

Features of English Medium Instruction Teachers Training

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ABSTRACT

English Medium Instruction (EMI) refers to the use of English to teach academic subjects in countries where it is not the predominant language. Its adoption is growing due to factors such as enhancing English language acquisition, providing a common language in multilingual settings, boosting economic competitiveness and global literacy, attracting international students, and improving university rankings. However, both educators and students often struggle with insufficient English proficiency. EMI programs typically prioritize content over language development, leaving instructors unprepared for teaching in a foreign language.

Kharkiv National Medical University (KhNMU) has a long history of implementing EMI, aiming to enhance student mobility and maintain competitiveness in the international education sector. The university employs a “full EMI” model, requiring faculty to meet a minimum English proficiency of B2. Recognizing the language challenges faced by instructors, KhNMU launched pre-service EMI teacher training programs. These programs address specific language needs, incorporating elements of EAP and ESP, while developing key EFL teaching skills. Effective EMI requires not only strong English proficiency but also the use of learner-centered, interactive teaching methods, making comprehensive teacher training essential for both language enhancement and pedagogical development.

Keywords: English Medium Instruction (EMI), Teacher Training, Professional Development, English Proficiency

The Global English Medium Instruction Context and Rationale

The global prominence of English as the *lingua franca* in fields such as science, technology, industry, and business has led to the growing trend of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in tertiary education. As Dearden (2014) explains, “the use of English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English”. This development illustrates the growing demand for English-language education in countries where English is not the native language, as it increasingly serves as the primary medium of academic instruction to address both national and international educational requirements.

As a result, the popularity of EMI continues to grow, often positioned as an alternative to traditional instruction in the local language. Richards and Pun (2021) identify several key reasons for the adoption of EMI, particularly in universities aiming to stay competitive in a globalized education market. These reasons include:

- Improving English language proficiency among students.
- Providing a common medium of instruction in multilingual contexts.
- Attracting international students to enhance global appeal.
- Boosting institutional rankings and prestige.
- Promoting the development of global literacy and intercultural communication skills.

However, in the context of EMI, English is not just a medium of instruction but also a tool for transferring knowledge and ideas. As such, it is clear that English language proficiency plays a central role in the effectiveness of education delivered through EMI. Yet, as Kirkpatrick (2017) points out, in countries where English is not the official language, both faculty members and students often struggle with insufficient English proficiency, which can hinder their success in EMI settings.

Given this context, one of the key challenges in EMI implementation is that the focus tends to be on content rather than language. As a result, EMI teachers, many of whom have

not received prior training or access to resources for teaching in a foreign language, often find themselves delivering academic content in English without the necessary pedagogical support (Dearden, 2014; Walkinshaw et al., 2017).

The lack of content teachers who are proficient enough in English to teach their subjects effectively (Cheng, 2017), combined with the shortage of appropriate training opportunities for such teachers (Miller, 2020), further exacerbates the difficulties faced in some countries when implementing EMI programs.

Thus, training subject teachers for work in the EMI setting is essential for the development and success of EMI systems at universities in non-English-speaking countries. This article reports on the experience of Kharkiv National Medical University (KhNMU) in preparing its faculty to teach in English-medium environments. The core thesis is that effective EMI teacher training must address both language enhancement and pedagogical development to adequately prepare instructors for challenges of teaching in an English-language setting.

This conceptual piece outlines the rationale, design, and implementation of a pre-service EMI teacher training program at KhNMU. It focuses on the institutional context and theoretical foundations that informed the program's curriculum, rather than presenting empirical data on its effectiveness. The aim is to show how a balanced approach to language proficiency and pedagogical skills can contribute to the success and sustainability of EMI programs.

English Medium Instruction at Kharkiv National Medical University

Kharkiv National Medical University has been training international students for over 70 years, with EMI programs in place since 1996. Today, EMI students at the university can pursue degrees in three major fields: Medicine, Dentistry, and Nursing. The decision to implement EMI was driven by several key factors.

Until the early 1990s, international students were enrolled in Ukrainian universities under intergovernmental agreements within the Soviet Union. However, after Ukraine gained independence, universities gained autonomy in student enrollment, prompting a shift in how international students were admitted. To remain competitive and relevant in the evolving global education landscape, the university recognized the need to modernize and offer programs in English.

Key motivations for implementing EMI included the rise in global student mobility, increased international competition for students, and the university's desire to maintain financial stability. Additionally, as domestic student numbers declined due to demographic shifts, EMI offered a way to attract international students and improve the university's standing in global rankings. This shift was also part of a broader push for internationalization, with faculty being encouraged to improve their English proficiency.

