Language Shift in Higher Education in Algeria: A Comprehensive Examination of Advantages and Challenges to English-Medium Instruction (EMI)

Soraya HAMANE
Oran 2 University / Mohamed Ben Ahmed, Algeria.
Maître de Conférences (MCA).
sorayahamane2@gmail.com

Abstract: The benefits of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) include the recognition by educators of its positive influence on enhancing language proficiency, fostering international collaboration, facilitating access to educational resources, promoting international career prospects, creating job opportunities, facilitating the dissemination of scientific findings, enhancing university reputation, providing access to international journals, supporting multimedia-based learning, aiding in standardized examinations, and enabling communication with international communities. The challenges of EMI encompass various aspects, including language barriers and the comprehension of complex concepts, effective communication between teachers and students in English, the potential impact on student performance, the student’s ability to comprehend the language, the potential increase in workload and stress, the scarcity of qualified teachers proficient in English, the potential exclusion of non-English-speaking students, the influence of language on students’ confidence and participation, student frustration, and motivation. Various strategies have been proposed to address the challenges English language learners face. These include the endorsement of specialized language training for teachers, the development of customized English-language materials, the provision of supplementary assistance, the implementation of a gradual transition approach, the promotion of student engagement in extracurricular activities, the establishment of peer support networks, the utilization of feedback systems, the provision of continuous training for teachers, the implementation of evaluation mechanisms, and the organization of workshops on pedagogical methods. In conclusion, it is essential to recognize the potential advantages of EMI in Algerian higher education. However, educators emphasize the necessity of implementing specific strategies to effectively handle language-related difficulties and ensure the successful integration of EMI in this particular context. These observations assist institutions and policymakers as they navigate the intricate EMI integration process.

Keywords: English-medium instruction, Algerian higher education, Language challenges, Teacher perceptions, Educational transitions
perspectives de carrière internationale, la création d'opportunités d'emploi, la facilitation de la diffusion des résultats scientifiques, l'amélioration de la réputation des universités, l'accès aux revues internationales, le soutien de l'apprentissage multimédia, l'aide aux examens normalisés et la communication avec les communautés internationales. Les défis de l'IME englobent divers aspects, notamment les barrières linguistiques et la compréhension de concepts complexes, la communication efficace entre les enseignants et les élèves en anglais, l'impact potentiel sur les performances des élèves, la capacité de l'élève à comprendre la langue, l'augmentation potentielle de la charge de travail et du stress, la pénurie d'enseignants qualifiés maîtrisant l'anglais, l'exclusion potentielle des élèves non anglophones, l'influence de la langue sur la confiance et la participation des élèves, la frustration et la motivation des élèves. Diverses stratégies ont été proposées pour relever les défis auxquels sont confrontés les apprenants d'anglais. Elles comprennent l'approbation d'une formation linguistique spécialisée pour les enseignants, l'élaboration de matériel personnalisé en anglais, la fourniture d'une assistance supplémentaire, la mise en œuvre d'une approche de transition progressive, la promotion de l'engagement des élèves dans des activités extrascolaires, l'établissement de réseaux de soutien par les pairs, l'utilisation de systèmes de retour d'information, la fourniture d'une formation continue pour les enseignants, la mise en œuvre de mécanismes d'évaluation et l'organisation d'ateliers de travail sur les méthodes pédagogiques. En conclusion, il est essentiel de reconnaître les avantages potentiels de l'IME dans l'enseignement supérieur algérien. Cependant, les éducateurs soulignent la nécessité de mettre en œuvre des stratégies spécifiques pour gérer efficacement les difficultés liées à la langue et garantir une intégration réussie de l'IME dans ce contexte particulier. Ces observations aident les institutions et les décideurs politiques à naviguer dans le processus complexe d'intégration de l'IME.

Mots-clés : Enseignement en anglais, Enseignement supérieur algérien, Défis linguistiques, Perceptions des enseignants, Transitions éducatives

Introduction

Adopting English-medium instruction (EMI) in higher education in Algeria is a complex and multidimensional process. This transition entails a departure from delivering instruction in the original language, French or Arabic, to adopting English as the medium of instruction. The rationale for this transformation is based on many causes, including the growing worldwide integration of higher education, the growing importance of English in the global employment landscape, and the Algerian government's ambition to improve the caliber of its higher education system. The linguistic shift substantially impacts educational achievements (Bredtmann et al., 2021). On the one hand, technology in education expands the range of educational materials and possibilities available to students, enhancing their readiness for worldwide professional pursuits (Haleem et al., 2022). On the other hand, the implementation of this approach presents some difficulties, such as the presence of language barriers, the preparedness of teachers, and the need for supplementary support systems
The increase in EMI in global higher education, observed over the past few decades, can be attributed to the expanding influence of the English language and the progressive internationalization of higher education (Galloway et al., 2017; Lin & Lei, 2021). The factors that contribute to the widespread appeal of EMI include the attraction it has for both international students and staff, its role in promoting institutional internationalization, and its ability to enhance competitiveness (Graham et al., 2021; Lin & Lei, 2021; Walkinshaw et al., 2017).

