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A comparative study of the implementation of EMI in Europe, Asia and Africa

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Abstract

Teaching higher education in English Medium Instruction (EMI) is one of the most important changes made in education policies in many non speaking countries over the world recently. EMI is claimed to have not received enough consideration in Europe, Asia and Africa. This paper presents an investigation, which was carried out from the available literature to discuss the possible ways of implementing EMI in engineering education in Libya. This paper also focuses on the possibilities of implementing EMI in higher education systems in non English countries in Europe, Asia and Africa and problems faced by these countries and suggested solutions. The study find that English proficiency achieved through EMI will increase the chances for graduated students to get better positions on the labour market. Most of countries witness similar problems in courses of the EMI adoption, which include: less funding, lack of qualified teaching staff, lack of students' understanding and interest and cultural opposition.

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1. Introduction

The English language has turned into a medium of the international communication (Crystal, 2003; Wright, 2004). It has become the language that dominates in business, arts, education and culture. What is more, with the invention of the World Wide Web and increasing telecommunication opportunities, English has been recognized a skill almost obligatory for a modern professional in any field. In higher education the role of English is growing simultaneously. The increasing need for highly qualified professionals, who could freely access data in English and communicate with their foreign colleagues, it has put it into the centre of curricula of the universities in Europe (Vinke and Jochems, 1992; Shattock, 2003). However, the remaining parts of the world, namely Africa and Asia, have not been that successful at learning English.

Therefore, there arose an urgent need to analyse one of the frequently used approaches to language learning – English Medium Instruction The English language has turned into a medium of the international communication recently (Crystal, 2003; Wright, 2004). It has become the language that dominates in business, arts, education and culture. What is more, with the invention of the World Wide Web and increasing telecommunication opportunities, English has been recognized a skill almost obligatory for a modern professional in any field. In higher education the role of English is growing simultaneously. The increasing need for highly qualified professionals, who could freely

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access data in English and communicate with their foreign colleagues, it has put it into the centre of curricula of the universities in Europe (Vinke and Jochems, 1992; Shattock, 2003). However, the remaining parts of the world, namely Africa and Asia, have not been that successful at learning English.

Therefore, there arose an urgent need to analyse one of the frequently used approaches to language learning – English Medium Instruction (EMI) whose specifics could possibly be employed by the countries with the low English competence. EMI is understood as a teaching and learning strategy that involves “focus on non-language subject-matter, and focus on the language, in terms of both communication and cognition” (Marsh and Laitinen, 2005). This paper compared the situation with the EMI adoption in the three parts of the world: Europe, Asia and Africa. It also discusses the possible solutions to the problems and challenges caused by the EMI implementation (EMI) whose specifics could possibly be employed by the countries with the low English competence. EMI is understood as a teaching and learning strategy that involves “focus on non-language subject-matter, and focus on the language, in terms of both communication and cognition” (Marsh and Laitinen, 2005). This paper compared the situation with the EMI adoption in the three parts of the world: Europe, Asia and Africa. also discusses the possible solutions to the problems and challenges caused by the EMI implementation.

2. The Possibilities of EMI

Although EMI is claimed to have not received enough consideration in Europe, its possibilities and expected benefits attracted a number of prestigious universities. As a result, numerous programs have been launched following the EMI trend (Coleman, 2010).

First of all, EMI in Europe is seen as a means of boosting intercultural knowledge. According to Jappinen (2005), it can also help advance the international communication, the quality of understanding across cultures and global mobility.

Furthermore, as the study by Marsh et al has proved, implementing EMI leads to considerable positive results concerning non-language subjects. To specify, the research conducted on the basis of Hong Kong students resulted in a conclusion that such an approach should not be delayed much later than secondary school (Marsh, Hau & Kong, 2000).

Apart from the secondary level, the EMI approach offers clear benefits to higher education. One of the biggest motives to start adopting courses taught through English in the non-English-speaking countries of Europe is the chance of participation in foreign exchange programs within the domain of higher education (Marsh & Laitinen, 2005, Coleman, 2010). To specify, in the states whose mother tongues are rarely taught abroad, bilateral student exchanges may be possible only if subjects are taught through the language that is comprehended by the majority, like English today.

This impetus is complemented by one more perspective. EMI offers a possibility for local students to study in the foreign countries. So by the time they come back, they will have already received prestigious diplomas and better education. Moreover, such graduates are likely to be successful at following their career ladders on the international level (Coleman, 2010).

