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Noteworthy Facets of Resorting to Code switching in Various EMI Settings within the Scope of Higher Education

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Dr. Roman Michaelan

SCE- Shamoon College of Engineering, 56 Bialik Street, Beer-Sheva, Israel

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of a rapidly growing trend towards embracing English as a medium of instruction in the arena of higher education, diverse viewpoints have been expressed concerning the necessity of resorting to the stakeholders' mother tongue in various English medium of instruction (EMI) settings. Being considered as a highly beneficial tool in reducing linguistic burden of both educators and students in EMI-based courses, it may also have potential negative consequences on the educational process and compromise the adherence to the English language learning environment. This paper is aimed at shedding more light upon the role of a native language in conveying content material via the EMI approach through the prism of literature review on a range of aspects related to the use code switching (CS). The paper concludes with some suggestions pertaining to further research into potential differences and similarities of the switch to a native language of instruction in certain domains within the sphere of higher education in different parts of the world.

Keywords: English medium of instruction, code switching.

1. Introduction

There has been an ever-expanding global shift towards adopting English as a medium of instruction within an array of different academic settings of non-Anglophone countries over the last decade. In their bid to align with the accelerating trend and keep abreast with the demands of the rapidly evolving field, a constantly increasing number of higher education institutions (HEI) have plunged actively into the process. Pursuant to one of the main findings

of the British Council interim report (Dearden 2014), English medium of instruction (EMI) is considered as 'a growing global phenomenon in both public and private education in all stages of education' (Dearden 2014, p. 3). The promulgation of the language as a medium of instruction is intertwined with its overwhelming predominance in a wide range of domains associated with modern society, among which are international trade, technology, science and scientific research. The extraordinary change in the role of the language in various fields of the society goes hand in hand with the globalization process that created a breeding ground for establishing its present status as a global lingua franca (Qin &Neimann 2017). Coming from this angle, it is possible to draw a certain parallel between the current position of the

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English language with that of Latin in the 13th century in the arena of higher education of Europe although there is a low likelihood English will reach a similar degree of domination in teaching and scholarship (Altbach 2013).

The ongoing and increasing interest in implementing EMI within various academic patterns has not been prompted by the gregarious instinct as it brings a host of benefits that are deemed to be highly valuable to decision-making bodies and policy makers of HEI. Amongst the benefits are urgent necessities of institutions of higher education in sharpening their international profile with the view of improving their ratings (Linn 2016; Doiz, Lasagabaster& Sierra 2011). Another not less important incentive of the adherence to the medium of instruction is inextricably linked to the financial component carrying much weight in the process. The financial nature of the component is manifested through institutions' dire interest to attract high fee-paying international students (Doiz, Lasagabaster& Sierra 2011).

2. Stumbling Blocks along the Way: Stakeholders' Language Inadequacies

It seems plausible to assume that in their bit to avoid lagging behind this worldwide trend providing the above mentioned and other valuable benefits, the stakeholders and decision-making bodies have attributed a minor significance, intentionally or unintentionally, to a number of hurdles and challenges that need to be taken into account in order to achieve the highest possible degree of realisation of EMI potential. Given the scope of the paper, particular emphasis is laid upon problems and challenges associated with limited English language proficiency on the part of both lecturers and students. Amidst the worrisome issues related to the linguistic difficulties is the superficiality of learning through the EMI approach. The issue emerged in the study conducted in one of Turkish universities (Kırkgöz 2005). Some of the students who participated in the study expressed, inter alia, negative views concerning English-medium education accentuating that the learning based upon the education is 'superficial rather than deep' (p.115). The superficial nature of the learning was also mentioned through the difficulty of mastering the subject.

The issue of superficiality may also be viewed through the prism of a time-consuming factor, which appears to be intertwined with it, along with the influence exerted by the stakeholders' first language (L1) upon the learning within the confines of EMI. In this regard, it is worth noting a case study conducted in one of Chinese HEI (Hu, Li & Lei 2014),in the course of which the participants held positive attitudes towards resorting to their mother tongue with a view to gain an in-depth understanding of the delivered content. Likewise, the aspect of the in-depth understanding was touched upon in the context of the time-consuming factor when one of the students who participated in the study pointed out that 'given the same amount of time, the professor can go deeper into the content if he or she teaches in Chinese' (Hu, Li & Lei 2014, p.34).