By the early 2020s, the university had risen to second place in Ukraine in terms of international student enrollment, and was the leading medical university in the country for EMI students.

EMI at KhNMU has always been the so-called full EMI, that is English is used in all elements of instruction (Pecorari & Malmström, 2018).

According to the typology proposed by J.C. Richards and J. Pun (2021), the EMI model at KhNMU can be characterized as content, single medium, sheltered, selection, supportive, English competent, with content assessment, English proficient teachers, bilingual or English certified learners both experienced and inexperienced EMI learners, native-speaker and designed materials. A detailed description is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

English Medium Instruction typology at Kharkiv National Medical University

Criterion	Model	Description
Purpose	Content EMI	Learning academic content and skills through English
Assessment	Content EMI	Assessment based on content mastery
Curriculum models	Single medium Sheltered	All major content subjects except foreign languages taught in English Content teacher teaches a content course specially designed for L2 students
Introduction of EMI	Early EMI or Middle EMI or Late EMI	EMI commences in pre-school or primary school and continues to higher education EMI commences in secondary school and continues to higher education EMI occurs only in higher education
Access to EMI	Selection	Students must demonstrate a proficiency level in English
The English course and EMI	Supportive	The English course includes support for EMI
The EMI teacher	English competent	Teachers must pass a proficiency test to teach EMI or be assessed as having sufficient English proficiency for EMI
The English subject teacher	English proficient	Teachers are proficient speakers of English as L2
The EMI student	Bilingual (+) English or	Learners may be bilingual or multilingual, including English Learners must achieve a certain proficiency level

	English certified Inexperienced EMI or Experienced EMI	in English in order to take part in EMI Learners have no previous experience of EMI Learners have previous experiences of EMI
Instructional materials in EMI	Native-speaker materials and Designed materials	Materials designed for use in English-speaking countries for English native-speaker teachers and students Specially designed materials in English suitable for teaching content subjects in the EMI context

To clarify the key terms, the different types of EMI mentioned in the table can be defined as follows: Content-EMI refers to learning academic subjects and skills in English, with evaluations focusing on content understanding rather than language proficiency. This approach integrates English into the curriculum while prioritizing mastery of the subject matter. Single-medium EMI involves courses where all instruction, including lectures and assessments, is conducted entirely in English, with no additional support in the native language. Sheltered EMI is a more tailored approach in which major subjects, excluding foreign languages, are taught in English. The courses are specifically designed for second-language learners, with content instructors adapting the material to meet students' language needs.

At KhNMU, the primary goal of EMI is content mastery. Students' performance is assessed based on their ability to assimilate the subject matter, with no language other than English used in instruction. The students' experiences with EMI vary: some have been

educated in English from primary school, while others have no EMI experience prior to University. Admission is based on results from an English entrance exam. To support first-year students who need to adjust to EMI, a short English course is offered. This course introduces medical terminology and helps students consolidate or acquire the language necessary for subjects like Biology, Chemistry, and Anatomy which they would have studied in school. Faculty members' language proficiency is also assessed before they begin teaching in EMI. The study materials used are a mix of resources designed for English-speaking countries and those specially prepared by university faculty for EMI students.

English Medium Instruction Teachers at Kharkiv National Medical University

At KhNMU, English proficiency of the EMI subject teachers has always been considered critical and their language proficiency has always been evaluated before receiving permission to teach their subject in English. Notably, there is still no consensus on the level of English of EMI teachers. There is an opinion that the teachers applying for the work with EMI students should have a C1 (CEFR) or in other words advanced, level of English proficiency. This opinion is supported by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, although, according to the British Council, B2 (CERF), or upper intermediate, is a suggested minimum for effective teaching in the medium of English (Bolitho & West, 2017). According to the regulations of the university, the candidates for teaching in the EMI setting must have at least a B2 level of English which must be confirmed either by passing an internationally recognized exam (as a rule TOEFL, IELTS, Cambridge English, Pearson Test of English, APTIS) or by passing a university exam which tests reading, writing, listening, speaking, language use.

Unfortunately, English language proficiency in Ukraine has proven insufficient despite 11 years of learning English at school and a university course of English for specific purpose. In 2023 the position of the country in EF English Proficiency Index went down

significantly from 35 out of 111 in the previous year to 45 out of 113 in the world and 31 out of 34 in Europe, a “moderate proficiency” group (EF EPI 2023). These figures tell us that it may not appear an easy task to find a specialist (subject teacher) with an upper intermediate or higher level of English gained at school lessons, the fact that can hinder the development and expansion of this form of education in Ukraine. To compensate for these deficiencies KhNMU launched pre-service EMI teacher training in English.

