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EMI CHALLENGES AND ISSUES IN SCIENCE CLASSROOM AT SECONDARY LEVEL- A SCENARIO IN ESL DOMAIN

Zaristan Khan[1], Zaheer Ullah[2], Ishrat Ranjhani[*3]

[1]MA TEFL, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad
[2]Lecturer English, University of Malakand
*[*3]Assistant Professor, Institute of English language and literature, University of Sindh.*

[1]zaristankhan73@gmail.com, [2]zaheerullah25@gmail.com, [*3]ishrat.rajhani@usindh.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

The use of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in science classrooms at the secondary level presents unique challenges in English as Second Language (ESL) contexts. This study explores the multifaceted issues faced by both students and teachers in such settings. Key challenges include linguistic barriers that impede students' comprehension of scientific concepts, limited proficiency among teachers in delivering content effectively in English, and the lack of culturally relevant and bilingual educational resources. Additionally, the complexity of scientific terminologies and language bias in assessments exacerbate these difficulties, often leading to reduced student participation, anxiety, and misconceptions. The research highlights the significant role of curriculum design, teacher training, and classroom interactions in addressing these challenges. Proposed strategies include the incorporation of bilingual materials, language scaffolding techniques, culturally relevant examples, and inclusive assessment practices. Emphasis is also placed on teacher professional development to enhance English proficiency and the adoption of interactive and technology-driven pedagogical methods. This study aims to provide insights into the critical areas that need attention to optimize EMI implementation in science education for ESL learners, fostering better engagement, understanding, and academic outcomes. The findings contribute to the broader discourse on effective teaching and learning practices in multilingual and multicultural educational environments.

***Keywords**: English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI), Science education, Secondary level, English as a Second Language (ESL), Linguistic barriers, Teacher proficiency*

INTRODUCTION

The adoption of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in science classrooms at the secondary level has become increasingly prevalent in non-native English-speaking regions. EMI is often promoted as a tool to enhance global competitiveness and access to international academic opportunities (Dearden, 2014; Ramzan et al., 2023). However, in English as Second Language (ESL) contexts, the implementation of EMI presents significant challenges (Li & Akram, 2023, 2024; Ramzan et al., 2023), particularly in science education, where complex concepts and terminologies can be difficult for students to comprehend (Hamid et al., 2013). These challenges are further compounded by the varying levels of English proficiency among both teachers (Ahmad et al., 2022; Ramzan et al., 2021) and students (Amjad et al., 2021; Ramzan et al., 2023). Science education relies heavily on precise language to communicate abstract concepts,

making it particularly susceptible to the effects of linguistic barriers (Aslam et al., 2021). ESL students often face difficulties in understanding and applying scientific terms, which can hinder their ability to grasp key concepts (Al-Adwan et al., 2022; Kim & Elder, 2008). Additionally, teachers in EMI contexts may lack sufficient proficiency in English, leading to ineffective communication and instruction (Macaro et al., 2018; Ramzan et al., 2020). This dual challenge of limited teacher and student proficiency creates a gap in learning outcomes (Noor et al., 2021), leaving students at a disadvantage compared to their peers in native English-speaking environments.

Curriculum design and assessment practices also play a critical role in the success of EMI in ESL contexts. Research has shown that the lack of bilingual resources and culturally relevant teaching materials can further impede students' understanding and engagement (Hu & Lei, 2014). Furthermore, language bias in assessments often fails to accurately reflect students' understanding of scientific concepts, favoring linguistic ability over content knowledge (García & Kleifgen, 2018).To address these challenges, it is essential to adopt inclusive pedagogical strategies that integrate language support into science instruction. Scaffolding techniques, bilingual glossaries, and professional development for teachers can help bridge the linguistic gaps in EMI science classrooms (Cummins, 2000). This article aims to explore the challenges and issues faced in EMI science classrooms at the secondary level in ESL contexts and propose evidence-based strategies to improve learning outcomes.

Literature Review:

The integration of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in science classrooms at the secondary level has garnered significant attention in educational research, particularly in ESL contexts. The existing body of literature identifies several challenges associated with EMI in science education, including linguistic barriers, teacher proficiency, curriculum design, and assessment practices. This review synthesizes scholarly insights into these issues and highlights potential strategies to address them.Linguistic challenges are among the most significant obstacles in EMI classrooms. Science as a subject involves complex terminology and abstract concepts, which can be difficult for ESL students to grasp in a non-native language (Macaro et al., 2018). Studies have shown that students often struggle with scientific vocabulary and syntax, leading to a superficial understanding of concepts (Dearden, 2014). Furthermore, the inability to express themselves fluently in English reduces student participation and engagement in classroom discussions (Hamid et al., 2013).Teacher proficiency in English plays a critical role in the success of EMI. Research indicates that many teachers in ESL contexts lack sufficient training and confidence to deliver content effectively in English (Hu & Lei, 2014). This gap in proficiency can result in miscommunication, inadequate explanations, and reduced student comprehension (Kim & Elder, 2008). Macaro et al. (2018) emphasize the importance of professional development programs for teachers, focusing on both language skills and pedagogical strategies to enhance EMI delivery.