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The factor of time can also be approached from a different angle related to the amount of hours spent on preparation English-taught courses. In this respect, it is worthy of note a study carried out among 73 teachers of one of Croatian Universities (Margić&Vodopija-Krstanović 2015). Among other things, the participants raised concerns regarding the excessive amount of time that needs to be spent on preparing foreign language-based lectures. As for the proper delivery of educational material of the lectures through the medium of English, it was pointed out that there is a probability of covering less educational material due to the stakeholders' insufficient command of English. Another potential adverse consequence of their unsatisfactory English proficiency is that it can result in 'the impairment of the acquisition and transfer of academic knowledge' (Margić&Vodopija-Krstanović 2015, p. 53). With regard to the students, it was indicated that the inadequate English competence on their part and incurred on account of the competence comprehension problems can leave its negative imprint on the learners' academic performance. The latter would manifest itself in lower test results.

The above-noted aspects of time and EMI students' academic attainments also emerged in a study conducted among engineering students and their educators of an Omani College of Technology (Ali 2021). As for the students, inter alia, the participants attributed negative attitudes towards the EMI approach for a number of reasons. Amongst them were the necessity to devote an exaggerated amount of time to English instead of investing it in content courses and core subjects. Being limited in their English proficiency, the students had difficulties in understanding exams owing to incomprehensible instructions and technical words. Understanding and comprehension of engineering lectures also posed a challenge to the learners due to their low mastery of the medium of instruction. In an endeavour to address the difficulties and challenges, the participants had to gear their efforts to alleviate the linguistic difficulties. Assigning a low weight to potential adverse consequences of the language barrier would be a largely myopic stance as it can exert a pernicious influence on students' academic performance (Ali 2021).

EMI students' poor command of the language of instruction and, as a result, its negative influence on their academic outcomes was touched upon in a paper of Chou (2016) describing a pilot study which was oriented towards examining 'whether there was an effect of reciprocal teaching on students' academic performance' (p. 37). The researcher provided some insights into her students' perceptions concerning the Educational Psychology EMI course. The students developed critical attitudes towards the course owing to difficulties with understanding its content or the content of the course's textbook. As a result, the hardships with understanding lead to poor academic outcomes in examinations or quizzes. However reasonable this claim may seem, it is worth mentioning that similar difficulties are experienced by the students with a robustly proficient knowledge of English. Referring to the reason behind the similarity, the author points to a difference in genre between academic

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English and daily-used one. According to the author, a good performance in a regular English course does not necessarily guarantee academic attainments in an English-only academic course. Many learners may 'still suffer greatly' (p. 37) in the latter type of courses.

Without belittling the significance of genre differences, due attention should be accorded to various aspects associated with EMI students' comprehension problems mentioned in studies carried out in a number of Norwegian and German HEI (Hellekjaer 2010). The results obtained from the study indicate, among other things, those factors as unfamiliar expressions and words, unclear pronunciation, subsequent difficulties to follow educators' line of thought and taking notes need to be taken into account in delivering educational materials through the medium of English. Interestingly enough, the factors are regarded as a source of hindrance 'to a … lesser extent' (p.18) to the learners of L1-based lectures as well.

In this respect, numerous strengths are ascribed to instruction through the stakeholder's first language in the sphere of higher education. Some of the strengths are highlighted in the study conducted at a South Korean university (MacDonald 2009) and revolve around a better quality and quantity of Korean-based courses as opposed to ones delivered via English. With reference to the aspect of quantity, namely a lack of educational materials or textbooks in English, it is deemed to be a challenge requiring due consideration according to an ethnographic study carried out at a Ukrainian university (Goodman 2014). In their bid to overcome the dearth of educational resources, teachers recourse to varied strategies, such for instance, as distribution of lecture notes in the form of multi-page booklets and distributing among the learners translated from Russian into English textbooks.

As to the quality of EMI courses, in the light of the emerging and mushrooming demand for learning and teaching diverse academic content through the EMI approach, a new strategic weight is assigned to the stakeholders' L1, the role of which is far from being fully understood. The prevailing use of the English language in the confines of different educational settings of non-Anglophone countries brings to the fore its relationship with the first language of those involved in the process. Coexistence and interaction of L1 and the second language (L2), i.e. in our case English, in the brain of a learner is deemed as the most significant factor affecting students' academic attainments and the development of their language fluency (Pirogova 2019).

