Deciphering Students and Teachers' Perceptions Towards English as a Medium of Instruction: A Case Study of Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University

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Abstract—**Medium of instruction has been shifting towards English, thereby producing English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in Saudi higher education due to internationalization, globalization, economic and technological advancement. Saudi universities have been adopting EMI to address the needs of the day and the demands by the stakeholders and students. This study explores the perceptions of Saudi university students and teachers about the use of EMI in the Saudi higher education. The participants are 80 students and 20 university teachers affiliated to Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. A five-point Likert-scale questionnaire was used to collect data. The findings show that both teachers and students hold positive perceptions about the use of EMI in Saudi universities. The findings suggest that teachers hold stronger positive attitudes towards the use of EMI. Students demonstrate a positive attitudinal behavior when teachers switch to Arabic while teaching. Findings further show that the use of EMI may hamper the native language and culture as perceived by the students. A number of implications have been suggested as students may feel hesitant to speak in English due to their low English proficiency.**

Index Terms—**EMI, EFL, internalization, perceptions, Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz**

I. INTRODUCTION

Medium of instruction (MOI) is often a debatable issue in education, as English has been growing as the MOI in the global context. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA thereafter) the largest country in the Arabian Peninsula, is the case of concern in this study. Arabic language is the official language as well as the MOI in general education. However, due to the *internationalization of the status of English* (Doiz et al., 2011) *and its* hegemonic power, the recent trend is adopting English as a medium of instruction (EMI) mostly in countries like KSA where English is not the native language and where English has no official status. English has been taken as a foreign language in these countries as they belong to the "expanding circle countries" in Kachru's (1992) framework. Around the world, the way English is being taught has undergone a paradigm shift "from English being taught as a foreign language (EFL) to English being the medium of instruction" (Dearden, 2014, p.4) over the last few decades. This is because English is becoming a global lingua franca (Tsou & Kao, 2017) as it is an international language (McKay, 2002).

In recent years, English language has been enjoying preferences as the MOI in the global context, especially in non-native English speaking countries (Bradford, 2016) due to the socio-economic power of the English language (Bourdieu, 1991) and for better socioeconomic mobility (Bhattacharya, 2013; Tupas, 2015; Manan et al., 2015). Moreover, English has been the language of science, technology, tourism, business, academia and international communication. Therefore, people have an attraction towards the English language around the world, especially in non-English speaking countries, and as such, English is enjoying a high profile in society with a positive image. Generally, English is taught as a subject in general education in KSA while all other subjects are taught in Arabic, students' mother tongue. However, some private international schools adopt EMI giving English much value thereby teaching all the content subjects in English.

Although the exact date of introducing English into the Saudi Arabian education system is unknown, some scholars date it to be in 1924 (e.g. Baghdadi, 1985; Al-Shabbi, 1989) while others claim it to be in the late 1920's (e.g. Alshahrani, 2016) or in the 1930's (e.g. Al-Johani, 2009). In fact, teaching and learning English in KSA has social, economic, political and religious values (Alshahrani, 2016). English in KSA has a social importance because of the spread of technological advancement and the need for communication within the international community. Politically, learning English in KSA is associated with the development of military power (Cordesman, 2003) and for foreign policy affairs. English is particularly important in the KSA's education system due to its economic value for the country, associated with the development of oil companies and enhancing foreign investment in the country.

Saudi Arabia is the top religious destination for Muslims around the world as it is the birthplace of Islam. During the main Islamic festivals like Hajj and Umrah, a large number of visitors come to KSA throughout the year. Makkah is believed to be "the ultimate multilingual phenomenon" during these religious occasions (Al-Hamami, 2018). English is

one of the languages that facilitate communication with the large mass of pilgrims who came from different speech communities. In the same vein, business industries have been expanded in KSA and workers come from all around the world. From what has been discussed earlier, the importance of English has been established in the Saudi context, especially in higher education (Shaabi, 2010; Habbash, 2011; Al-Issa, 2011; Alhawsawi, 2014). Thus, there has been a trend in shifting from Arabic to an English medium of instruction in Saudi universities. Likewise, the shift towards EMI is influenced by internationalization and globalization (Al-Kahtany et al., 2015). This research situates itself in this specific context and thus seeks to explore the perceptions of the Saudi university teachers and students concerning the use of EMI in the Saudi higher education context.