At the same time, EMI offers a possibility of studying abroad for well-off students who can afford to pay the required fees. Unfortunately, as J.Coleman mentioned, the latter has become one of the perspectives that are mostly valued in relation to EMI. The phrase “international students” increasingly means not the “organized mobility” of mutual exchanges but the “spontaneous mobility” of fee-paying individuals” (Coleman, 2010). In relation to this, it needs to be mentioned that such “internalisation” of the market of university education is viewed as being crucial for enrolling local students because it is considered rather attractive for them (Kurtan, 2004).

Additionally, the EMI strategy in higher education through employing international staff and inviting students from all around the world boosts the prestige of the institution. As a result, the university receives a chance of getting better funding for its development and scientific research (Kurtan, 2004).

Furthermore, EMI offers a perspective for the university staff in terms of their career opportunities. Namely, teachers get a chance to display their skills of instructing in English, as well as publishing in the international journals (Coleman, 2010).

To add, students get good career prospects after graduation if they are proficient in English. This appears to be true about the employability of graduates on the local and international level. In its turn, high rating of graduates' employability is, as a rule, regarded one of the most important criteria of the institution's prestige (Coleman, 2010). Next, the EMI approach provides students with a possibility of understanding quotes from academic sources in modern classes. To support this view, teachers cite their research in today's classrooms increasingly in English, not only in sciences but across the disciplinary panoply, (Hoberg, 2004).

Importantly, academic research is cited not only in classrooms. The majority of scholarly databases on-line are in English. In addition, English has become the language of international conferences and seminars. Finally, EMI allows extensive job mobility of academic staff from economically less developed countries through teaching and publication acknowledgement (Marsh, Laitinen, 2005).

All the possibilities listed above attracted the attention of numerous universities. It resulted in the increasing number of courses taught in English to which foreign students could be enrolled. The Table 1 below shows the rankings of the European Universities in non-English speaking countries that have resorted to EMI (See Table 1).

Table 1: English medium courses in European HE in 1999/2000 (Ammon and McConnell 2002)

Country	Total number of HEIs	Number of HEIs with programmes taught in English	Rationales*
Austria	37	10+	2, 7
Belgium	15	11	2, 3, 6
Bulgaria	26	8	2, 6
Czech republic	30	25	2, 7
Denmark	17	8	3, 5, 6
Estonia	34	6	2, 7
Finland	55	55	2, 3, 5, 6
France	72	38	5, 6
Germany	356	43	2, 3, 5, 7
Hungary	22	8	2, 3, 5, 7
Netherlands	100	90	2, 7
Norway	7	6	2, 7
Poland	56	34	2, 5, 6, 7
Portugal	22	2	2, 3
Slovakia	16	9	6
Slovenia	2	2	2, 3, 6
Sweden	42	5	2, 5, 6

*Rationales drawn from above, with the exception of Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and English language teaching and research material. And inferred from Ammon and McConnell's data, which may not be comprehensive:

- 2 Internationalization
- 3 Student exchanges
- 5 Staff mobility
- 6 Graduate employability
- 7 International student market

The possibilities of EMI in Asia have been widely discussed by academics. First of all, EMI approach will enable students to receive a good command of English, so that they can continue their studies abroad. The latter becomes possible due to the ability of such education to connect students to the principles of English (and American) work at classes. Indeed, EMI is closely related to the values of the English education through the language, and its

psychology, so an Asian learner will predictably better adjust to the British educational reality after he/she leaves his/her native country (Jusuf, 2001).

English proficiency achieved through EMI will increase the chances for Arabian students to get better positions on the labour market. Importantly, as A. Al-Sultan (2009) points out, “the English of Saudi university graduates is very poor”. This reality seems especially unacceptable if to take into consideration the fact that the English language has turned into the major medium of business communication, as foreign resources are a significant part of the labour market (Al-Sultan, 2009).

Therefore, some universities in Saudi Arabia plan to resort to EMI to improve the poor level of English that is being demonstrated by the majority of graduates. Directed by realising that changing the preparatory year specifics in terms of teaching English will be a step rather weak to solve the problem, the academic staff of some universities in the country intends “to make English the medium of instruction for specializations that are in huge demand in the labour market” (Al-Sultan, 2009).