There appears to be a general consensus among today's scientists that the nature of the relationship between the languages is mutually complementary rather than mutually exclusive (Cook 2001). Amid the vivid manifestations of the valuable relationship is the one that emerged in the study conducted among the students of two second-tier Japanese universities (Chapple 2015). Drawing upon the learners' feedback pertaining to taught via English classes, it can be surmised that resorting to L1 by means of 'providing translated documents, simpler

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explanations or links to readings in Japanese' (p. 5) by their educator can yield positive results in terms of the learning process. Additionally, in their aspiration not to lag behind the class, the learners applied, inter alia, to peer support: foreign students and their Japanese classmates.

The rationale behind having recourse to the form of support is another example of the meaningful function of the students' first language in overcoming impediments associated with adherence to the EMI environment within academic patterns. In this regard, it is worth mentioning a study carried out at a Rwandan university among the students of the faculty of Economics and Management (Kagwesage 2013). In an endeavour to cater their educational needs, namely to develop a deeper understanding of the studied material, the students used 'mentoring and peer support systems' (p. 7) based on delivering the content of the course through Kinyarwanda, which is considered to be the language commonly shared by the majority of people living in Rwanda. Among other things, to facilitate comprehension of the content, the support systems lay special stress upon assistance of more knowledgeable peers to convey educational material in the medium of Kinyarwanda to other students without the presence of a lecturer.

Viewed from this angle, a dire need of EMI students to acquire a proper understanding of Educational material by means of employing their L1 along with aspiration on the part of academic staff members to achieve effective delivery of the material by making use of L1 as a vehicle for establishing a firm grasp of the content underlies the principle of code switching (CS). According to one of the definitions of the term, CS is 'the introduction of items (words, phrases, or sentences) from another language into the base language, which occurs within sentences or between sentences within the course of a single conversation' (Ibrahim 2001, p.134). To shed further light upon the term, it is of significance to provide meaningful insights into a certain range of reasons adduced for resorting to the tool by the stakeholders. In that respect, it is worth paying due attention to Baker's (2011) view of CS. The author considered it through the prism of sociolinguistics emphasizing the varied nature of its purposes and the one of the tool itself. As for the latter, its variedness is contingent upon the topic of the conversation, people involved in it 'and in what kind of context the conversation occurs' (p. 107).

Bearing this in mind, special stress needs to be placed on the author's list of thirteen purposes related with CS. Amidst the purposes are those associated with accentuating a specific point in a conversation, substituting a word in a different language in case a person is unfamiliar with a phrase or a word in a language, switching to one language with the aim of expressing a concept with 'no equivalent in the culture of other language' (p. 108), reinforcing a request, and clarifying a point by repeating a passage or a phrase in another language. Baker's (2011) list of thirteen purposes for adopting CS approach into various existing environments carries much weight in identifying a whole gamut of benefits stemming from the adoption.

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To capture the breadth and depth of a variety of benefits pertaining to the use of CS, it is of importance to view its occurrences from diverse perspectives and take into account the heterogeneity of the existing educational landscapes. In that sense, it is valuable to turn our attention to the study that investigated the standpoints of the stakeholders, i.e., students and teachers of a large Indonesian college, about the use of the medium of English (Floris 2014). Against the background of the general consensus on the part of the students concerning the important role of English, the learners expressed their preference for using L1 in the classrooms. In a similar vein, the preference for the learners' mother tongue over EMI was mentioned by the teachers who switched to Indonesian with a view to explain central concepts due to the learners' poor command of English.

This preference for accommodating L1 and mixing it with EMI also emerged among students who participated in the study carried out at four Malaysian universities (Saeed et al. 2018). Being aimed at exploring the participants' attitudes towards the EMI approach in the HEI, the study presented another variable related to noted earlier connection between English language skills and the learners' need for inserting their L1 within EMI settings: mixture of L1 and the medium of English. The learners with inadequate English competence favoured the mixture in order to alleviate understanding of the courses' contents. Another noteworthy reason of the preference for the mixture approach revolves around the degree of exposure to English by the students outside classroom. Interestingly enough, those of them who were less exposed to the language were more positively oriented towards embracing both languages in delivering educational contents, while learners with a higher degree of exposure to English held an ambivalent attitude regarding the approach based on adopting the mixture within the EMI settings. Along with this, without detracting from the importance of resorting to the stakeholders' L1 to address various challenges arising from the implementation of EMI within varied educational landscapes, what lies beneath the reality, however, is that sometimes EMI classes consist of students sharing different mother tongues. This valuable aspect can never be overemphasized and should be taken into high consideration particularly by EMI teachers to effectively exploit the potential of L1 owing to a dilemma they may face. The study at the HEI in Malaysia is one of the examples of such a dilemma when the teacher's decision to use EMI, Bahasa Malaysia (BM) or Chinese to convey contents would put a certain number of students at a disadvantage or even confuse them (Saeed et al. 2018).

