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Exploring the Multifaceted Landscape of English-Medium Instruction: Students' Perspectives and Challenges at the University of Kutai Kartanegara

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Andika Rahman [1], M.Bahri Arifin [2], Maria Teodora Ping [3]

Mulawarman University, Indonesia

Rachmanandika848@gmail.com[1], mbahriarifin12@gmail.com[2], maria.t.ping@gmail.com[3]

Correspondence author Email: a03907729@gmail.com

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Abstract

This mixed-methods study investigated students' perceptions of using English as a Foreign Language (EFL) as a medium of instruction at the University of Kutai Kartanegara. Data were collected through a questionnaire (n=25) and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative results showed an overall positive perception, with a mean score of 71.38 on the questionnaire. However, qualitative findings revealed nuances in students' experiences. While most enjoyed learning English and appreciated lecturers' engaging teaching styles, some faced difficulties with comprehension due to lecturers' delivery or their students' proficiency levels. Students had varied engagement in extracurricular English activities. Interactions in English with lecturers facilitated language development, but peer interactions were limited. Most deemed English suitable for language classes but had concerns about its exclusive use in non-language courses given varying proficiencies. Lecturers employed motivational strategies like emphasizing English's importance and suggesting practical activities, but implementation of English-medium instruction was inconsistent. Benefits included improving skills like presentations and vocabulary, but challenges included inadequate proficiency, lack of motivation, workload concerns, and limited materials. The research contributes valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and researchers in English language education and international higher education, emphasizing the importance of creating inclusive learning environments that support both language acquisition and academic content mastery.

Keywords: Students Perceptions and English for Medium Instructions

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1. Introduction

The choice of language as the medium of instruction in the classroom plays a crucial role in facilitating effective teaching and learning. The use of English as a foreign language (EFL) as the medium of instruction has become increasingly common, particularly in contexts where English is not the primary language. Exposing students to the target language through classroom instruction can enhance their language acquisition and provide opportunities for

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active language use(Nurul et al., 2020). However, the successful implementation of EFL as a medium of instruction depends on various factors, including students' proficiency levels, motivation, and the availability of appropriate teaching materials(Tai & Zhao, 2024).

Theories on students' perceptions highlight the importance of understanding how learners interpret and respond to instructional stimuli. Perception is a complex process influenced by both internal factors, such as psychological makeup and individual experiences, and external factors, like the learning environment and cultural influences (Suyadi & Aisyah, 2021). Students' perceptions of the use of EFL as a medium of instruction can shape their attitudes, motivation, and ultimately, their learning outcomes. Principles of perception, such as relativity, selectivity, and the influence of expectations, provide insights into how students may perceive and respond to EFL instruction (Solikhah & Galuhwardani, 2023).

The use of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) has gained prominence in various educational contexts worldwide. EMI offers opportunities for increased exposure to the target language and can facilitate the development of language proficiency. However, the effectiveness of EMI depends on factors such as the clarity and intelligibility of the language used by teachers, the availability of suitable teaching materials, and the proficiency levels of both teachers and students. Theories on language instruction highlight the importance of selecting a comprehensible language, promote further learning, and are widely recognized within the educational context. The rapid expansion of using English as the medium of instruction (EMI) has been described as the most profound development in the internationalization of education (Chapple, 2015).Within China, this trend has been portrayed by Hu, (2008) as an unstoppable and powerful force that is sweeping across the nation at an intense pace.

Previous studies have explored students' perceptions of EMI and the challenges associated with its implementation. Concerning Indonesia's educational policies, the government lacks specific guidelines aimed at regulating the implementation of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) at the university level (Dewi, 2017). This implies that universities

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are adopting EMI practices independently, without centralized direction. Due to limited research on language policy in this area, the underlying rationales behind the implementation of EMI in higher education institutions within Indonesia remain unclear(Santoso & Kinasih, 2022). These studies have identified issues such as students' inadequate English proficiency levels, lack of motivation, increased workload for teachers and students, lower quality of knowledge transfer, and limited availability of teaching materials in English(Saifullah, 2024). Understanding these challenges is crucial for developing effective strategies to support the successful implementation of EMI and enhance the teaching and learning experience for both educators and learners (Jiang et al., 2019). The results of this study indicate that incorporating English as a medium of instruction (EMI) into university curricula provides multiple benefits for both students and lecturers (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020). According to the data gathered from students, the advantages of EMI include boosting confidence, enhancing English language proficiency, and improving future career prospects(Urmeneta, 2013). The increasing adoption of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in non-English speaking countries has sparked considerable debate in higher education (Macaro et al., 2018). While EMI aims to enhance students' English proficiency and prepare them for a globalized workforce, its implementation presents various challenges, particularly in contexts where English is a foreign language (EFL). This study investigates the complexities of EMI implementation in the English Education Department at the University of Kutai Kartanegara, Indonesia.

