THE POWER AND POLITICS OF ENGLISH-MEDIUM INSTRUCTION DEBATE IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT: STUDENTS AND GRADUATES' PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract - The purpose of this study was to determine the attitudes and beliefs of students and graduates towards English-medium instruction (EMI) in the Turkish tertiary education system. As a basis for this, the study explored the diverse factors that have affected the use of EMI in Turkey.
The research study employed quantitative data collection and analysis procedures. A questionnaire was conducted at six Turkish universities (three private and three public), obtaining data from 246 students and 45 graduates. Quantitative data results were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Students tended to be more positive towards the use of EMI. However, graduates had reservations in regard to the implementation of EMI in the Turkish higher education system.

Keywords - English-medium instruction, Higher Education, Globalisation, Politics of EMI

I. INTRODUCTION

The rationale for English becoming a global language is underpinned by the dynamics of business, technology, science and the internet (Crystal, 2003). English holds a privileged position as a second language in most parts of the world. Its growing popularity as the global language of communication and its perceived supremacy as the linguistic key to achieving social and economic power and international prestige have helped its relentless spread across the globe (Johnson, 2009). Some view this as a threat and the cause of socio-cultural destruction in the form of linguistic imperialism, linguistic genocide or 'linguicide' (Pennycook, 2007; Phillipson, 1992, 2008; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). This view of linguistic domination appears in the descriptors some researchers use for English: Trojan horse (Cooke, 1988), a killer language (Pakir, 1999), a Tyrannosaurus rex (Swales, 1997) and the language of the conqueror (Templer, 2003).
There are various alternative views in this regard: some see English as a basic survival skill (Graddol, 1996); others see it as a global commodity to which every individual adds a distinct flavour (Kachru, 1986). Because English has become ever more popular as a result of scientific and technological developments, and its widespread use in educational and professional environments (Cook, 2003), Kachru (1986) considers it to be the linguistic key to the global world, favoured for its pragmatic and instrumental functions and defined as an international language, medium of intercultural communication and a ticket to 'the good life'. Viewed in this context, the massive increase in ESL and TESOL programs, especially in first world countries, such as the USA, UK, Canada and Australia, and even in non-English speaking countries such as China, which has the largest English language teacher labour market in the world (Stanley, 2013), demonstrates that English proficiency is regarded as a way into the lands of opportunity in a globalised, interconnected world (Morrison &Lui, 2000).
The next generation of would-be achievers in these lands of opportunity is growing up and being educated in a global information age such has never been seen before, and the interconnectedness of this global information age is not only economic, although this was originally the driving force, but also social, cultural and political. Beck (as cited in Babacan & Babacan, 2007, p. 8) calls it "the global enmeshment of money, people, ideas, images, values and technologies that flow in a much swifter manner across the world." This recent and rapid development of an interconnected world is important to this study because of the obvious determination of the Turkish government to secure its place in that interconnected world, through investing in English language teaching (ELT) through EMI, not only for its own citizens but also for the international language-teaching market. Turkey also occupies a strategic geopolitical and socio-cultural position. Located at the crossroads between the East and West, determined to be part of the European Union (EU) and dedicated to its continued socio-cultural as well as economic growth, it cannot afford to miss out on the sweeping changes and benefits that globalisation is rapidly bringing about.
Turkey, whose geopolitical location together with its status as a cultural bridge between the East and West, places considerable importance on the learning of English (Di Paola & Tansel, 2015; Sarıçoban&Sarıçoban,2012). Therefore, the processes of globalisation are particularly pertinent for younger people in Turkey, who want to maintain global communications and keep up with developments in fields where English has become the most-widely used language, through education, the internet, global

trading and mass communications. Given its bridging potential between Europe, Asia, the Middle East and Africa, Turkey has come to play a strategic and vital role in building peace and stability in the region. Turkey has achieved great significance and prestige for North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), EU countries and the region as a whole. As a secular democracy, Turkey has become the world's 17th largest economy and a G-20 member (Zou, 2015).