The rest of this study is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the literature review as well as some previous studies pertinent to the topic under investigation. Section 3 is the methodology of the study, wherein the context of the study, its design, and the data collection and analytical procedures are provided. Section 4 offers the results of the study. Section 5 discusses the results. Section 6 concludes the study and offers some recommendations for further research.

Research Questions

This study aims towards investigating the perceptions of the Saudi university teachers and students about the use of EMI in the Saudi higher education context. To achieve this objective, this study answers the following overarching question:

To what extent do Saudi university teachers/students perceive the use of EMI in the Saudi higher education context?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

EMI is a controversial issue (Arkın, 2013; Macaro, 2017) in the polity of education though it has increasingly been used in education particularly in non-native English speaking countries like Saudi Arabia. As the literature shows, there have been various studies about adopting EMI in higher education around the world. In this regard, Dearden (2014) reports EMI is a "growing global phenomenon" (p.2) in education, particularly in higher education (Smit, 2010; Sultana, 2014; Fenton-Smith et al., 2017) mainly to internationalise the university (Macaro et al., 2018). Jiang and Zhang (2017) argue that if implemented effectively, EMI "can minimize the linguistic barrier to the internationalization of higher education" (p.174).

In KSA, there is a growing trend of using EMI in higher education (Shamim et al., 2016) in the last few decades because of the Saudi government's policy of "expanding English language teaching and the use of English in education" (Al-Kahtany et al., 2015, p. 49). As a result, EMI programmes have been introduced and developed, especially in higher education. Most universities use EMI in Saudi Arabia (Jawhar, 2012; McMullen, 2014) since the internationalisation process can be achieved through it and more international students can be attracted. However, Asiri (2019) argues, "The preference for EMI gives the impression that Arabic is not the appropriate language of instruction" (p.16). Nonetheless, the use of EMI cannot be stopped in higher education in KSA due to the influence of globalization, internationalization, science and technology and the global economic market-place.

Regarding the perceptions and beliefs of EMI in higher education, various studies have been done in non-English speaking countries (Jensen & Thøgersen, 2011; Hamid et al., 2013; Ellili-Cherif & Alkhateeb, 2015). Those studies have shown positive views of the participants regarding the use of EMI in higher education, may it be for communication, for career opportunities, or to attract foreign students. However, Hengsadeekul et al. (2012) study showed both positive and negative perceptions of students about the use of EMI. As the study showed, EMI can enhance English language proficiency and better job opportunities, but the use of English can create a great burden on the students' comprehension of the subject contents. Similarly, Corrales et al.'s (2016) study showed that implementing EMI initiatives had benefits, though posed some challenges.

Belhiah and Elhami (2015) also examined teachers and learners in six universities in the United Arab Emirates and found that they were generally positive towards the use of EMI. Al-Kahtany et al. (2015) investigated the attitude of Saudi students and instructors towards EMI and towards Arabic as an alternative in King Khalid University, Saudi Arabia. The results showed strong attitudinal differences. Most of the studies done in higher education have been on EMI and EMI related issues like the effectiveness, challenges, and classroom practices (e.g. Vu & Burns, 2014; Hu & Lei, 2014; Huang, 2015). As far as is known, little research has been conducted to explore the Saudi university teachers' and students' perceptions about the use of EMI. Therefore, this study is trying to fulfill this gap in the Saudi university context.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Study Context

As KSA is a monolingual country, the national language is Arabic. It has been used as the MOI in education. The English language is viewed as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia. English is the MOI in higher education for many subjects like science, and engineering (Shamim et al., 2016). There has been a demand for EMI in KSA higher education due to the internationalization of education and students' mobility to study abroad. As Phan and Barnawi (2015) report, the growth of private universities and colleges in KSA has also led to the increased use of EMI in the Saudi higher education contexts. Considering this situation, the present study was conducted in a Saudi university

where disciplinary knowledge was delivered through both Arabic Medium of Instruction (AMI) and EMI with the main objective of exploring teachers' and students' perceptions regarding EMI in higher education in KSA.

B. Research Design

This study employed the descriptive quantitative method with a survey research design "in which the investigator administers a survey or questionnaire to a sample or to the entire population of people to describe the attitudes, opinions, behaviors, or characteristics of the population" (Creswell, 2012, p. 628). Toendan (2013) stated that descriptive research involves the collection of the data for describing existing conditions. This design provides quantitative data for analysing and interpreting the results.