Given the growing prominence of EMI and the need to understand its impact on student learning experiences, this study addresses two critical questions:

1. How do students perceive the use of English as a foreign language (EFL) as a medium of instruction in their university courses?

2. What challenges do students encounter when their lecturers use EFL as the primary medium of instruction?

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By exploring these questions, the researcher aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on EMI effectiveness and identify potential areas for improvement in its implementation within the Indonesian higher education context.

2. Method

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches(Creswell, 2013). The quantitative data was collected through a questionnaire administered to students to gauge their perceptions on the use of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) as a medium of instruction. The questionnaire utilized a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." On the other hand, the qualitative data was obtained through in-depth personal interviews with students. These interviews were conducted after the students completed the questionnaire, allowing them to elaborate on their responses and provide insights into their reasoning and experiences.

The data analysis process involved both quantitative and qualitative techniques (Huberman, 2013). For the quantitative data, the researchers calculated measures of central tendency, such as mean, median, and mode, as well as deviation scores and standard deviations. This analysis provided numerical insights into the students' perceptions. The qualitative data from the interviews underwent a process of data reduction, coding, and display. The researchers identified recurring themes and patterns in the students' responses, which were then organized and presented systematically. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the student's perceptions and the challenges they faced regarding the use of EFL as a medium of instruction(Albert et al., 2010).

3. Findings and Discussion

The findings revealed inconsistencies in the implementation of English as a medium of instruction within the department. While some lecturers frequently used English during classroom interactions and outside the classroom setting, others did not employ English as a medium of instruction. This inconsistency in the adoption of English as the primary language of instruction could potentially impact students' language learning experiences and the

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development of their English proficiency(Yu & Kaur, 2024). The study revealed inconsistent implementation of EMI within the department. Student responses indicated a range of experiences:

1. Frequent use of English:

Some lecturers consistently used English both in and outside the classroom. As one student (PR1/EMI) stated, "Yes, from my experience, both in class and outside the class, several lecturers, such as Ms. Elsa, often speak English with them."

2. No use of English:

Other students reported that their lecturers never used English as a medium of instruction. Two participants (PR2, PR4/EMI, and PR3/EMI) responded with "Never" when asked about their lecturers' use of English.

3. Consistent use of English:

One student (PR5/EMI) affirmed that their lecturers "Always" used English during instructional sessions.

The inconsistent adoption of English as the primary language of instruction across lecturers echoes findings from Yu and Kaur (2024), who identified similar variability in EMI implementation across Asian universities. This inconsistency can significantly impact students' language learning experiences and English proficiency development. As Macaro (2020) argues, such variability in EMI delivery can lead to uneven learning outcomes and potentially exacerbate existing language proficiency gaps among students.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of lecturers' knowledge transfer in English varied, with some excelling at clear delivery while others struggled to communicate concepts effectively. Consequently, many students favored a combination of English and Indonesian (roughly 50/50) as the medium of instruction, while some preferred full English instruction, depending on the students' proficiency levels. This preference for a balanced approach or full English instruction aligns with the finding that students generally supported the use of English in language classes but had concerns about its exclusive use in non-language courses due to varying proficiency

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levels among Indonesian students. In addition, the preference among many students for a balanced approach (50% English, 50% Indonesian) in instruction reflects the complex linguistic landscape of EMI implementation. This finding resonates with Jiang et al. (2019) observation that a scaffolded approach to EMI can better support students' learning needs. The challenges faced by students with limited English proficiency, particularly in non-language courses, align with concerns raised by Hu (2008) regarding linguistic inequality in EMI settings.

