

University Teachers' Views on English as the Medium of Instruction in an Iranian Higher Education Institution

Abbas Zare-ee

English Department, faculty of Foreign languages and Literature,
University of Kashan, Iran.

S. Yahya Hejazi

English Department, Faculty of Foreign Languages & Literature
University of Tehran, Iran

Abstract

The use of English for instruction at the tertiary level of education by nations whose native language is not English has been the subject of considerable debate. This study aims to survey the attitudes of a group of Iranian university teachers at a state university in central Iran towards the possible use of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in Iranian higher education, where Persian is currently the medium of instruction except in English language departments. It also explores whether teachers' attitude towards EMI is affected by their university rank. To this end, 60 teachers were randomly selected from faculties of Humanities, Science, and Engineering, and their perceptions about EMI were explored through questionnaires and interviews. The findings indicated that, in spite of the current emphasis on Persian by authorities, teachers valued English over Persian as the medium of instruction, expressing concerns mainly about inadequacies in resources and English proficiency requirements. Interview results showed that their opinions were divided as they enumerated a variety of economic, academic, cultural, social, and technological reasons both for and against the possible use of EMI at Iranian tertiary levels. The results imply that concerns over the launch of new curricula using EMI are multidimensional. Possible suggestions for future research on EMI are discussed.

Key words: EMI, English as a lingua franca, English as medium of instruction, higher education, teachers' perceptions

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1. Introduction

The use of English as the medium of instruction (EMI) at tertiary level of education has been the subject of considerable debate in recent decades. One main reason is that the growing use of EMI is a consequence of globalization and advances in international communication. English has assumed the role of an international language due to historical, political, and sociological factors and is widely used as both a *lingua franca* and an international language (Wysocka, 2013).

The medium of instruction in higher education has conventionally been the local language of the country where the institutions operate, and it continues to be the learners' mother tongue in many parts of the world. Recently, however, English is increasingly used as the language of instruction more than ever before in Europe and many other countries (See Dearden, 2014; Doiz, Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2013). The spread is to the extent that more than half of international students are now taught in English (Graddol, 2006). As Doiz, Lasagabaster, and Sierra (2011) maintain, European universities offer various degree programs in English to 'attract more international students', 'prepare domestic students for the global market', and 'raise the profile of the institution'. Graddol (2006) believes that higher education around the world has been extensively internationalized and marketized as the result of globalization. In fact, internationalization or "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (Knight, 2003, p. 2) has led to the implementation of degree programs in foreign languages, particularly English.

Today, the language of instruction is not always the learner's mother tongue, and English is the most common non-native medium of instruction. This is because English is widely used for the dissemination of research results in books, journals, and conferences (Mauranen, Hynninen, & Ranta, 2010). Teaching subject-matter via a language other than students' first language has been described using different terms such as 'second or foreign language-medium instruction', 'content-based instruction', or 'content- and language-integrated learning' (Costa & Coleman, 2013). The differences seem to be basically contextual: immersion in Canada, content and language integrated learning (CLIL) in Europe, and EMI in Hong Kong. Moreover, these differ in terms of the amount of English usage and its balance with content, instructional goals, and pedagogical approaches (Lo & Maraco, 2015).

In academia, there has been a growing interest in the use of English as the medium of instruction in many countries (Coleman 2006; Knight 2008). Given the tendency of many higher education institutes to gain a highly international identity, EMI is becoming increasingly prevalent in contexts, where English is conventionally treated as a foreign language (Dafouz & Camacho-Miñano, 2016). English is today used as the medium of instruction in some university departments in Expanding Circle countries (see Kuchru, 1985), where the main language of education and business is other than English, and English is taught as a subject (Evans & Morrison, 2016). In some other countries, the possibility of adopting English as the medium of instruction,

at least at the tertiary level of education, has recently attracted much attention. Such widespread and growing use of English in research and academic circles has engaged researchers in debates about the role of English as a lingua franca.