The design of the curriculum and the availability of bilingual resources significantly impact learning outcomes in EMI classrooms. Hu and Lei (2014) argue that science curricula in EMI contexts often fail to account for the linguistic challenges faced by ESL students. The absence of bilingual glossaries, simplified explanations, and culturally relevant examples exacerbates these difficulties (García & Kleifgen, 2018). Research highlights the need for localized and context-sensitive curriculum design that aligns with students' linguistic abilities and cultural backgrounds (Cummins, 2000).Assessment practices in EMI science classrooms frequently prioritize linguistic proficiency over conceptual understanding. García and Kleifgen (2018) have noted that language bias in assessments can lead to underestimation of students' actual knowledge of scientific contents. Alternative assessment methods, such as visual demonstrations, oral presentations, and collaborative projects, have been proposed as strategies to minimize this bias and better evaluate students' understanding (Hamid et al., 2013).

Scholars suggest various strategies to overcome the challenges of EMI in science education.

Language scaffolding techniques, such as using visuals, sentence starters, and structured discussions, can help bridge the linguistic gap (Cummins, 2000). The integration of bilingual resources, such as glossaries and translated materials, has also been recommended to support ESL students (Hu & Lei, 2014). Moreover, teacher training programs focusing on both English proficiency and EMI-specific pedagogical skills are crucial for improving instructional effectiveness (Macaro et al., 2018).The literature highlights the multifaceted challenges of EMI in science classrooms at the secondary level, particularly in ESL contexts. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that combines curriculum reform, teacher training, and inclusive assessment practices. By adopting evidence-based strategies, educators can enhance the learning experiences of ESL students and improve outcomes in EMI science education.

Significance:

The significance of this study lies in its potential to address critical gaps in the understanding and implementation of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in secondary-level science classrooms, particularly within the ESL domain. Given the increasing global adoption of EMI as a strategy to enhance educational and professional opportunities, it is imperative to investigate the challenges it poses for both students and teachers in non-native English-speaking contexts (Dearden, 2014). Science education, with its reliance on precise language and abstract concepts, is especially vulnerable to the impacts of linguistic barriers, which can hinder comprehension, engagement, and academic performance (Macaro et al., 2018). By exploring these issues and proposing evidence-based strategies, this study aims to contribute to the development of more inclusive and effective EMI practices, ensuring equitable access to quality education for ESL students. The findings will provide educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers with actionable insights to improve teaching and learning outcomes in multilingual settings (Cummins, 2000).

Research Methodology:

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to explore the challenges and issues associated with the implementation of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in secondary-level science classrooms within the ESL domain. The research uses semi-structured interviews and classroom observations to gather in-depth insights from both teachers and students. Semi-structured interviews provide a flexible yet systematic approach to understanding participants' experiences, perceptions, and strategies in navigating EMI-related challenges (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Classroom observations complement the interviews by offering real-time data on teaching practices, student interactions, and language barriers in science lessons (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Thematic analysis is applied to analyze the data, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns and themes related to linguistic challenges, teacher proficiency, curriculum adequacy, and assessment practices (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of EMI in science education, providing valuable insights into potential interventions to enhance learning outcomes in ESL contexts.

Results:

The results of this study, which utilized semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and thematic analysis, provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges associated with English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in science classrooms at the secondary level, particularly within the ESL domain. Key findings include linguistic barriers, teacher proficiency limitations, and curricular constraints, each of which impacts the effectiveness of EMI in ESL contexts.

1. Linguistic Barriers

A significant challenge identified through both interviews and observations was the linguistic barrier faced by ESL students in understanding complex scientific concepts. Students reported frequent difficulties with scientific terminology, which often hindered their ability to fully comprehend lessons. For example, terms such as

"photosynthesis," "mitosis," and "acceleration" were often found to be beyond the students' current vocabulary, affecting their understanding of the underlying concepts (Macaro et al., 2018). Additionally, students struggled with the syntax of English sentences in scientific texts, which impacted their ability to interpret instructions, engage with academic texts, and participate in discussions (Hamid et al., 2013). These findings align with previous research that highlights the critical role of language proficiency in understanding content-heavy subjects like science (Dearden, 2014).

