

# Students' Opinions About English-Medium Instruction: A Case Study at Tishk International University

Bunyamin Celik<sup>1</sup>, Recep Bilgin<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>English Language Teaching Department, Faculty of Education, Tishk International University, Erbil  
[bunyamin.celik@tiu.edu.iq](mailto:bunyamin.celik@tiu.edu.iq)

<sup>2</sup>English Language Teaching Department, Faculty of Education, Tishk International University, Erbil  
[recep.bilgin@tiu.edu.iq](mailto:recep.bilgin@tiu.edu.iq)

DOI: [10.23918/vesal2023v14](https://doi.org/10.23918/vesal2023v14)

## ABSTRACT

English-medium instruction (EMI) has recently become very popular all over the world. Especially the rapid spread of globalization and the increase in the need for communication have brought English to the forefront as the language of communication. In order to meet this need, educational institutions in many countries, especially at the university level, choose English as the medium language of education. Although this situation is quite attractive, it also renders some problems. English proficiency level of the students who would like to attend English-medium universities should be high enough to meet the requirements of the academic language of the courses, and it is quite different from daily English. It may yield some negative consequences for the students who do not have proficient level of English. In addition, there are some other difficulties. In this study, 670 students at Tishk International University in Erbil comprised study participants. In the study, it was intended to address the difficulties of English-medium instruction. According to the results obtained from the survey, the students have different difficulties with EMI. This study draws attention to the different dimensions of these difficulties. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used in a mixed manner in the study.

**Keywords:** English-medium Instruction, Education, the Effects of EMI

## 1. INTRODUCTION

English-medium Instruction is one of the most popular topics in education in the modern age. There are some situations that always keep this issue on the agenda. Due to the increasing need for English in the globalizing world, many educational institutions and especially universities have adopted English as the language of education. Thus, they both responded to an issue needed by the society and gained prestige in this way. However, with the widespread use of EMI, some disadvantages have emerged. In particular, the fact that many students cannot learn with EMI as they learn in their mother tongue has emerged as a remarkable obstacle (Sukardi & Sopandi, 2011).

Communication, one of the basic needs of the modern world, has made EMI a necessity for many universities (Ibrahim, 2001). In addition, EMI for universities is a matter of prestige (Preece, 2022). Therefore, it is seen that many universities around the world have made the necessary changes. In addition, the demands of the society they live in to integrate from universities to the globalizing world force universities to EMI (Tran & Nguyen, 2018). In

addition, the fact that the academic literature is mostly in English is also an attractive factor (Brown, 2014). On the other hand, preparing textbooks in the mother tongue of the society they live in poses a separate challenge.

Despite all this, there are other rather problematic aspects of EMI. First of all, it is a difficult process to train instructors who will teach the course in English. In addition, it takes time for students to learn academic English to meet EMI's requirements. While creating the infrastructure of all these is a problem, the fact that students cannot fully understand the opposite as in their mother tongue is another problem aspect of the issue.

Dealing with any issue academically requires evaluating its advantages and disadvantages together. The hard part of EMI is that it has a lot of positive and negative aspects. Therefore, discussions on this subject continue in the literature. What kind of problems EMI produces has been the focus of this study.

### Research Questions

- 1-) What disadvantages does EMI have?
- 2-) At which points are these disadvantages more evident?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 ENGLISH-MEDIUM INSTRUCTION

In countries where English is not the main language, the teaching of academic courses through this language is called English-medium instruction (EMI) (Richards & Pun, 2023). In this context, an institution's adoption of English-medium instruction means that it presents academic subjects using English (Macaro et al., 2019). Despite the fact that the mother tongue of each country is not English, the fact that educational institutions give their education in English explains this concept.

EMI is spreading quite rapidly in the modern world because it has some benefits for both students, institutions and countries (Doiz et al., 2011). The fact that the common communicative language is English, especially in the globalizing world, has forced many institutions around the world to EMI (Reynolds, 2021). In addition, the fact that English has become a *lingua franca* has increased the popularity of EMI internationally (Fang, 2018).

The fact that the majority of the works produced in the academic world is in English, as well as the historical developments had an important effect on the acquisition of this feature of English (Gupta, 2006). Therefore, in addition to political reasons, academic and social reasons have also been influential in English gaining this position.