According to Hughes (2008), in many countries where English is not the official language, there has been a marked tendency towards the use of this language as the medium of instruction in higher education (see also Evans & Morrison, 2011). In Denmark, for example, a growing number of degree programs are taught in English. According to Jensen and Thogersen (2011), about 25% of all university programs in Denmark are implemented in English. Jensen and Thogersen (2011) probed Danish university lecturers' attitudes toward EMI and found both positive and negative attitudes, varying based on their age and teaching load in English. Also, closely related to internationalization in higher education in Norway, there has been a recent increasing tendency towards the implementation of university-level courses, especially post-graduate ones, in English (Ljosland, 2011).

The widespread use of EMI is attributable to many factors including international employment, access to academic literature, and mobility increases in the academia. Costa and Coleman (2013) attribute this growth in the use of EMI to several key factors such as:

1. Rapid advances in scientific knowledge and consequently in course content,
2. The increasing proportion of knowledge sources such as books, papers and theses which, for economic, social and prestige reasons, are available only in English,
3. The accelerating pattern of academic staff and student mobility, and
4. The near-necessity of English proficiency for graduate employability. (pp. 3-4)

Research on EMI has focused on a wide variety of issues including the amount of English used in EMI contexts (e.g., Carroll-Boegh, 2005; Petersen & Shaw, 2002), teachers' and students' proficiency requirements/limitations (e.g., Hellekjær, 2005; Vinke & Jochems, 1993), language competence (e.g., Jensen, Denver, Mees, & Werther, 2011; Tange, 2010), students' expectations (e.g. Wilkinson, 2013), and the efficiency of EMI programs (e.g., Airey & Linder, 2006, 2007). The most common research trend in EMI research has been the study of different stakeholders' perceptions about EMI. Using questionnaires and interviews, previous studies have explored different stakeholders' attitudes towards EMI (e.g. Jensen & Thogersen, 2011; Tange 2010; Vinke 1995). However, the results have been inconclusive: while a large number of studies have indicated students' and teachers' positive attitudes towards EMI (e.g., Ball & Lindsay, 2013; Costa & Coleman, 2013), others have reported resistance to it (e.g., Doiz et al., 2013; Webb, 2002). Several other studies have reported stakeholders' concerns about the possible relegation of the local language and culture (e.g., Gunnarsson, 2001). A third group has recognized the undeniable role of EMI in providing opportunities for international collaboration, English proficiency development, and better jobs (Airey, 2013; Griffiths, 2013).

For some other contexts, there is inadequate research on EMI, making it too early to make decisions about the possibility of its use. For instance, little is known about the role of English and the possibility of EMI application in Iranian universities (Ghorbani & Zahed Alavi, 2014; Sadeghi & Richards, 2015). Sadeghi and Richards (2015) found that English is “regarded as an important international language among Iranians living in Urmia [a major city in northwestern Iran] as well as one that accrues a number of social benefits to its users” (p.1). Ghorbani and Zahed Alavi (2014) also surveyed university teachers’ and learners’ views on EMI, supporting its potential use in Iran. On the contrary, Zandian (2015) maintains that, in the current Iranian English language education program, English language teaching and the related materials fail to increase learners’ intercultural understanding because they prefer (or better to say *are forced*) to work on what is in agreement with local beliefs and ideologies. She suggests migrant literature be used in Iranian English language classes (probably because of the perceived opposition to English and American literature!). We located no other studies addressing the potential use of EMI in Iran.

In our view, researching EMI and exploring the possibility of its use can have potential benefits especially at tertiary levels of education in Iran. The first reason is that an extremely small part of the world’s knowledge can possibly be constructed, communicated, and disseminated in the local language, Persian. The second reason is that Iranian academics are becoming more and more mobile in global higher education, and one cannot expect them to become part of global scientific communities without a good command of English. The third reason is that Iranian academic communities need access to cutting-edge research which cannot possibly be gained through translation because of the amazing speed at which new advances in science and technology are communicated. Finally, our perception is that the public view should be in favor of EMI as evidenced by the growing number of language schools dotting the country and the increasing rate of immigration among the educated. EMI, therefore, deserves more research attention. The present study was designed to explore teachers’ and learners’ views about the potential use of EMI in Iran and seeks answers to the following research questions:

1. What is Iranian university professors’ attitude toward the possible use of EMI in Iranian higher education?

2. Is Iranian university professors’ attitude toward EMI affected by their academic rank?

2. Review of Literature

Although researchers sometimes argue seriously against the spread of English as the medium of instruction, the related literature abounds with both advantages and disadvantages of EMI programs. They have several positive effects on students such as improving their language proficiency (Dalton-Puffer, 2011; Yang, 2015), increasing their chances of mobility and employability (Wächter & Maiworm, 2014), and enhancing their language learning motivation (Doiz, Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2014; Yang, 2015). Moreover, English can empower the “subjugated and marginalized,

eroding the division between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'" (Crystal, 2003, p. 24) by giving them a channel to voice their ideas. Also, for many scholars in countries where English is not the national language, publication in English could offer them better job opportunities and career development (Coleman, 2006). Improved proficiency in English is, of course, not highlighted here since EMI courses are primarily meant to teach content knowledge to students, not language (Zhang, 2017).

On the other hand, these programs have some obvious shortcomings. Potential challenges include teachers' and students' inadequate language proficiency, inefficiency of instructional methods, and lack of resources (Vu & Burns, 2014). Students' proficiency plays a key role in the efficiency of EMI courses to the extent that students with low English proficiency might experience serious comprehension problems (Joe & Lee, 2012; Räsänen, 2008; Vinke, Snippe, & Jochems, 1998). In fact, students' proficiency should be at a satisfactory level in order for EMI courses to be successful (Stryker & Leaver, 1997; Swain & Johnson, 1997); otherwise, they would feel uninterested to participate in classroom discussions and interactions (Airey & Linder, 2006) or, at best, have to spend more time reviewing the course content and completing their assignment after their classes (Evans & Morrison, 2011). Therefore, students themselves need more than a good command of general English; they should have an extensive repertoire of academic English vocabulary, critical thinking and evaluation skills, and the ability to work under time constraints and testing conditions (Salamone, 2015). In addition, as to instructors, Salomone (2015) believes if they are not fluent enough to use English confidently and competently, their lectures might "become scripted and lack spontaneity" (p. 252) by relying only on PowerPoint slides. Moreover, they might simplify the teaching content (Hu, Li, & Lei, 2014), significantly reduce classroom interactions (Hu & Lei, 2014; Jensen & Thøgersen, 2011), and resort to code-switching for conveying their points better (Hu et al., 2014; Vu & Burns, 2014). Unfortunately, when both students and teachers fail to possess very fluent English, their interactions in English would be oversimplified (Salamone, 2015).

Regarding the efficiency of the instructional method, Wilkinson (2005), for example, found that the use of EMI negatively affected the communication and teaching quality of Dutch content teachers. Furthermore, with respect to resources, Baldauf, Kaplan, Kamwangamalu, and Bryant (2011) found that insufficient budget is invested in EMI programs for textbook production and teacher training. Finally, there are concerns such as teachers' and students' unfamiliarity with academic literacies (Wilkinson, 2013) and understanding of the content knowledge, language proficiency, and the possible negative effects of EMI on the overall quality of the programs (Doiz, et al., 2011). The perception of the use of English as a threat to national language (Phillipson, 2015) and the possibility of 'social discrimination' resulting from the privileges associated with English proficiency (Truchot, 2008, cited in Salomone, 2015) are other limitations worthy of attention. To us, these are all important limitations that need to be addressed if high-ranking officials decide to use EMI in Iranian higher education. Failure to address these challenges would create considerable pressure for both students and teachers (Hsieh & Kang, 2010).

3. The Context of the study

The status of English has radically changed in Iran in the last few decades. After the Islamic Revolution in 1979 which was associated with hostility toward the west, the status of the English language was relegated to a 'foreign' language or even an 'alien' one, showing the negative political attitudes of the then Iranian officials towards the USA, the UK, and their language (Borjian, 2013). A few years later, however, the situation began to change when Imam Khomeini (PBUH), the former supreme leader, stressed the importance of learning English as evidenced by his famous words printed on all national public school ELT textbooks. He states:

Earlier there was no need for foreign languages. Today, there is a need, however. The world's living languages should be included in the syllabi of schools.... Today we can remain in Iran and promote ourselves in other parts of the world using another language [English]. (Translated by Sadeghi & Richards, 2015, p. 1)

