

# English Medium Instruction at Tertiary Level in Turkey: A Study of Academics' Needs and Perceptions

## Türkiye'de Yükseköğretim Düzeyinde İngilizce Öğretim Dili: Akademisyenlerin Gereksinim ve Algılarının İncelenmesi

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### ABSTRACT

Universities offering English Medium Instruction (EMI) programmes have been gaining in popularity in higher education across the globe. The reasons why students favour EMI programmes and how the medium of language affects employment outcomes have been a matter of debate. However, lecturers' views on the quality of EMI programmes are often ignored, although they are of vital importance as lecturers are key actors in the process itself. This paper both examines the language-related challenges which academics experience when adjusting to the demands of EMI and also provides an overview of teaching practices in EMI undergraduate programmes. To this end, the study seeks to shed light on three research questions: (1) Which teaching practices do EMI lecturers use? (2) What are EMI lecturers' views on the implementation of EMI? and (3) What areas of improvement can be identified to enhance the effectiveness of EMI through in-service training? The study comprises quantitative and non-experimental research; it was based on the findings of a survey of academics working in a state university in southern Turkey. To investigate the faculty members' views, a questionnaire was developed based on a literature review and expert opinions and was distributed to 113 faculty members of different academic ranks. Overall, the results show that the content lecturers seemed to be using a variety of methodological teaching practices in class. However, the use of the native language by lecturers to help students' comprehension needs to be studied carefully. Most of the participants agreed that EMI necessitates tailored training. The faculty members also believed that there has to be a collaboration between the content lecturers and the language teachers in the Preparatory Year Programme (PYP). By examining content lecturers' teaching practices and views on the implementation of EMI, the findings of this study can help university administrators to evaluate and enhance the effectiveness of EMI programmes.

**Keywords:** English medium education, Higher education, Lecturers, Needs analysis, University language policy

### ÖZ

Son yıllarda öğretim dili İngilizce (ÖDİ) programların yurt içinde ve yurt dışında yaygınlaşması dikkat çekmekle beraber bu konu üzerine yapılan çalışmaların önemli bir kısmı öğrencilerin neden bu programları yeğledikleri ve öğrencilerin bu programlara ilişkin bakış açlarına odaklanmıştır. Öğretim sürecinin temel öğelerinden bir diğeri olan öğretim elemanlarının ÖDİ programların etkililiğine yönelik değerlendirmeleri son yıllarda özellikle odaklanılan bir tartışma alanı olmuştur. Bu çalışma, akademisyenlerin yabancı dil kullanımına ilişkin yaşadıkları güçlüklerden daha çok öğretim elemanlarının öğretim uygulamaları ve pedagojik gereksinimlerini incelemiştir. Bu amaçla çalışma üç temel araştırma sorusuna yanıt aramıştır: (1) Öğretim elemanları hangi öğretim uygulamalarını kullanmaktadırlar? (2) Öğretim elemanlarının ÖDİ'nin uygulanması hakkındaki görüşleri nelerdir? (3) ÖDİ'nin etkililiğinin yükseltilmesi için sağlanacak eğitim neleri kapsamalıdır? Deneysel olmayan nicel araştırma yaklaşımındaki bu çalışmanın verileri, tarama modeliyle Türkiye'nin güneyinde yer alan bir devlet üniversitesinin öğretim dili İngilizce olan lisans programlarında ders veren 113 öğretim elemanından toplanmıştır. Bu amaçla öncelikle uzman görüşleri ve alanyazın ışığında bir anket formu hazırlanmıştır. Araştırma sonucunda, öğretim elemanlarının temel