There are some reasons behind the prevalence of EMI in the modern context.

- 1-) The necessity of teaching English, which is the language of the global world, in the most effective way has forced many Institutions to EMI.

- 2-) English has become a common language for many multilingual societies.
- 3-) It has become a necessity to learn English effectively in order to compete with the modern world.
- 4-) In this way it was possible for students to acquire some global literacy skills to be educated in accordance with the requirements of the modern world.
- 5-) EMI has emerged as an important factor for institutions to gain prestige.
- 6-) The necessity of developing students' intercultural communication skills forced institutions to EMI (Galloway et al., 2017).

## **2.2 DISADVANTAGES OF EMI**

Despite all these positive aspects, EMI also has some negative aspects. First of all, there are very few teachers who will use English effectively in academic circles. In addition, the level of English proficiency expected from students is quite high and many students fail to achieve it. Moreover, students and teachers can easily switch to their mother tongue, as the mother tongue is easier to use in many regions. Since EMI requires a particularly advanced level of English, students' motivation and interest decrease over time and this becomes an extra burden for teachers and students. Furthermore, knowledge transfer does not occur as effectively as in the mother tongue and many subjects remain unlearned. Additionally, native speakers who teach especially in environments where EMI is implemented cannot respond to the needs of students. More importantly, EMI prevents the development of local culture and language according to the needs of the modern age (Al-Issa & Dahan, 2011). Finally, it should be noted that EMI requires teachers to spend more time preparing for lessons (Byun et al., 2011). Moreover, in some cases, access to English materials becomes very difficult due to insufficient financial resources (Songbatumis, 2017).

## **2.3 EMI AROUND THE WORLD**

Universities in many countries of the world offer English-medium instruction. This includes many African countries. In some countries, it is even possible to encounter EMI at the primary and secondary school level (Briggs et al., 2018). However, EMI cannot find much place in pre-university education, especially with the effect of nationalist movements (Troudy, 2022). In addition, some countries that use English as a medium of instruction along with their mother tongue in education are discussing the harm that this may cause to their cultural development. In some African countries, English is already an official language and is used at all levels of education (Sibomana, 2015).

In addition, it is seen that EMI is widely used in many developing countries of the world. An important reason for this is the efforts of these countries to integrate into the world economy and the resulting needs. It is also obvious that developing countries need trained manpower. In this context, there is a particular need for employees who speak English and are integrated with the world (Chien & Chapman, 2014).

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 RESEARCH MODEL**

This study was conducted on 670 students studying at Tishk International University. Quantitative and Qualitative research techniques were used together in the study. Students were asked questions in accordance with the Likert scale and their opinions about EMI were taken. Afterwards, these statistics were evaluated comparatively. Along with these questions, it was tried to understand the difficulties that the students encounter during the English courses. Also, with the foresight that they could not understand some subjects well due to the English instruction, they were asked for their opinions on this subject. In addition, the issue of the fact that the textbooks are in English and that many points in the books cannot be understood have been examined. Lastly, the psychological aspect of this issue was brought to the fore and students were asked whether they would feel more secure if the education was in their mother tongue.

#### **3.2 SAMPLING**

In this study, 670 students studying in different departments of the university were asked questions in accordance with the Likert scale. All of these students get education in their own faculties with English-medium instruction. In addition, all course materials of these students are in English. English Language Teaching (ELT) students were excluded from this study.

#### **3.3 DATA COLLECTION**

The data used in this study were collected with the Questionnaire created on the Google form. Afterwards, these data were evaluated comparatively. Thus, students' thoughts about EMI were revealed. The questions asked to the students here are generally considered as the main disadvantages of EMI in the relevant literature.

### **4. FINDINGS**

While getting the opinions of the students studying in different departments about EMI, first of all, the difficulties of learning the courses in English were examined. Accordingly, the students were asked how difficult it is to explain the course content in English and their answers were presented in statistics.