Purposive sampling was used to select 20 university staff members and 80 students from Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University to collect the data. Since the study used survey design, a questionnaire was used as a research tool to collect data from the participants to fulfil the objective of the study. The questionnaire has been adapted from other studies dealing with perceptions of the students and teachers (e.g. Khan, 2013; Doiz et al., 2011; Al-Kahtany et al., 2015; AlBakri, 2017). The questionnaire included a five-point Likert scale with twenty statements. Data was collected by distributing the questionnaire to the selected university staff members and students. Written consent form was collected from the participants, which informs them about the purpose of the study and their rights.

IV. RESULTS

This study aimed at investigating the Saudi university teachers and students' perceptions about the use of EMI in the Saudi higher education context. The following sections present the results and analyses.

A. Statistical Procedures

A reliability check was performed using the Cronbach's Alpha equation for the teachers and students' questionnaire consisting of 20 items in each. The Cronbach's Alpha value for the questionnaire of teachers was found to be (0.71) and for the questionnaire of students (0.94). This shows that the questionnaire was reliable to a great extent.

TABLE 1
RELIABILITY STATISTICS

SURVEY	N OF ITEMS	CRONBACH'S ALPHA
TEACHERS	20	0.71
STUDENTS	20	0.94

Statistically speaking, the range of 5-point Likert type scale is determined by subtracting the minimum value from the maximum. Thus, the range is calculated by $(5 - 1 = 4)$, the range value then should be divided by five as it is the greatest value of the scale $(4 \div 5 = 0.80)$. The value of (0.8) should now be added to the five scales to determine the length of each cell. Therefore, the length of the cells of each degree of agreement will be as follows:

TABLE 2
LENGTH OF CELLS

DEGREE OF AGREEMENT	SCALE
VERY LOW	1-1.8
LOW	1.8 - 2.6
MODERATE	2.6 - 3.4
HIGH	3.4 - 4.2
VERY HIGH	4.2 – 5

B. Students' Perceptions on EMI

Students studying at the Saudi university have certain beliefs, views and attitudes towards the use of EMI in Saudi higher education. Table 3 below contains the mean and standard deviations with the significance level regarding 20 items in the questionnaire.

TABLE 3
STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF EMI

QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS	MEAN	STD. DEVIATION	MEAN DIFFERENCE	T	SIG. (2-TAILED)	LEVEL
1.	3.98	1.08	0.58	5.28	0.000	HIGH
2.	3.84	1.00	0.44	4.36	0.000	HIGH
3.	3.86	1.06	0.46	4.28	0.000	HIGH
4.	3.65	1.29	0.25	1.87	0.065	HIGH
5.	3.85	1.08	0.45	4.14	0.000	HIGH
6.	3.85	1.02	0.45	4.38	0.000	HIGH
7.	3.73	0.96	0.33	3.37	0.001	HIGH
8.	3.95	1.30	0.55	4.13	0.000	HIGH
9.	3.96	1.38	0.56	3.98	0.000	HIGH
10.	2.84	1.10	-0.56	-4.96	0.000	MODERATE
11.	2.97	1.24	-0.04	-3.40	0.001	MODERATE
12.	4.02	1.58	0.62	3.86	0.000	HIGH
13.	4.01	1.41	0.61	4.24	0.000	HIGH
14.	4.00	1.48	0.60	3.97	0.000	HIGH
15.	3.91	1.62	0.51	3.06	0.003	HIGH
16.	3.69	1.76	0.29	1.61	0.112	HIGH
17.	3.64	1.84	0.24	1.25	0.213	HIGH
18.	3.86	1.86	0.46	2.45	0.016	HIGH
19.	3.97	1.87	0.57	2.99	0.004	HIGH
20.	4.54	1.74	1.14	6.43	0.000	VERY HIGH
TOTAL	3.81	0.73	0.41	5.43	0.000	HIGH

As indicated from Table 3 (Students' Perception of EMI), the total mean is 3.81. This mean is considered high and is statistically significant as the P value is 0.00. It indicates that the students have positive perceptions about EMI in general terms. However, there are some irregularities in the results of the students' survey as there are items that do not have statistical significance, namely items number 4, 16 and 17. Likewise, Items number 10 and 11 have medium levels of agreement towards EMI use. Item number 20 has a very high mean (4.54) and it is also statistically significant, followed by item number 12 (mean = 4.02) as the second highest mean. Item number 10 has the lowest mean (2.84) along with item number 11 (2.97), and these are moderate degrees of agreement.