Along similar lines, the above-noted connection between the stakeholders' English proficiency level and the amount of CS occurrences in class can be traced in the study conducted in another higher education institution of Malaysia (Ariffin & Husin 2011). Against the backdrop of the adherence to English as the instructional language in the institution's classrooms, the study's findings clearly pointed to the extensive use of CS and code-mixing (CM) of BM and English by the lecturers during the lectures. Drawing on the results obtained, the degree of frequency of the phenomenon varies, inter alia, depending on

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the level of the stakeholders' competence in English. Based on the analysis, for instance, a greater extent of occurrence related to the phenomenon was revealed in certain lectures, namely Biology and Discrete Mathematics, owing to the fact that the instructors of the courses 'were less proficient in English compared to the other four' (Ariffin&Husin 2011, p. 235). To this should be added that there is yet another valuable finding concerning instructors' proficiency level in English that needs to be taken into account. According to the finding, lectures' English proficiency level is not the only factor exerting influence on their decision to use only the medium of English in the classroom or mix the language with BM in their teaching. The revealed data indicated that even the lecturers with an adequate command of English had to code switch to BM with the view of enhancing understanding of the students with unsatisfactory English proficiency. Not unexpectedly, the group of the learners held positive attitudes regarding the use of CS/CM on the part of the lecturers. As for the more proficient group of the learners, they were less tolerant to the CS/CM behaviour of the instructors feeling that 'the use of BM should be minimized as students should be more exposed to the English Language' (Ariffin & Husin 2011, p. 238).

Apart from the aforenoted reasons lying behind educators' CS behaviour in the existing learning environment, there are yet a host of other noteworthy instances of resorting to the technique requiring due attention. The instances emerged in the study conducted at a Spanish university and fell within the scope of pedagogy as an additional incentive for the CS approach (Sánchez-García 2018). The examination of eight EMI lectures delivered by two different educators revealed more than 200 occurrences of CS within the academic setting. The insight into the intricacies of the cases of switching to L2, i.e., Spanish, brought to the fore four main pedagogical purposes that are deemed as the main rationale behind the switch. The purposes are associated with constructing 'disciplinary knowledge; ... [managing] the classroom; ... [realizing] personal or affective meanings; and finally, [establishing] personal relationships between classroom participants'(Sánchez-García 2018, p. 114). Interestingly, the teachers' inclination to switch to L1 to construct knowledge appeared to be the most common purpose revolving around the need to employ the CS approach.

The aforementioned categories of personal or affective meanings and the ones of knowledge construction, classroom management and interpersonal relations were also touched upon in an ethnographic case study at an Indonesian State Polytechnic (Cahyani, de Courcy & Barnett2018). The study aimed at exploring why and how the country's educators employed the CS technique in bilingual classrooms. According to the analysis of the data, the switch between languages fell into the four categories. Among other things, the study stressed the significance of CS, its strategic use, when it takes a form of translanguaging. The researchers point out that by integrating languages 'within a single clause, sentence or set of sentences, teachers invite a fully multilingual construction of meaning' (Cahyani, de Courcy & Barnett2018, p. 11). Additionally, drawing upon the investigators' argument, an intentional

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use of the technique, namely for purposes of pedagogical and sociocultural nature, can lead to maximization of multilingual learning.