What is more, it is hard to disagree that turning English into the medium of communication in classrooms ought to be beneficial for such specializations as “medicine, engineering and computing because it would be difficult for anyone who does not know English to deal with new developments” (Al-Sultan, 2009). Importantly, there are not enough up-to-date sources in Arabian that discuss the issues of the subjects mentioned, (Al-Jarf, 2004). Besides, translating into Arabian and publishing books appears to be rather costly and may still be an obstacle to timely received data.

Discussing the possibilities encapsulated in EMI, one cannot help mentioning that Africa has been greatly affected by the English language. In some states, like Namibia, South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya and Malawi, it has even been fixed as the official language, either the main (as in Nigeria) or one of a few (as in South Africa, Malawi, Namibia etc) (Schmied, 1991). The importance of English is also supported by the fact of existence of a variety of English dialects throughout the continent that are

East African English (includes Ugandan English and Kenyan English)

Malawian English

Liberian English

South African English

Nigerian Standard English (Schmied, 1991; Titlestad, 1999; Brock-Utne, 2005).

Due to the consequences of the British colonization, Africa has been more exposed to English than the countries situated in Asia (except Singapore and the Philippines). Therefore, EMI offers a number of opportunities for the young generation in terms of career prospects. This has been conditioned by the fact that many countries employ English as the language of broadcasting, science, education, business, and arts. Still, there are few countries that despite using English in some regions are rather firm about keeping their cultural and language identity. This is especially true about Libya, Tamtam et al. (2011). This Arabic country has got a comparatively low level of the English proficiency, Tamtam et al. (2010). Therefore, adopting EMI may be resorted to as a decisive step to improve the general English fluency of the young generation (The Libyan National Commission for Education, Culture and Science Report, 2001).

3. The Challenges of EMI

One of the challenges of EMI is related to the detrimental effect this language policy can have on the mother tongues of the countries that resorted to it. English being a medium of instruction, promoted by numerous overseas agencies, has been said to be developing in damage to native languages on the continents that are adopting it. To illustrate, the case of Namibia, a country situated in the south western part of Africa, has witnessed the decline of ten native languages since English became an official one after the country got independent in 1990 (Brock-Utne and Holmaldottir, 2001).

Populated by 1.5 million inhabitants, Namibia uses 13 languages as official. However, all of them have been reported to be in a poor condition comparing to English (Brock-Utne and Holmaldottir, 2001). Namely, a number of people in Namibia deplore the fact that the languages that linguistically have an African origin “are losing a battle against English” (Brock-Utne and Holmaldottir, 2001). For instance, the expansion of English lead to broadcasting most of the television programs in this language while one can observe the absence of TV shows in the languages of the Bantu and Khoe groups.

What is more, owing to the growing popularity of knowing English, there has been a significant drop in the number of students who studied their native languages at the university level. From the study by Brock-Utne and Holmaldottir one gets to know that “in 1995 there were 100 students taking Oshindonga, and in the academic year 1999–2000 there was one” (Brock-Utne and Holmaldottir, 2001). This has been the result of the stereotypes that developed within the Namibian society. These could be best described by the words of locals recorded by Brock-Utne and Holmaldottir, according to which “if you know English well, you are considered educated. If you just know Namibian languages, even though you may know several of them and speak them well, you are considered dumb and uneducated” (Brock-Utne and Holmaldottir, 2001).

Similarly, turning English into the medium of instruction in Saudi Arabia is seen as a serious cultural threat that may lead to a “cultural catastrophe” (Al-Jarf, 2004),(Al-Sultan, 2009). The language threat is said to be likely to be complemented by the threat of the negative influence the teachers who studied abroad will have on their students. Apart from this, in Saudi Arabia, where English has already become the language of business, making it the medium of instruction presents one more challenge. According to A. Al-Sultan, “Anyone who does not master English will be in a weak position when competing for a job. His or her chances for progressing in terms of career will be severely compromised” (Al-Sultan, 2009).

One more challenge to be discussed in this part of the work is the quality of instruction in English in the education systems of the countries where English has been adopted as a medium of instruction. Specifically, teachers who train students in a number of technical subjects, find it truly challenging “to cope with the double demand of transmitting content as well as language” (Othman, Moht Saad, 2009). For example, in Malaysia where the EMI approach has been practiced for years, it is thought a gruesome objective to productively instruct the content field in English within the reality of Malaysian secondary schools (Hudson et al, 2007). This is rooted in the fact that a lot of students have insufficient levels of mastering the English language (Othman, Moht Saad, 2009). All in all, challenges related to the quality of instruction using English as a medium have been listed in Table 2, developed by J. Othman and R. Moht Saad (See Table 2).

