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ABSTRACT

English as a medium of instruction (EMI) represents an internationalization strategy that has been expanding throughout higher educational systems worldwide. While this approach is believed to bolster graduate employment, students with lower levels of English often struggle to learn content in English. This challenge is particularly relevant in the context of Saudi higher education, as the nation ranks low in English proficiency. To investigate this issue and provide recommendations for improving EMI programs, a mixed-methods study was conducted within Saudi vocational colleges. Questionnaires with Likert-scale and open-ended items were distributed to 50 teachers and 50 graduates. The findings confirm that students face language-related difficulties as they transitioned to EMI, and there are shortcomings in institutional language support mechanisms. The results also reveal that both teachers and graduates promote a clear focus on English language development in content courses, and they underscore the influence of classroom methodologies in improving proficiency. While these findings relate to the Saudi context, this study highlights the importance of integrating language-focused teaching practices in EMI classrooms in various contexts. In turn, the findings suggest that language support must be available for students who are not native English speakers at each stage of their academic journey.

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ABSTRACT

English as a medium of instruction (EMI) represents an internationalization strategy that has been expanding throughout higher educational systems worldwide. While this approach is believed to bolster graduate employment, students with lower levels of English often struggle to learn content in English. This challenge is particularly relevant in the context of Saudi higher education, as the nation ranks low in English proficiency. To investigate this issue and provide recommendations for improving EMI programs, a mixed-methods study was conducted within Saudi vocational colleges. Questionnaires with Likert-scale and open-ended items were distributed to 50 teachers and 50 graduates. The findings confirm that students face language-related difficulties as they transitioned to EMI, and there are shortcomings in institutional language support mechanisms. The results also reveal that both teachers and graduates promote a clear focus on English language development in content courses, and they underscore the influence of classroom methodologies in improving proficiency. While these findings relate to the Saudi context, this study highlights the importance of integrating language-focused teaching practices in EMI classrooms in various contexts. In turn, the findings suggest that language support must be available for students who are not native English speakers at each stage of their academic journey.

INTRODUCTION

English as a medium of instruction (EMI) involves “[t]he use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not

English" (Dearden, 2014, p. 4). This approach represents an internationalization strategy that is expanding in higher education systems worldwide (Brown & Bradford, 2017; Dearden, 2014; Galloway et al., 2020; Kirkpatrick, 2011; Lasagabaster, 2022; Morton, 2016). Following global trends, EMI has been implemented in Saudi Arabia. This approach is associated with advantages such as greater access to knowledge, improved English proficiency, and expanded job opportunities (Deveci et al., 2023; Elyas & Al-Hoorie, 2024).

While EMI is associated with many potential benefits, institutions have to consider the needs of stakeholders such as students and teachers to implement the approach effectively. Institutions may offer support mechanisms to ensure students are prepared for English-medium programs (Curle et al., 2020). In the Saudi context, preparatory year programs, which typically involve a semester or year of intensive English language courses, represent a common support model (Deveci et al., 2023; Macaro et al., 2018). At the same time, Saudi Arabia ranks among the lowest nations in the world in terms of English language proficiency (English First, 2022), and students' limited language skills pose pedagogical problems after initial preparatory programs (Alanazi, 2021; AlHarbi, 2022). Considering these factors, one would expect teachers and students in EMI programs to advocate for greater language support to overcome these challenges.

To better understand how EMI implementation can be improved in this context, this study aims to explore vocational teachers' and graduates' experiences regarding the challenges faced in EMI programs and their views on solutions to improve these programs. In turn, the impact of current practices can be gauged, and recommendations can be made to strengthen students' language development. On a wider scale, this research contributes to the literature on EMI and language support in vocational education. As EMI continues to grow, the results highlight institutional mechanisms and classroom-based practices that can minimize English language learners' difficulties in English-medium content courses.

Implementing EMI

When implementing EMI, higher educational institutions must consider key areas related to the approach, language policies, and support mechanisms applied. Considering the overall approach, EMI is understood to be a strategy to teach content without an explicit focus on

language development. In contrast, content and language integrated learning is an umbrella term for a variety of pedagogical approaches in which a dual focus is used to develop both content knowledge and language proficiency while giving equal attention to both (Coyle et al., 2010; Dalton-Puffer, 2011). This dual focus is not explicitly integrated in EMI, as gains in English proficiency are only considered as a byproduct of the approach (Coleman et al., 2018; Curle et al., 2020; Dearden, 2014).