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bir takım öğretim yöntemlerini uygulamakla beraber öğrencilerin ders içeriğini anlamakta güçlük çektikleri zamanlarda Türkçe kullanarak ders işledikleri ortaya çıkarılmıştır. Ayrıca katılımcıların önemli bir bölümü ÖDİ programlarda ders veren ve verecek olan öğretim elemanlarına yönelik eğitimlerin gerekliliğine vurgu yapmıştır. ÖDİ programların etkililiği noktasında bölümdeki öğretim elemanları ile yabancı dil hazırlık programında ders veren öğretim görevlileri arasındaki işbirliğinin olası yararı da katılımcılar tarafından ifade edilmiştir. Uygulama sonucunda yabancı dille öğretim yapan lisans programlarındaki öğretim elemanlarına yönelik yürütülecek bir hizmet içi eğitim programının kapsayacağı başlıca alanlar belirlenmiştir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** İngilizce öğretim dili, Yükseköğretim, Öğretim elemanları, İhtiyaç analizi, Üniversite dil politikası

## INTRODUCTION

English has become a global language in the academic field as well as in other fields. Schools at different levels are one of the domains where English as a lingua franca appears. The use of English as a *lingua franca* in higher education institutions (HEIs) has become a decisive factor in attracting academics and students of foreign nationality (Inbar-Lourie & Donitsa-Schmidt, 2019; Werther, Denver, Jensen & Mees, 2014; Zhang, 2018). There are several private high schools which provide instruction using the medium of English (Macaro, Akincioglu & Dearden, 2016). Universities, as well as other schools, provide undergraduate programmes taught in English. Actually, universities offering EMI programmes have been gaining in popularity in higher education across the globe (Dafouz, 2018; Doiz, Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2013). Undergraduate as well as postgraduate programmes which are taught in English fall within the scope of EMI, which refers to the teaching of academic subjects through the medium of English in non-native-speaking countries (Macaro et al., 2016).

Opinions are mixed regarding the presence of EMI programmes in educational settings across the globe. On the one hand, many scholars have an overall positive attitude towards EMI (Bolton & Kuteeva, 2012; Turhan & Kırkgöz, 2018), but on the other hand, others express various overriding concerns stemming from pedagogical issues such as lecture comprehension (Airey, Lauridsen, Rasanen, Salö & Schwach, 2017; Aslan, 2018; Cho, 2012; Hellekjaer, 2010) and political factors (Huang & Singh, 2014; Kirkpatrick, 2017).

There are various reasons why HEIs prefer EMI. HEIs want to increase their international visibility (Airey et al., 2017; Dearden & Macaro, 2016) and attract high-quality international students, researchers, and academics (Haigh, 2014; Lueg & Lueg, 2015; Özer, 2012). EMI programmes are generally thought to be an indicator of internationalisation in HEIs (Ekoç, 2018; Kim & Yoon, 2018). Some HEIs introduce EMI programmes as a consequence of international accreditation (Haigh, 2014). This may result from top-down pressure from universities (Yang, 2015). Other reasons given for the existence of EMI programmes at a university are world university rankings, financial expectations, and prestige (Haigh, 2014).

Some debates regarding the effectiveness of EMI are centred around the ineffective delivery of course content (Akar, 2010; Cho, 2012; Kırkgöz, 2009), lecture comprehension (Hellekjaer, 2010), proficiency levels among teachers and students

(Wächter & Maiworm, 2014), a fear of the country's official language losing ground as the academic language (Jarvad, 2001), additional time spent on preparing to teach in English (Huang & Singh, 2014) and a decrease in content achievement (Byun et al., 2011).

### EMI Practices in Turkey

English has become widespread and is one of the essential parts of our everyday lives. As a result, using English as a medium of instruction has also become popular. Most countries, including Turkey, have attached importance to teaching students through the medium of English. In Turkey, EMI programmes are expanding, especially in HEIs (Ekoç, 2018; Karakaş, 2019; Macaro & Akincioglu, 2018; Selvi, 2014). Turkish universities have been aspiring to internationalise (Efe & Ozer, 2015), and this could be one of the reasons for the spread of EMI programmes at the tertiary level in Turkey. Reading between the lines, it may be understood that English-taught programmes at the tertiary level are intended to increase competitiveness with European countries and to keep up with the recent global standards in education (Selvi, 2011; 2014) as well as internationalisation at home (Rowland & Murray, 2019; Selvi, 2014).

