

English Medium Instruction in the Transition Year: Case from KSA

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Abstract

Many countries in the world are beginning to use English as the medium of instruction, particularly in higher education, due to the economic and social demands for learning English. However, this presents a number of challenges particularly in EFL settings where the learners normally have low competence in the English language. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia presents a case in point. This paper reports findings of a case study of the use of English as medium of instruction in the preparatory or transition year at a public sector university in Saudi Arabia. Findings reveal that both teachers and learners prefer English as medium of instruction due to instrumental needs. However, they face a number of challenges mainly due to learners' low proficiency in English. Consequently, they use some coping strategies to address these challenges. However, these have negative consequences for students' learning of academic content in science subjects. Similarly, some institutional support mechanisms, such as simplified curricular content, limit the amount of learning taking place in the transition year. A clearly articulated language policy regarding the use of English as the medium of instruction, and an accompanying research program are required to gain the alleged benefits from using English- medium instruction in higher education institutions in general, and the transition year, in particular.

Keywords: challenges in English-medium instruction, higher education, English as medium of instruction, Saudi Arabia, preparatory year

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Introduction

The debate about medium of instruction (MoI) has been going on for decades, particularly in ex-colonies in Asia and Africa such as Tanzania, Uganda, Malaysia and Hong Kong. The issue of MoI in these countries is linked closely to feelings of patriotism following freedom from the colonizers, and the desire to develop local languages and culture. However, it is well known that the status of languages is closely linked to their perceived or actual functionality or use in society. The recent rise in the demand for English globally, even in countries with well-developed majority languages such as Chinese and Arabic, can be traced to the increasing trend of globalization and internationalization with the world becoming a global village (Graddol, 2006). In addition, the growth of digital media facilitating increased access to knowledge production and sharing of ideas transnationally has necessitated the need for a lingua franca; as most of the world knowledge is produced in English, English has become the preferred lingua franca (Shohamy, 2013). In fact, English has now become the language of choice, both in ESL and EFL contexts, for keeping abreast with latest developments, particularly in the fields of science and technology, and also for improving life chances through study abroad in English-speaking countries (J. Coleman, 2006; H. Coleman, 2011). Unsurprisingly, the phenomenal increase in the demand for English during the last decade or so has fostered the use of English as MoI, particularly in higher education settings, even in countries in Kachru's expanding circle (1982) in Europe, Asia and the Gulf countries such as Denmark, China and the United Arab Emirates (see Belhiah & Elhami, 2015; Coleman, 2006; Doiz, Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2013; Hu, Li & Lei., 2014).

There are a number of drivers for the increased use of English as medium of instruction (EMI) in higher education (Dearden, 2015). In the developing countries, in particular, such as the ex-British colonies in Asia and Africa, English is seen as the language of development (Coleman, 2011). In comparatively more developed countries such as China, Hong Kong and Taiwan in Asia, and Denmark and Spain in Europe, globalization and internationalization of education along with the widely accepted status of English as lingua franca has increased the use of EMI, in higher education settings (Coleman, 2006; Doiz, Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2011; Doiz, Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2013). In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), similar to other EFL settings, there is a growing trend of using EMI in higher education due to a number of reasons to be discussed in a subsequent section.

This rise in the use of EMI has implications both for policy and practice, particularly in regard to improving students' proficiency in English and their learning of content subjects. Accordingly, Shohamy (2013) calls for "extensive research to examine empirically the costs and benefits of the use of EMI in HEIs [higher education institutions]; the main goal being how much language is being gained by such programs as well as how much academic content is being achieved" (p. 203).

As mentioned above, the last two decades in particular have witnessed a sharp increase in the demand for English around the globe. However, it's only recently that the research community has begun to realize the effects of the 'Englishization' of higher education on learners' proficiency in English- a much touted benefit of EMI- as well as the quality of the learning experience offered through EMI. This is evident in the recent burgeoning of research studies conducted in diverse contexts around the world (e.g., Belhiah and Elhami, 2015; Doiz et al, 2013; Hu et al., 2014). It must be noted that till recently, the majority languages in some of these countries such as, Arabic and Chinese were considered adequate to carry the burden of intellectual discussion and scholarship, and were therefore used as medium of instruction at all levels in education, including higher education.