Given that most commercial, cultural, diplomatic and economic relations and communications in the international arena are conducted in English, lucrative jobs and prestigious positions demand proficiency in this language, in addition to other professional qualifications. As a result, there is a high demand for the English language, so Turkish universities and educational institutions that prioritise English in their programs are highly sought after, and the number offering EMI is increasing (Sert, 2008). Nevertheless, EMI is a topic passionately debated among those invested in politics, education and socio-linguistics (Selvi, 2014). In this regard, Doğançay-Aktuna (1998, pp. 30-31) claims:

In Turkey, English is not an official language, a national *lingua franca*, or a second language. It is not a remnant of colonisation or the legacy of missionaries. Though it is taught widely in the schools, it has not been institutionalised to function as the primary language of higher education. Indeed, Turkish is the sole official language and it also acts as the *lingua franca* for Turkey's various minority groups. The main domains where English carries functions in Turkey are in education and in the private sector (including international business and the tourist industry).

The increasing popularity of English in Turkey has become a major topic of discussion in the media and political circles. In particular, the effects of EMI in higher education and the private sector, being largely unknown, understandably gives rise to debate. Different views have developed around the increasing function of English in tertiary education where it is a medium of instruction. However, EMI is still seen as a primary cause of failures within the national education system and suspected of reducing in-class participation by students with a low level of English proficiency (Sinanoğlu, 2000). Further, valuable teaching hours are spent teaching the language at the expense of the content (Arslantunalı, 1998; Demir, 1995) and many researchers and teachers look at ways to prevent the spread of EMI in higher education (Demircan, 1988; Evans, 2000; Köksoy, 2000; Lucas &Kartz, 1994; Master, 1998; Pennycook, 1994; Sinanoğlu, 2004). Reservations about EMI at universities are particularly held by nationalists and some liberal scholars and academics (Büyükkantarcıoğlu, 2004; Kılıçkaya, 2006; Sinanoğlu, 2000), who feel Turkish as a medium of instruction is losing its value.

Although there is debate on the topic of EMI in Turkey (Kilimci, 1998; Kılıçkaya, 2006; Sinanoğlu, 2000; Sert, 2008; Selvi, 2014), the subject has not been truly investigated (Kırkıcı, 2004). Specifically, there is a lack of in-depth research, longitudinal studies and empirical data related to the subject, which tend to highlight the negative aspects of EMI rather than its benefits to higher education (Kılıçkaya, 2006; Kırkgöz, 2005; Sert, 2008). Concerns for lecturers include the scarce number of resources provided in Turkish, inadequate proficiency of students and lack of student participation in EMI classroom settings (Kılıçkaya, 2006). In a similar vein, students are challenged by the artificial use of English in class and the possibility they may not receive the academic content presented in EMI classes in a coherent manner (Sert, 2008). However, students are motivated by the long-term benefits and opportunities English may bring to a country that is experiencing economic development (Kırkgöz, 2005). Not surprisingly, EMI has become a prominent research topic in Turkey (Büyükkantarcıoğlu, 2004; Doğançay-Aktuna, 1998; Sinanoğlu, 2000). Therefore, it follows logically that, in educational circles, over the last three decades, the introduction of English and its consequent popularity in education institutions, along with political, cultural and social changes, have resulted in academics showing interest in EMI's effectiveness. Thus, my study analyses the perspectives of students and graduates to gain a broader picture in relation to the acceptance of EMI.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs Quantitative methodology. Quantitative data was collected from students, and graduates in the form of a questionnaire. The study was administered to 291 participants (246 students and 45 graduates). Students were aged within a range of 18 to 29 years. Graduates' ages were also fairly spread from 24 to 52 years. The participants were from three main disciplines: business and economics; humanities; and science and engineering. The majority of student participants had a great exposure to the English language because it was the medium of instruction, whereas some of them had exposure to both English and Turkish as languages of instruction. Students and graduates were sourced from the six campuses where English was offered – three private universities (Fatih, Bilkent and Gediz) and three state universities (Istanbul, Middle East Technical and Hacettepe)

General Procedures and Ethical Considerations

This research was undertaken in compliance with the requirements of the University of Western Sydney (UWS) Human Research Ethics Committee. The selected universities were contacted via email and phone calls to approve the research process. Accordingly, initial contact with eight universities

(four in each of the public and private sectors) was made regarding this research project. The six universities that responded were shortlisted to conduct the study, as the medium of instruction in these universities is predominantly English or both English and Turkish.

