Research Paper

Instruction in the English Language and English Medium Instruction: Implementing Research Findings in Practical Applications

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ABSTRACT

The increasing global reliance on English as a medium of instruction has significantly influenced educational policies and classroom practices across non-native English-speaking countries. As institutions worldwide adopt English Medium Instruction (EMI) to enhance internationalization and academic competitiveness, a parallel concern emerges regarding the preparedness of both educators and learners to operate effectively in English-dominant academic settings. This research paper critically examines the intersection between English language instruction (ELI) and EMI, emphasizing the importance of applying empirical research findings to practical teaching and institutional frameworks. Drawing on current research in applied linguistics, second language acquisition, and EMI implementation, the paper explores how language instruction theories and pedagogical innovations can be effectively translated into classroom strategies. It highlights the necessity of integrated approaches that address content learning and language development simultaneously, particularly through models such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and translanguaging practices. Furthermore, the paper investigates institutional challenges, such as limited teacher training, lack of language-aware curricula, and assessment misalignment, offering actionable solutions based on documented best practices from diverse educational contexts. Through a synthesis of empirical studies and interviews with EMI practitioners, the paper outlines key success factors for effective EMI adoption, including targeted professional development, curriculum redesign, and institutional support systems. The findings underscore the need for context-sensitive, flexible, and research-informed approaches that empower teachers and support learners in multilingual classrooms. Ultimately, this study advocates for a research-to-practice model that enables sustainable and inclusive EMI programs, ensuring that English language instruction and content delivery mutually reinforce academic success.

Keywords: *Global Reliance, Internationalization, Intersection, Pedagogical Innovations, Empirical Studies*

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The use of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) has rapidly expanded across educational systems worldwide, especially in higher education institutions seeking to internationalize their curricula and attract global student populations. This shift reflects broader socio-economic trends in globalization, academic mobility, and the status of English as the de facto language of science, technology, and international communication. However, the move toward EMI often outpaces the capacity of institutions, educators, and learners to adapt, resulting in significant pedagogical and linguistic challenges.

Traditionally, English language instruction (ELI) has aimed to build proficiency in the four core language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—primarily within the context of second or foreign language learning. These language programs are designed with a focus on communication, grammar, vocabulary acquisition, and fluency development. In contrast, EMI involves teaching academic content (e.g., engineering, medicine, history) through English, often to students for whom English is not a first language, and by instructors who may not be trained in English language pedagogy. This divergence between the goals and methodologies of ELI and EMI has given rise to a complex educational dilemma: how can content knowledge be effectively transmitted when both learners and teachers may be operating with limited language proficiency or pedagogical preparedness?

A growing body of research highlights the risks of implementing EMI without adequate linguistic and instructional support. These risks include reduced student comprehension, diminished classroom interaction, and widening achievement gaps. At the same time, research also points to successful EMI models that integrate language support with content teaching, particularly those employing Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), scaffolded instruction, and translanguaging techniques. Despite these promising strategies, there remains a gap between research findings and their actual implementation in classrooms. This paper seeks to address that gap by exploring how empirical research on language learning, bilingual education, and EMI can be effectively applied to enhance classroom instruction and institutional practices. Specifically, the paper investigates:

- How research findings in English language instruction and EMI can be operationalized in diverse educational contexts
- What pedagogical strategies, teacher training models, and curriculum designs are most effective in EMI environments
- How institutions can support sustainable and inclusive EMI adoption at a structural level

By synthesizing international research and real-world experiences, this study offers a framework for translating theory into practice in EMI settings. It argues that effective EMI implementation requires more than policy change; it demands pedagogical innovation, interdisciplinary collaboration, and a commitment to research-informed decision-making.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The shift toward English Medium Instruction (EMI) in educational systems around the world has generated a rich and growing body of research within the fields of applied linguistics, education policy, teacher training, and second language acquisition. This literature review examines key theoretical and empirical studies that inform the understanding of both English language instruction (ELI) and EMI, highlighting significant challenges, emerging best practices, and the evolving role of research in bridging the gap between policy and pedagogy.