EMI, unlike Content Integrated Language Learning (CLIL) and immersion programs in Canada, lacks a theoretical foundation or accompanying research program (Dearden, 2015). In fact, EMI is often introduced hurriedly in many EFL contexts due to external pressures such as university rankings. As mentioned earlier, it's only recently that language planners and policy makers have started taking interest in the impacts of EMI on student learning in varied contexts. For example, in the Gulf region, one of the reasons for the recent interest in the effects of EMI is its likely impact on identity and local culture, and possible de-intellectualization of Arabic, a language with a rich cultural and intellectual heritage (Belhiah& Elhami, 2015)

This paper presents the use of EMI in the transition year, normally known as the Preparatory Year Program (PYP), in one university in the KSA - an EFL country. First, to set up the context for the study, the place of Arabic- the majority language, and English- the target language or L2, is outlined briefly in the current education system of the country. Next, the research questions and methodology used in the study are presented. The study findings in regard to teachers' and learners' experience and perceptions about the use of EMI in the PYP, as well as their coping strategies, and the reported impact of EMI on student learning are then discussed. Some support measures to facilitate the shift in MoI from Arabic in secondary schools to English in the transition year are also shared. Finally, a way forward is suggested based on the study findings and similar studies in EFL contexts elsewhere. This includes future directions for research and practice.

Literature Review

Models of EMI in higher education

The models for EMI are as varied as the higher education contexts in which EMI takes place around the world. Some universities offer dual-medium education while others are experimenting with a trilingual system of education, i.e., through English as well as majority and/or local languages (for examples of EMI models in universities in different countries see Doiz et al., 2013). Moreover, EMI programs are offered for all or selected subjects/disciplines only. The use of EMI may be optional or mandated across all subject areas and for all higher

education programs, for example in ESL contexts such as Pakistan (Shamim, 2011). When the EMI courses can be selected by the students on a voluntary basis, they have more prestige, and often a higher fee structure; also, there may be support systems in place to facilitate students' study through EMI (Hu & Lei, 2014). However, there is little awareness at the policy level of the requirements for introducing EMI or the need to provide support to teachers and students with inadequate proficiency in the language. Hence, often, there is a gap between policy intentions and the actual implementation of the EMI programs thereby leading to challenges both for the teachers and the students. These include teachers and students' inadequate proficiency in the English language, the lack of effective support mechanisms and/or resources for implementation of the EMI program (Hu, Li & Lei, 2014; Vu & Burns, 2014; Werther, Denver, Jensen & Mees, 2014). Hence, recently, there have been calls to focus on improving the *implementation* of EMI, including support systems, to derive the alleged benefits from EMI courses and programs (e.g. Byun et al., 2011; Hu, Li & Lei, 2014).

Benefits and Challenges of using EMI

The alleged benefits of EMI have been the major drivers in its introduction in different higher education settings. These are: students' improved proficiency in English, and career enhancement through increased mobility and study abroad opportunities (Coleman, 2006; Hu & Lei, 2014; Yeh, 2012; Zare-ee & Gholami, 2013). However, Lei & Hu (2014), in their recent study on Chinese undergraduate students, find no statistically significant effect of EMI on students' English proficiency. More important, Lo and Lo's (2014) conclusion, based on their meta-analysis of 24 EMI studies conducted in Hong Kong since 1970, that "using an L2 as the medium of instruction does not guarantee successful L2 learning without sacrificing academic achievement"(p.65) needs urgent attention. Additionally, Hu, Li & Lei (2014) find that the higher cost of the EMI program and the institutional policies regarding entry requirements serve to limit access to the program mainly to students from a higher socio-economic stratum, thereby "exacerbating extant inequalities and creating new ones in Chinese universities and society" (p.37).

