternative (Sharma, 2020). However, there is evidence to support the belief that using English as a medium of instruction can enhance students' English language skills (Bakhit & Mohamed, 2021). Students' perceptions of EMI vary, with some favoring English as a medium of instruction (Belhiah & Abdelatif, 2016; Afiyanti et al., 2021) while others express concerns about anxiety and adjustment in English medium instructional contexts (Ali et al., 2021).

The impact of EMI on educational policies and practices varies across different regions. For example, the Philippine government has proposed switching from English to the vernacular as the medium of instruction in primary schools (Nunan, 2003, 2003). In contrast, some countries, such as China and Vietnam, have seen a craze for English-medium education, driven by sociological factors and the desire to promote bilingualism and trilingualism (Hu, 2009; Manh, 2012).

The use of English as a medium of instruction also has implications for linguistic diversity. Some argue that EMI can contribute to the dominance of English and the erosion of other languages

(Pitkänen et al., 2013). However, others suggest that EMI can foster basic communication skills and make it easier for students to master English at higher levels (Qomariah et al., 2022).

Faculty of Medicine at Universitas Malikussaleh uses English as the language of instruction for its medical education programs. According to a study by van Mulligen et al. (2018), the use of English as the language of instruction has grown in popularity in numerous nations around the globe. This trend is motivated by the need to equip medical professionals with the language skills necessary for effective communication in a globalized healthcare setting.

Utilizing English as the Medium of Instruction (EMI) in medical education programs has become a global phenomenon (Yang et al., 2019). EMI refers to the use of English as the primary language for teaching academic subjects in non-English speaking countries. The implementation of EMI in higher education requires students to have sufficient English proficiency in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. This is essential for students to cope with the English-medium instruction (Chou, 2018).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research has shown that there is a need for teacher development in EMI contexts. Teacher educators play a crucial role in promoting EMI teacher development in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) higher education contexts (Yuan, 2019). They reflect on their experiences and provide guidance to teachers in effectively delivering instruction in English (Yuan, 2019).

In the context of medical education, implementing an English-medium program poses challenges and requires adaptations. A case study conducted in China highlighted the challenges faced in implementing an English-medium medical program and the strategies adopted to overcome them (Yang et al., 2019). These challenges include language barriers, cultural differences, and the need for specialized medical terminology (Yang et al., 2019).

When implementing EMI, it is important to consider content adaptations in lectures. Comparing lectures delivered in the first language (L1) and English-medium lectures can provide insights into the specific adaptations required for effective instruction (Zuaro, 2023). This understanding is crucial for ensuring that the content is accessible and comprehensible to students in an EMI setting (Zuaro, 2023).

English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) refers to the practice of teaching academic subjects in English to students whose first language is not English. The effectiveness of applying EMI in classroom teaching has been a topic of debate and research in various educational contexts.

Several studies have examined the impact of EMI on students' English proficiency and content learning. Macaro et al. (2017) conducted a systematic review of studies on EMI in higher education and found evidence that teaching academic subjects through English as a second language can benefit students' English proficiency without negatively affecting content learning. Similarly, Chou (2018) highlighted the importance of students having sufficient English proficiency to cope with EMI courses and programs at universities.

The implementation of EMI policies in different countries has also been investigated. Byun et al. (2010) critically examined the effectiveness of EMI policy in Korean higher education and highlighted the importance of the implementation strategy. The study emphasized the need for adequate English proficiency among students and instructors. Similarly, Nunan (2003) discussed the impact of English as a medium of instruction on educational policies and practices in the Asia-Pacific region. The study highlighted the concerns of the Philippine government regarding the effect of EMI on school children and proposed a switch to using the vernacular language from Grade 1.

The perceptions and attitudes of students towards EMI have also been explored. Al-Shboul (2022) discussed the students' perceptions of Arabic and English as a medium of instruction in Jordan. The study emphasized that the implementation of EMI is seen as an effective path for competitiveness and internationalization in education. Badiozaman et al. (2019) aimed to better understand the relationship between students' perception of English and academic self-efficacy in higher education institutions where English is used as a medium of instruction.

The impact of teachers' proficiency in English on their teaching efficacy in an EMI context has also been investigated. Wang (2021) highlighted the relationship between teachers' classroom English proficiency and their teaching self-efficacy. The study emphasized the role of English as a medium of classroom instruction in enhancing teaching effectiveness.

