STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS ABOUT ENGLISH MEDIUM INSTRUCTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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English Language Hegemony

- In Central Asia, English is the most studied foreign language at schools and universities (Bezborodova & Saida Radjabzade, 2021)

- English functions as the language of research and academia; arguably the hegemon language (Ferguson, 2007)
English Medium Instruction

- In recent years, English instruction has increased specifically in higher education because English medium instruction (EMI) is associated with prestige and high status (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

- Many students choose to study in English because they believe that it guarantees a brighter future and better employment (Shohamy, 2013)
Role of English language in Kazakhstan

◦ The English Medium Instruction (EMI) has become popular in Kazakhstan secondary and higher education systems since the break-up of the Soviet Union.

◦ HEIs have been actively introducing EMI in their programs

◦ "Trinity of Languages" and trilingual education as a national strategy since 2007
Purpose of the Study

- The study aims to identify the graduate students’ perceptions of the importance of the English language, the impact of their previous experience on their perceptions, and the language of instruction.

- In addition, the study focuses on filling the gap in research on graduate students’ perceptions of EMI and the correlation between students’ perceptions and their background characteristics, such as gender, age, and academic degrees.
Research questions

◦ How do graduate students differ in their EMI perceptions based on gender factor?
◦ Does graduate students’ age correlate with graduate students’ EMI attitudes?
◦ To what extent does degree influence graduate students’ reactions to EMI context?
◦ What are graduate students’ support expectations?
Literature review

◦ Positive reactions about EMI and the importance of the English language for various aspects (Dearden, & Macaro, 2016).

◦ Students’ perception of English language as a global language of science and academia (Baltabayev 2020; Karabay, 2017; Myrzakulova, 2019).

◦ Better career opportunities, prestigious and well-paid jobs, higher positions, further education abroad, and broader access to world scientific databases (Rogier, 2012).
Access to world literature, science, knowledge and technology

- English dominance in research and education

- In 20th century, international communication has shifted to English in the field of science (Hamel, 2014)

- More than 75% of publications in social sciences and humanities and over 90% in natural sciences are written in English
Scholarly publications

Figure 1. Proportional language use in scientific publications in the course of one century in American, German, French and Russian bibliographies (based on data collected by Tsunoda 1983; in Ammon 1998: 152; Ammon 2006: 3).
Publications in natural sciences
Publications in humanities
Students’ and faculty members’ perception of the English language as a global language of science and academia (Macaro et al, 2018).

Benefits (Dearden, 2014; Dearden & Macaro, 2016; Zenkova, & Khamitova, 2018):

- access to wider scientific resource
- academic mobility
- networking and involvement in international projects and conferences
- Influence of EMI context on quality of education (Du & Jackson, 2018; Jensen et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2016; Rogier, 2012).

- Motivation to improve their English further (Du & Jackson, 2018)
EMI challenges

- Lack of English support for teachers and students at EMI universities, shortages of materials (Jensen et al., 2013; Singh, 2019).

- Poorer proficiency of language faculty members and students (Dearden, 2014; Dearden & Macaro, 2016; Oralova, 2012)
Challenges with academic writing

- Challenges with academic writing as it requires building arguments, aligning sentences in a coherent manner, and follow the academic writing structure (Al Fadda, 2012).

- Not prepared to receive constructive feedback to written work which often causes tension (Puspitasari et al, 2020; Myrzakulova, 2019).
Methodology

- Mixed methods study.

- The study was conducted by researchers from NU, KIMEP, and SDU as part of a collaborative research project funded by NU.
Research participants

- Master’s and Ph.D. students studying in EMI programs
- Voluntary participation
- 320 students from 10 universities responded to the survey
Data collection and analysis

- A quantitative research design:
  - online survey with closed-ended and open-ended questions to capture the participants’ perceptions and attitudes towards EMI
  - The survey questionnaire contained 44 closed-ended and 6 open-ended questions.
Qualitative Data (individual interviews and focus groups) not ready yet
Themes

◦ the importance of the English language,
◦ the experience of learning the English language,
◦ the impact of previous academic experience on their reading and writing skills,
◦ instruction in English and local languages, and
◦ the confidence during speech and oral presentations in English.
Ethical considerations

- invitation letters and informed consent forms
  - detailed information about the research project, its purpose, and the measures used to ensure their anonymity and confidentiality

- Graduate students took the anonymous online survey
Results

The findings include correlations between the participants’ EMI perceptions and gender, age, academic degrees, and expected support from universities.
Perceptions of EMI according to gender

◦ Male students agreed that instruction in the English language was always used during their EMI classes, or most of the time, the score for female students was a bit lower.