Teachers and students generally show a positive attitude towards EMI; however, a number of challenges are also reported. For example, students at a private university in Taiwan show positive attitudes toward their EMI courses; they believe that EMI has helped them improve their English language skills, particularly listening skills; at the same time, they report some problems in understanding the lectures in English (Chang, 2010). Similarly, Byun et al (2011) report that although the EMI policy seems to have produced, in general, positive outcomes in Korean higher education, such as improving students' English proficiency, its compulsory enforcement across all academic disciplines, and without any support measures, has led to several challenges (and negative consequences), particularly due to students and instructors inadequate language proficiency. Floris (2014) also finds that while the teachers and learners in a large college in Indonesia generally show a positive towards EMI due to the

important role of English in the world, a number of challenges are faced in implementing the EMI program successfully.

Belhiah and Elhami (2015) in a study of teachers and learners in six universities in the United Arab Emirates also find that teachers and learners are generally positive towards the use of EMI; however, a number of challenges are reported by the teachers due to learners' inadequate proficiency in the English language. Interestingly, when presented with the possibility of using both Arabic and English as medium of instruction, 62% students and 75% teachers showed their preference for a dual-medium of instruction. The authors, therefore, recommend a bilingual curriculum to develop students' bi-literacy skills in English and Arabic. Similar findings have been reported from a Malaysian university where a survey of undergraduate students reveals that although students' attitudes are quite positive about EMI, "the English language as a medium of teaching and learning in science and mathematics at UKM [a Malaysian university] is not the students' first choice" (Isa et al., 2011, p. 365). Interestingly while the Malaysian students disagree that the use of EMI is the cause of low academic performance, they argue "that the teaching and learning of science and mathematics should also be carried out in both English and Malay" (Isa et al., 2011, p. 365). Accordingly, Isa et.al assert that, if given a preference, the students are more likely to choose Malay as medium of instruction as they believe that it is easier to study science and math in Malay.

It is important to note that while, overall, the teachers and learners seem positive towards the use of EMI, its effectiveness in improving students' English proficiency is uncertain. Moreover, the compulsory enforcement of EMI without regard to students and instructors' language proficiency, the lack of resources and/or a much-needed support system, and appropriately qualified instructors to conduct EMI classes have led to several challenges, and even negative consequences for student learning. In addition, there are a number of mediating variables that could adversely affect the effectiveness of EMI programs.

EMI and Mediating Variables

The varying effects of EMI on students' learning of English and the content of subjects taught through EMI leads to discussions about the likely impact of moderating factors on the effectiveness of EMI programs such as, teaching methodology, learners' ability in English at point of entry, and strategies used by the teachers and learners to cope with the challenges presented by EMI. Lo and Lo's (2014) meta-analysis of 24 EMI studies conducted in Hong Kong since 1970 indicates the importance of moderating variables such as, "the socio-linguistic context, the actual program implementation in schools, students' language proficiency, teachers' pedagogical practices, and the typological differences between the languages involved" (pp. 65-66). Kym & Kym (2014) also find that teachers background, i.e., native or non-native English speakers (and therefore their facility in using English), students' background knowledge and study abroad experiences are important moderating variables that help explain the effects of EMI

on students' learning. In fact, prior English proficiency has been found to be the strongest predictor of effect on students' proficiency, learning and use of English (Hu & Lei, 2014). This means that students who enter a program with EMI with higher proficiency levels tend to gain more compared to students with lower proficiency levels. However, it is the latter that actually need to improve their English language skills more to cope with the requirements of studying through EMI.

Gaps in policy support and EMI practices in the classroom can also influence the expected outcomes of EMI programs. For example, Hu and Lei (2014) note in their case study of a business program at a large university in China that the misalignment between policy intentions and classroom practices could lead to negative consequences for student learning. These are: watering down the curriculum context, using L1 or Chinese textbooks to gain understanding of the concepts, and students' heavier reliance on teachers' notes. Some other consequences of EMI are reduced classroom participation (Kilickaya, 2008), and limited opportunities for practice for improving proficiency in English (Li, Leung & Kember, 2001).

Several universities offer English language support programs to improve learners' proficiency in the English language. However, the effects of these programs, in terms of learners' improved proficiency in English, are varied due to a host of moderating variables regarding teachers, learners and the program management.