This change has continued in the same direction so that, today, there is great interest in learning and teaching English as a foreign language documented by the presence and proliferation of many state/private English language schools, academic and professional journals/magazines in English, national/international conferences held in English, English TV channels, and the observable increase in use of English by the youth in public spheres (See also Sadeghi & Richards, 2015). English is a compulsory subject not only at junior and senior high schools but also at university where students have to take general English and ESP courses at BA, MA, and PhD levels (Sadeghi & Richards, 2015). Today, Iranian PhD candidates cannot defend their thesis and graduate unless they show proof of satisfactory English proficiency (by obtaining at least 50% of a standard national or international English proficiency examination). An important criterion for employment in both private and public sectors is also a good command of English. Moreover, the number of teenagers, adults, and even pre-school children taking language courses in the private sector is rapidly increasing. The authors understand that even low socio-economic status families send their children to private language schools in spite of their economic problems because this is what the majority of the families do!

EAP courses taught at Iranian higher education mainly aim "to bridge the gap between the learners' general English reading competence and their ability to read discipline-based texts" (Atai & Tahririan, 2003, p. 4). As Kiany, Mahdavy, and Ghafar Samar (2011) claim, English is mainly used for reading comprehension purposes so as to gain access to new information and knowledge produced in other countries. According to the National Curriculum Document, the current educational system in Iran aims to develop students' foreign language skills for spreading knowledge and Islamic Revolution ideologies (Yavari, 1990), paying special attention to Islamic-Iranian identity, national culture, and local beliefs (Mirhosseini & Khodakarami, 2015).

The use of EMI in Iranian higher education is currently very limited because the main language of instruction is Persian. Only English departments where students study English Literature, English Language Teaching, and/or Translation Studies use EMI. All other majors are offered in Persian. Professors can be questioned by officials if they decide to present their courses in English in other departments because Persian is the official language. They even have to publish at least one or two articles in Persian if they want to get promotion based on current regulations. The use of Persian is, therefore, emphasized in spite of the fact that many may like to use English as a medium of instruction. Some Iranian universities (e.g. Imam Khomeini International University in Qazvin, Chabahr University, University of Tehran Kish Branch, Sharif University Kish Branch, Iran University of Science and Technology, Aras University in Tabriz, and Imam Reza International University in Mashad) have started to admit more and more international students coming mainly from Asia and the Middle East. Even these universities mainly use Persian as the language of instruction.

4. Methodology

The current study employed a cross-sectional survey design. The researchers used questionnaires and structured written interview items to collect data on university teachers' attitudes towards the possible use of EMI in Iranian higher education.

4.1. Participants

The participants included 60 university teachers who were randomly selected from a population of 70 teachers at the University of Kashan in the 2014-2015 academic year. The participants were from three faculties, namely, Humanities, Engineering, and Science. Sample size was determined based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table. Random data collection continued until the required sample size was reached. Table 1 shows participants' gender and academic degree.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics on Gender and Level of Teachers*

Gender	F (%)	Rank	F (%)
Male	50(83.3)	<Associate	50(83.3)
Female	10(16.7)	Associate and >	10(16.7)
Total	60(100)	Total	60(100)

As Table 1 demonstrates, most teachers (83.3%) were lecturers and assistant professors, and only 10 out of 60 were associate or full professors. These percentages are reflections of the population because there are fewer teachers who have managed to promote to associate and professor status.

4.2. Instruments

In order to investigate students' and teachers' attitudes towards the possible use of EMI in the Iranian higher education system, two instruments were used: a questionnaire and a structured interview (written form).

Developed based on a similar instrument used to study university teachers' attitudes towards EMI in Hong Kong (Tung, Lam, & Tsang, 1997), our teachers' attitude questionnaire included 24 five-point Likert-scale items probing teachers' level of (dis)agreement with statements on the use of EMI. After the modifications of the original items, they were translated into Persian to make sure participants in departments other than English had no comprehension problems when recording their answers. Back-translation and expert views were used for validating the questionnaire. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of reliability for this instrument was 0.84, which indicates a high level of internal consistency.

The second instrument, the structured interview, asked teachers to record their answers in at least 150 words in response to the following two questions: 1) In your view, what are the reasons/justifications in favor of using EMI in Iranian universities? 2) In your view, what may prevent us from efficiently using EMI in our higher education? The interview questions were distributed and collected in three ways: institutional emails, institutional mailboxes, and personal delivery. In spite of the use of multiple delivery modes, only 18 out of 60 teachers provided answers to the two questions (a return rate of 30%).