Experience of training EMI teachers at KhNMU shows that many of them are struggling with language-related issues, stemming from language inadequacies, which make them feel insecure about their own linguistic performance and fear a loss of subject-content depth. They also tend to have concerns about pedagogy, seeing language and pedagogical challenges as a threat to learning outcomes. This proves that many EMI teachers need specialized support to increase their own proficiency and strategic behavior.

English Medium Instruction Students at Kharkiv National Medical University

According to the existing Ukrainian regulations, only international students can be instructed in the medium of English. EMI students at KhNMU are mostly from the countries where English is either L2 or a foreign language. The majority are from Nigeria, India, Pakistan, Middle East and North Africa (MENA). There are rarely students from the countries where English is an official language and those we have usually tend to be first-generation immigrants. The reasons why these students choose EMI are various, among them:

- 1) 1 year shorter and thus less costly course of studies (if an international student takes Ukrainian-medium, he/she has to spend one year doing preparatory course);
- 2) after graduating they will have to pass licensing exams in their country in English;
- 3) they are planning to move to an English-speaking country after the graduation;

4) they are afraid that they will not cope with mastering medicine in the medium of Ukrainian;

5) EMI can improve their job prospects;

6) they hope to improve their language proficiency studying within the medium of English.

The level of English proficiency of the students who gained entrance is variable but at least B1 (CEFR), or intermediate, because according to the rules existing at the university, this is the minimum level of English demonstrated on the entrance exam to be admitted. As it is seen from Table 1, EMI students represent a heterogeneous group. Some of them are bilingual with English as a second language (for example, the students from Nigeria, India), for the others, English is a foreign language which they learned at school and perhaps did not use outside the classroom (the students from MENA countries). Besides, some of them are late EMI students who started learning in the medium of English after entering the university, which means that they entered the university without any experience of studying in English, do not understand the difficulties, have no strategies of EMI learning, in addition often lack the knowledge of the language of Biology, Chemistry, Physics – the subjects on which the 1st and 2nd year courses are based; they sometimes have insufficient EAP proficiency. Among the applicants there are students whose English proficiency was assessed by passing internationally recognized exams, for example the TOEFL or IELTS, while the rest were assessed at school.

The Design and Rationale of the EMI Teacher Training Course

The course is planned in the traditional way; the work is preceded by a thorough needs analysis. Besides the stakeholders, we also consider the opinion of those who took part in the translation/ proofreading /editing of the educational materials for the EMI students. In this way we obtain valuable information about the communicative genres most in demand

from the EMI teachers. The core of the course is general English with elements of EAP and ESP (medicine), the proportion of general English being dependent on the results of the mandatory placement test. The general English component aligns with the standard practices for adult foreign language instruction.

However, the English course for teachers has one feature which puts it apart from other courses of English. The fact is that simultaneously with subject material the students must acquire the language of the subject: technical words, collocations, communicative genres. In the medium of the mother tongue, this is the job of the subject teacher, which is done automatically. In EMI settings this is the responsibility of the EMI teacher. Besides, as you see from the description of our EMI students, this teacher will work with a mixed-ability group of students with different language proficiency and different experience of EMI, for some of them English is a foreign language. Thus, to accomplish the goals of the teaching process, the teacher should realize the linguistic problems of the students and be prepared to deal with them. As it was assumed “they (EMI teachers) would additionally need to find alternative ways of presenting academic material to students for whom English was also a second language. In which case similar skills required of an EFL teacher would need to be found in an EMI teacher. They would need to know how to modify their methods of input, assure comprehension via student-initiated interactional modifications and create an atmosphere where students operating in an L2 are not afraid to speak; all this whilst taking into account the many cultural differences present in the room and the potentially different language levels of individuals” (Dearden, 2014), otherwise “how students are supposed to understand lectures and classes if the EMI teacher does not help with their knowledge of English by paraphrasing, by teaching subject-specific vocabulary and technical terms” (Dearden, 2014).

Integrating EFL/Pedagogical Skills Development

The essential EFL teacher skills can be summarized as follows:

- 1) to overcome lexical difficulties of the students, to pre-teach vocabulary;
- 2) to present the material in different ways, to paraphrase;
- 3) to structure the information;
- 4) to receive feedback, to see if the students understand them;
- 5) to facilitate student's speaking using graphic organizers.