EMI is used in the transition year program in Saudi Arabia. However, little is known about teachers and learners' perceptions and experience of teaching-learning of science subjects through EMI. Also, there is no evidence of the success, or otherwise, of using EMI in the transition year on the learning of English and the content subjects, in particular. The present study was therefore undertaken on the use of EMI in a one year Preparatory Year Program (PYP) at a university in KSA to arrive at an in-depth understanding of the use of EMI within the specific context of this program. The insights gained from the study are used to make recommendations for future EMI policy and research in KSA.

The study context

English is a foreign language in KSA. Arabic, the national language of the country, is used as the medium of education in schools (Al-Nofaie, 2010). It is also the sole official language of communication in the public domain such as government offices, educational institutions (except a few international schools and universities) and hospitals. According to Alshumaimer, (2001), Saudi Arabia belongs to Kachru's third or expanding circle (1982), where English is used in several domains such as trade and business. However, the use of English in KSA is still quite limited (except for higher education). The teaching of English in KSA begins at the elementary level (grade six) and continues till the end of secondary school, i.e., grade 12 (Rahman & Alhaisoni, 2013). However, according to Alshumaimer (2001), it has been

observed that many students graduate from high school with only rudimentary knowledge and skills in the English language. In higher education, English is the medium of instruction for many subjects such as science, medicine, dentistry, engineering and computers. English is also used as the MoI for science subjects in the PYP or transition year in all universities in the Kingdom.

The demand for EMI in KSA has grown, similar to other EFL contexts, due to internationalization of education with a major focus on student mobility and increased opportunities for study abroad (mainly in countries where English is the native language), ‘a clear form of internationalization’(MOE report, 2013: 73). The exponential growth of private universities and colleges of excellence in the Kingdom in recent years, normally set up in partnership with foreign organizations and universities, has also led to the increased use of English as the language of instruction in higher education in KSA (Phan & Barnawi, 2015).

Research Questions

The following questions were used to arrive at an in-depth understanding of EMI as used in the context of the preparatory or transition year program at a public sector university in KSA:

1. What is the teachers and learners' preferred medium of instruction for science subjects in the PYP?
2. What challenges are faced in teaching-learning of science subjects through the medium of English?
3. What strategies do teachers and learners use to address the challenges in learning science subjects through EMI?
4. What are the consequences of using EMI for students' learning of curricular content?
5. How effective are the institutional level support mechanisms for using EMI in the PYP?

Methodology

A case study approach was used for the study to get to get a holistic picture (Yin, 2014) of the use of EMI in the PYP, within the specific context of a public sector university in KSA. Qualitative data was collected through classroom observation, and semi-structured and focus group interviews from teachers and learners respectively. In addition, documents such as textbooks and sample test papers were analyzed.

Purposive sampling was used to select seven teachers and three groups of learners from the PYP. All the participating teachers, except one, were English-Arabic bilinguals with doctoral level qualifications. Also, they had vast experience of teaching outside the KSA (ranging from 5-15 years) and a minimum of 1 year in Saudi Arabia (except the English-only math teacher who had recently joined the university). However, only one teacher had received any long-term professional training before or after starting her teaching career. All teachers, except the mathematics teacher, had Arabic as their L1, and had learnt English as a second or third language in their own countries and/or during study abroad in native English speaking countries.

One lesson each of all the seven selected teachers was observed. Follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted using a set of guiding questions. The interviews were

recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis. All the teachers were also asked to self-assess their proficiency in English and Arabic in all the four language skills, i.e. Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. The participating teachers' self-reported proficiency in the four language skills in English ranged from good to excellent.

Additionally, three focus group interviews were conducted with learners, all Saudi nationals, from three sections representing varying levels of proficiency in English. It was assumed that learners with varied proficiency levels in English may differ in their perceptions and experiences of EMI relative to their proficiency level. Moreover, as their sections for English are different from their sections for their science subjects, they would be able to talk about their experience in their content subject classes more candidly and without reference to specific teachers. The interview for level I or students with higher proficiency in English was carried out by two interviewers in English and Arabic; the students were told that they were free to respond in any of the two languages according to their comfort level. The interviews for the lower proficiency students, i.e. levels II and III, were conducted in Arabic only. The groups were kept small (6-8 students) to allow the learners space to share their experiences and voice their opinions freely (Rabiee, 2004). Overall, 19 students participated in the three focus group interviews. The English translation of the learner interview data was done by the two co-researchers who are fluent in both English and Arabic.