Coding the Questionnaire

All statistical analysis of the data obtained from the questionnaire was conducted using SPSS software, version 17. The most appropriate method to summarise and analyse the demographic data was frequency statistical analysis. The results for each statement from the questionnaire were interpreted and summary results of the responses of the three groups were collated and analysed. The final analysis was represented in tabulated form, displaying column values (1 = strongly agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree, 5 = Strongly disagree). Furthermore, population size was also displayed, as well as the mean for the data and the standard deviation.

III. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Students' Attitudes, Views and Preferences about English

The main thrust of the study is to survey students' attitudes, views and preferences about the use of English as a medium of instruction.

	1	2	3 %	4	5	N	M	SD
1. Studying in English helps me understand the course content more effectively	11.4	26.4	29.7	25.2	7.3	246	2.91	1.12
2. I prefer English as the medium of instruction at university	26.5	31.3	20.7	18.7	2.8	246	2.40	1.15
3. I prefer Turkish as the medium of instruction at university	11.0	20.7	23.1	28.5	16.7	246	3.19	1.25
4. The greatest problem in using Turkish as the medium of instruction is the need to translate many specialised terms	30.5	37.4	15.8	12.6	3.7	246	2.22	1.12

Note. Column values: 1 = Strongly agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree, 5 = Strongly disagree, N = Population, M = Mean, SD = Standard deviation

Table 1: Summary results for students' attitudes, views and preferences about English

Statement 1 illustrates that 37.8 percent of the students agreed that '*studying in English helped me understand the course content more effectively*,' while 32.5 percent of the students disagreed with the statement and 29.7 percent remained neutral. In this regard, students are divided into almost equal percentages, but those in agreement are in a slight majority.

Statement 2 shows that 57.8 percent of participants '*prefer English as the medium of instruction at university*,' whereas 21.5 percent disagreed with the statement; however, 20.7 percent of the participants remained neutral. The majority has a preference towards EMI, where almost equal groups of similar percentages are either against the notion or undecided.

In **statement 3**, comparatively, a sizeable majority of 45.2 percent of students disagreed with the preference of '*Turkish as the medium of instruction at university*.' On the contrary, almost one-third of the students (31.7 percent) agreed with the statement, whereas only less than a quarter, 23.1 percent remained undecided.

Statement 4 received a very high percentage of 67.9 where participants agreed that '*the greatest problem in using Turkish as the medium of instruction is the need to translate many specialised terms.*' While only 15.8 percent remained neutral, 16.3 percent disagreed with this statement. A large majority of students identified the challenges of Turkish-medium instruction (TMI) in the area of terminology and specialised terms, as opposed to the proportion that is smaller than one-fifth of two groups of variances.

Students' Views on the Power of English vs Turkish language

This section investigates whether students support EMI from a socio-political perspective and whether universities should choose to adopt EMI or TMI. Furthermore, the issue of Turkey's acceptance for EU candidacy has a bearing on matters of EMI and was merged into the set of questionnaire statements to elicit responses at a student level. I also cover areas where EMI could be perceived as a possible threat to the Turkish language and culture, which is a matter of continuing debate. Thus, it is important to analyse EMI from the perspectives of the power and impact of language in the socio-political arena. Table-2 illustrates summary results for student views and preferences about English, containing summary statistics for statements 5, 6, 7 and 8.

