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Lecturers' Perceptions of English Medium Instruction at Engineering Departments of Higher Education: A Study on Partial English Medium Instruction at Some State Universities in Turkey

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Abstract

English-medium instruction (EMI) is expanding in Turkey and especially at higher education. Universities with EMI are more favored and popular for students and parents in comparison to universities without EMI. There are integrative and instrumental reasons to prefer universities with EMI. Therefore, English, in a way, competes with Turkish as the medium of instruction, especially at higher education. English is partially used as a medium of instruction at some universities which offer one third of the lectures in English and the others in Turkish. However, views of lecturers on whether EMI is a requisite and benignant in terms of instructional goals are generally ignored. This paper reports on the results of a survey of 63 lecturers that have different titles at university, such as professors, associate professors, assistant professors, and assistants from engineering faculties of two universities with partial EMI. This research aims to compare their attitudes towards EMI. A Lickert-type scale questionnaire was used in the study to collect data on attitudes of lecturers. The findings may provide some insights into lecturers' perceptions of their teaching in English: lecturers in partial EMI programs may consider that they are less capable of performing their teaching duties or may feel some aspects of teaching to be more difficult.

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1. Introduction

Within Europe, internationalization is being supported by teaching subjects in English, and especially at the graduate and post-graduate levels. This situation places pressure on educational institutions to offer increasingly courses taught in English and even whole programs. Across Europe, the subject areas most frequently offered in English are engineering and technology, closely followed by business-related studies. A good example of this

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scenario is the universities in Turkey. English language has always been a concern of the educational field in Turkey and there is an on-going discussion from the past to today regarding the EMI at universities.

English language is widely used and recognized both in education and the private sector in Turkey. Different views come into play regarding the role and function of English in institutions of higher education, where it is the medium of instruction. It now entails being able to provide high-quality education through English-medium instruction. In Turkey, EMI is expanding especially in the institutions of higher education and generally considered as a tool which differentiates one university from the others. Many students prefer English for instrumental reasons and integrative reasons as well. However, lecturers' views on this issue are either ignored or taken for granted that the lecturers in these institutions support the view that EMI is an indispensable component of university education. What do the lecturers themselves think about this situation? What attitudes do they have towards English as a medium of instruction?

This paper reports on the results of a small-scale survey of 63 lecturers from Engineering Faculty of two state universities regarding attitudes towards partial EMI. In this research, the word 'lecturer' will be used as a neutral term to refer to anyone who is lecturing through English at university. Thus, it refers to people who have different titles at the university, such as professors, associate professors, assistant professors and assistants, all have one point in common: they all give lectures in partial English-medium programs.

2. The role of English in education in Turkey

English started to spread in Turkey in the 1950s due to the increasing effect of American economic and military power (Demircan, 1988). English started to compete with French and the need to improve trade relations and keep up with the technological developments made English a compulsory foreign language. Later in the 1980s, Turkey felt a more urgent plan as regards foreign language teaching and this required an efficient foreign language policy to be implemented due to economic factors. This led to an increase in the number of public and private schools where a foreign language, especially English, has been taught as a foreign language. In the 21st century, English as a foreign language makes Turkey take place in the Expanding Circle, where English has mostly instrumental functions in education and the private sector.

Since the mid 1980s, Turkey has increasingly been influenced by the forces of globalization through English language. For international communication (with a commonly known language to meet economic, social and cultural demands), English has become the most the predominant means of interaction. With the effect of globalization, English has had an increasing status in Turkey because it has become the lingua franca of the world. Ahmad (1993) states that "English had become the *sine qua non* for a successful career in virtually any field, and thus parents struggled to have their children acquire a working knowledge of the language" (p.210).

In Turkey, during the mid 1980s, there was an increase in the number of the schools with EMI because of the increasing popularity of English. The statistics of Ministry of National Education (MONE) show that there were 193 English-medium secondary schools (103 private, 90 state-owned) in the 1987-1988 academic year. By the 2006-2007 school year, the number of private secondary schools reached 717 while the number of Anatolian high schools was 415 (MONE, 2008).

As for the higher education, there are two types of universities as state and private that are controlled by The Council of Higher Education. Currently, there are 103 state and 65 private universities in Turkey. As the first state university with EMI, Middle East Technical University (METU) was established in 1956. In 1983, Bilkent University was founded as the first private university in Ankara. Today, most private universities provide EMI to their students. In many state universities (with Turkish medium instruction) students are offered one year of intensive English program (preparatory classes) to become proficient in English. After that, students need to take a course "Reading and Speaking in English" aiming to improve general knowledge of English in the third semester of four-year degree program, and it is followed by "English for Specific Purposes I and II" intending to terminology of

their own field. "English for Business" aims to advance students' oral and written communication skills that will help them do business with foreign people and companies (Doğançay-Aktuna & Kızıltepe, 2005). In addition, European Union plays an important role in higher education so; some universities adopt English medium instruction at some of their faculties.