Informed consent was gained from the teachers using a form, and after providing them details about the study and their rights as study participants. For the students, only verbal consent was gained after explaining to them the purpose of the study and promising anonymity and confidentiality of data. This was considered to be the culturally appropriate way of gaining consent from the learners (Shamim & Qureshi, 2013).

The data analysis was guided by the research questions. The classroom observation notes and interview transcripts were carefully read line-by-line and coded as meaningful qualitative units to arrive at themes (Chenail, 2012). Document such as books, power point lecture presentations, class handouts and sample test papers were also analyzed to gain additional information about the use of EMI in the PYP.

Findings and Discussion

Teachers and Learners' Preferred Medium of Instruction

All the participating teachers (except one) were unanimous in their view that English should continue to be the medium of instruction. This is because, "English is the language of science" and "They [the students] will need it for higher education- if they do their Ph.Ds they'll need it" (Teacher 2, interview data). Another teacher shared a similar view, "English has now become a world known language- it is I think it should be compulsory here also so if our students go anywhere in the world they can communicate with anybody- because language is not a barrier

for them" (Teacher 3, interview data). This resonates with the view of many teachers internationally as found by studies of teachers' perception of EMI in EFL countries such as Iran and China (Hu & Lei, 2014; Zare-ee & Gholami, 2013), and a recent survey conducted by the Oxford University, Department of Education and the British Council in 55 countries in the world (Dearden, 2015). Only one of the participating teachers did not support the use of English as MoI in the PYP. She justified it based on her own experience: "They taught in German in Germany- they told me it's useful to study in your own language". She agreed that English was very important, "but sciences are easier to teach in their [the students'] own language . . . so they should understand the [subject]" (Teacher 5, Interview data).

Interestingly all the higher proficiency level students, except one, also favored the use of EMI. Their justification for this view was similar to that of their teachers: "So we are with the other world. They know a lot of stuff. We still don't know so it [MoI] should be English" (Focus Group (FG), level I). In contrast, the students in level III (lowest proficiency level) questioned the use of EMI in the PYP, because it disadvantages them in regard to gaining admission to the faculties of their choice in the university:

It is not fair to study in English during preparatory year because it will determine our fate. I have been studying hard during secondary school to enter the medical faculty and when I came here everything disappeared because of English (FG, level III).

To sum up, the majority of teachers and the higher proficiency level students in the PYP showed a positive attitude towards EMI. This is not surprising due to the benefits of EMI generally claimed for individual, social and economic growth and development (Coleman, 2011). However, similar to other EFL contexts, they also reported several challenges.

Participants' Challenges, Coping Strategies and Consequences of Using EMI

In the PYP, the prescribed textbooks for the science subjects and math are in English; however, they contain bilingual (English and Arabic) glossaries of scientific terms. Classroom observations revealed that all teachers used 'standardized power-point lecture presentations and worksheets and practice tests. These lecture presentations, developed centrally by the subject coordinator for use at all campuses of the university, and also made available to the students, were mainly in English with some words/scientific terms translated into Arabic. Also, there was extensive use of tables and diagrams in the power point slides (with occasional reference to the same in the books) to explain and clarify scientific concepts. However, the teaching-learning in the classroom including task instructions, explanation of concepts and checking of learning, was carried out mainly in Arabic.

