

Algerian Higher Education Teachers' Attitudes Toward English Medium Instruction: Recommendations for Professional Growth

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Abstract:

The recent adoption of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) in Algerian higher education marks a significant internationalization shift, yet teacher perceptions remain underexplored. This qualitative study examines ten (10) EMI lecturers in scientific faculties at universities in Constantine, Algeria. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using latent content analysis. Findings reveal a dual orientation: lecturers value EMI for global knowledge and employability but face linguistic, pedagogical, and cognitive challenges, including exam system tensions. The study identifies a policy–practice gap where institutional ambitions exceed support. It concludes by proposing a structured professional development framework integrating disciplinary language development, EMI-specific pedagogy, and institutional alignment mechanisms. The research contributes to emerging EMI scholarship in underrepresented Global South contexts.

Keywords:

English-Medium Instruction, Higher Education, Lecturer Attitudes, Professional Development, Algeria.

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1. INTRODUCTION

English-Medium Instruction (EMI)—the use of English to teach academic content in contexts where English is not the first language—has expanded rapidly across global higher education systems (Macaro et al., 2017). Institutions increasingly adopt EMI as part of internationalization strategies aimed at enhancing academic mobility, research visibility, and graduate employability.

In Algeria, the recent policy decision by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research to introduce English as a medium of instruction in scientific and technical disciplines, formalized through Circulars 1433/2022, 1998/2022, and 49/2025, represents a significant departure from the longstanding Arabic- and French-dominant system (Bouguebs, 2025). While framed as a modernization initiative aligned with global academic standards, this shift introduces complex pedagogical, linguistic, and institutional challenges, including persistent gaps in discipline-specific language training, resource scarcity, and misalignment between policy mandates and classroom realities (Bouguebs, 2025).

Existing research demonstrates that EMI implementation extends beyond language substitution; it reshapes classroom interaction, assessment practices, and lecturer identity (Helm & Guarda, 2015; O'Dowd, 2018). Although lecturers are disciplinary experts, many face difficulties adapting content delivery to a second-language medium without systematic preparation.

Despite growing international EMI research, empirical studies examining Algerian lecturers' perspectives remain scarce, though emerging longitudinal work has begun to document faculty readiness, systemic support gaps, and the mediating role of ESP practitioners (Bouguebs, 2023, 2025). This study therefore seeks to explore how EMI lecturers in Algerian scientific faculties perceive this policy transition and how these perceptions inform their professional development needs.

The guiding research question is:

- How do Algerian university lecturers perceive the implementation of EMI, and what implications do these perceptions have for their professional development?

2. Literature Review

English Medium Instruction (EMI) in Algerian higher education is undergoing a rapid, policy-driven transition from French and Arabic to English, particularly within scientific, technical (STEM), and medical disciplines. While designed to foster internationalization, improve graduate employability, and modernize the academic sector, this shift faces significant challenges related to language proficiency, teacher training, and resource availability.

EMI is the use of English to teach academic subjects in countries where it is not the first language, often serving as a key tool for university internationalization, attracting students, and improving career prospects. Unlike Content-Based Instruction (CBI) or Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), which may allow native language use, EMI focuses exclusively on English and has roots in different historical and educational contexts.

Rapid implementation causes concern for students and teachers due to language barriers, insufficient training, and difficulties in comprehension and assessment. Success in EMI requires both lecturers and students to have high-level language proficiency and adaptability, with particular challenges arising from technical terminology and complex structures.

To overcome these challenges, institutions are increasingly providing language support, such as English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses. EMI is often used in scientific and technical disciplines (STEM) and is growing in popularity in regions like Southeast Asia, Europe, and increasingly, North Africa (e.g., Algeria).

2.1 EMI as Language Policy Reform

EMI is widely associated with internationalization and the global dominance of English in academic publishing (Hamel, 2007; Macaro et al., 2017). However, scholars caution that EMI represents not merely a linguistic shift but a structural transformation affecting institutional culture and academic practice (Doiz et al., 2019).

2.2 Lecturer Agency and Professional Identity

Research emphasizes the central role of lecturers in mediating EMI policy implementation. Teaching in a second language reshapes professional

identity and introduces new cognitive and communicative demands (Helm & Guarda, 2015). Lecturers must simultaneously manage content expertise and language performance, creating what some scholars describe as “dual competence” pressure.

2.3 Professional Development in EMI Contexts

Effective EMI implementation requires structured professional support, including pedagogical training, disciplinary language development, and assessment adaptation (O’Dowd, 2018). In contexts where EMI is rapidly introduced without systemic preparation, tensions often emerge between policy objectives and classroom realities.