C. Teachers' Perceptions on EMI

Saudi university teachers hold certain perceptions on the use of EMI in Saudi university education. Table 4 (Teachers' Perception of EMI) summarises the results of teachers' perceptions on EMI.

TABLE 4
TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF EMI

QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS	MEAN	STD. DEVIATION	MEAN DIFFERENCE	T	SIG. (2-TAILED)	LEVEL
1.	4.44	0.67	1.04	12.13	0.00	VERY HIGH
2.	4.34	0.70	0.94	10.47	0.00	VERY HIGH
3.	4.36	0.68	0.96	10.97	0.00	VERY HIGH
4.	4.39	0.69	0.99	11.25	0.00	VERY HIGH
5.	4.38	0.69	0.98	11.11	0.00	VERY HIGH
6.	4.43	0.67	1.03	11.97	0.00	VERY HIGH
7.	4.28	0.71	0.88	9.66	0.00	VERY HIGH
8.	4.23	0.74	0.83	8.76	0.00	VERY HIGH
9.	4.25	0.72	0.85	9.15	0.00	VERY HIGH
10.	4.16	0.76	0.76	7.88	0.00	HIGH
11.	4.13	0.76	0.73	7.48	0.00	HIGH
12.	4.11	0.80	0.71	7.00	0.00	HIGH
13.	4.15	0.75	0.75	7.79	0.00	HIGH
14.	4.13	0.76	0.73	7.48	0.00	HIGH
15.	4.15	0.79	0.75	7.37	0.00	HIGH
16.	4.16	0.80	0.76	7.46	0.00	HIGH
17.	4.16	0.80	0.76	7.46	0.00	HIGH
18.	4.18	0.81	0.78	7.56	0.00	HIGH
19.	4.13	0.81	0.73	7.09	0.00	HIGH
20.	4.15	0.83	0.75	7.01	0.00	HIGH
TOTAL	4.24	0.17	0.84	37.75	0.00	VERY HIGH

The results indicate that the total mean is very high based on the statistical length of cells demonstrated in Table 2. Likewise, all the individual item means vary between high to very high. Further, the significance level is also quite high with the value of 0.000. Therefore, it can be concluded that teachers have positive perceptions about EMI in the Saudi university context. Item number 1 has the highest mean (4.44), while item number 12 has the lowest mean (4.11).

V. DISCUSSION

Both students and teachers hold positive perceptions about the use of EMI in Saudi university education, which correlates with Belhiah and Elhami (2015), and Ellili-Cherif and Alkhateeb's (2015) studies, but in different degrees. Teachers exhibit stronger attitudes about the use of EMI than students do.

Regarding students' perceptions about EMI, the mean of item number 20 is (4.54). As this is the highest mean, most of the students agree with this statement. It is statistically significant. This can be seen as contradiction of the general positive perceptions held by students towards EMI as students hesitate to speak English in the classroom because of their lack of confidence in their English proficiency. A possible justification of such contradiction is that the general level of English proficiency among the Saudi students is statistically very low (41.60) as indicated by EF English Proficiency Index (2019). In other words, while students acknowledge the importance of English in Saudi Arabia as indicated in item number 12, whose mean value is (4.02), their low levels of proficiency is hindering their use of English in class. Similarly, studies by Belhiah and Elhami's (2015) and Al-Kahtany et al.'s (2015) showed that students are inefficient with low proficiency levels in English. Due to their low proficiency levels in English, students hesitate to speak in English in the classroom.

Furthermore, since items 10 and 11 have the lowest mean (2.84 and 2.97, respectively), students held below average agreement about EMI in Saudi universities. They felt happy when teachers switched to Arabic from English. They also believed that EMI hampers their language and culture. In one hand, they held positive perceptions about EMI in general; on the other hand, they had preferences towards their own language and culture, feeling happy while switching to the Arabic medium of instruction. Belhiah and Elhami's (2015) study showed that almost two-thirds (62%) of students preferred a bilingual English-Arabic medium of instruction. It also shows the preference of the mother tongue instruction in Arabic contexts.

In terms of teachers' perceptions about EMI, the highest mean is shown in item number 1 (mean = 4.44), which means that they viewed EMI to be essential in Saudi higher education. However, as shown by item number 6 (mean = 4.43), they viewed that students felt bored when the teachers only taught in English. This is in line with students' view that they felt happy when teachers switched to Arabic while teaching.