Both the teachers and learners reported several challenges in using EMI for teaching-learning of science subjects in the PYP. One teacher shared that a major challenge for her was to help the learners "think about meaning as a whole rather than to try to understand every word" (Teacher 3, interview data). Another teacher advised the learners to "learn by translating immediately [so that] they read by their eyes in English and what they have in their mind is in Arabic". She was confident that "after a month or two they will get it"(Teacher 4, interview data). The English-only math teacher shared that her major challenge was to know "how they understand my teaching- how they understand my language- this is my main challenge" (Teacher 7, Interview data). She shared that when she asked the learners how they felt when she used English only in the classroom, "they tell me no problem-we can understand because in math numbers- many things you write on the board-so we can catch many things from the board- not your language". The students agreed in their interviews that they could understand math in English (but not physics or chemistry) as it was mainly numbers and the teacher could solve the problems on the board to help them.

All the teachers found the request from the learners to translate all the curriculum material into Arabic to be a major challenge. This was both time-consuming and not helpful, in their view, in making the required transition from Arabic to English as the medium of instruction. At the same time, the teachers shared that the students already knew most of the material in Arabic from high school; so, essentially, the teachers' job seemed to be simply to translate everything into English. This was corroborated by the learners in their interviews: "We know the material from secondary school- we know it in Arabic- now we have to learn it in English" (FG, level III). The majority of the students shared that their new learning mainly comprised the learning of scientific terms in English. Hence, it seems that nothing new is learnt in the science subjects in the PYP due to 'simplifying' the learning material (content) to make it accessible to the learners in English.

The teachers shared that at the time of recruitment they had been told that they would have to teach through the medium of English. However, once they started teaching, they were forced to make accommodations due to their students' low proficiency in English, for example, using Arabic for explanations and clarifying concepts in the classroom (see also Goodman, 2014). Moreover, as the majority of the students were unable to read the textbooks in English, the teachers helped them prepare for their exams by giving them bilingual word lists, and 'checklists' identifying sections and paragraphs from the book to study; also, they conducted mock exams to practice answering exam questions in English.

It has been pointed out that the low proficiency of content subject teachers and the additional burden on them, of presenting their specialist knowledge to the learners in a language different from the one in which they studied it, can be a major challenge for these teachers (Wiseman & Odell, 2014). However, the majority of teachers in the study had a reasonably good

proficiency in English, so it seems that their challenges stemmed more from the learners' low proficiency in English and the learners' mindset that every single word in the lectures and textbooks needs to be translated into Arabic, than their own inadequacy in English. However, some of the challenges faced by these science teachers may be due to their lack of professional training either in bilingual teaching or in using the learners' L1 strategically for scaffolding their learning.

The learners also reported a number of challenges in using EMI. Level I students, with relatively higher proficiency in the language, shared that although they did not face any problems in following the curriculum through EMI, most of their friends spent an enormous amount of time translating all the relevant material into Arabic after which they memorized it in English for exam purposes. All the learners in levels II and III (lower proficiency levels) agreed with this assertion: "We translate the book word by word and try to memorize the scientific terms in English. We already know the material in Arabic" (FG, level II). Majority of learners shared that as they cannot understand the book, they only use the lecture presentations and their class notes as study material for the exams. The students also reported that they find both scientific terms (e.g. dehydration) and general English words such as 'several' and 'composed of' difficult to understand, particularly, in test questions. Consequently, "In the exam reading the question [in English] and understanding it is an achievement" (FG, level II). This language 'barrier' often led to students answering some questions incorrectly in their chemistry and physics assessment, even though they knew the correct answers in Arabic.

To sum up, the students do not have adequate command of English to follow the lectures, read their prescribed textbooks and answer the exam questions in English only. Hence, they believe that with EMI no learning is possible without first translating everything from English into Arabic. This forces their teachers to facilitate their 'access' to the curricular content through Arabic rather than English as the language of instruction in the classroom. Additionally, the teachers tend to help their learners in various ways to enable them to answer the exam questions in English. As a result, teaching and learning in the transition year becomes highly exam-oriented, leaving no place for discussion of ideas for in-depth understanding of scientific concepts and theories. In any case, the curriculum content is similar to the one they have studied in high school. Thus, the purpose of studying science subjects in the transition year seems to be limited to re-learning the already known scientific terms and concepts in English. Hence, nothing new is added to the learners' knowledge. This indicates that the use of EMI in the PYP has an adverse effect on both the amount and quality of student learning.