Overall, the effectiveness of applying English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in classroom teaching depends on various factors, such as students' English proficiency, implementation strategies, and the perceptions and attitudes of students and teachers. It is important to ensure that students and teachers have sufficient English proficiency to effectively engage in EMI. Additionally, the impact of EMI on students' English proficiency and content learning should be carefully examined to determine its effectiveness in different educational contexts.

Despite growing interest in the use of English as the language of instruction in medical education programs, there is no consensus regarding its efficacy and effects on students. In addition, it is necessary to investigate the experiences and perspectives of both native and non-native English speakers in medical education programs, especially in non-English speaking countries.

English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) has gained popularity in many non-English speaking countries, particularly in higher education institutions (Byun et al., 2010). However, the implementation of EMI comes with several challenges and drawbacks.

One of the main challenges is the difficulty of teaching and learning English as a foreign language, especially when it is used as a medium of instruction for other subjects (Paliath & Evangeline, 2022). This poses a problem for both teachers and students, as they may struggle to understand and effectively communicate complex concepts in English.

Another challenge is the lack of sufficient thought given to the implementation processes of EMI (Bradford, 2016). The trend towards EMI has accelerated without considering the challenges that may arise during the transition. This can lead to issues such as inadequate teacher training and support, which can hinder the effectiveness of EMI.

Additionally, the use of EMI can limit opportunities for students to use their home language and actively participate in the classroom, which can hinder language learning and vocabulary development (Avalos et al., 2021). This is particularly problematic for emergent bilinguals who are placed in classrooms where English is the norm.

Furthermore, the proficiency of teachers in English as a medium of instruction can have an impact on their classroom leadership performance (Wang, 2021a). Inadequate language proficiency and intercultural competence can affect the effectiveness of instruction and communication in the classroom.

The challenges of EMI also extend to students, as they may face difficulties in understanding concepts when the language of instruction is different from their mother tongue (Nahole & Haimbodi, 2022). This can create a barrier to learning and hinder academic achievement.

Moreover, the reliance on English as the medium of instruction can have negative effects on students' transition to thinking in English and their long-term acquisition of the language (Kang, 2012). This can hinder their overall language proficiency and limit their ability to fully engage with the subject matter.

This study's findings will contribute to the existing corpus of knowledge regarding the use of English as the language of instruction in medical education programs. The results of the study may shed light on the challenges and opportunities associated with the use of English as the language of instruction and propose methods for enhancing the efficacy of medical education programs. The findings of the study may also inform language policy decisions in medical education programs.

The study aims to investigate the perceptions and attitudes of students and faculty members towards the use of English as the medium of instruction in medical education programs. It also aims to examine the challenges and opportunities associated with the implementation of English as the language of instruction in medical education programs, as well as to evaluate the effectiveness of English language proficiency assessment and support programs for medical students and faculty members.

3. METHOD

In this investigation, quantitative research will be conducted. This study makes use of survey research as its method of inquiry. This study employed a cross-sectional research design, which is a type of observational study involving data collection at a singular point in time.

For this research, a survey questionnaire will be administered to participants who are students and instructors in medical education programs. The survey questionnaire will consist of closed-ended questions and will be administered online using Google Forms. The survey will collect data on the demographics of the participants, their perspectives, and experiences regarding the use of English as the language of instruction, and their suggestions for development.

Participants for this research are students from the Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Malikussaleh. They are enrolled in EMI (English as a medium of instruction) classes. They study like any other class but use English as their medium of instruction as well as for discussion. The faculty has three EMI classes, and they all serve as the target population and sample. Each of the class consist of 10 students; a total of 30 students They have been studying with EMI for over a year now, allowing room for making perception and self-introspection on how the class progress.

Simple descriptive data analysis will be conducted to summarize the demographic characteristics of the participants. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, will be used.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 elaborates on students' perception and attitude towards the application of EMI in the class. With 7 question items entailed, the graph depicts how students perceived the policy and its effect on their learning and future career.

As we can observe from the graph, students' perception is relatively high with a score of 3.760204. This score is considered high as it is higher than 3.5. The highest score rating was shown at question 1 (To what extent do you believe that English language proficiency is necessary for success in medical education?) with 4.107, and the lowest was observed at question number 3 (I am confident in my ability to understand and communicate complex medical concepts in English) with 3,328, leaving the gap between the highest and the lowest at 0.779,779. A relatively low gap between the two.