Both students and teachers acknowledged the important role of English in the present, which is in accordance with Floris's (2014) findings. Students perceived English to be important for better career opportunities (Lueg & Lueg, 2015; Martinez, 2016; Gurney, 2018). Both students and teachers agreed that EMI hampers their local language and culture (item number 11, student: mean = 2.97; teacher: mean = 4.13) although to different degrees. This is seen to be true in the case of English use in non-native communities as emphasised by Fang et al. (2017).

Overall, teachers show that they recognize the importance of English in Saudi universities as it is the language of academia and research. At the same time, they view EMI as a problem in the classroom since students' low levels of proficiency is hindering their use of English in classroom. Although EMI is perceived positively in Saudi higher education on the whole, it is found that preference is on the use of Arabic language in addition to English. This is in line with Ellili-Cherif and Alkhateeb's (2015) study, which demonstrated a strong preference for the Arabic/English code switching as a medium of instruction for more comprehension. Since students become habituated in their mother tongue, they feel it easier to understand the subject matter if it is explained in their own language.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study has explored students and teachers' perceptions towards EMI in Saudi higher education in Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University. This survey research took the students and teachers from the department of English and other departments from a Saudi university. Based on the results of the study, both students and teachers had positive perceptions towards EMI in Saudi universities. Since English carries better career opportunities for the students and teachers, the use of EMI is positively perceived in higher education. However, the result showed that teachers had stronger perceptions about EMI than students. Both teachers and students agreed that students preferred the use of Arabic for better understanding of the content through switching to Arabic in EMI classes. They also agreed that the use of English in education influenced their language and culture. One key implication of this study is that code-switching or the use of translanguaging can be a possible potential model of teaching which guarantees that students understand the content competently. Effects of EMI on the students' language and culture can be a further direction of research in Saudi universities.

APPENDIX A. QUESTIONNAIRE FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Tick (√) in the right box from 5 to 1.
Response scale: 5 = strongly agree   4 = agree   3 = neutral   2 = disagree   1 = strongly disagree

S.N.	Statements	5	4	3	2	1
1	EMI is good in Saudi higher education.					
2	I prefer EMI classes.					
3	Most of the required reading material is available in English.					
4	EMI will develop my English proficiency.					
5	I am highly motivated when teachers teach in English.					
6	I can understand better if teachers teach in Arabic.					
7	I understand better in English medium.					
8	Teachers cannot fully express in English.					
9	EMI should be used in all universities in Saudi Arabia.					
10	I feel happy when teachers switch to Arabic to make the subject matter more clear.					
11	EMI hampers our language and culture.					
12	EMI is the need of the day.					
13	I have difficulty to comprehend teacher's lecture in English.					
14	EMI is an English language hegemony.					
15	English is more important than Arabic in education.					
16	EMI might cause language loss of the country.					
17	English is important for the socio-economic development of Saudi Arabia.					
18	English brings high social status and prestige.					
19	I face language problems regarding English as a medium of instruction.					
20	I hesitate to speak English in classroom due to my language problem.					

APPENDIX B. QUESTIONNAIRE FOR UNIVERSITY TEACHERS

Tick (√) in the right box from 5 to 1.
Response scale: 5 = strongly agree   4 = agree   3 = neutral   2 = disagree   1 = strongly disagree

S.N.	Statements	5	4	3	2	1
1	EMI is good in Saudi higher education.					
2	EMI makes learners learn better.					
3	Teaching in English can promote students' interest in learning more.					
4	Using EMI will contribute to English proficiency of the students.					
5	My students are motivated when I use EMI.					
6	Students feel bored when I only teach in English.					
7	I support and promote EMI in my university.					
8	I cannot fully express myself in English.					
9	I fully use EMI in my class.					
10	I sometimes switch to Arabic to make the subject matter more clear.					
11	EMI hampers our language and culture.					
12	EMI is the need of the day.					
13	The use of EMI in Saudi universities can catch students from abroad.					
14	EMI is an English language hegemony.					
15	English is more important than Arabic in education.					
16	EMI might cause language loss of the country.					
17	English is important for the socio-economic development of Saudi Arabia.					
18	English brings high social status and prestige.					
19	All content subjects should be taught in English in higher education.					
20	English is an integral part of educational, political, economic and social life in Saudi Arabia.					

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