A similar situation can be observed at some European universities (Phillipson, 2003; Sercu, 2004). According to Sercu, who provides fundamental evidence, “a decrease in the quality of teaching and the students’ overall learning results and an increase in study’ teaching load” (Sercu, 2004, p. 547).

Next, the challenges faced in course of implementing English as a medium of instruction, or the EMI strategy, have been numerous within the countries of Europe. According to (Smith, 2004), these are

Table 2: Pre-service Teachers’ Challenges

Challenges	Mean*	Std. Dev
Explaining concept in English	2.71	0.72
Lack of teaching skills in integration content with language teaching	2.66	0.74
Low English proficiency learners needs	2.61	0.90
Lack of appropriate instructional materials for class	2.58	.90
Lack of competence in English	2.55	0.71

* Value based on 4-point likert scale 1 = Least Challenging, 2 = Quite Challenging, 3 = Challenging and 4 = Most Changing

- Insufficient language competence and the demand of training the staff that is native, along with the need of training students.
- Opposition to EMI from locals who see it as the one that may lead to a cultural disaster and loss of national identity.
- Opposition from the representatives of the nations who are afraid that their indigenous languages will lose their positions as mediums of science.

- Absence of a sufficient number of competent subject professionals of the Anglophone origin on the global market (Erling & Hilgendorf, 2006).
- Staff recruited of locals being opposed to the instruction in English.
- Anglophone teachers' being incapable of adjusting to indigenous students who speak their native languages
- Lack of proficiency among students from other countries that come to study to a given country without knowing properly the native language (Erling & Hilgendorf, 2006)
- Problems that are related to organization and administrative resources
- Insufficient interest from indigenous learners
- Lack of confidence and inability to adjust to the reality common for the students of the area
- Insufficient number of students from abroad
- Low levels of cultural integration among students from abroad
- Absence of fees for teaching the students from abroad, which is the reason they are financed locally
- Funding the studies of the students from abroad who come from poorer states where fees are charged
- Lack of diversity and accessibility to teaching aids
- Same assessment rates for indigenous and non-indigenous students.

Last but not least, the overall trend of turning the English language into the medium of instruction around Europe, as well as in Asia, poses a threat of a so-called 'Englishization' of the world, as stated by J.Coleman, a linguist from the Open University, UK (Coleman, 2010). Specifically, the world risks becoming diglossic, i.e. characterized by the adoption of two clearly different language varieties, the use of which depends on whether the situation is formal or informal. Coleman argues that the phenomenon of diglossia will leave one language as a means of local culture, informal communication and arts, and another - that is English - as a means of communication on the formal level, writing in particular.

Furthermore, the EMI approach is thought to pose a threat to people's identity. Predictably, the majority of people around the globe will work out "*a bicultural identity*, in which one part of their identity is rooted in their local culture, while another part stems from an awareness of their relation to the global culture" (Arnett, 2002, p. 777).

As a result, practically all the world languages risk becoming a minority. This process has been progressing, as Nettle and Romaine state. In their opinion,

"In today's global village, however, increasing bilingualism in a metropolitan language, particularly English, is making the majority of the world's languages in effect minority languages. Even small languages such as Icelandic with its 100,000 speakers, and larger national languages such as Swedish and Hebrew, substantially protected by national boundaries and institutions, exist in a diglossic relationship with English at the highest levels of international communication".

(Nettle and Romaine, 2002, p.190)

Perhaps, this is the fear of the challenges listed above that made other developed Asian nations reject the EMI approach. To specify, contrary to the Malaysian experience, these countries chose not "to phase out or marginalize their languages" (Coleman, 2010). Instead, they implemented a wide and effective translation program that also became a means of making their native languages richer (Rundall, Hernandez, 1986). Interestingly, as Al-Sultan emphasizes, such an approach did not hinder the representatives of these nations from being at premium practically in each branch of science and knowledge (Al-Sultan, 2009).