The study revealed varying perceptions and experiences among students regarding the use of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) as a medium of instruction. While some students found it relatively easy to comprehend English instruction due to their early exposure to the language, others acknowledged the challenges faced by their peers who were new to learning English. The effectiveness of English instruction was closely tied to the lecturers' ability to communicate concepts clearly and understandably deliver lessons. Students who found their lecturers' delivery unclear or convoluted reported facing difficulties in comprehending the lessons conducted in English. However, this result was supported by these responses: "Yes, for me it's easy (PR1/CE), "For me, it's easier to understand than other languages I study (PR2/CE)

Additionally, the classroom atmosphere when English was used as the medium of instruction varied. Some students described an interactive and engaging environment where they actively participated by asking questions and seeking clarification. However, others reported moments of silence or confusion when comprehension was lacking. These findings highlight the importance of lecturers' proficiency in English and their ability to create an inclusive learning environment that fosters active participation and comprehension among students with varying language proficiency levels(Yu & Kaur, 2024).

The study also explored the motivational strategies employed by lecturers to encourage students' use of English in the classroom. Lecturers emphasized the global importance of English, suggested practical activities such as watching English movies or videos, and highlighted career prospects like translation or tourism. Additionally, some lecturers made it

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mandatory for students to speak English during certain courses, such as Speaking classes, while others encouraged its use without making it compulsory. Regarding the accessibility of learning materials, students generally found the resources provided by lecturers, including links to websites, YouTube videos, and e-books, to be easily accessible (Fitria, 2022).

The study identified several problems and challenges faced by students when English was used as the sole medium of instruction:

a. Students with limited English proficiency found it difficult to understand when lecturers taught exclusively in English, citing issues with unclear delivery or convoluted explanations.

b. The classroom atmosphere varied when English was used as the medium of instruction. Some students found it interactive and engaging, while others reported moments of silence or confusion due to comprehension difficulties.

c. The implementation of English as a medium of instruction was inconsistent among lecturers. While some lecturers embraced the use of English, others relied more heavily on the students' native language or a combination of languages.

d. The effectiveness of knowledge transfer in English varied among lecturers, with some excelling at clear delivery while others struggled to communicate concepts effectively.

e. Students expressed concerns about using English as the medium of instruction for non-language courses due to the varying English proficiency levels among Indonesian students.

The identified challenges, including difficulties in understanding English-only instruction and concerns about using English in non-language courses, reflect broader issues in EMI implementation noted by (Macaro, 2020). These challenges underscore the need for a more nuanced and context-sensitive approach to EMI, as advocated by Galtress et al. (2012) in his work on English as a lingua franca in Asian contexts.

The findings underscore the crucial role of lecturers in motivating students to use English in the classroom and providing accessible learning resources. By highlighting the practical applications and career opportunities associated with English proficiency, as well as

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incorporating engaging activities and accessible materials, lecturers can effectively motivate and support students in their language learning journey(Macaro, 2020).

The study showed the critical role of lecturers' English proficiency and pedagogical skills in effective EMI implementation. This aligns with Kartini et al. (2020)research, which emphasizes the importance of lecturer training in EMI contexts. The varying effectiveness of knowledge transfer in English observed in this study underscores the need for targeted professional development programs for EMI lecturers, as recommended by (Birgün, 2023)

4. Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the implementation of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in the English Education Department at the University of Kutai Kartanegara, Indonesia. The findings reveal a complex landscape of challenges and opportunities associated with EMI adoption in this context. The other inconsistent implementation among lecturers, mixed student perceptions influenced by individual English proficiency levels, and the critical importance of lecturer competence in effective EMI delivery. Many students favor a balanced approach combining English and Indonesian instruction, suggesting that a scaffolded approach to EMI might better support diverse learning needs. Lecturers employ various motivational strategies to encourage English use, and the accessibility of learning materials plays a crucial role in supporting EMI implementation. However, concerns persist about using English as the medium of instruction in non-language courses, pointing to the need for a more nuanced approach across different subject areas. The study underlines the importance of ongoing professional development for lecturers in EMI contexts and the potential benefits of a scaffolded approach to language instruction. Future research could explore effective strategies for addressing the identified challenges and optimizing the benefits of EMI in Indonesian higher education contexts. Therefore, this study contributes significantly to the ongoing discourse on EMI effectiveness and provides valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and researchers in the fields of English language education and international higher education. By addressing the complexities and challenges

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associated with EMI implementation, institutions can work towards creating more inclusive and effective learning environments that support both language acquisition and academic content mastery.

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