Turkish students learn English mainly for instrumental reasons of education and better career opportunities. Today, English is not just a compulsory school subject, but "also a must for most of the jobs in urban Turkey", as in most of the other countries in the world (Doğançay-Aktuna, 1998). Therefore, there are some debates on whether English medium instruction should be used in education or not.

3. The debate over EMI in Turkey

In Turkey, as in most other countries, teaching and learning have a very important role in the educational context. English is, in a way, in competition with Turkish as the medium instruction, especially in the institutions of higher education. It is not just a 'must' course, but in most universities (including the departments where the medium of instruction is English) such as Bogaziçi University, Middle East Technical University and Bilkent University and Hacettepe University, English is the medium of instruction. This is where a hot discussion commences among Turkish educators as well as students and parents as regards the pros and cons of EMI.

Some educators oppose EMI by arguing that it leads to 1) reduced ability to understand concepts, 2) low-level of knowledge about the subject studied, 3) excessive consumption of time, 4) feelings of alienation and separation, 5) the least amount of participation in the classes due to low level proficiency in English. (Vinke, 1995; Mutumba, 1999; Wächter, B. and Maiworm, F. 2008; Maurunen, 2010a).

Furthermore, it is claimed that the education sector where English is the medium of instruction is "a vehicle for creating an elite class" that will rule the masses, since it limits the involvement of the majority of the students, who do not have access to English education, in economic and social development (Mutamba 1999; Sarihan 2005). The benefit of using L1 in language classes adds another perspective to this discussion. The study conducted by Tung, Raymond and Tsang (1997) shows that limited use of the mother tongue in the ELT does not reduce students' exposure to English, but it can help in teaching and learning processes.

These claims are also shared by the students in the study conducted by Kirkgöz (2005) regarding the attitudes towards EMI. Students expect lecturers' coverage of subject matter to be more superficial. This view is also stressed by Klaassen and Graaff (2001, 282).

The focus on language production influences the lecturer's didactical skills in the sense that they are less flexible in conveying the contents of the lecture material, resulting in long monologues, and a lack of rapport with students, humor and interaction.

Marsh (n.d.) proposes that without adoption of appropriate curricula, teaching in English leads to confusion and despair among students and lecturers. However, some educators state that learning foreign languages (English, in our context) does not lead to forgetting Turkish, and the second language in fact increases competence in mother-tongue (Alptekin 1998a). Bear (1998a, 1998b) and Çolakoglu (1995) consider EMI as an artificial environment where students are required to communicate in English because of the few opportunities outside of school to practice the language in everyday communication and adds that it is an appropriate model as regards the current situation in Turkey where there are no other proposed alternatives.

4. Method

4.1. Participants

The sample of this study consisted of the lecturers at two state universities. 63 lecturers from the departments of Engineering Faculty; these departments are: Geodesy and Photogrammetry Engineering, Civil Engineering, Electrics and Electronics Engineering, Environmental Engineering, Machinery Engineering.

The participants responded the questionnaire about their views on the use of English and Turkish as medium of instruction in universities. They were chosen from these departments because 30 % of lectures were given in English in these departments. Their positions can be seen from the table below:

Table 1. Lecturers attended the survey

Position	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Research Assistant	37	58,7	58,7	58,7
Lecturer	10	15,9	15,9	74,6
Assisted Professor	13	20,6	20,6	95,2
Associated Professor	1	1,6	1,6	96,8
Professor	2	3,2	3,2	100,0
Total	63	100,0	100,0	

4.2. Data collection instruments

The questionnaire used by Tung, Raymond, and Tsang (1997) was used in this study with some modifications to make the statements fit the current situation in Turkey. The questionnaire with reliability value .91 consisted of 24 items. All the items required participants to rate a given statement according to a specified Likert-type scale. The participants' views on the statements in the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS with summary measures such as means and standard deviations.

4.3. Data analysis

The general results of the study are presented in two tables, which contain the mean and standard deviations as regards 24 items in the questionnaire. Table 2 includes the questionnaire items regarding lecturers' viewpoints on teaching and learning process in EMI.

Table 2. Lecturers' viewpoints on teaching and learning process in EMI

1) strongly disagree 2) disagree 3)neutral 4)agree 5) strongly agree	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
2. Resources for teaching, e.g., textbooks and reference books, are more plentiful in English than in Turkish.	63	3,75	1,164
3. Lecturing in Turkish allows the lesson to progress faster than lecturing in English.	63	3,27	1,347
4. I support adopting EMI at the university where I teach.	63	3,51	1,480
5. EMI increases workload of lecturers.	63	3,24	1,279
7. It is more difficult to evaluate learners' success in EMI.	63	3,25	1,270
8. It is difficult to express myself fully in lecturing in English.	63	2,78	1,197
10. EMI conflicts Turkish scientific people with their national interests.	63	2,71	1,349
12. Lecturing in Turkish allows a teacher to go deeper into the content of the lesson than lecturing in English.	63	3,81	1,075
13. It is easier to organize the lesson, to prepare for it and to prepare classroom materials in EMI.	63	2,98	1,171
14. It is inappropriate for instructors to teach the same lesson mixing English and Turkish.	63	2,84	1,234