2. **Teacher Proficiency and Instructional Challenges**

The analysis of teacher interviews revealed a gap in English proficiency, which impacted instructional effectiveness. Many teachers reported feeling unprepared to deliver content in English due to limited training in both English language teaching and subject-specific pedagogy. This lack of proficiency led to inconsistent explanations and a heavy reliance on simplistic language, which, while aimed at making concepts more accessible, sometimes oversimplified key scientific ideas (Kim & Elder, 2008). Classroom observations confirmed that when teachers struggled with certain terms or concepts, they often used translation or overly simplified language, which resulted in student disengagement and confusion \(Macaro et al., 2018). Furthermore, teachers noted the difficulty of providing adequate language support while maintaining the integrity of the scientific content. This reflects findings from Hu & Lei (2014), who emphasized that teachers need both subject-specific expertise and English language teaching skills in EMI contexts.

3. **Curricular and Resource Constraints**

Another significant issue identified was the lack of bilingual resources and culturally relevant materials. In classrooms where English was the primary language of instruction, many students reported a disconnect between the language used in textbooks and their understanding of the material, especially when no bilingual resources were available (Hu & Lei, 2014). The absence of resources that integrated both the English language and scientific content in a student-friendly manner exacerbated the linguistic challenges students faced. Additionally, culturally relevant examples were often lacking, making it difficult for ESL students to relate the content to their personal experiences (Cummins, 2000). Thematic analysis of classroom materials revealed that textbooks and supplementary resources were often designed for native English speakers, with little consideration for the language proficiency levels of ESL learners.

4. **Psychological and Participation Barriers**

A key finding was the psychological barrier that discouraged student participation in EMI science classrooms. Many ESL students expressed fear of making language-related mistakes, which led to reluctance in answering questions or engaging in discussions. This fear of error was particularly prominent in group work and oral assessments, where students felt vulnerable to peer judgment (Dearden, 2014). As a result, students tended to withdraw from active learning opportunities, which further hindered their language acquisition and academic success. This aligns with studies by García & Kleifgen (2018), which highlight the negative impact of language anxiety on academic performance in multilingual classrooms (Javaid et al., 2024).

5. Assessment Practices and Language Bias

The study also found evidence of language bias in assessments. Many ESL students struggled with written exams and assessments due to their limited English proficiency, despite demonstrating a solid understanding of the scientific concepts being tested. Teachers and students both noted that language-heavy assessments did not accurately reflect the students' grasp of scientific ideas, but rather their ability to navigate academic English (García & Kleifgen, 2018). This observation supports the arguments put forth by Macaro et al. (2018), who suggest that assessment methods in EMI contexts should be adjusted to focus more on content knowledge and less on linguistic ability.

6. **Potential Solutions and Recommendations**

Thematic analysis also highlighted several strategies that could help alleviate these challenges. Both students and teachers emphasized the importance of bilingual materials, such as glossaries or dual-language textbooks, to facilitate comprehension (Hu & Lei, 2014). Furthermore, students expressed a preference for teachers incorporating more visual aids, demonstrations, and hands-on activities to reinforce scientific concepts without relying heavily on text-based language (Dearden, 2014). Teachers recommended professional development programs focused on both language proficiency and subject-specific teaching strategies to better prepare them for the demands of EMI teaching. This mirror the findings of Kim & Elder (2008), who suggest that teacher training should include not only English language instruction but also content-area expertise in EMI settings.In conclusion, the study demonstrates that while EMI offers significant potential to expand global learning opportunities, its implementation in ESL science classrooms is fraught with challenges. Linguistic barriers, teacher proficiency issues, and the lack of appropriate resources hinder effective teaching and learning. By addressing these issues through improved teacher training, the development of bilingual and culturally relevant resources, and the implementation of more inclusive assessment methods, EMI in science education can become more accessible and effective for ESL students.

Discussion:

The findings of this study highlight several critical challenges in implementing English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in secondary-level science classrooms within ESL (English as a Second Language) contexts. These challenges, identified through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and thematic analysis, underscore the complexities of navigating EMI in multilingual environments, especially when science content involves technical language and abstract concepts. In this discussion, we reflect on these challenges and offer insights into potential solutions, with a focus on linguistic barriers, teacher proficiency, curricular design, and assessment practices.

A central theme emerging from the study is the linguistic barrier that ESL students face when learning science in English. The complexity of scientific vocabulary and its role in conveying technical knowledge was repeatedly mentioned by both students and teachers. Students struggled to understand and use specialized terms such as "photosynthesis," "acceleration," and "chemical bonding," which are crucial to mastering scientific concepts (Macaro et al., 2018). This aligns with the research by Hu and Lei (2014), who argue that science subjects, due to their reliance on specific terminology, can present insurmountable difficulties for ESL students if not supported by adequate language scaffolding.