	1	2	3 %	4	5	N	M	SD
5. The Turkish language is threatened by the prevalent use of English at university	10.6	17.5	33.3	23.6	15.0	246	3.15	1.19
6. Universities in Turkey should gradually adopt English as the medium of instruction	11.8	39.8	24.8	18.3	5.3	246	2.65	1.07
7.Education in English enhancesTurkey's chances for EU candidacy	20.8	28.6	28.6	11.8	10.2	246	2.62	1.23
8. English language education attracts increasing numbers of foreign students from neighbouring countries	48.4	39.0	6.5	1.6	4.5	246	1.75	0.98

Note. Column values: 1 = Strongly agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree, 5 = Strongly disagree, N = Population, M = Mean, SD = Standard deviation

Table 2: Summary results for students' views on the power of English vs Turkish

Statement 5 showed that 28.1 percent of the participants agree that the '*Turkish language is threatened by the prevalent use of English at university*;' however, 38.6 percent disagree with them. One-third of the students (33.3 percent) were neutral.

In statement 6, more than half of the participants (51.6 percent) strongly felt that '*universities in Turkey should gradually adopt English as the medium of instruction*,' while 24.8 percent of those questioned remained neutral and 23.6 percent disagreed.

Statement 7 indicates that almost half of the students (49.4 percent) were positive in their perception that '*education in English enhances Turkey's chances for EU candidacy*.' While more than a quarter (28.6 percent) remained undecided, and a comparatively smaller group of 22 percent disagreed. The result indicates students' awareness of Turkey's interest related to potential entrance into EU that further promotes English in education**.**

Statement 8 was agreed to by a vast majority of 87.4 percent, who are of the opinion that '*English language education attracts increasing number of foreign students from neighbouring countries*.' However, a minimal 6.5 percent remained neutral and 6.1 percent disagreed with the statement. In line with the great percentages received in previous statements, the majority viewed EMI as an impetus and incentive for foreign students studying in Turkey, thus reinforcing the value of English at national and international levels**.**

In summary, a number of conclusions can be drawn from these eight statements. Views were relatively at variance with regard to EMI enhancing content comprehension. While a considerable number of students expressed preference for EMI, a large number identified the need for the translation of specialised terms from English to Turkish. When viewed from a socio-political perspective and the power of English, it can be seen that students are generally in support of EMI, with half the students agreeing that Turkish universities should gradually adopt EMI, as well as reinforcing the view that education in English positively enhances Turkey's acceptance for EU candidacy. There is student support for English in general and they do not feel it is a threat to the Turkish language. It is also significant that a slight majority of students support the Turkish government's stance for EMI.

Graduates' Attitudes, Views and Preferences about English

Graduates' views and ideas – attitudes, choices, dislikes and preferences – give a more complete picture about the impact of EMI, as they have gone through the education process and are actively using their skills. This section also looks at whether they found EMI-based education beneficial and their choice and preference of medium of instruction in relation to specific subjects. Hence, Table-3 illustrates summary results for graduates' views and preferences about English, containing summary statistics for statements 1, 2, 3 and 4.

	1	2	3 %	4	5	N	M	SD
1. I prefer English as the medium of instruction at university	15.5	22.2	13.3	35.5	13.3	45	3.08	1.33
2. It was easier to learn subjects like science, mathematics, finance, economics, history, political science, sociology and psychology in English than in Turkish	11.1	6.7	22.2	35.6	24.4	45	3.56	1.25
3. I prefer Turkish as the medium of instruction at university	24.4	17.8	31.1	20.0	6.7	45	2.67	1.24
4. The greatest problem in using Turkish as the medium of instruction would be the need to translate many specialised terms	26.7	44.4	11.1	8.9	8.9	45	2.29	1.22

Note. Column values: 1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree, 5 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree, N = Population, M = Mean, SD = Standard deviation

Table 3: Summary results for graduates' attitudes, views and preferences about English

Statement 1 indicates that a majority (48.8 percent) of the participants disagreed with the statement that '*English should be the medium of instruction at universities,*' while 37.7 percent of the participant graduates agreed with the statement. Whereas 13.3 percent remained neutral. Graduates were generally not in favour of EMI.