At the tertiary level, students can opt for studying EMI programmes or Turkish-Medium Instruction programmes (TMI) (Aksu-Ataç, Özgan-Sucu, Eriçok & Bulut, 2018). TMI programmes do not require students to have English when they start in their departments, whereas students in EMI programmes are required to pass an in-house developed English proficiency test. Students can also move onto their programmes if they get a satisfactory score in a widely recognised national or international central examination (Aslan, 2018; British Council/TEPAV, 2015). Students who do not meet the requirements are offered a preparatory year programme (PYP) which is designed to help them gain sufficient linguistic skills in order to understand their lectures in English (Macaro & Akincioglu, 2018; Turhan & Kırkgöz, 2018). Broadly speaking, the PYP is a two-semester programme for students planning to complete a bachelor's degree in a four-year programme. It is considered that the PYP for English plays an essential role in the students' subsequent success in departmental courses concerning the academic English requirements of the course. In addition to the PYP, departmental courses can also help students to improve their proficiency in English. Nonetheless, Kırkgöz (2009) commented that an English for Academic Purposes curriculum with an emphasis on the development of

language skills remains inadequate for preparing students adequately for their academic requirements. However, it is also crucial for students to continue their English language studies to a higher level for the rest of their undergraduate studies. In this context, EMI can be considered as a means through which students become more motivated to steadily improve their proficiency in English so that they can understand the content knowledge in English (Rowland & Murray, 2019; Selvi, 2014).

In studies conducted in Turkey, EMI has been repeatedly criticised on the grounds that the delivery of course content in EMI is ineffective (Kırgöz, 2009) and that content lecturers suffer from a lack of improvisation and spontaneity (Kılıçkaya, 2006; Tange, 2010). Zaif, Karapınar and Eksi (2017) investigated the assessment of the performances of students in EMI and TMI programmes and found no significant differences with regard to their overall grades. Regarding EMI in Turkey, Ekoç (2018), Kırgöz (2014), and Ozer and Bayram (2019) explored students' perceptions of EMI and found that students could not internalise the subject content, yet their beliefs in the instrumental advantages of EMI, such as benefits when seeking employment, persisted.

### The Present Study

Recently, there has been an increasing interest among universities in evaluating the provision of EMI in terms of quality and consistency (Kim & Tatar, 2017; Toh, 2014). Although a few well-designed studies (Aslan, 2018; Ekoç, 2018; Kırgöz, 2009; Macaro & Akincioglu, 2018; Selvi, 2014) have been conducted, there is still a dearth of research investigating the effectiveness of EMI programmes. As Soruç and Griffiths (2018) put it, "At the moment, very little in the way of support systems for either students or teachers seems to be available, so there is a huge amount of work to be done, first to determine the kind of support that is required and useful" (p. 47), so studies identifying the professional needs of stakeholders of EMI are necessary to create a supportive environment for students.

The current study explores the perspectives of the lecturers to underpin the current teaching practices in EMI programmes. The purpose of the study is to examine lecturers' perspectives on EMI practices, identify their lecturers' potential strengths and weaknesses when teaching in English, and gather their expectations concerning a potential in-service support system. O'Dowd (2018) said that, teaching subjects through a foreign language requires a shift in methodology and that academics without a methodological and pedagogical background can have difficulties. Teaching through English is simply more than just translating and conveying the subject content to students (Helm & Guarda, 2015; Werther et al., 2014). The findings of this study will hopefully contribute to the universities providing undergraduate programmes entirely in English concerning language policy and pedagogical practice.

The research questions addressed here take into account the need for exploring academics' perspectives on teaching through English. The study is expected to shed light on the following research questions:

- (1) Which teaching practices do EMI content lecturers use?
- (2) What are the content lecturers' views on the implementation of EMI?
- (3) What areas of improvement can be identified in order to enhance the effectiveness of EMI programmes through in-service training?

## METHODOLOGY

The current paper is a descriptive research study which is quantitative and non-experimental. This study is part of a more extensive study which analyses and describes the views of both students and content lecturers on EMI practices.