4.3. Procedure

Copies of the questionnaire were sent through emails, mailboxes, or personal delivery during office hours by the second researcher. The researchers cooperated in the collection of written responses to the interview questions in the second phase with a time interval of one month. After the data collection, descriptive statistics for each individual item of the questionnaire were considered in the analysis. Interview data were also coded by the two researchers with an inter-coder reliability of 80%, and the results were summarized based on the recurrent themes. First, responses were reviewed by the researchers and the coding system was discussed and agreed. Then the two researchers worked independently to identify recurrent themes, and the data were reduced to manageable themes. Every recorded sentence in response to the interview questions was a unit of analysis. The sentences were, therefore, carefully read, content-analyzed, and grouped based on their conceptual contents.

5. Results

5.1. Questionnaire survey results

Based on simple frequencies and means, the analysis of the data obtained from teachers indicated that an unexpectedly high number of teachers marked the 'no idea' alternative for many questionnaire items, and around half of the respondents (30 out of 60) clearly agreed or disagreed with the statements. When we coded the interview data realizing that teachers expressed both pros and cons for the use of EMI, we interpreted

this pattern of responses as an indication of teachers' difficulty in decision-making on the possible use of EMI in Iranian higher education. Based on the frequency of agreements and disagreements summarized in Table 2, it was found that in teachers' views, learners' low proficiency in English, problems with translating technical terms, inadequate supply of academic materials in Persian, and language transfer are the main issues of concern in using EMI. In teachers' views, the target student population does not demonstrate the required English proficiency for the application of EMI. They believe that translating technical/academic terms into Persian is a problem when EMI is not used. They also agree that resources for teaching (e.g., textbooks, reference books, journals, etc.) are mainly in English. On the other hand, as the table shows, the lowest mean was assigned to the possible negative role of EMI in students' intake. The respondents believed that using EMI will not necessarily lead to poor academic performance. The role of parents and the function of Persian in increasing students' interest also received one of the lowest means.

Chi-square analyses were also carried out for each questionnaire item to explore differences between university teachers' attitudes towards EMI across academic ranks.

Table 2. *Teachers' attitudes towards EMI*

Item No.	Description	Mean	SD	Agree F(%)	Disagree F(%)	Chi-square	Sig.
21	The English proficiency of my students is not adequate to study non-language subjects (e.g., Physics, Mathematics) in English.	2.67	.681	7 (10)	6 (11.7)	3.319	.050
8	The greatest problem in using Persian as the medium of instruction is the need to translate a lot of technical terms.	2.65	.659	6 (10)	9 (15)	.160	.419
10	Resources for teaching, e.g., textbooks and reference books, are more readily available in English than in Persian.	2.65	.659	6 (10)	9 (15)	.160	.481
13	Learning academic subjects through Persian will help understanding them in English.	2.45	.699	7 (11.7)	19 (31.7)	.869	.284
7	I feel I can write better in English than in Persian.	2.30	.869	16 (26.7)	10 (16.7)	.217	.450
18	Studying in Persian will not help students with poor academic performance.	2.30	.809	13 (21.7)	16 (26.7)	.334	.410
20	Students with good academic performance should study academic subjects in English.	2.30	.850	15 (25)	12 (20)	1.091	.245
19	Using Persian to study non-language subjects (e.g., Physics, Mathematics) will affect students' English proficiency.	2.28	.761	11 (18.3)	21 (35)	.857	.281
11	The Iranian Higher Education should provide universities with more resources in Persian.	2.20	.777	13 (21.7)	22 (36.7)	.343	.403