Statement 2 had minimal support among the graduates, wherein 17.8 percent of the participants favourably agreed '*it was easier to learn subjects like science, mathematics, finance, economics, history, political science, sociology and psychology in English than in Turkish,*' while a larger group comprising 60 percent of the participant graduates disagreed with the statement. However, almost one-quarter of the participants (22.2 percent) remained neutral. The result shows participants' preference for Turkish-medium instruction (TMI) in relation to most content subjects.

In statement 3, 42.2 percent of the graduate participants favourably agreed that they preferred '*Turkish as the medium of instruction at university,*' while more than a quarter (26.7 percent) of the group disagreed with the statement. However, 31.1 percent, almost one-third of the participants remained neutral. Graduates in general remained consistent in their responses to the statement.

In statement 4, 71.1 percent of the participants supported the proposition that '*the greatest problem in using Turkish as the medium of instruction would be the need to translate many specialised terms,*' while 17.8 percent of the participant graduates

disagreed with the statement. However, 11.1 percent remain neutral. The majority identified the shortcomings of Turkish as a medium of instruction in the areas of terms and terminology.

Graduates' Views on the Power of English vs Turkish language

Graduates were asked about their experiences whether the Turkish language is threatened by the prevalent use of English at tertiary level. Views on the power play between the two languages as it stands today in Turkey were also canvassed. They were questioned whether English attracts international students to Turkey and if EMI would enhance Turkey's chances for EU candidacy or not. Table-4 provides a summary of results for graduates' views on the power of English vs Turkish, comprising summary of statistics for statements 5, 6, 7 and 8.

	1	2	3 %	4	5	N	M	SD
5. The Turkish language is threatened by the prevalent use of English at university	13.3	22.2	44.5	11.1	8.9	45	2.80	1.10
6. Universities in Turkey should gradually adopt English as the medium of instruction	6.7	24.4	24.4	28.9	15.6	45	3.22	1.18
7. Education in English enhances Turkey's chances for EU candidacy	15.6	24.4	20.0	17.8	22.2	45	3.07	1.41
8. English language education attracts increasing numbers of foreign students from neighbouring countries	37.8	37.8	8.9	13.3	2.2	45	2.04	1.11

Note. Column values: 1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree, 5 = Strongly disagree, N = Population, M = Mean, SD = Standard deviation

Table 4: Summary results for graduates' views on the power of English vs Turkish

In statement 5, a small majority of 35.5 percent agreed while 44.5 percent were neutral and the minority accounting for 20 percent of the participants disagreed with the statement that '*the Turkish language is threatened by the prevalent use of English at university*.' The fact that a slight majority remains neutral in this area shows the socio-political nature of this issue.

The findings of statement 6 regarding '*universities in Turkey should gradually adopt English as the medium of instruction*' indicate that 31.1 percent agreed, while those who disagreed were in the majority, accounting for 44.5 percent. Those who remained non-committal were almost one-quarter (24.4 percent). Similar to the previous statement, almost similar percentages have been received in regards to preference for TMI.

The number of participants who agreed to statement 7's notion that '*education in English enhances Turkey's chances for EU candidacy*' was on par with those who disagreed (40 percent), while 20 percent remained neutral. These highly polarised views are most likely indicative of the political nature of EU candidacy.

In statement 8, an overwhelming majority of the graduates (75.6 percent) viewed in the affirmative that '*English language education attracts increasing numbers of foreign students from neighbouring countries,*' while 15.5 percent of the participant graduates disagreed with the statement. However, 8.9 percent remained neutral. Similar to the previous statement, a large majority holds that English is a positive factor for attracting international students.