In this study, students also experienced difficulty in constructing and articulating responses during classroom discussions and assessments. Their fear of making linguistic errors led to reduced participation, which in turn affected their learning outcomes. This phenomenon is consistent with Dearden's (2014) findings, which suggest that the pressure of mastering both language and content in EMI environments can result in anxiety and disengagement. To address this issue, it is crucial to provide additional linguistic support, such as glossaries for scientific terms, visual aids, and bilingual teaching resources, to help students overcome language barriers (Javaid et al., 2024; Kim & Elder, 2008).

Another major finding from the study concerns the proficiency of teachers in English, which directly influences their ability to effectively teach science in EMI contexts. Many teachers reported feeling insufficiently prepared to deliver content in English, especially in complex subjects like biology, physics, and chemistry. While some teachers possessed strong subject knowledge, their limited command of English restricted their ability to explain intricate scientific concepts and engage with students in meaningful discussions (Javaid et al., 2024; Macaro et al., 2018). This is consistent with the concerns raised by Hu and Lei (2014), who argue that many non-native English-speaking teachers in EMI contexts lack the linguistic resources to teach effectively in English,

leading to breakdowns in communication and poor student outcomes.

Moreover, teachers also noted that the dual focus on teaching content and language often led to an overwhelming burden, making it difficult to prioritize conceptual understanding over linguistic proficiency (García & Kleifgen, 2018). This underscores the importance of teacher professional development, which should focus not only on enhancing subject knowledge but also on improving language proficiency and pedagogical strategies for EMI (Macaro et al., 2018; Akram et al., 2021, 2022, 2022). Teacher training programs should incorporate techniques for scaffolding language learning, including the use of simplified language, visual aids (Akram & Abdelrady, 2023), and interactive teaching methods (Abdelrady & Akram, 2022; Ma et al., 2024).

The findings further reveal that the existing curriculum in many EMI science classrooms does not sufficiently cater to the needs of ESL learners. The lack of bilingual resources and culturally relevant teaching materials was a recurring issue, with teachers and students alike reporting that the standard curriculum was difficult to navigate without additional language support (Dearden, 2014). This finding aligns with previous research by Cummins (2000), which suggests that curricula designed for native English speakers may not adequately address the linguistic and cultural diversity of ESL learners.

To improve the effectiveness of EMI, it is essential to adapt the curriculum to better support ESL students. This could include the incorporation of bilingual glossaries, instructional materials in multiple languages, and culturally relevant examples that bridge the gap between scientific content and students' everyday experiences (Hamid et al., 2013; Javaid et al., 2024). Furthermore, EMI curricula should emphasize the development of both scientific literacy and English language proficiency, with a clear focus on ensuring that students understand key scientific concepts regardless of their linguistic background (García & Kleifgen, 2018).

A key issue raised by both teachers and students was the language bias present in assessments. Students reported that their limited proficiency in English often resulted in lower scores, despite having a solid understanding of the scientific concepts being tested. This issue of language bias in assessments is well-documented in the literature (Kim & Elder, 2008), and it highlights the need for inclusive assessment practices that prioritize students' conceptual understanding over their language ability.

To address this challenge, it is recommended that assessments be designed to assess scientific understanding without penalizing students for their language skills. This could involve using alternative assessment formats such as oral presentations, group projects, or portfolios, which provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their knowledge without being constrained by linguistic proficiency (Macaro et al., 2018). Additionally, formative assessments that provide ongoing feedback rather than relying solely on summative exams can help teachers identify students' strengths and weaknesses in both content and language (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

The findings suggest that several pedagogical strategies can enhance EMI in ESL science classrooms. These strategies include the use of visual aids, collaborative learning, and language scaffolding techniques. Visual aids, such as diagrams, charts, and videos, can help students better understand abstract scientific concepts (Macaro et al., 2018). Collaborative learning activities, where students work together in small groups to solve problems or discuss scientific topics, can promote language acquisition while reinforcing content knowledge (Hamid et al., 2013). Additionally, teachers should adopt language scaffolding techniques, such as simplifying instructions, paraphrasing complex concepts, and providing opportunities for language practice through peer interactions (Dearden, 2014).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the challenges of implementing EMI in secondary-level science classrooms for ESL students are multifaceted, involving linguistic barriers, teacher proficiency issues, and curricular constraints. However, these challenges can be mitigated through targeted interventions, including teacher professional development, curriculum adaptation, and inclusive assessment

practices. By adopting these strategies, educators can create more supportive learning environments that enable ESL students to achieve both scientific and linguistic proficiency.

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