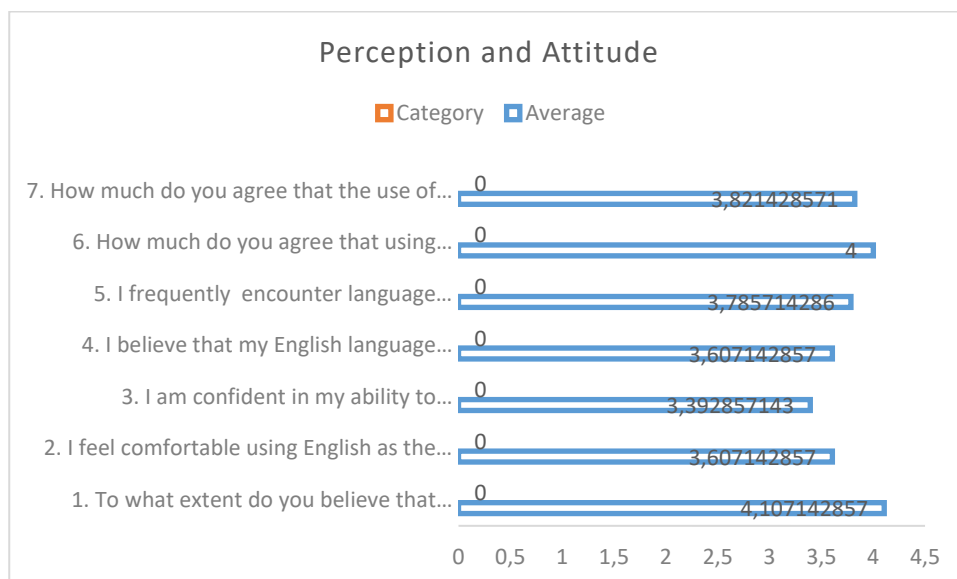


Figure 1 Perception and Attitude

Looking at the results, we can see that respondents generally believe that English language proficiency is necessary for success in medical education. They also feel moderately comfortable using English as the medium of instruction and believe their proficiency has improved since starting the program. However, students still see that language is barriers or issue in interactions with faculty and peers. They agree that using English in medical education prepares students for a global healthcare environment and enhances education quality.



Figure 2 Challenges and Opportunity

From the chart, we can observe that respondents feel somewhat prepared to learn and communicate medical concepts in English, but they agree that it presents a significant challenge for non-native speakers. Their confidence in faculty members' training to teach in English is moderate.

Additionally, students value the implementation of English as the medium of instruction, is seen as an opportunity for collaboration with international institutions and the exchange of medical knowledge. Thus, they believe it promotes diversity and inclusivity in medical education and contributes to the globalization of medical education.



Figure 3 Effectiveness

Figure 3 elaborates on respondents' belief that English language proficiency assessment and support programs are necessary for success in medical education. These programs are perceived to improve student performance and help faculty members teach effectively in English. Although their satisfaction with existing programs is moderate, they believe that the programs aid integration into English-speaking medical communities and contribute to the overall quality of medical education.

Based on the combined analysis of the three datasets related to English language proficiency in medical education, we can draw the following three conclusions:

English Proficiency is Vital but Challenging:

The data shows that there is a strong belief in the importance of English language proficiency for success in medical education. This underscores the recognition that English is a critical tool for communication and knowledge exchange in the global healthcare context. However, respondents also acknowledge that English instruction presents a significant challenge, particularly for non-native speakers. This dual perception highlights the complexity of integrating English into medical education programs, where the need for proficiency is clear but the challenges are substantial.

Opportunities for International Collaboration and Knowledge Exchange:

Respondents perceive the implementation of English as the medium of instruction as an opportunity for collaboration with international medical institutions and the exchange of medical knowledge. This suggests that the use of English in education can foster global connections and facilitate the sharing of expertise and best practices in healthcare. Additionally, the belief that English instruction promotes diversity and inclusivity underscores the potential for internationalization to bring together students and faculty from diverse cultural backgrounds, enriching the learning environment.

Support Programs Play a Vital Role but Require Improvement:

The data indicates that English language proficiency assessment and support programs are viewed as necessary for success in medical education. However, the level of satisfaction with these programs is moderate, suggesting room for improvement. While these programs are believed to improve student performance and help faculty teach effectively in English, the usage of the provided resources is also moderate. This suggests that institutions should focus on enhancing the quality and accessibility of language support programs to better meet the needs of students and faculty.

5. CONCLUSION

In summary, the data analysis across these three datasets indicates that while English language proficiency is seen as important for medical education, it also presents challenges, particularly for non-native speakers. Respondents generally appreciate the support programs but suggest room for improvement. The implementation of English as the medium of instruction is viewed as an opportunity for international collaboration and diversity in medical education. Ensuring effective language support programs and addressing language barriers can enhance the overall quality of medical education programs.

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