Consequently, the literature on EMI emphasizes the multifaceted nature of this teaching approach. The purpose of this study is to explore the perspectives of lecturers involved in EMI programs and to predict their professional development needs based on these perspectives.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The present study adopts a qualitative multiple-case study design to investigate EMI lecturers’ perspectives on English-Medium Instruction (EMI) as a means of professional development within scientific faculties. This methodological approach is appropriate for examining the complex and context-dependent nature of EMI in higher education. By focusing on multiple cases, the study seeks to capture diverse experiences and viewpoints among lecturers engaged in EMI practices. Such a design aligns with established qualitative research traditions that aim to explore real-world educational phenomena in depth.

3.2 Participants

This case study examines the implementation of EMI from the perspective of lecturers working in universities in Constantine that offer EMI programs. Purposive sampling (Patton, 2002) was employed to select participants who could provide rich and relevant insights into the phenomenon under investigation.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten voluntary EMI lecturers from different academic departments. The selection criteria required participants to be currently teaching through English and to

represent a diversity of academic disciplines, experience levels, and academic ranks.

The sample included two full professors, five associate professors, and three assistant professors. Their teaching experience ranged from one to fifteen years. Participants were drawn from various departments, including engineering, natural sciences, economics, and medical sciences, allowing for a broader understanding of EMI implementation across disciplinary contexts..

3.3 Research Questions

The interviews were guided by a set of open-ended questions designed to explore lecturers' experiences and perceptions of EMI. Examples of the guiding questions included:

- How do you perceive teaching your subject in English?
- Based on your experience, how would you describe the process of teaching through English?
- How would you evaluate your own effectiveness when teaching in English?
- Do you experience any difficulties when teaching through English?
- What major challenges do you encounter in EMI classrooms?

3.4 Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which combined the collection of basic demographic information with open-ended questions related to EMI practices and experiences. This flexible format allowed participants to elaborate on their perspectives while enabling the researcher to probe emerging themes. Such an approach facilitated a comprehensive understanding of lecturers' experiences and captured the complexities associated with the implementation of EMI in higher education contexts.

3.5 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis, with a particular emphasis on latent analysis.

Qualitative Content Analysis: This analytical approach enables the systematic examination of textual data by organizing and categorizing

responses into meaningful themes. Rather than focusing solely on word frequency, it involves interpreting patterns within the data, comparing categories, and drawing conceptual insights.

Latent Analysis: Unlike manifest analysis, which focuses on explicit content, latent analysis seeks to uncover the underlying meanings, assumptions, and interpretations embedded within participants' responses. This interpretive process allows the researcher to identify deeper themes and implicit perspectives related to EMI implementation.

Presentation of Findings

To enhance transparency and credibility, the findings are presented in tabular form accompanied by illustrative excerpts from participants' responses. The inclusion of direct quotations helps anchor the researcher's interpretations in the original data and provides evidence for the themes identified during analysis.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Several ethical measures were implemented to ensure the protection of participants and to maintain transparency throughout the research process.

- **Informed Consent:** Participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study and provided their consent to participate, including permission for the recording of online interviews.
- **Anonymity:** All identifying information was removed during transcription to ensure that individual participants could not be linked to their responses.
- **Confidentiality:** Audio and video recordings were accessible only to the researcher and were not shared publicly.
- **Voluntary Participation:** Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were free to withdraw at any stage. They were also allowed to choose their preferred interview format (online or face-to-face) and schedule.
- **Participant Comfort:** Interviews were conducted at times convenient for the participants and in environments they considered comfortable, such as their homes when interviews were conducted online, to ensure that they felt safe and at ease.

4. Findings

The analysis of interview data revealed that lecturers' attitudes toward EMI are organized around two overarching thematic orientations: perceived benefits and perceived challenges. Each category includes several subthemes reflecting lecturers' pedagogical, linguistic, and professional experiences with EMI.

Table 1.

EMI Lecturers' Attitudes toward EMI

Main Category	Subcategories
EMI Benefits	• EMI as a gateway to global academic and professional standards • Fostering multicultural learning environments • Enhancing graduate employability • Improving English language proficiency • Access to up-to-date scientific resources and innovations • Participation in international conferences and collaborations • Opportunities for academic recruitment and promotion • Perceived advantages over Arabic Medium Instruction (AMI)
EMI Challenges	• Structural differences between native language and English • Cognitive barriers (e.g., memory retention, foreign language anxiety) • Time-consuming lecture preparation • Terminology gaps in Arabic • Diverse linguistic input and comprehension

	difficulties • Restricted linguistic scope and reduced classroom interaction
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The findings are discussed below according to the main thematic categories.