### Research Setting

The HEI in which this study was conducted is a small state university located in the southern Mediterranean region of Turkey. This higher education institution was selected for a variety of reasons. One of the main reasons for selecting this particular research setting was that this institution has been offering EMI practice in almost all its programmes since 2013. Second, this institution delivers mostly engineering degree programmes, and engineering programmes have been playing an active role in the trend towards EMI at the tertiary level (Kim, Kweon & Kim, 2017). Third, the researchers' familiarity with the research setting could lead to a more natural situation for the research. Finally, the institution is planning to develop a language policy, and the findings of this study might serve as a reference for further research into the effectiveness of EMI programmes.

### Participants

A total of 109 participants at a state university in Turkey took part in the study. The single inclusion criterion for the study was lecturing in an undergraduate EMI programme. Table 1 provides demographic data of the faculty members who took part in the study.

With respect to the subjects taught, the participants represented two significant areas, namely programmes which are mainly numerical such as mechanical engineering and programmes which are mainly verbal, such as political sciences. The specific departments in which the academics worked were Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Food Engineering, Bioengineering, Industrial Engineering, Computer Engineering, Energy Systems Engineering, Civil Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Materials Engineering, Aerospace Engineering, Political Science and Public Administration, Business Administration, Management Information Systems, Tourism Management, and International Relations. The mean length of their work experience was 10.02 years (range=1-31; SD=5.939).

Questionnaires were distributed to as many lecturers as possible from the faculties of aeronautics and astronautics, architecture and design, business, engineering, political sciences and tourism.

**Table 1:** Demographic Information Related to the Participants

Variable	Descriptor	n	%
Academic rank	Professor	5	4.6
	Associate Professor	20	18.3
	Assistant Professor	69	63.3
	Lecturer	5	4.6
	Research Assistant (PhD)	10	9.2
Subject	Mainly Numerical (science-related)	77	70.6
	Mainly Verbal (social-related)	32	29.4
Any previous training in pedagogy	Yes	43	39.4
	No	66	60.6
Previous experience in EMI (years)	Yes	30	27.5
	No	21	19.3
	Missing data	58	53.2

### Instrument

A quantitative methodology was adopted, and a questionnaire was designed to be completed in one session. To this end, a draft version of the questionnaire was piloted with two academics, neither of whom participated in the main study. Taking the feedback from the pilot into account, the final version of the questionnaire was developed. This questionnaire consisted of a total of 20 questions divided into four sections. The first section comprised of socio-demographic questions. The second section comprised 15, five-point Likert-type, closed questions, rated from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree.' Some statements were negatively worded, and these were reverse-scored. In the third section, there were four statements, all five-point Likert-type, related to attitudes towards the implementation of EMI. In the fourth section, there was only one question in which content lecturers could mark areas which they preferred for possible training to be provided by the university, or they could write their suggestions, if any.

The survey was designed, specifically for use in this study, with both closed and open-ended questions focused on lecturers' perceptions of EMI teaching. The design of the instrument was inspired by previously conducted needs analyses (Kırkgöz, 2009; Ozer & Bayram, 2019) and by the studies of Kırkgöz (2009), Soruç and Griffiths (2018) and Werther et al (2014) to suit the specific needs of the study locale. Most of the items were closed questions, which referred to issues related to pedagogy and teaching practices. The completion of the questionnaire required respondents to imagine their teaching as a whole and rate their agreement with the items.

The validity of the data collection instrument used in this study was determined by means of content validity. The items in the questionnaire were designed in line with the conceptual framework and the research aims. The items were then shown to two experts to gather their opinions. One of the experts was working as an assistant professor at a state university in the same city; she had obtained her bachelor's degree in an EMI programme. The other expert was a teacher trainer who was

working in a private publishing company. Based on the experts' opinions, an item which read '*The whole course content is divided into learning units and presented by my students week by week*' was removed. A demographic question (*Have you taught the course you teach in other universities?*) was added to respond to a suggestion offered by the experts. After that, a lecturer and an assistant professor took part in a pilot test since they did not meet the inclusion criterion, and were, therefore, they were not invited to participate in the main study. After I had analysed their feedback, I decided not to remove any more items.