1. English Language Instruction (ELI): Foundations and Pedagogical Approaches

Traditional English language instruction, especially in English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, is grounded in communicative language teaching (CLT), task-based learning (TBL), and content-based instruction (CBI). These approaches emphasize meaningful interaction, real-world language use, and learner autonomy (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Studies such as Nation (2001) and Brown (2007) underscore the importance of balanced instruction that develops vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and the four macro skills. Moreover, research advocates for learner-centered strategies, formative assessment, and differentiated instruction to support diverse learner profiles. However, when learners transition from English language classes to content-based EMI settings, these instructional models may no longer be sufficient on their own, creating a need for more integrated and context-specific strategies.

2. English Medium Instruction (EMI): Scope and Expansion

EMI refers to the use of English to teach academic subjects in contexts where English is not the first language of most participants. Its rapid expansion, particularly in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, is often driven by institutional goals such as internationalization, global rankings, and enhanced employability (Dearden, 2014; Wächter & Maiworm, 2014).

However, research by Macaro et al. (2018) reveals that while EMI has become a strategic priority for many universities and secondary schools, its implementation often outpaces the development of adequate support systems for both teachers and students. Teachers are frequently expected to shift from teaching in their native languages to English without sufficient language training or pedagogical preparation. Similarly, students may struggle to engage with complex academic content due to limited proficiency in academic English.

3. Challenges in EMI Implementation

Several studies identify recurring challenges associated with EMI:

- **Teacher Proficiency and Pedagogical Gaps**: Many EMI instructors are content experts but lack training in second language pedagogy (Ball & Lindsay, 2013). This can result in limited scaffolding, reduced interaction, and over-reliance on lecture-style delivery.
- **Student Comprehension and Participation**: Learners in EMI settings often report difficulties understanding lectures, engaging in discussions, and completing assignments due to language barriers (Galloway, 2017; Aguilar & Rodríguez, 2012). This can negatively affect their academic performance and confidence.
- **Curriculum and Assessment Misalignment**: Traditional content curricula and assessments rarely account for the linguistic demands placed on learners in EMI classrooms. As a result, students are often evaluated on content knowledge without adequate support for the language skills needed to demonstrate that knowledge (Llinares, Morton & Whittaker, 2012).

4. Research-Informed Strategies and Emerging Models

Recent research offers promising models for addressing EMI challenges:

- **Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)**: CLIL is a dual-focused educational approach that simultaneously develops language skills and content knowledge. It emphasizes scaffolding, active learning, and the use of multimodal resources to support learner comprehension (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010). Research

suggests that CLIL enhances cognitive engagement and promotes long-term retention of both content and language.

- **Translanguaging**: This approach acknowledges the multilingual realities of EMI classrooms by encouraging students to use all their linguistic resources for learning. Translanguaging has been shown to increase participation, reduce anxiety, and support deeper conceptual understanding (Garcia & Wei, 2014).
- **Teacher Professional Development**: Empirical studies stress the importance of targeted EMI training programs that blend content knowledge with language pedagogy. These programs should include language upgrading, classroom strategies for scaffolding, and reflective teaching practices (Costa & Coleman, 2013).
- **Institutional Support Mechanisms**: Research points to the value of pre-sessional English courses, academic writing support, and language policy frameworks that guide EMI implementation. Institutions that invest in these support systems see improved student outcomes and higher satisfaction (Kirkpatrick, 2014).

5. Gaps in the Literature and the Research-to-Practice Divide

Despite a growing body of EMI research, a gap remains between theoretical recommendations and classroom realities. Much of the literature highlights the need for:

- Localized, context-sensitive solutions rather than generic, top-down models.
- Inclusion of teacher and student voices in EMI policy development.
- Longitudinal studies that assess the impact of interventions over time.
- Cross-disciplinary collaboration between language educators, content experts, and administrators.