18. The greatest problem in using Turkish as the medium of instruction is the need to translate a lot of special terms.	63	3,13	1,276
19. It is easier to teach non-language subjects (e.g., Geography, Mathematics) in English than in Turkish.	63	2,81	1,030
22. I think I am proficient enough to lecture in English.	63	3,56	1,118
23. EMI damages Turkish culture and mentality.	63	2,70	1,531

Regarding item 2 (mean=3,75), most of the lecturers participated in the study think that to find materials in English is easier than Turkish. When item 4 (mean=3,51) and item 22 (mean=3.56) are taken into account, it can be recognized that lecturers have mostly positive attitudes towards applying EMI in teaching and they believe that they are proficient enough to lecture in English. On the other hand, unexpectedly, they favor lecturing in Turkish provides deeper and clearer understanding in terms of the content of the lesson (item 12, mean=3,81). They are nearly neutral about that EMI carries out neither a threat for Turkish culture and mentality (item 23, mean=2,70) and nor a conflict with Turkish scientific people in terms of their national interests (item 10, mean=2,71).

Table 3 contains the questionnaire items regarding lecturers' viewpoints on teaching and learning process in EMI from the perspectives of learners.

Table 3. Lecturers' viewpoints on teaching and learning process from the perspectives of learners

1) strongly disagree 2) disagree 3)neutral 4)agree 5) strongly agree	N	Mean	Std.
1. Lecturing in Turkish can promote students' interest in learning more than lecturing in English.	63	2,52	1,318
6. EMI will provide students with being more successful in business life after university.	63	3,73	1,234
9. Students give more importance to subjects taught in English.	63	2,68	1,148
11. Using EMI will also contribute to English proficiency of the students.	63	3,73	1,208
15. Students tend to neglect those subjects taught in Turkish.	63	2,37	1,067
16. Students' gains regarding their fields of study increase via EMI.	63	3,43	1,341
17. Lecturing in Turkish produces a better classroom atmosphere than lecturing in English.	63	3,22	1,250
20. Students utilize their academic and social environments more in Turkish medium instruction.	63	2,37	1,362
21. Teaching a class in Turkish encourages students to speak uninhibitedly, thereby disrupting the order of the class.	63	2,49	1,216
24. The English proficiency of the students I teach is not adequate for them to study non-language subject in	63	4,17	,925

Responses to item 11 show that, according to lecturers, using EMI would contribute to English proficiency of learners (mean=3,73). As a result, they believe that students' gains regarding their fields of study increase via EMI (item 16, mean=3,43), also that learners utilize their academic and social environments more (item 20, mean=2,37) in addition to provide more success in their business lives after university (item 6, mean=3,73). Quite the contrary, it can be commented from item 24 (mean=4,17) that lecturers mostly suggest that the English proficiency levels of learners are scarcely sufficient for studying non-language subjects.

5. Results and Conclusion

The results of the questionnaire, in general, show that Turkish lecturers using partial EMI at two Turkish state universities are more favorable to the idea of adopting English as an instructional medium rather than Turkish. They agree that instruction in English can promote learners to be more successful in terms of both their academic or social environments and their business lives after university. Besides, the lecturers have no concerns related to EMI in higher education such as the resources provided in English. The lecturers think that through EMI, learners could make use of their fields of study more since they could access to all the resources in English. They believe that learners are not proficient enough to learn subject matters in English. Hence, they support the idea that lecturing in

Turkish provides deeper and clearer understanding in terms of the content of the lesson. In addition, they think that EMI would contribute to their English proficiency levels as well as their fields of study.

The authorities at universities adopting EMI or partial EMI are unwilling to change the medium of instruction with mother tongue instruction as this may affect the quality of their student intake or they may lose their 'tool' which makes their university an 'elite' one. The lecturers participated in this study have positive attitudes towards adopting EMI. However, they also think that lecturing in mother tongue helps learners acquire enough knowledge about the content of the lesson. When students' proficiency levels of the target language are considered, it is reasonable to offer some courses both in English and Turkish electively. This is already being done in some other universities, where approximately 30% of the courses are provided in English.

Based on the current policies and strategies set by state universities with EMI or partial EMI, internationalization is a goal. One tool for achieving this goal is the use of English as the instructional language. The findings from the present study reveal that there are some negative effects related to using English as the instructional language. However, in some cases, this effect is possibly reduced by favorable circumstances. It should be noted, however, that these findings are based on self-reporting. A more in-depth study with a factor analysis is recommended for confirmation of the present.

Considering benefits and opportunities of knowing English, lack of quality in English language teaching and the different needs of students, EMI has to be brought into discussion not just taking lecturers into consideration, but also the government and other stakeholders. The lecturers who have limited experience and proficiency in teaching in English and in publishing in English or who do not otherwise meet the favorable circumstances criterion should be directed to courses for language, communication, and pedagogical support.

It is recommended that training should be provided for the improvement of skills needed for both lecturing and publishing in English. Through specific training, lecturers can develop the interactive skills needed for lecture situations and required communication skills in target language. Courses developing skills for lecturing should preferably be designed by a team consisting of language and communication specialists and education specialists.

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