### Data Collection Procedures

Ethical approval for the study (Permit number: 17/07/2018 - 5/1) was granted by the University's Research and Publication Committee on Ethics. In addition, the necessary permission to implement the survey across the faculties was obtained from the university administration. Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants, and their consent to take part in the study was sought and obtained. The lecturers' consent to take part was inferred from the return of the questionnaire. Questionnaires were delivered to 113 faculty members who taught undergraduate courses through the medium of English, and 109 valid responses were received. Members of the research team gave instructions and answered respondents' questions while handing out the surveys. The respondents completed the survey during regular working hours. It reportedly took between ten to twelve minutes to complete the questionnaire.

### Data Analysis

The quantitative data from the questionnaire was fed into IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 20 (IBM, 2011). Descriptive analyses were performed. Data were presented as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. The open-ended question was used to support the data obtained from the closed questions.

## RESULTS

In order to address the first research question, the participants were given a list of teaching practices and asked to rate their agreement with each statement. Table 2 provides data on the content lecturers' opinions of the teaching practices which they used in the EMI set.

The respondents were asked to rate their actual teaching practices in the EMI set. As Table 2 shows, the top two statements were: 'The content I deliver and the exam questions are parallel' ( $M= 4.58\pm0.55$ ) and 'I encourage my students to ask questions' ( $M= 4.53\pm0.67$ ). It is also worth noting that the items 'I wrap up lessons in Turkish so that my students learn better' ( $M= 2.79\pm1.22$ ) and 'I teach in the native language when my students need it' ( $M= 2.96\pm1.24$ ) were the least popular.

To address the second research question, the respondents' answers to some of the statements were analysed. The third part of the questionnaire contained four statements regarding the implementation of EMI and the lecturers were asked to rate them. Their responses to each statement are shown in Table 3.

As depicted in Table 3, 'Collaboration between content lecturers and language teachers at PYP is a necessity' ranked at the top

( $M=4.00\pm0.95$ ). It is interesting to note that 'Assessing in an EMI programme is unavoidably influenced by the student's language level' ( $M= 2.63\pm1.05$ ) was the item with the lowest mean.

In order to address the third research question, the respondents were asked a single question. In the final part of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to select from listed options their responses to a question which read, "If content lecturers were provided with an in-service teacher training, what would you include in that training?". The respondents were provided with an 'other' option where they could write their own suggestions for the training to be provided.

The participants' consent to in-service teacher training was inferred from their answers to the optional question asking their opinion regarding potential training to be provided by the university administration. The majority of the respondents ( $f=97$ ; 89%) would welcome teacher training provided by the university. For the other 11%, in-service teacher training was not a necessity for content lecturers in EMI undergraduate programmes. The majority ( $f=64$ ; 69.8%) selected 'Psychology of learning,' which was closely followed by 'Effective presentation techniques – signpost language' ( $f=61$ , 66.5%).

**Table 2:** Content Lecturers' Opinions on Actual Teaching Practices

No.	Statement	M	SD
1	I stick to my course plan while delivering the content.	3.44	1.01
2	I use supportive language when my students ask questions.	4.53	0.57
3	I wrap up lessons in Turkish so that my students learn better.	2.79	1.22
4	I encourage my students to ask questions.	4.53	0.67
5	I teach in the native language when my students need it.	2.96	1.24
6	I simplify my language when my students need it.	4.36	0.60
7	I use authentic teaching techniques.	4.21	0.69
8	Keeping my students' attention active is my priority while preparing my presentations.	4.29	0.70
9	I use the board for crucial information only.	3.47	1.03
10	As the content lecturer, the technical vocabulary gap of my students is out of my responsibility.	3.14	1.12
11	I use intonation only when it is necessary.	4.47	0.66
12	The content I deliver and the exam questions are parallel.	4.58	0.55
13	I establish eye-contact while teaching.	4.47	0.62
14	Motivating my students is out of my responsibility.	3.79	1.05
15	I prefer preparing my own teaching materials.	4.30	0.70