In summary, graduates are generally not in favour of EMI, as illustrated by the majority of graduates disagreeing with the statement that English should be the medium of instruction in Turkish universities. Further support is given to this notion by the significant number of graduates indicating that most subjects are easier to learn in Turkish rather than English. The majority of graduates indicated that they prefer TMI. However, there is some minimal support for EMI because of concerns about the need to translate specialised terms when using TMI. These views represent a dilemma that could change over time if more resources in Turkish become available.

Results from the socio-political perspective (power of English vs Turkish) also indicated perceived contradictions in relation to graduates' views. While

some support for English language and EMI were expressed by graduates holding that education in English enhances Turkey's chances for EU candidacy as well as the potential for attracting increasing numbers of foreign students from neighbouring countries to Turkey, however the contrary was revealed where the majority of graduates disagreed with the view that universities in Turkey should gradually adopt EMI as well as that the Turkish language would be threatened by the prevalent use of English at university.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study found there was a lack of consensus among the two respondent groups. While the views and attitudes of the academic participants altered greatly, it has been discovered that students were more heavily in favour of EMI, whereas graduates generally were of the opposing view and more inclined to the use of Turkish-medium instruction (TMI).The results obtained from graduates, most of whom were full-time employees in the private or public sector, as well as further investigation and analysis, portrayed a significant resistance towards EMI among graduates.

The questionnaire analysis revealed that students have challenges grasping specialist vocabulary particular to subjects. This is essentially perceived as the end product of a lack of English proficiency. This indicates that English proficiency could enable students to grasp content more effectively and become competent in their fields, highlighting the significance of English language.

This research study reveals different perspectives among participant groups in regard to the use of EMI and Turkey's chances of EU candidacy, which demonstrates the fluid and dynamic nature of the trends in current society where the potential for change is evident and pressing. To this end, close to half of the students surveyed (49.4 percent) suggest that Turkey's aim for EU candidacy hinges on the use of EMI where the internalisation of English should be mandatory rather than simply desirable.

This finding supports the view that Turkey should prioritise English as a compulsory foreign language in its education policies as it is directly linked to its efforts to comply with standards and gain unfettered entrance into the EU (Alptekin& Tatar, 2011; Kırkgöz, 2009; Özturk&Atay, 2010), thus reinforcing the primary aims behind EU membership. Research reveals that graduates (40 percent) are also divided on this matter, which shows uncertainty and circumspection on this particular issue. For both of these groups, a further underlying element of pessimism is attributable to the fact Turkey has been an associate member of the EU for 15 years and an applicant for more than 40 years, with little obvious progress towards full membership, which would cause some participants to feel EMI is not a major factor to increase Turkey's chances for EU candidacy.

International student mobility and the increased potential of Turkey attracting foreign students were a noteworthy result from this study. Within the economic and geo-political contexts, most participants in the questionnaire strongly agreed with the premise that education in English language attracts foreign students (87.4 percent for students and 75.6 percent for graduates). This broad level of agreement among all groups may be attributed to the fact they are all beneficiaries from the inflow of international students to the universities and colleges, exemplified by factors such as interactions with other cultures and intercultural dialogue, and further influenced by clear economic advantages to the universities and Turkish society.

In summary, this study revealed that students were the most positive in their responses towards EMI, expressing pragmatic attitudes mainly due to practical reasons and motivations (i.e. English as a global language and academic tool) rather than ideological (i.e. English as a threat to Turkish). From their responses, it appears they regard an EMI-based education to be enriching and rewarding, and do not consider English proficiency to be a symptom of a negative attitude toward Turkish language and identity. These perceptions held by most students indicate a level of enhanced maturity of the Turkish approach to the use of English in educational as well as other settings. Previous research and studies noted a general dislike towards the use of English-based education and EMI among students and educational institutions (Demircan, 1988;Pennycook, 1994; Köksoy, 2000; Sinanoğlu, 2004; Kırkgöz, 2005; Sert, 2008). These results have been disputed with the findings of this study as much has changed in a decade and there seems to have been a shift in the views and attitudes of students towards EMI-based education.

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