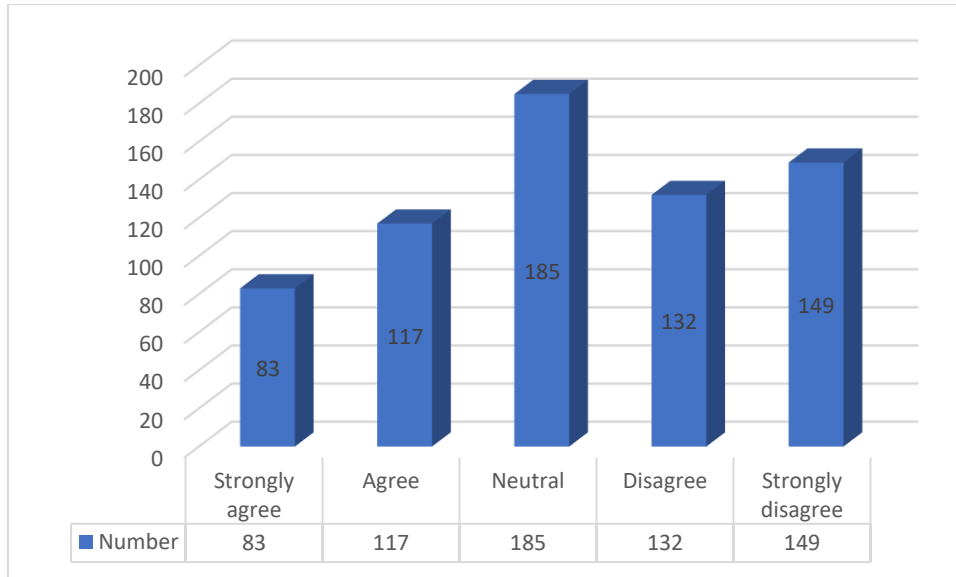
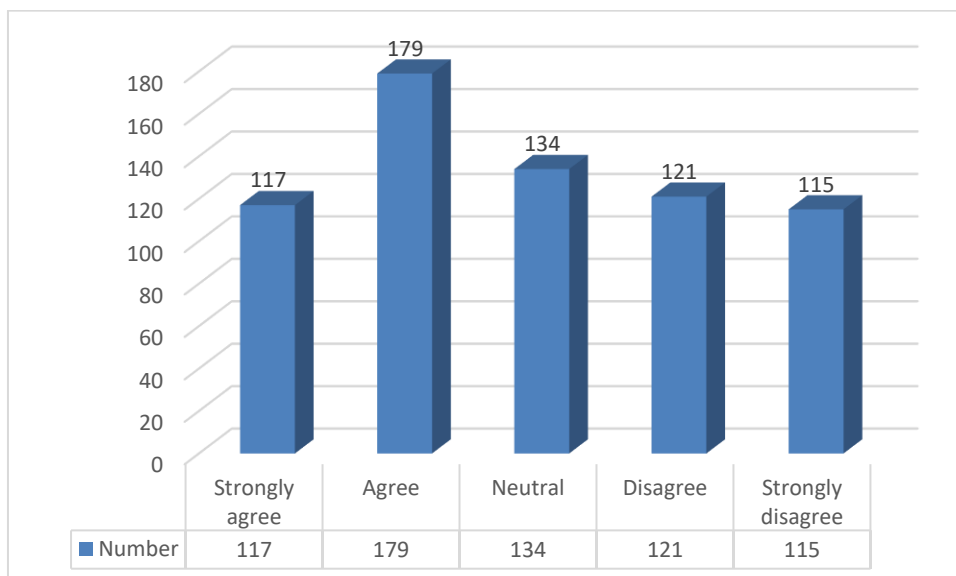


FIGURE 1-It is difficult for me to have lessons in English

Approximately 30% of the students stated that it is very difficult for them to have the courses in English. Although this situation statistically showed the minority among the total, the fact that 200 of 670 students answered in this way shows how difficult EMI is for these students. In addition, 28% of the students were undecided on this issue. This corresponds to a total of 185 students. Only 42% of the students stated that they did not experience difficulties in the lessons. This clearly illustrates the difficulties of EMI.

In addition to the fact that EMI is an important obstacle to learning the lessons effectively, one of the important issues that students complain about it is skipping some points in the lesson without understanding. Although students attend the lesson carefully, it is one of the important disadvantages of EMI that some points are passed without understanding. The statistics obtained by asking students about this situation are as follows.