**Table 3:** Content Lecturers' Attitude Toward the Implementation of EMI

No.	Statement	M	SD
16	I feel more comfortable while delivering the content in L1.	3.63	1.17
17	EMI practice can improve students' English proficiency.	3.96	1.03
18	Collaboration between content lecturers and language teachers at PYP is a necessity.	4.00	0.95
19	Assessing in an EMI programme is unavoidably influenced by the student's language level.	2.63	1.05

**Table 4:** Content Lecturers' Suggestions For Potential Teacher Training

Area of Training	Frequency (f)
Psychology of learning	64
Effective presentation techniques - signpost language	61
Alternative assessment techniques	46
Eye contact; body language	42
Inclusive practices for locals and international students	39
Effective integration of Information and Communication Technology	37
Inclusive practices for students at different language levels	33
Anchoring	11

According to 46 participants (50.1%), alternative assessment techniques were a necessity for EMI lecturers. Anchoring was the least favourite area of training from the listed options ( $f=11$ , 12%). Despite them not being listed, the participants suggested the following areas for training: keys to attracting students' attention ( $f=2$ ), alternative teaching methods ( $f=1$ ), pre-service teacher training ( $f=1$ ), and behavioural learning ( $f=1$ ).

### DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

This study was devised to explore EMI lecturers' views on their actual teaching practices. As the number of English-taught courses in Turkish universities increases, the findings which emerged from this survey will contribute to developing thorough teacher training at HEIs where EMI programmes operate.

First, the content lecturers, nearly 40% of whom had some sort of pedagogical training before their current employment, seemed to be using various methodological teaching practices in class. However, the statement "I teach in the native language when my students need it" had a mean of 2.96, and this needs to be studied carefully by the HEI. Karakaş (2019) also stressed the importance of the need to investigate why EMI content lecturers prefer a mixed-use of Turkish and English in the classroom. Although this was not a common practice at the selected university, a consensus among academics over the role of the medium of instruction should be achieved. In order to prevent such practices from taking place, HEIs should have some sort of orientation and monitoring programme for the faculty members. The participants in this study agreed that EMI necessitates specific training, and this finding supports earlier research findings (Aguilar, 2017; Başıbek et al., 2014; de Graaf, Koopman, Anikina & Westhoff, 2007). This training can be provided in several areas, including language support, pedagogical training, or methodological training.

Second, the survey revealed that the faculty members believed that there had to be a collaboration between the content lecturers and the language teachers in a PYP. Not only do language teachers in a PYP prepare students for their departmental courses, they also help students to become independent users of English. Macaro, Curle, Pun, An, and Dearden (2018) made a similar finding and suggested that

language teachers in PYPs should be more familiar with and attuned to the specific subjects in general so that they could fully support their students before their departmental courses. Another issue revealed by the current survey was the assessment of exam papers in some courses, where students have more opportunities to show off their language capabilities. Some academics believed that some of their colleagues might be affected by the language level of students when grading the content in exam papers.

Third, in terms of the areas for future training, the academics' top preferences were 'Psychology of learning' and 'Effective presentation techniques – signpost language.' Jenkins (2011) and Werther et al. (2014) showed the importance of signposting in an EMI class. Costa and Coleman (2013) pointed out that lecturers might pay special attention to an effective presentation. It is also worth noting that the content lecturers reported having some difficulties in addressing students from different nationalities and at different language levels effectively. The finding that these difficulties were related to inclusive practices resonates with those of previous studies (Dearden & Macaro, 2016; Kirkgöz, 2009).

The findings of this study confirm those made by earlier researchers (Martin Del-Pozo, 2017; Mancho-Barés & Arnó-Macià, 2017; O'Dowd, 2018) who dealt with the training and certification of lecturers who wished to teach in an EMI programme. The findings of the current survey showed a real need for training to be provided by the university. This finding is in close accord with those of Tange (2010) and Werther et al. (2014). It seems evident that teacher training for EMI content lecturers should be developed from the language proficiency, pedagogical, and methodological aspects of teaching. Some of the possible areas for improvement in teacher training have been listed in this study, but this is just one of the steps which should be taken by the HEI. In the future, considerably more attention is needed to systematically analysing the needs of the teaching staff in EMI programmes.

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