EMI also seems to have a negative influence on students' motivation level. For example, a student shared the following regarding the change in her attitude to science subjects when she had to study them through EMI: "I used to love math and chemistry in the secondary school and I hated English subject but in the university I love English and hate math and chemistry" (FG,

level II). Another student shared that she was ready to drop out of the prep year program when she did not get high marks in the quiz [because of English] even though she had worked very hard. The students also observed that, "the problem is English- it affects the marks" (FG-level 1).

Support Mechanisms for Teachers and Students

Realizing the need for university entrants to improve their English language skills, an intensive English language program of approximately 550 hours is offered to prospective students in the PYP by all the universities in the Kingdom. The English language program at the focal university (PYEL), however, focuses on developing English language skills for everyday communication. All the teachers were dissatisfied with the PYEL program as it did not focus on their students' needs for learning 'scientific English'. In contrast, the students showed a general level of satisfaction with the PYEL program *for developing general communication skills for everyday life*. However, similar to their teachers, none of them found this program helpful for studying science subjects through EMI. This is not surprising due to the current aims and nature of this program.

Several other mechanisms for supporting the students and teachers at the institutional level were identified during classroom observations and interviews. These include local professors simplifying and adapting foreign textbooks, for example, by adding an English-Arabic glossary at the end of the book, and the development and use of standardized lecture presentations for all science subjects. However, as mentioned earlier, these simplified textbooks comprised concepts or information already known to the students from high school, and therefore did not add much to the knowledge of the students. Similarly, many teachers reported that the standardized lecture presentations did not allow them to use different pedagogical techniques; in fact, as the lecture slides were used as study material by the students (and subsequently to examine them), they were forced to follow everything to the letter, thus making their teaching non-creative and mechanical.

The PYP also has an extensive system of full-time academic advisors for all science subjects. However, it was found that normally, the academic advisors are not proficient bilinguals in English and Arabic; also, they are mainly approached by the students for translating their course material into Arabic.

Summary and Conclusion

Teachers and the majority of students in this study showed a preference for EMI for instrumental purposes. At the same time, they reported a number of challenges in using EMI. The major challenges seem to stem from students' inadequate proficiency in the language. Both teachers and students use a range of coping strategies to address these challenges. This adversely affects the quality and amount of learning taking place in the PYP. The use of EMI in the PYP can also have negative consequences for learner motivation.

The phenomenal growth of higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia over the last two decades has increased the need for learning English for building a knowledge society in KSA. However, it must be noted that the gap between rhetoric and reality (cf. Hu et al. 2014) and aspirations and achievement (Coleman, 2011) can only be filled through an acknowledgment of the challenges faced both by teachers and learners in EMI during the transition year. This also underlines the need for providing research-based support to facilitate a shift in MoI from Arabic in high school to English in higher education settings.

The Way Forward: Future Directions for Policy and Research

Using EMI in higher education in the KSA, similar to other EFL settings, is a major language planning (both corpus and status planning) issue. As there is no clear or stated language policy in the KSA, EMI seems to be creeping in through the back door with all its ensuing challenges and adverse effects on students' learning. Hence, there is an urgent need not only to articulate a language policy for KSA but also to undertake implementation planning for the same. Also research is needed to study the effectiveness of the EMI policy, as well as its current and future impact on individual and societal growth. Additionally, further research is required to "examine empirically the cost and benefits of the use of EMI at HEIs; the main goal being how much language is being gained by such programs as well as how much academic content is being achieved" (Shohamy, 2013, p. 203). Similarly, research evidence is required on the effects of EMI on affective variables such as teachers and students' self-efficacy, identity construction, and local languages and culture. The latter particularly needs to be explored in the Arab countries in general, and in the KSA in particular, where the Arabic language has a rich intellectual and cultural tradition. Finally, the divisive effect of EMI hinted in many studies, i.e., the rich getting richer and the poor getting poor-needs urgent attention from policy makers to create equal educational opportunities and foster social equality. Finally, the effects of CLIL and bilingual programs, generally recommended for learning an additional language in EFL settings such as the KSA, need to be studied through a systematic research program.

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