### FIGURE 2-I can miss some points when the lessons are in English

Approximately 45% of the students stated that they passed through the course without understanding some of the subjects. This corresponds to a total of 296 students. In addition, 20% of the students were undecided on this issue. Only 35 percent of the students (236 students) stated that they did not have any problems in this regard. As this statistic shows, an important problematic aspect of EMI has emerged. According to this, a remarkable part of the students do not understand some of the subjects due to the education in English.

Textbooks are an important resource for students to use to understand the subject outside of the classroom. It is possible to learn the subjects that they cannot learn in the course from the course book. However, another problem arises at this point. The English level of the textbooks is quite advanced and there are many academic words that students do not understand. This is another challenge for students. The next question was asked to the students to observe how effective this situation was.

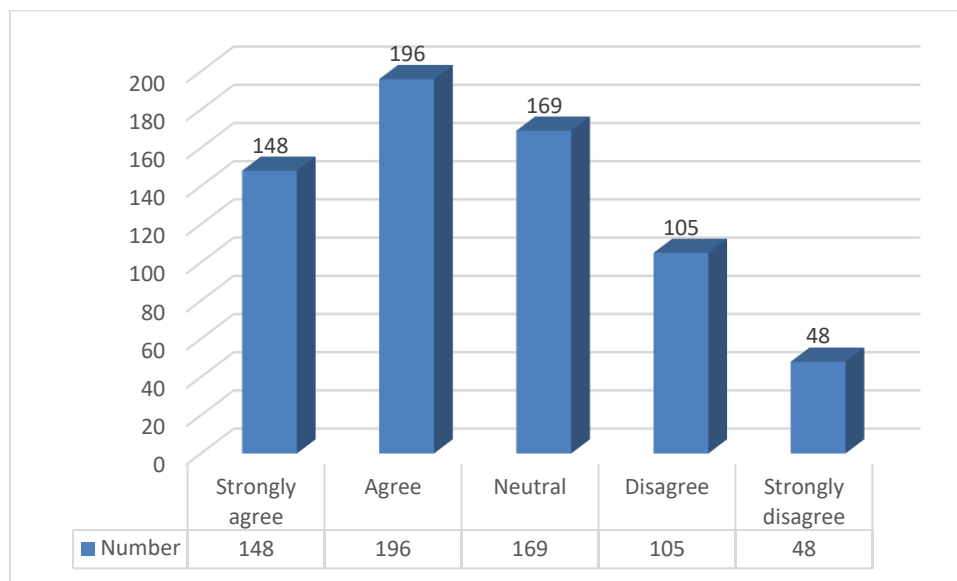


FIGURE 3-There are too many unknown words in our coursebooks

As can be seen, 51% of the students (344 students) stated that they had difficulties in this regard, while 25% were undecided. Only 23% of the students stated that they did not experience any difficulties in this regard. This statistic clearly shows what kind of difficulties the students face in terms of textbooks.

The psychological effects of EMI should also be emphasized. Although students continue their education in these institutions because they give importance to EMI in the reality of the global world, there are some psychological consequences of not being able to learn effectively in the process. In order to determine this situation, the students were asked how they would feel if the lessons were taught in their mother tongue.