The literature demonstrates that while EMI offers significant opportunities for global engagement and academic advancement, it also presents complex pedagogical and linguistic challenges. To ensure its success, educational institutions must move beyond policy adoption to research-informed, sustainable practice. This paper builds upon the reviewed literature to propose a practical framework for implementing EMI grounded in established language education research, with an emphasis on adaptability, equity, and continuous professional development.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a **qualitative research synthesis approach**, integrating findings from diverse sources—empirical studies, case reports, institutional reviews, and expert interviews—to develop a comprehensive framework for implementing research-informed practices in English language instruction and English Medium Instruction (EMI). The methodology is designed to bridge theoretical insights with practical classroom strategies and institutional policies, ensuring that the resulting recommendations are grounded, adaptable, and applicable across varied educational contexts.

1. Research Design

The research design is exploratory and interpretive in nature, focusing on understanding how theoretical research in applied linguistics, second language acquisition (SLA), and EMI implementation can inform practical decision-making in educational settings. Given the interdisciplinary scope of the study, this design is particularly suited to synthesizing insights from multiple domains—pedagogy, linguistics, curriculum design, and teacher education.

The study was carried out in three phases:

1. **Literature Collection and Analysis**
2. **Case Study Review**
3. **Practitioner Interviews and Thematic Analysis**

Each phase contributed to a layered understanding of the research-to-practice gap in EMI and helped construct a grounded framework for actionable implementation.

2. Phase I: Literature Collection and Systematic Review

An extensive literature search was conducted using academic databases including Scopus, ERIC, JSTOR, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Search terms included:

- "English Medium Instruction"
- "CLIL implementation"
- "Teacher training EMI"
- "Academic English support"
- "Instructional scaffolding in EMI"
- "ELT and EMI integration"

Selection criteria for inclusion were:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2005 and 2024
- Empirical or theoretical studies focusing on EMI or ELI implementation
- Research conducted in non-native English contexts across higher education and secondary school settings
- Studies that proposed, tested, or evaluated pedagogical or institutional strategies

A total of **48 high-relevance articles and reports** were shortlisted, analyzed, and thematically coded using qualitative content analysis techniques. Key themes identified included scaffolding strategies, language-aware assessment, CLIL implementation, institutional support, and translanguaging.

3. Phase II: Comparative Case Study Analysis

To gain insight into real-world application, **comparative case studies** from six countries (Japan, India, Spain, the Netherlands, United Arab Emirates, and South Africa) were selected based on diversity in language policy and EMI maturity. Each case study focused on:

- Institutional motivation for EMI adoption
- Teacher preparation models
- Classroom practices
- Student experiences
- Challenges and innovations

These case studies were drawn from academic publications, institutional reports, and international EMI evaluation projects such as the EMEMUS project (English Medium Education in Multilingual University Settings). The case analysis helped identify context-sensitive practices that had measurable positive impacts on student learning outcomes and teacher efficacy.

4. Phase III: Practitioner Interviews

To validate findings and gather first-hand insights, **semi-structured interviews** were conducted with **15 EMI practitioners**, including:

- Subject instructors teaching in English
- English language support faculty
- Curriculum designers
- Academic coordinators and policy implementers

Participants were selected from universities and secondary institutions across Asia, Europe, and Africa, representing both urban and rural settings. The interview protocol included questions on:
- Their experience with EMI implementation
- Training and support received
- Observed student challenges and coping strategies
- Innovations and adaptations developed at the classroom level
- Views on institutional support and policy effectiveness

Interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically using NVivo software. Emerging themes reinforced the literature findings but also surfaced additional concerns, such as emotional burnout among EMI teachers, resistance to policy changes, and gaps in learner motivation.

5. Analytical Framework

To synthesize insights across data sources, the study employed a **three-tiered coding framework**:
1. **Pedagogical Level** – instructional strategies, teacher knowledge, scaffolding methods
2. **Learner Level** – language proficiency, cognitive load, classroom interaction
3. **Institutional Level** – policy, training infrastructure, curriculum alignment

This framework enabled cross-comparison between theory and practice, and facilitated the development of an **implementation matrix** linking specific challenges to research-informed solutions.

Ethical Considerations

This research maintained strict ethical standards. All interview participants provided informed consent, and their identities have been anonymized to protect privacy. Secondary data sources were cited according to academic integrity norms. No vulnerable populations were involved.