The adherence to CS as a strategy of pedagogical nature is mentioned, inter alia, in the study carried out among 22 university instructors in Taiwan (Yeh 2013). Based on the interview data, the strategy was oriented to alleviate students' learning and managing 'student-teacher relationship' (p. 209). The alleviation of learning manifested itself through a number of strategies developed by the instructors, such, for example, as simplification of course content and language. But the switch to Chinese-the stakeholders' shared L1-was the most popular reported strategy pursued by the instructors. The pursuit for the strategy was geared to tell jokes, ask questions, translate and summarize. With this purpose in mind, a few teachers also expressed concern over instructors' preparedness (e.g., confidence and ability) for teaching via the medium of English. In addition, it was pointed out that the difficulty to deliver course content through the language of instruction was particularly evident among the instructors whose education had been obtained in Taiwan and whose language has always been Chinese. Quite surprisingly, similar difficulty with delivering course contents via English was experienced by teachers having 'a doctoral degree from an English-speaking institution' (p. 223).

Without detracting from the importance of adopting the CS approach within diverse educational settings and benefits of using it, due attention should be attributed to ascertaining the extent to which the English language learning environment is still deemed as such and not undermined by the adherence, either constant or temporal, to the stakeholders' mother tongue. Coming from this angle, one of the durable solutions to a possible gradual abandonment of the non-native medium of instruction is to adopt learning by means of a mixed mode (Hengsadeekul et al. 2010). The mode is embraced in a number of educational programs in HEI of Thailand and based upon the reliance on English 'as the medium of textbooks, and written assignments' (Hengsadeekul et al. 2010, p. 91). As for the stakeholders' L1, Thai is used as the instructional language in content delivery. A potential downside of employing the mode is that it may present an obstacle to developing or maintaining students' English listening and speaking skills owing to the lack of exposure to the skills of the language.

2. **Implications and Recommendations**

In the light of the foregoing, it is of importance to note that despite the seemingly reasonable nature of adopting the CS approach within existing EMI environments, it might be misleading to assume that the tool needs permanently to be an integral part of varied EMI settings. It should be born in mind, however, that without belittling appreciable results the switch to the stakeholders' L1 may yield, teachers' willingness and necessity to revert to their learners' native language is an indicative of various shortcomings in the process of EMI implementation across different educational landscapes, as well as mistakes made by a range of decision-making bodies and policy makers, to successfully embrace EMI within their

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academic patterns. It seems plausible to assume that in their aspiration not to lag behind the rapidly growing global trend towards a full-scale implementation of EMI in the sphere of higher education, the bodies and the policy makers accorded little or no significance to a variety of difficulties, pitfalls and missteps the shift to the EMI approach is fraught with.

Keeping these challenges and the rationale behind employing the powerful linguistic tool in view, it is important to emphasize that the earlier mentioned studies provide only a brief glimpse into the domain of EMI and the integration of L1 within its parameters. With that being said, presented in the paper literature review provides fertile ground for a list of recommendations pertaining to potential benefits and adverse consequences of resorting to CS in the arena of higher education of non-Anglophone countries.

3. 1. CS as a Temporal, Last Resort Solution to a Problem of the Students' Limited English Language Proficiency

Use of English as the instructional language goes hand in hand with an adequate proficiency level in the language by both students and teachers alike. Yet, the current situation with the learners' English proficiency within a wide array of EMI academic settings is far from being entirely satisfactory. Approached from this angle, it is recommended that EMI lecturers switch to their students' mother tongue during the lessons with a view to alleviate their linguistic difficulties. However reasonable this solution might seem under the circumstance, it is of importance to emphasize that the CS technique should be applied only if there is insuperable difficulty on the part of the learners to gain a thorough understanding of academic contents. Members of academic staff should devote considerable efforts to adhere to the English language learning environment throughout EMI lectures not to compromise the entire process of conveying content material through the medium of English.

In addition, it is highly advisable to adhere to English-based terminology associated with students' field of study during EMI lectures and expound the meaning of terms using the combination of simple words, spoken expressions, short sentences, suitable examples and a variety of visual tools. L1 equivalents of the terms should be introduced only if there is no other way to explain their exact meaning.

EMI educators need to make particular efforts toward completely avoiding using the CS approach over the course of the second and subsequent years of academic studies of their students.