Development of these skills can be incorporated in the traditional classroom activities.

Let us consider how it can be done.

1. The EMI teacher should be able to explain the meaning of the unknown words in different ways (demonstration, explanation, synonyms and antonyms, exemplification). Development of these skills can be combined with numerous activities on vocabulary consolidation at the lessons of English. As for pre-teaching vocabulary, the teacher trainer can explain the advantages of these techniques as well as how to select the words for pre-teaching. Working in small groups, EMI teacher trainees can use short texts and make lists of words for pre-teaching.

2. Paraphrasing activities can be different: using the word with the same meaning, using the words with the opposite meaning, matching phrases with similar meaning, etc.

3. Structuring information is a skill which can be developed within EAP course when teaching how to make oral presentations. First, the teacher gives the list of the phrases which are used to make an oral presentation (e.g., *The purpose of my presentations is...*, *First, I am going to tell you about... Second, we will discuss...*). After that the trainees turn a text into an oral presentation using the phrases. This can be consolidated by a role-play when the trainees make a short presentation on any subject of his/her course for the group, and the rest of the group ask questions about the points they have not understood.

4. Receiving feedback can be accomplished using short tests after each chunk of information.

5. At the lessons with subject teachers the trainer should use different graphic organizers (tables, schemes, illustrations) to facilitate speaking. The EMI teachers can be asked to prepare similar tasks for their groupmates as homework.

Role-plays when trainees give short lessons on their course for the group consolidate both English language and EFL teacher's skills.

English Medium Instruction Pedagogy

EMI is a new phenomenon in education, thus it is obvious to expect that EMI pedagogy may have specific features. The recent publications on EMI have drawn attention to the fact that EMI classes lose interactivity. It was noticed that EMI teaching is less interactive than teaching in the native language (Pun & Macaro, 2019; Lo & Macaro, 2012).

The cited above report on the results of the investigation "English Language for Universities" conducted in Ukraine highlighted the need to change the teaching style "from a teacher-led transmission style to a more interactive one" (Bolitho & West, 2017).

The studies investigating interactive teaching of medical disciplines show that the majority of students feel the need for such classes, they result in statistically significant increase of the students' performance. The students involved in active learning were also shown to learn more versus the students participating in passive sessions. Interactive lessons encourage evaluation of the content material, application of the knowledge to other types of situations and evaluation of the studied material, which plays a role in forming problem solving, decision making and communication skills (Begum et al., 2020). The use of interactive strategies increases the volume of the acquired material, stimulates thinking, inspires and motivates students, increases attention (Gupta et al., 2015). It is stated that

interactive classes are equally effective in terms of students' scores, both at online and offline teaching (Veeraiyan et al., 2022).

On the other hand, lack of interactivity results in less opportunity for students to produce the knowledge of the subject in English, thus their role in the educational process becomes passive (Pun & Macaro, 2019).

Lack of active involvement in the classroom indicates the need for the right strategy to convey knowledge in English, as well as retain the concept as a whole to students. (Galloway et al., 2017).

In this regard, it is emphasized that special professional development programs, which will provide understanding of pedagogical strategies in EMI context and make the choice of such strategies more conscious, should be introduced for EMI teachers (Macaro et al., 2020). As it was mentioned in the recent work on EMI pedagogies “The more we can raise awareness of different styles of teaching and strategies that foster interaction, the more we are able to improve EMI delivery across a range of higher education institutions” (Sahan et al., 2021).

It follows that it is possible that improving English proficiency of subject teachers will not necessarily improve the quality of teaching, as EMI is not simply about changing the language of instruction; instead, it requires teachers to re-evaluate their existing pedagogy and change it to a learner-centered approach (Dang et al., 2021).

The findings suggests that improving EMI teachers' training should address both the language and pedagogy. Language enhancement should be integrated alongside pedagogical skills development, ensuring a holistic approach to teacher preparation.

Additionally, the language course for EMI teachers should be designed with an understanding of the specific typology of EMI at the institution, as well as the characteristics and needs of the EMI students at the particular university.

We suggest that activities to develop specific EMI skills be included in training EMI teachers; the possibility to incorporate pedagogy issues in the EFL lessons should be considered.

To conclude, this paper offers a conceptual case study of KhNMU approach to training pre-service teachers to deliver content in English. While this work does not constitute an empirical study, it offers meaningful analysis of course design and implementation within this particular institutional framework. These reflections may serve as a model for similar initiatives at other universities.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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