24	The use of English as the medium of instruction will be useful in Iran.	2.18	.911	20 (33.3)	9 (15)	.334	.410
6	I feel it is easier to write examination questions in English than in Persian.	2.17	.924	21 (35)	8 (13.3)	.334	.410
12	The Iranian government should raise the status of the Persian language in the country.	2.12	.804	16 (26.7)	21 (35)	1.70 0	.172
22	I have a good understanding of the language policy of the university where I teach.	2.05	.723	14 (23.3)	29 (48.3)	.410	.414
2	Lecturing in Persian allows the lesson to progress faster than lecturing in English.	2.00	.921	25 (41.7)	10 (16.7)	.672	.325
4	Lecturing in Persian allows a teacher to go deeper into the conceptual content of the lesson than lecturing in English.	1.98	.911	25 (41.7)	11 (18.3)	.500	.725
17	Teaching a class in Persian encourages students to speak uninhibitedly, thereby disrupting the order of the class.	1.93	.800	21 (35)	22 (36.7)	.410	.414
23	It is inappropriate for instructors to teach the same lesson mixing English and Persian.	1.90	.933	29 (48.3)	8 (13.3)	.014	.586
5	I support adopting mother-tongue education at the university where I teach.	1.88	.922	29 (48.3)	9 (15)	.057	.539
3	Lecturing in Persian produces a better classroom atmosphere than lecturing in English.	1.83	.924	31 (51.7)	8 (13.3)	.132	.510
9	It is easier to teach non-language subjects (e.g., Physics, Mathematics) in English than in Persian.	1.82	.813	26 (43.3)	19 (31.7)	4.00	.050
16	Students do not take subjects taught in Persian seriously.	1.80	.732	23 (38.3)	26 (43.3)	1.09 1	.262
1	Lecturing in Persian can increase students' interest in learning more than lecturing in English.	1.78	.904	32 (53.3)	9 (15)	.755	.480
15	Parents are a major obstacle in the promotion of mother-tongue education.	1.63	.610	26 (43.3)	30 (50)	.214	.528
14	English as the medium of instruction will certainly lead to poorer student intake.	1.58	.787	36 (60)	13 (21.7)	.557	.409

The differences were significant only for items nine and 21: 9) It is easier to teach non-language subjects (e.g., Physics, Mathematics) in English than in Persian, and 21) The English proficiency of my students is not adequate to study non-language subjects (e.g., Physics, Mathematics) in English. Forty lecturers and assistant professors (80%) agreed that it was easier to teach non-language subjects in English while only five out of ten associate and full professors agreed with this statement ($X^2 = 4.00$, $p. \leq 0.05$). The low proficiency of the learners was a major problem for the teaching of non-language subjects in English in the views of 13 (26%) teachers with ranks below associate degree, but no teachers with associate or professor rank agreed with this statement ($X^2 = 3.319$, $p. \leq 0.05$).

5.2. Interview results

In addition to the questionnaire data presented above, the respondents recorded their answers to two written interview questions. The recorded responses were all read and analyzed sentence by sentence by both researchers. They were then coded in three levels. In the first level, each sentence was read to see whether it expressed an opinion for or against EMI. In the second level, the content was re-read to see what main theme was mentioned in the reason for/against EMI. Finally, five main categories of reasons (for/against) were identified for the reasons expressed by the respondents: academic, cultural, technological, social, and economic reasons. Table 3 shows the themes extracted from the interview statements.

Table 3. Summary of themes for and against EMI

Category	Themes for EMI	Themes against EMI
Academic	17	9
Cultural	10	5
Technological	7	5
Social	6	6
Economic	5	7

It is noteworthy that teachers did not clearly express a position that was only for or against EMI and had mixed opinions about the academic, cultural, technological, social, and economic (dis)advantages of the use of EMI. This could partly be because of the fact that they were asked to express reasons both for and against EMI and partly due to the fact that it was difficult for them to clearly voice their opinions in the present educational context.

Teachers' perceptions about academic reasons for/against EMI: Based on 165 sentences recorded by the participants on academic themes, we reduced all academic reasons in favor of EMI into the following sub-categories:

- 1) English is the language of science.
- 2) EMI can help students have access to a wide range of up-to-date sources in English.
- 3) English has considerable potential for the expression of scientific concepts.
- 4) Academic English is widely used all over the world.
- 5) The use of EMI leads to increased international academic exchange.
- 6) EMI helps students and professors participate in international academic events.
- 7) EMI can raise Iran's academic standing.
- 8) Translated academic materials (to Persian) are mostly inefficient.
- 9) English is a necessity for all academic disciplines.
- 10) EMI facilitates access to and use of ICT.