3. 2. CS as a Temporal, Last Resort Solution to a Problem of the Lecturers' Limited English Language Proficiency

In a similar vein, a high value should also be assigned to EMI lecturers' English language inadequacies deemed as yet another significant factor behind opting for the CS approach on their part. From this perspective, it is advised that members of academic staff with an insufficient command of English make use of L1 to efficiently deliver a broad range of

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educational materials to their students. That being said, it is of vital importance that lecturers reach a certain level of fluency in English prior to being hired to teach varied academic contents via the instructional language with a view to avoid, or at least minimize the switch to their L1. In that sense, it is highly recommended that decision-making bodies and policy makers of HEI develop effective gate-keeping mechanisms pertaining to a required minimum level of English competence for EMI instructors according to their area of specialization. In particular, the main goal of establishing the mechanisms would be to identify linguistic weaknesses of the instructors with regard to all four language skills, i.e., speaking, reading, writing and listening. The identification of the weaknesses needs to be considered through the prism of the instructors' domain of expertise. Special stress should be laid upon evaluating the depth of their knowledge of English-based terminology related to academic content that is supposed to be delivered in EMI. The differentiated approach will be profound in its impact upon the quality of subject content delivery as the content will be conveyed by academic staff possessing an acceptable level of English language proficiency suitable for their expertise field. The structure of the mechanisms may resemble in some respects an assessment procedure elaborated by the Centre for Internationalization and Parallel Language Use, at the University of Copenhagen(Kling &Stæhr 2011).

Another highly significant goal of the gate-keeping mechanisms is to identify and hire educators possessing an ability of creativity when it comes to explaining complex lecture material to EMI students with diverse language repertoire. Along similar lines, it is recommended that EMI educators are fluent in one or more additional foreign languages owing to the frequent heterogeneity of domestic and international students in terms of their mother tongues.

3. 3. Educational Resources as a Tool to Minimize the Switch to the Stakeholders' L1

It would be a largely myopic stance not to exploit educational resources as a supportive tool oriented towards minimizing the use of the CS technique in a broad spectrum of EMI environments. In that respect, it is highly advisable that the resources, such, for example, as workbooks and presentation slides, include mainly translations of complex technical terminology into learners' mother tongue primarily over the course of the first year of students' academic studies.

3. 4. CS Behaviour in out-of-class Communications

It is worth pointing out that the avoidance from resorting to the CS approach should be extended to communications between teachers and students outside of class meeting times, namely email messages, office hours meetings, prior to and after each lecture as well in order to strengthen the stakeholders' linguistic competence. In addition, it is recommended that the adherence to the English language environment outside the confines of classroom manifests itself in encouraging learners to communicate in the medium of English during breaks to keep the single-language environment over the course of the learning day.

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4. Suggestions for Further Research

Deeply rooted as they are, the foregoing studies provide a brief overview of the role of the stakeholders' L1 in different non-English contexts. Due to a high importance of the language's role in the learning process and a host of issues that are deeply intertwined with it in a diversity of EMI settings, it would be highly expedient to conduct further, in-depth studies into ascertaining the impact of stakeholders' mother tongue upon various fields of study within the parameters of EMI.

4. 1. To explore the degree of resorting to L1 by EMI lecturers in teaching exact sciences and the humanities in the arena of higher education of Asia and Europe with a view to compare and ascertain the extent of the switch to the students' native language.

4. 2. To identify major reasons lying behind the differences or similarities between employing the CS technique by members of academic staff in the domains of exact sciences and the humanities in Asian and European institutions of higher education.

4. 3. To examine students' attitudes towards the CS technique in the above-mentioned domains in HEI of Asia and Europe.

5. Conclusion

In their bid to align with an accelerating global shift towards embracing the EMI approach in the sphere of higher education of non-English speaking countries, more and more HEI plunge actively into the process posing greater linguistic demands and challenges on both learners and teachers. It is worth highlighting, however, that a number of the challenges seem to have been ignored by decision-making bodies and policy makers in their pursuit for a full-scale implementation of EMI across HEI. One of the vivid manifestations of according little or even no value to the fact that the transition towards delivering academic contents through the medium of English is fraught with varied difficulties and hurdles is a compelled switch to learners' L1 on the part of their lecturers to cater the educational needs. The necessity to resort to the stakeholders' native language in EMI-based academic courses stands as a cautionary reminder that a robustly proficient knowledge of English by both teachers and students plays a pivotal role in a successful delivery of diverse educational contents. Being a highly efficient tool in easing the stakeholders' language burden, the tool should be applied to a limited extent not to compromise EMI-oriented learning process and achieve the most effective implementation of English as a medium of instruction in the scope of higher education of non-Anglophone countries.

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