The objectives for using EMI extend beyond the goal of global integration. They encompass enabling student mobility, enhancing employment opportunities, and offering a platform for developing English competence while maintaining the integrity of topic learning (Graham & Eslami, 2021; Luu et al., 2023; Rose et al., 2022). In contrast to the rapid and exponential expansion of EMI experienced in other nations, Algeria has been characterized as a relative latecomer to this prevailing trend. Algerian teachers face redefining their pedagogical approaches within a cultural context that has historically prioritized education delivered in French or Arabic. In light of the dynamic changes occurring worldwide and in acknowledgment of the imperative for flexibility, the Ministry of Higher Education has embarked upon a resolute initiative. This necessitates a deliberate transition in the teaching medium from French or Arabic to English, indicating a notable deviation from the prevailing linguistic conventions. The present study scrutinizes teachers' opinions on switching the teaching language from French or Arabic to English. It seeks to gather their views on this practice's advantages, challenges, and potential solutions. This will provide an in-depth insight into teachers' perspectives on the impact of Teaching in English on content learning within the broader framework of global language change in higher education.

Research Questions

1. **Advantages of EMI in Algerian University (RQ1):** Examining the distinct benefits of EMI inside Algerian institutions necessitates a comprehensive comprehension of how EMI enhances academic, linguistic, and cultural dimensions.

2. **Challenges of EMI (RQ2):** To comprehensively understand the issues associated with EMI, it is necessary to delve into the linguistic obstacles, cultural adaptations, and pedagogical modifications that students and teachers may encounter.

Methods

The survey collected responses from teachers (n=327) and categorized them into five levels: "Strongly Disagree," "Disagree," "Neutral," "Agree," and
"Strongly Agree." Each response represents the teachers' level of agreement with various statements related to EMI, which can be categorized into advantages, challenges, and solutions.

Results
Advantages of EMI

Language Skills Improvement: A substantial majority of participants (76.1%) believed that integrating EMI impacts students' language proficiency and scientific lexicon. This observation signifies a commonly held notion regarding the ability of EMI to enhance language proficiency. Acknowledging that this discovery reflects dominant views rather than facts, further research may yield more substantial empirical evidence. Nevertheless, the considerable proportion adopting this position demonstrates its pervasiveness within the examined group.

International Collaboration: Most teachers (89%) see its capacity to facilitate worldwide cooperation and research opportunities. The feature mentioned above promotes scholarly networking and underscores the pervasive influence of EMI worldwide. The observed tendency leads to heightened levels of global interconnectedness, facilitating enhanced opportunities for students and researchers from other nations to partake in more streamlined academic study and cooperation. The construction of a shared means for communication by EMI facilitates academic networking, allowing for the interchange of knowledge, joint research, and the formation of worldwide alliances. The recognition by teachers of the potential of EMI signifies their comprehension of the necessity to equip students with the skills required to thrive in a globalized society.

Access to Resources: A significant majority of respondents (82.6%) recognize that using EMI offers students access to a broader array of educational materials, enhancing their knowledge foundation. This result suggests that educational institutions significantly enrich students' knowledge by providing various resources, such as online databases, electronic books, videos, and multimedia products. Educational materials provide many benefits through online learning platforms, fostering collaborative collaborations and leveraging the potential of EMI. The acknowledgment above underscores the noteworthy influence of EMI in transforming the educational landscape, guaranteeing students abundant prospects to delve into diverse disciplines and learning approaches.

International Careers: A significant majority of participants, namely 85.3%, demonstrate a high level of trust in the effectiveness of EMI in preparing students for successful careers in the worldwide scientific arena. This result highlights the significance of language, mainly English, within the worldwide job
market. The acknowledgment of English as a prevailing language globally underscores the need to possess good English language abilities to succeed in international scientific pursuits.

**Job Opportunities**: Despite some concerns, most teachers (61.5%) have a positive outlook on the potential of EMI to enhance student career prospects. This optimism is mainly attributed to the perceived ability of EMI to augment students' employability skills. Teachers may see EMI as a pedagogical approach to bolster students' English language ability, equipping them with essential competencies to navigate an increasingly interconnected global society. Effective communication, support, and scholarly investigations are vital for addressing uncertainties and guaranteeing the seamless implementation of EMI in educational establishments.

**Communication of Scientific Results**: A significant majority of teachers (93.6%) concur that using EMI enhances the capacity to effectively convey scientific discoveries globally. The proper dissemination of research is of utmost importance. Using the English language as a universally accepted medium for scientific discourse augments the accessibility and visibility of scholarly pursuits.