4.1 EMI as Epistemic Access

Lecturers consistently described EMI as a gateway to global scientific knowledge. English was widely perceived as the dominant language of academic communication, enabling direct access to international research publications, digital resources, and contemporary scholarly debates.

“English acts as the dominant language of scientific research and academic publishing. Through EMI, students can access a much broader and more up-to-date body of knowledge.”

(Lecturer 2, Faculty of Engineering)

This perception indicates that lecturers view EMI as a mechanism for expanding students’ intellectual horizons and facilitating engagement with contemporary global scholarship.

4.2 EMI and Academic Mobility

Another theme that emerged from the interviews concerns the role of EMI in promoting academic mobility and internationalization. Participants emphasized that English proficiency enables students to pursue postgraduate studies abroad and to participate in international academic communities.

“Mastering English acts as a global passport for students. Most master’s and doctoral programs rely heavily on English for research, journals, and academic collaboration.”

(Lecturer 7, Faculty of Nursing)

This view highlights how lecturers associate EMI with increased opportunities for academic exchange, international partnerships, and participation in global knowledge networks.

4.3 EMI and Graduate Employability

Many lecturers also emphasized the relationship between EMI and improved employment prospects. English proficiency was widely perceived as a strategic asset in a globalized labor market.

“In the current job market, English is not just an advantage—it is a strategic resource that significantly increases graduates’ employment opportunities.”
(Lecturer 5, Faculty of Economics)

This observation suggests that EMI is not only valued for academic purposes but also for its potential to enhance graduates’ competitiveness in both national and international employment contexts.

4.4 EMI as a Means of Language Development

Participants also perceived EMI as an effective way of developing advanced English language proficiency. Teaching disciplinary subjects through English was seen as providing a more immersive learning environment than traditional language courses.

“Immersing students in English through their academic subjects allows them to develop language skills more effectively than studying English as a separate course.”

(Lecturer 6, Faculty of Economics)

This perspective highlights the dual role of EMI as both a content-learning approach and a language development strategy.

4.5 Linguistic and Cognitive Challenges

Despite recognizing the benefits of EMI, lecturers also reported several challenges related to teaching and learning through a foreign language. One frequently mentioned issue concerns the cognitive demands associated with delivering lectures in English.

“Teaching complex subjects in a second language creates additional cognitive pressure. You have to monitor both the accuracy of the language and the clarity of the content at the same time.”

(Lecturer 1, Faculty of Engineering)

This suggests that EMI increases the cognitive load for lecturers, requiring additional preparation and continuous linguistic monitoring during instruction.

4.6 Student Comprehension and Classroom Interaction

Lecturers also expressed concerns regarding students' limited English proficiency, which can affect classroom interaction and conceptual understanding.

“Students often struggle to follow complex explanations in English, and many hesitate to ask questions because they lack confidence in their language skills.”

(Lecturer 4, Faculty of Sciences)

These observations indicate that language barriers may reduce classroom participation and potentially limit deeper conceptual engagement with course content.

4.7 Policy–Practice Tensions

A further concern raised by participants relates to the mismatch between EMI policies and local linguistic realities. Some lecturers noted that students educated primarily through English may experience difficulties using discipline-specific terminology in Arabic.

“Many students become comfortable using English terminology but struggle to express the same scientific concepts in Arabic when they face national examinations or local professional contexts.”

(Lecturer 8, Faculty of Economics)

This observation highlights an important tension between the internationalization objectives of EMI and the linguistic requirements of local academic and professional environments.

4.8 Increased Workload for Lecturers

Finally, participants indicated that teaching through English requires significantly more preparation time compared to teaching in their native language.

“When I teach in Arabic, I can improvise easily. In English, I need much more preparation to ensure that my explanations are clear and precise.”

(Lecturer 9, Faculty of Nursing)

This finding suggests that EMI increases the workload for lecturers by requiring additional preparation, language monitoring, and pedagogical adaptation.

5. Discussion

The findings indicate that English-Medium Instruction (EMI) in Algeria operates at the intersection of aspiration and constraint. Lecturers perceive English as a form of symbolic academic capital, facilitating access to global knowledge, professional mobility, and international collaboration. At the same time, they experience significant pedagogical strain, cognitive load, and institutional inconsistencies. Recent longitudinal analysis of the Algerian context confirms these systemic deficiencies, highlighting uneven professional development pathways and the absence of standardized frameworks for material adaptation (Bouguebs, 2025).

The increased preparation time and cognitive demands align with international EMI research emphasizing the dual burden of content delivery and language management. However, the Algerian context introduces unique tensions, including multilingual educational traditions, national assessment structures, and limited locally adapted resources.