Limitations

While the study offers rich qualitative insights, it is limited in scope to non-native English contexts and does not include longitudinal outcome data. Future research could expand into quantitative measures of EMI impact or examine sector-specific EMI practices (e.g., in STEM, business, or medical education). By combining systematic literature review, case study comparison, and practitioner interviews, this methodology offers a robust and multi-layered approach to identifying how research can inform practical improvements in EMI and English language instruction. The findings not only validate current theoretical models but also illuminate the real-world adjustments and innovations required for successful implementation.

Findings

The analysis of literature, case studies, and practitioner interviews revealed several critical insights into the relationship between English language instruction (ELI) and English

Medium Instruction (EMI), highlighting both challenges and promising practices in bridging research and classroom application.

1. Misalignment Between Language Proficiency and EMI Demands
A recurring theme in both the literature and interviews was the **linguistic gap** between students' actual English proficiency and the academic demands placed on them in EMI classrooms. While institutions often assume a certain level of language competence, learners frequently struggle with academic vocabulary, lecture comprehension, and content-specific writing. This misalignment leads to **reduced engagement, poor academic performance, and increased dropout rates** in some contexts.

2. Teachers' Need for Dual Competency
Practitioners emphasized the **dual challenge** faced by EMI instructors: delivering complex content while ensuring language comprehensibility. Many faculty members reported lacking training in language-sensitive pedagogy, relying instead on lecture-heavy methods with minimal interaction. This often results in limited learner participation and surface-level understanding. Those who received training in strategies such as **scaffolding, paraphrasing, and using visuals** reported significantly better student outcomes.

3. Institutional Policies Often Lack Pedagogical Grounding
While many institutions have adopted EMI as a strategic move toward internationalization, interviewees and case studies revealed that **policy frameworks rarely include structured pedagogical or linguistic support**. Teachers are frequently left to adapt individually, leading to inconsistent practices and a lack of shared standards.

4. Promising Practices Emerging from Context-Sensitive Implementation
Case studies from countries such as the Netherlands, Spain, and India revealed successful EMI models that integrate research-based approaches:
- **CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning)** was widely cited as a successful framework that supports both content mastery and language development.
- **Pre-sessional English support**, **discipline-specific language modules**, and **team teaching** (language and content instructors collaborating) were effective in enhancing student comprehension.
- **Translanguaging** was used successfully in multicultural classrooms to enable students to process content in their native languages while articulating understanding in English.

5. Professional Development as a Key Enabler
All interviewees unanimously agreed that **ongoing, hands-on EMI teacher training** was critical. Programs that combined language enhancement with classroom strategies empowered teachers to adjust materials, manage diverse classrooms, and support learner needs more effectively. Institutions that offered regular workshops, mentoring, and feedback loops saw more consistent EMI outcomes.

CONCLUSION
The findings of this study affirm that while English Medium Instruction continues to gain momentum globally, its success is highly contingent on **the degree to which research findings are translated into practical, localized teaching and institutional strategies**.

A major conclusion is that **EMI cannot be treated merely as a language shift**; rather, it must be approached as a **pedagogical transformation** that requires structural, curricular, and instructional change. Institutions must recognize that implementing EMI without a parallel investment in teacher training, curriculum redesign, and student language support risks undermining the very academic goals EMI seeks to achieve.

This study advocates for a **"research-to-practice" model of EMI** implementation, where empirical insights from linguistics, language education, and bilingual pedagogy inform every stage of planning and delivery. The most effective EMI programs are those that:
- Integrate content and language instruction
- Provide institutional scaffolding for both students and faculty
- Promote collaborative teaching practices
- Are sensitive to the linguistic and cultural realities of their learners

As EMI continues to shape the future of global education, it is imperative that institutions move from policy-driven to **pedagogy-driven EMI models**, guided by evidence, equity, and contextual understanding. The study concludes that by adopting inclusive, research-informed practices, educational systems can ensure that EMI does not become a barrier to learning, but rather a bridge to broader academic and professional opportunities.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.