**University Reputation**: The majority of respondents (77.1%) acknowledge the potential of EMI to increase a university’s global reputation. Implementing the EMI enables educational institutions to demonstrate their commitment to internationalization, attract international students and faculty members, and facilitate global research partnerships. Recognizing the significance of faculty training and addressing problems about indigenous languages are crucial considerations. Moreover, the formulation of strategic plans is necessary in order to ensure the successful execution of initiatives.

**Access to International Journals**: 89.9% of respondents agree that EMI is pivotal in facilitating Ph.D. students and researchers access to international scientific publications, hence cultivating an atmosphere prioritizing research. As mentioned earlier, the observation signifies a robust consensus among the participants, underscoring the pivotal significance of EMI in fostering an environment conducive to research-driven pursuits.

**Multimedia Learning**: A significant majority of respondents (78%) recognize that English-language materials frequently incorporate multimedia elements, thus augmenting the overall educational encounter. The commendable aspect lies in acknowledging the benefits of multimedia resources in English-language papers.

**Standardized Exams**: A significant majority of 88.1% of respondents believe that EMI offers superior preparation for standardized worldwide scientific examinations, ensuring that education aligns with global assessment standards. Although subjective, this attitude implies a strong opinion that EMI matches educational techniques with worldwide norms.
Communication with International Communities: 93.6% of respondents believe EMI enhances communication with global scientific groups, fostering academic networking. This result highlights the importance of proficient English language skills within the scientific community.

International Student Attraction: According to the survey findings, a significant majority of teachers (73.4%) believe implementing EMI will potentially attract more international students. Consequently, this anticipated outcome is expected to enhance campus diversity and cultivate a more globally oriented educational atmosphere. Educational professionals hold optimistic expectations regarding the potential benefits of recruiting international students, promoting campus diversity, and cultivating a globally networked educational atmosphere. In order to have a thorough grasp of prospective outcomes, it is essential to consider varied viewpoints from stakeholders outside teachers.

Challenges of EMI
Language Barriers and Complex Concepts: 71.6% of teachers recognize that language obstacles impede students' understanding of intricate concepts, presenting educational difficulties. Possible reasons for this phenomenon include a restricted English language command, diverse cultural origins, and the intricate nature of language. Students with linguistic issues may lack scaffolding or instructional support from teachers, resulting in challenges while attempting to grasp the complex subject matter. Teachers and students have obstacles due to the constraints imposed by limited resources, encompassing both temporal and material aspects.

Teacher Communication in English: The majority of respondents (75.1%) voiced worries over teachers' efficacy in properly delivering course content in English, hence emphasizing the significance of teachers' skills in the English language. The level of language proficiency plays a crucial role in education, exerting a profound influence on several aspects such as communication, understanding, and academic achievements. Proficient teachers can accommodate a wide range of linguistic needs, employing efficient pedagogical approaches and offering crucial support to promote the development of language competence. Teachers must uphold a proficient degree of linguistic proficiency, highlighting the significance of language training and support in facilitating successful pedagogy.

Impact on Student Performance: Inquiries have been prompted by the concerns of 46% of individuals regarding the possible adverse effects of EMI on students' overall academic achievement. Academic difficulties might arise due to language obstacles, limited comprehension, cognitive load, diverse learning styles, cultural importance, and instructor competency. The establishment of comprehensive and efficient educational frameworks necessitates the inclusion of deliberation and help.
Student Language Comprehension: A considerable proportion of teachers (77.9%) believe that students may have difficulties comprehending the English language, which might impact their academic performance. The understanding abilities of students may be hindered by language hurdles that arise from disparities in grammatical structures, inadequate exposure, and cultural variables. Recognizing the intricate nature of the language acquisition process is crucial for comprehending students' challenges.

Increased Workload and Stress: The expectation of a 60.8% rise in workload and stress levels for teachers and students during the transition to EMI underscores the difficulties associated with adaptation. The transition process necessitates acquiring and integrating novel vocabulary and grammatical frameworks, presenting obstacles for teachers and learners. Teachers and learners may require additional time to engage in preparatory activities, enhance their professional skills, engage in academic pursuits, and refine instructional resources. The anticipation of achieving high proficiency in a second language might potentially result in heightened stress levels for both individuals involved.

Shortage of Qualified English-Speaking Teachers: The hurdle to implementing EMI concerns 76.2% of individuals regarding the availability of skilled teachers proficient in English. The challenges encompass a restricted availability of resources, fluctuating standards of competency, the need for adequate teacher training, high rates of staff turnover, and the need to understand the specific local environment fully. The presence of English-speaking teachers who possess a comprehensive understanding of both language proficiency and local pedagogical approaches is crucial for the effective implementation of EMI programs.