◦ Female participants considered English language experience more enjoyable compared to male ones.

◦ Similarly, women were convinced that their previous experience helped them in improving academic reading and writing skills.
Both genders agreed that the English language was necessary for their academic and professional life with the moderate difference where the mean scores for male participants were slightly higher than that of females (Male M=3.86; Female M=3.84).
Remarkably, the mean scores indicated that male participants ($M=2.18$) felt slightly more confident when presenting in English than their female counterparts ($M=2.07$). The previous studies also support that men might feel more confident during speaking sessions and in oral presentation as compared to women [20; 24].
EMI perceptions and students’ age

- The impact of age on graduate students' EMI perceptions. In general, the participants of four age groups were compared:
  - 1) 18-25;
  - 2) 26-35;
  - 3) 36-45;
  - 4) 46-55.

- Graduate students might differ from each other in their EMI perceptions (Importance and Instruction in L1) according to their age.
The descriptive analysis shows that the participants in the age group 26-35 (M=3.95) considered the importance of the English language for their academic and professional life stronger compared to participants of other age groups.

Regarding the EMI sessions, students in the age group 18-26 (M=2.26) confessed that they were exposed to instructions in L1 more often than other groups.
EMI perceptions and students’ degrees

- The independent samples t-test showed the statistical significance for Importance and previous experience.
Participants' mean scores indicated that the Ph.D. students ($M=3.95$) perceived the importance of the English language much higher than the Master students ($3.82$).

The same result was for the previous experience item, where the Ph.D. students ($M=2.87$) believed that their previous academic experience improved their reading and writing skills more than the Master students' experience did ($M=2.68$).
Students’ support expectations

- The responses from open-ended questions revealed that students hold expectations from their universities to provide more effective and timely English language support.
Graduate students’ Support Expectations at the University Level

**Support Expectations**

- University/School: 40% support expectations
- Faculty: 9% support expectations
- Thesis Supervisor: 15% support expectations
- English language Instructor: 62% support expectations

**Number %**
- University/School: 72
- Faculty: 17
- Thesis Supervisor: 27
- English language Instructor: 62
The survey question related to the English language support response rate was 66% (178) out of 269, while 34% (91) was neglected.

Out of this 66%, 40% of respondents expect help from university and school

36% expect help from English language instructors

15% from thesis supervisors

9% from faculty teaching content-based courses.
Need for constructive feedback

◦ Graduate students expect more comprehensive, constructive, and timely feedback related to the content of their work and academic language

◦ Some students’ responses reveal dissatisfaction with the quality of feedback they receive
A significant proportion of students in each subcategory want to have additional courses on academic reading and writing.

In addition, students wanted some support in developing their critical reading and writing skills throughout their studies.
Conclusion

- The graduate students positively perceive the EMI implementation in Kazakhstan.

- However, the study also found that gender might impact how students perceived code-switching into L1 during EMI sessions.

- Female participants were more sensitive to other languages' usage during the EMI teaching process than their male counterparts. On the other hand, men were more confident during oral presentations in the English language than women.
The study found that students' perceptions might differ based on their age and academic degrees.

A finding is that the graduate students in the age group of 18-26 perceived English language importance stronger compared to other age groups.

Similarly, the Ph.D. students attach more importance to the English language as compared to the master students.
Despite the overall positive attitude towards EMI, graduate students felt dissatisfied with the quality of feedback regarding academic language skills.

The participants suggested that universities may offer more courses in EMI programs to develop their academic reading and writing skills.
Sources

- Baltabayev, M. (2020). Faculty and Students’ Perceptions of EMI and its Impact on Academic Content and Language Acquisition from the Participants’ Perspectives. Doctoral dissertation, Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education.