To sum up, comparing the challenges faced by various nations that started implementing the EMI approach within the sphere of higher education, it can be said that they are rather similar. In particular, having analyzed the works of the scholars from Africa, Europe and Asia, one will undeniably name the common ones. The first and the most feared one is related to the loss of cultural identity, which from the people's perspective is indiscernible from the loss of language as the basic means of communication. Penetration of English into all spheres of life and growing interest may mean the potential decline of native languages development among non-anglophone speakers. The Arabian world is also afraid of the negative impact on people's outlook that may be brought by those teachers who are either of the American or other European origin. Furthermore, in many countries the insufficient number of well-trained staff was named as one of the biggest challenges (Coleman, 1997). Interestingly, lack of interest from the side of local learners has been named as well. Despite similarities between posed threat and challenges there has

been a significant difference to EMI approach within the European and Asian countries. To specify, while Europe generally sees EMI as a positive phenomenon, just seeking ways of its improvement (Block, Cameron, 2002), Asians struggle to preserve their identity, as in Japan, Saudi Arabia or South Korea. Anyway, the list of challenges compiled in this section may help form a basis of rethinking the strategies of the EMI implementation.

4. Advantages and Disadvantages of EMI. Possible Solutions

On the basis of the previous paragraphs the paper discussed the possibilities and challenges of making English the language of instruction in different parts of the globe, referring to the recent research findings, this paper work out the main advantages and disadvantages of the EMI approach. What is more, it will discuss the possible solutions to the problems that evolve or may evolve.

As for the advantages that are based on the possibilities of EMI in the countries of Europe, Asia and Africa, they seem to be common. First of all, EMI increases the motivation to study the language owing to the international significance of the latter (Jusuf 2001). Next, career and studying opportunities are rooted in being bilingual. What is more, EMI increases the general exposure to English, which is beneficial in terms of learning (Weinstein, 1984). It also allows for skills developed while learning a mother tongue to be applied to studying English.

The disadvantages have been noticed as well. In all discussed continents a lack of proficient teaching staff is observed, which means there are not enough professionals who could combine both developing the language skills and helping to learn the major subject, mathematics for instance (Othman, Moht Saad, 2009). Furthermore, students are reported to encounter a lot of difficulties being taught according to EMI, which is related to poor language knowledge. This may result in loss of interest. Additionally, EMI is often seen as a means of gaining economic profit, especially when some universities welcome well-to-do students from abroad. Moreover, the intensive application of EMI threatens cultural identities of many countries, especially their languages (Coleman, 2010). To add, it helps to convert the world into a “global village”, where people might forget their roots and culture.

Among the problems that evolve within the EMI approach there can be named a question of which type of EMI immersion needs to be used. Specifically, partial immersion can be chosen, as well as total. Despite the seemingly promising perspectives of the total immersion, which suggests teaching without using mother tongue, it has met some criticism of late. For instance, Rababah argues that total immersion is not suitable and not reasonable (Rabah, 2003). At the same time, partial immersion is thought to be a good studying solution. (Jusuf, 2001).

Another problem is related to the loss of cultural identities in the countries that adopt EMI (Crystal, 2003; Crystal, 2004). Libya, for instance, unlike many neighbouring countries of the African continent has not resorted to EMI, Tamtam et al. (2011), intending to preserve the prevailing position of the Arab language. English has been studied as a foreign language at the secondary school, but all the rest of subjects are taught in the official language (The Libyan National Commission for Education, Culture and Science Report, 2001). The solution for this country may be starting to implement EMI into higher education. If the authorities are afraid it might threaten the culture and lifestyle of the population, only some specializations could be taught through English, like medicine, engineering, science, etc.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, EMI has been a strategic approach to learning English that is winning its positions globally. Having compared its adoption within Europe, Africa and Asia, one may say that EMI has been the most popular strategy among the European universities. Africa occupies the second position, with EMI getting more and more spread within schools and universities. In its turn, Asia has been the region where EMI still has to win recognition due to the perceived threats it may pose to Arabian Muslim societies. At the same time, the Philippines, Malaysia and Hong Kong are a region in Asia where EMI has been practiced (Othman, Moht Saad, 2009; Marsh, Hau & Kong, 2000).

It should also be said that EMI approach is perceived similarly by many countries. For instance, the population of Africa, as well as Asia, appears to be dissatisfied about its influence (Brock-Utne and Holmaldottir, 2001). However, this view is opposing to that the Europeans hold finding it all right. What is more, all the countries witness similar problems in course of the EMI adoption, which include: funding, lack of qualified teaching staff, lack of students' understanding and interest, and cultural opposition

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