- 11) EMI improves students' academic language skills.
- 12) EMI helps the dissemination of local knowledge and publication of research results.
- 13) EMI facilitates the establishment of international academic networks/communities.
- 14) EMI provides us with direct access to original materials in English rather than their translated versions.
- 15) It provides excellent opportunities for bilingualism.
- 16) It helps positive language transfer.
- 17) EMI facilitates access to and use of the latest software and teaching materials.

On the other hand, the teachers stated academic reasons against the use of EMI along with their justifications for its use. They reported that it was not academically justified to apply EMI in Iran because of the following reasons:

- 1) Teachers' and students' English proficiency is inadequate.
- 2) Much time and budget is required to solve English proficiency problems.
- 3) English is neglected at the early stages of education in Iran.
- 4) Iranian Ministry of Education has failed to improve students' basic language proficiency in lower levels.
- 5) The class atmosphere is very boring because of proficiency struggles.
- 6) There is much difficulty disseminating knowledge to the public if EMI is used.
- 7) Students and teachers perceive EMI as difficult.
- 8) There are insufficient teaching materials in English.
- 9) There is little local research in support of the use of EMI.

Teachers' perceptions about cultural reasons for/against EMI: The written responses to interview items included 82 statements that were coded as cultural justifications for/against the use of EMI. Based on the reduction of these statements to recurrent themes, teachers provided the following cultural justifications for EMI use in the Iranian context:

1. Students will become familiar with different cultures.
2. EMI facilitates communication of cultural ideas, events, and values.
3. The use of EMI leads to positive cultural understanding.
4. It improves learners' behavior in intercultural encounters.
5. It helps students understand their own culture in the light of other cultures.
6. It promotes cultural ties.
7. EMI helps prevent blind cultural judgments.
8. It helps resolve cultural misunderstandings.
9. It helps transmission of cultural ideas via books, films, events, etc.
10. It increases cultural tolerance.

Teachers believed that it was not culturally appropriate to use EMI because of the following reasons:

1. EMI can be a threat to our local language and culture.
2. Socio-cultural matters are communicated more efficiently in L1, i.e., Persian.
3. Students might adopt incompatible cultural norms by the use of EMI.
4. The use of EMI relegates our rich local cultural heritage.

5. The use of EMI leads to cultural invasion.

Teachers' perceptions about technological reasons for/against EMI: From a technological point of view, the participants expressed their positive and negative attitudes towards the use of EMI in a total of 63 statements reduced to the following themes. The use of EMI in Iran was technologically justified because:

1. English is the language of the Internet and technology.
2. Language learning is nowadays basically technology-based.
3. English facilitates understanding manuals, guidelines, and instructions.
4. EMI helps learning about new technologies as they emerge.
5. Web-based teaching/learning could be facilitated via EMI.
6. EMI facilitates access to a lot of new software and teaching aids.
7. It improves student-teacher relationships through technology.

However, teachers provided the following technological reasons against the use of EMI:

1. Iranian universities are not well-equipped with modern technologies, laboratories, and ICT facilities.
2. There are serious problems with the speed and cost of using ICT and the Internet.
3. Access to ICT and the Internet is geographically limited, and
4. Improving the country's technological infrastructures is very expensive.
5. There are digital literacy problems for both learners and teachers.

Teachers' perceptions about social reasons for/against EMI: As to social reasons, teachers recorded 87 statements that pointed to social issues. The following social themes for the use of EMI were expressed:

1. EMI helps train global citizens.
2. EMI increases social interactions with native English-speakers.
3. EMI enhances learners' socio-economic status because of improvements in proficiency.
4. EMI increases awareness of social differences.
5. EMI widens teachers' and students' world views.
6. EMI facilitates access to international mass communication media.

On the other hand, teachers believed that the implementation of EMI programs in Iran could not be socially beneficial since:

1. Some social values communicated via EMI are not compatible with local values.
2. People who are not taught through EMI will suffer from social disadvantages.
3. EMI can change the intact social atmosphere.
4. The use of EMI may imply that we are weak in our own socio-cultural values.
5. Many people are prejudiced about their social norms and values.
6. EMI may loosen local bonds by increasing global bonds.

Teachers' perceptions about economic reasons for/against EMI: Out of 75 statements on economic reasons for/ against the use of EMI, the following themes were extracted for the use of EMI:

1. The budget spent on translation of academic materials is higher than the cost of using EMI.
2. EMI improves the business of importing original books.
3. EMI increases qualifications for jobs requiring English.
4. The use of EMI can improve tourism industry.
5. Using EMI will improve textbook production market.