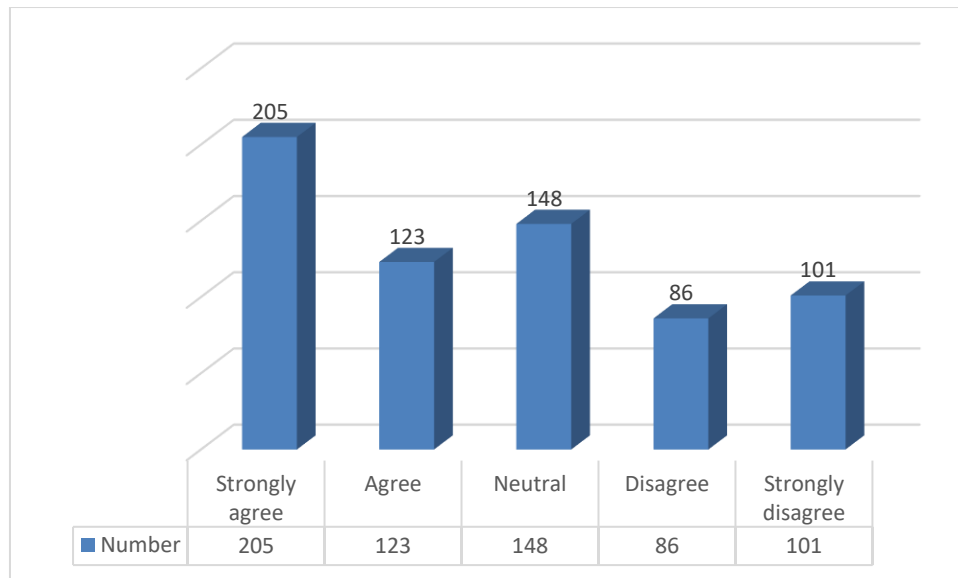


FIGURE 4-I would feel more secure in my mother tongue

Accordingly, 50% of the students (328 students) stated that they would feel more secure if the courses were given in their mother tongue. In addition, 22% of the students (148 students) were undecided on this issue. On the other hand, only 28% (187 students) of the total stated that EMI did not have any psychological effect.

## 5. DISCUSSION

There are important reasons why EMI has become widespread all over the world recently. Especially in the global world, the need for communication is more than ever, bringing English to the fore as a communication language. That's why many universities use EMI to both meet this need and gain a prestigious position (Galloway et al., 2017). However, some disadvantages have emerged over time. In addition to the difficulties that it brings to students and teachers, EMI, which significantly slows down the development of the local language at the academic level, imposes extra burdens on institutions, teachers and students (Al-Issa & Dahan, 2011).

In this research, students' opinions on the subject were asked and the answers obtained were put into statistics. According to the results obtained, a significant portion of the students stated that EMI was quite difficult, and the English lessons brought some extra burdens on them. There are some reasons for this. First of all, students may not understand English as well as they understand in their mother tongue. It is quite difficult to say that active learning in their mother tongue occurs in the same way in English. Although this is not a problem for some high achievers, a significant portion of the students state that effective learning does not occur. In particular, the fact that students missed some topics during the lesson clearly shows the difficulties experienced by the students.

Textbooks, which are an important reference source, also appear as an important problem if students do not understand in the lesson. Although it is an important reference source for students, it is very difficult for students to understand because the content of the course book is prepared in a very academic and difficult English.

When we put all these together, it is important to emphasize what the psychological effects on students are. In this case, it should be noted that the result is remarkable. The majority of the students stated that they would feel more secure if they received this education in their mother tongue. This is important in that it points to the psychological difficulties that EMI brings to them.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The advantages of EMI for students and society have been widely expressed in the literature. However, the disadvantages that arise in the processes are also remarkable. Considering these disadvantages, some adjustments need to be made. First of all, it seems that some students do not understand the lessons effectively with EMI. In addition, this situation creates an important obstacle to the academic development of local languages. If other disadvantages in addition to these are taken into account, the necessity of incorporating local languages into the content of the education given with EMI arises. Among 670 students, a considerable number of them expressed their opinions in a way that indicates they do not have any difficulty with EMI. On the other hand, there are also many others who express their concerns and state that they somehow face up to difficulties. Therefore, it is important to adjust the curriculum by taking these students into account.

As for the limitations of this study, it was done at a private university only, and if it were applied in another setting like a state university, the results would be different. Some departments are attractive to students, and the best achievers choose to go to them while some others are not so popular. For that reason, if this study was done in more heterogenous settings, the results could be more clearly reflective of the real situation.

As for some implications, the students should be aware of their limits and choose their departments more wisely, especially about the EMI. It seems there are many others who are already satisfied with that kind of instruction. As for the others, they should know their limits and make choices accordingly. Another focus should be on instructors' attention to these students who have difficulty with EMI. If the instructors detect them on time, they may develop appropriate strategies for these students, or for some of them, they may offer some radical changes to other universities where EMI is not applied.

Moreover, the language of the textbooks can be simplified so as to make them comprehensible for students. Some textbooks do not serve for anything for the students because of their incomprehensible language. Another point is that the instructors may make the content easier for students. The last option is that the educational institutions take English preparatory classes more seriously to solve this problem before it occurs.



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