The results reveal a clear policy–practice gap. While institutional objectives stress internationalization, structured pedagogical support remains insufficient. This disjunction mirrors recent findings describing Algeria's EMI rollout as a 'policy-practice dichotomy,' where centralized mandates outpace local implementation capacities (Bouguebs, 2025). Without systematic professional development, EMI risks remaining a symbolic reform rather than a sustainable instructional transformation. Scholars warn that without structured institutional support, such reforms risk devolving into 'ceremonial policy enactment' that prioritizes compliance over substantive pedagogical change (Bouguebs, 2025; Sharma, 2022).

6. Implications for Professional Development

Based on these findings, a three-dimensional framework for EMI professional development is proposed, addressing linguistic, pedagogical, and institutional needs.

Linguistic development aims to bridge the gap between general English proficiency and the specialized language demands of various academic and professional fields. Key strategies include:

6. Implications for Professional Development

Based on the findings, a three-dimensional framework is proposed to support EMI lecturers' professional development, addressing linguistic, pedagogical, and institutional needs.

6.1 Linguistic Development

Linguistic development focuses on bridging the gap between general English proficiency and the specialized language demands of different academic and professional fields. This includes both discipline-specific workshops and the enhancement of academic discourse skills.

6.1.1 Discipline-Specific English Workshops

Discipline-specific workshops aim to align English language learning with the vocabulary, register, and conventions required in particular fields. Key strategies include:

- **Needs-Based Design:** Begin with a needs analysis to identify field-specific terminology and registers (e.g., medicine, engineering, economics).
- **Practical Integration:** Use studio-based or project-based activities to help students apply terminology in real-world contexts rather than relying on rote memorization.
- **Resource Centralization:** Establish EMI resource centers to provide localized materials, glossaries, and technical references for both lecturers and students.

6.1.2 Academic Discourse Enhancement

Enhancing academic discourse involves developing students' ability to communicate coherently and purposefully in academic contexts. This requires:

- **Discourse Analysis:** Examine how language is used in a specific academic community, connecting form (grammar) and function (meaning).
- **Competence Development:** Move beyond sentence-level proficiency to extended discourse that is coherent, meaningful, and purposeful.
- **Skills Focus:** Develop competencies in:
 - **Argumentative Writing:** Structuring evidence-based academic papers.
 - **Oral Presentations:** Discussing complex concepts fluently.

- **Critical Thinking:** Analyzing multiple perspectives and forming reasoned conclusions.

6.2 Pedagogical Development

Effective EMI instruction requires strategies for multilingual classrooms, balancing cognitive challenge with linguistic support.

6.2.1 Scaffolding Strategies

- Provide temporary, adjustable support to help students gradually achieve independence in both language and content.

6.2.2 Interactive Teaching Techniques

- Shift from monologic teaching to student-centered, multimodal instruction to enhance engagement and comprehension.

6.2.3 EMI-Sensitive Assessment Design

- Design assessments that account for both content mastery and language proficiency.
- Ensure alignment with national evaluation standards while maintaining international academic rigor.

6.3 Institutional Alignment

Sustainable EMI implementation requires institutional support to bridge policy and practice. Key elements include:

- **Integration of Bilingual Terminology Resources:** Develop corpora and translation systems to enhance consistency in discipline-specific language use.
- **Coordination Between EMI Curricula and National Assessment Systems:** Align EMI objectives with local educational requirements and labor-market standards to ensure practical applicability.

Structured institutional support is essential to transform EMI from a policy aspiration into a sustainable, practice-oriented model.

7. Future Research

Future studies should focus on:

1. Developing targeted pedagogical and language-focused professional development for EMI lecturers, especially at postgraduate levels.
2. Conducting comparative international studies to benchmark practices.
3. Incorporating student perspectives to evaluate the effectiveness of EMI.
4. Designing comprehensive frameworks to address the linguistic, cognitive, and institutional challenges identified in EMI implementation.

8. Conclusion

This study provides empirical insight into Algerian lecturers' experiences with EMI implementation. While EMI is perceived as a vehicle for global integration and professional advancement, it simultaneously generates linguistic, pedagogical, and institutional tensions.

By foregrounding lecturers' perspectives, this research contributes to expanding EMI scholarship within underrepresented Global South contexts. Sustainable EMI reform in Algeria requires coordinated professional development initiatives that address both language competence and pedagogical adaptation. Lecturers view EMI as a tool for global integration and professional growth. However, this shift generates significant linguistic, pedagogical, and institutional tensions, including a lack of confidence in English proficiency, limited specialized vocabulary, and inadequate institutional support.

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