The following economic themes against the use of EMI were extracted from the teachers' comments:

1. Training proficient teachers to use EMI is very costly.
2. It is difficult and costly to have access to up-to-date international materials.
3. The cost of translation is usually the same as the cost of importing original books.
4. Several stakeholders should cooperate to implement EMI programs/courses.
5. EMI will make education extremely expensive in Iran.
6. The use of EMI could exert much pressure on the Iranian government and families.
7. Low-income families will be sacrificed if EMI is adopted in Iranian education system.

6. Discussion

This study of university teachers' perceptions about the possible use of EMI in Iran revealed three interesting results. The first finding was that in university teachers' views, Iranian university students' low proficiency in English, problems with translating technical terms into Persian, inadequate supply of academic materials in English, and language transfer issue were the main obstacles in implementing EMI programs. This finding is in line with previous international research that considers English proficiency and access to academic sources as two main concerns in the implementation of EMI programs (e.g., Vu & Burns, 2014). As Iranian university teachers reported, students' proficiency will be an enormous challenge if Iran intends to use EMI. In fact, proficiency plays a key role in the efficiency of EMI courses because students with low English proficiency might experience serious comprehension problems (Joe & Lee, 2012; Räsänen, 2008; Vinke, Snippe, & Jochems, 1998).

The second interesting finding was that 80% of the targeted Iranian university teachers reported it was easier for them to teach non-language subjects (e.g., Physics, Mathematics) in English than in Persian. This could be due to the fact that most content area teachers tend to work with articles and textbooks originally written in English. They also publish most of their articles in English to the extent that Iranian Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology has recently pushed professors to have at least two publications in Persian for promotion purposes. To many teachers, the English proficiency of Iranian students is not at a satisfactory level to take courses taught in English. It seems the current situation in Iran is very similar to Denmark (See,

Thogersen, 2011) and Norway (See Ljosland, 2011) where there is increasing tendency towards implementation of university-level courses, especially post-graduate ones, in English.

The third major finding of the study was that, as fully described in the results section, there were reasons both for and against EMI in teachers' views in all the five academic, cultural, technological, social, and economic dimensions. Iranian teachers' reasons for the necessity of using EMI are in line with those enumerated by Costa and Coleman (2013) for the recent growth in the use of EMI. More specifically, rapid advances in academic content published in English, increase in knowledge sources such as books, papers, and theses in English, academic staff and student mobility, and, the necessity of English proficiency for employment are among the frequent themes addressed in support of EMI (See Costa and Coleman, 2013, pp. 3-4).

7. Conclusion

The present study was limited in that it targeted only teachers (disregarding students, administrators, etc.) in just a single university (rather than taking samples from the whole country) using questionnaires and interviews. These methodological decisions were influenced by considerations of time, cost, and type of data analysis. In spite of these limitations, we believe the results can be somehow revealing and have implications at both local and international scopes. At the local level, this can be the beginning of a pre-implementation analysis required for the more extensive use of EMI in Iranian higher education in future. At the international level, the qualitative results including social, cultural, academic, economic, and technological issues raised by the targeted Iranian professors can shed more light on accountability issues in planning a new EMI curriculum. Future research could possibly explore the perceptions and attitudes of both teachers and students towards the possible implementation of EMI at national levels through comprehensive surveys. Moreover, further research in the context of Iran and similar contexts should employ more powerful research techniques such as document analysis, observation of actual classes, and ethnography to explore the complexities involved in the use of EMI.

Authors' Bio Data

Abbas Zare-ee is associate professor in TEFL at the University of Kashan, Iran. He completed his Ph.D. in Iran with research attachments at the University of Reading, University of Malaya, and the University of Sheffield. His research interests are issues in SLA, L2 writing and Teaching English language skills.

S. Yahya Hejazi is a PhD candidate of TEFL at the University of Tehran, Iran. He is currently a visiting lecturer in the University of Tehran (Iran) and the University of Kashan (Iran). His main research interests are English for specific/academic purposes, materials development and evaluation, second language acquisition, and language skills.

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