Exclusion of Non-English-Speaking Students: 61.7% of respondents express apprehension over the potential exclusion of non-English speakers due to the implementation of EMI. This issue highlights the need to ensure inclusion within educational settings. Potential exclusion can be attributed to various factors, including language hurdles, educational disadvantages, inadequate support, and cultural inequities. Teachers endeavor to solve these challenges to foster equal opportunities for academic success among all students.

Language Impact on Confidence and Participation: A considerable proportion of individuals (72.4%) believe that language proficiency challenges might impact students' self-assurance and involvement, potentially impeding their educational journey. Language barriers can hinder effective communication, resulting in social isolation, perpetuation of negative stereotypes, and exacerbation of cultural and linguistic imbalances. The scarcity of resources and lack of guidance exacerbate students' challenges, underscoring the necessity for initiatives to bolster language development.
Communication Barriers: A significant proportion of respondents (72.8%) believe that using EMI might give rise to obstacles in communication between teachers and learners, which may hinder teaching efficacy. Several factors influence this notion, including language competency, a heterogeneous student body, the educational environment, previous experiences, and a strong belief in the need for comprehensive and equitable education. Additional research is necessary in order to have a thorough understanding of the fundamental justifications for this line of thought.

Student Frustration and Motivation: There are concerns arising from a significant proportion of participants, namely 71.6%, have expressed concerns over the potential negative influence of language challenges on students' motivation and frustration levels, hence affecting the overall learning environment. The presence of language difficulties can result in emotions of frustration, impede active engagement, impede academic progress, and have a detrimental effect on the overall educational setting. Recognizing these issues is crucial to taking supportive measures to address linguistic difficulties and cultivate a favorable and all-encompassing educational environment.

Solutions to Address EMI Challenges

In order to address these difficulties, it is advisable to use a comprehensive and multidimensional approach. According to this survey, it is widely recognized that specialized language training is of utmost importance, as indicated by 95.1% of teachers. This result underscores the continuous requirement for professional development initiatives to improve English competence. Creating customized English-language instructional materials, which has garnered approval from 89.9% of teachers, aims to meet the need for resources that facilitate successful EMI. Acknowledging the significance of tackling language-related difficulties, a substantial majority of 91.8% favor providing supplementary assistance and resources, such as English support courses, to cater to the needs of both students and teachers. Furthermore, the data indicates that a significant majority of 80.7% of respondents prefer a gradual transition time. This finding suggests that a phased strategy of using EMI would be preferable, wherein first courses are taught in both languages. This technique facilitates a more seamless adaptation for all parties involved.

Promoting student engagement in English-language science clubs or extracurricular activities, as endorsed by 84.4% of teachers, enhances language proficiency outside the traditional classroom setting. Implementing peer support networks among teachers, which has received an endorsement from 88.1% of participants, facilitates the exchange of information and disseminating effective teaching strategies in the English language, cultivating a collaborative atmosphere. Implementing a feedback system, which has received endorsement from 91.8% of participants, offers a platform for students and teachers to
exchange perspectives about the efficacy of EMI, hence facilitating ongoing enhancements. Highlighting the need for continuous training, most teachers (94.5%) express support for providing professional development opportunities to enhance teachers' familiarity with English scientific terminology. The recognition of the need for evaluation is evident, as a significant majority of 93.6% of individuals acknowledge the requirement of employing English assessment techniques to gauge scientific comprehension and language proficiency. This recognition is crucial in ensuring the overall quality of EMI. The high level of support (89.9%) for organizing workshops and seminars focused on successful pedagogical methods for teaching in English indicates a strong inclination among teachers to adopt new teaching approaches and strategies.

Conclusion
The survey results reveal a complex landscape where the advantages of EMI in higher education are weighed against its challenges. While teachers acknowledge the potential benefits, they are acutely aware of the hurdles and call for targeted solutions to address language-related concerns, teacher preparedness, and the development of appropriate resources and support mechanisms. These insights provide a valuable foundation for institutions and policymakers seeking to implement EMI effectively in the Algerian higher education context. In conclusion, integrating English as an EMI in educational settings brings many advantages and challenges. On a positive note, EMI offers a platform for enhancing language proficiency among students, preparing them for global communication, and aligning educational practices with international standards. However, the teachers' insights underscore several challenges that require careful consideration for a successful and inclusive implementation of EMI.

Funding: This paper was not funded.
Conflict of Interest: None to declare
Declaration of interests: The authors have no relevant affiliations or financial involvement with any organization or entity with a financial interest in or financial conflict with the subject matter or materials discussed in the manuscript
Author contributions:
SH: Conceptualization; Data curation; Formal analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Validation; Visualization; Writing, review and editing
NDA: Conceptualization, Data curation, and Formal analysis

Bibliographical references