EMI implementation can differ in terms of the language(s) applied. Language policies typically relate to 3 main types: English-only policies in which English is exclusively or mainly used, bilingual policies that use English and a national or local language, and trilingual policies that use English along with 2 national or local languages (Risager, 2012). While monolingual, English-only policies were the norm in the past, many institutions are becoming more accepting of the use of students' L1 in the EMI classroom. Often, students and teachers will translanguage, meaning they employ their linguistic repertoire when constructing knowledge (Otheguy et al., 2015).

Institutions often employ EMI support mechanisms to prepare students for their future English-medium programs or assist them in learning content in English. One model involves preparatory year programs, in which students take a semester or year of intensive English prior to EMI courses. Before students are able to enroll in English-medium programs, the selection model uses standardized English tests to ensure that students have the necessary English proficiency. In contrast, the concurrent support model uses EAP (English for academic purposes) and ESP (English for specific purposes) courses delivered alongside EMI courses to help students cope with the demands of English in their content courses. Lastly, the Ostrich model describes a lack of institutional action to support EMI learners (Curle et al., 2020).

EMI in Saudi Arabia

Considering the implementation of EMI in Saudi higher education, previous studies have largely focused on stakeholders' views regarding the advantages and disadvantages of employing this approach and coping strategies that have been applied within Saudi public universities. Shamim et al.'s (2016) study explored the opinions of science teachers and learners regarding EMI. Because English was seen as a global language and the language of knowledge acquisition, both students and teachers preferred EMI over Arabic as a medium of instruction (AMI).

However, challenges related to students' low levels of proficiency were described. Their limited English language skills spurred a greater focus on exam preparation and translation, indicating that Arabic was often used to help learners. Moreover, Alfehaid's (2018) study, which involved teachers and students who represented health, science, and engineering, described preferences for EMI and similar benefits. Arabic was also used in these EMI programs to overcome language-related barriers and support students' comprehension.

In contrast, 2 studies indicate that using Arabic as a coping strategy may not be sufficient in Saudi EMI programs. Louber and Troudi (2019) investigated the views of engineering and EFL teachers and engineering students in an EMI program. Students and teachers preferred AMI since EMI was seen as a barrier to accessing and understanding knowledge, and in turn, academic success. As a result, Arabic became the de facto language of these programs. Rather than using students' L1, Alanazi's (2021) study indicates that other strategies may be viable. His research involved gauging the opinions of teachers and students from 4 Saudi medical schools. Due to the language-related issues faced by students, teachers employed translanguaging as well as other coping strategies such as language simplification and multi-modal content delivery. Moreover, the teachers in the study described a lack of training opportunities, and the researcher recommended expanding training sessions that address best practices for teaching and learning in EMI contexts.

The previous research outlines the advantages and disadvantages associated with implementing EMI and reveals the use of Arabic as a common coping strategy. However, the literature shows gaps in context and focus. All studies took place within public universities, raising questions regarding the presence of language-related difficulties in institution types such as vocational colleges. Moreover, the studies focused on the benefits and challenges of implementing EMI but did not thoroughly explore stakeholders' opinions on the way forward. Only Alanazi's (2021) study addressed coping strategies outside of using students' L1 and suggested expanding professional development opportunities for EMI teachers. These findings raise questions regarding language support mechanisms and practices that may be relevant in minimizing the challenges cited. As a result, this study aims to explore the opinions of vocational teachers and graduates regarding the challenges of implementing EMI, the place of students' L1 in these

programs, and their opinions of how EMI implementation can be improved. In turn, best practices in promoting the achievement of non-native English speakers in EMI programs can be outlined.

This research aimed to explore stakeholders' views regarding difficulties in EMI programs, the relevance of Arabic, and recommendations for improvement. The following research questions (RQ) were posed to meet these goals:

RQ 1. What are the main challenges that students face when implementing EMI in Saudi vocational programs?

RQ 2. Do teachers and graduates support the use of Arabic in EMI within Saudi vocational programs?

RQ 3. What do teachers and graduates from Saudi vocational college recommend to improve EMI programs?

To answer these questions, this study used a mixed methods design that involved questionnaires and a thematic analysis of free response items. This design allowed for the research questions to be thoroughly answered by using multiple sources of data rather than one data type alone (Ivankova & Creswell, 2009; Pole, 2007), as both graduates and teachers participated. In turn, this method supported triangulation and complementary analysis (Greene et al., 1989). Moreover, the integration of both closed-ended and open-ended items accounted for breadth and depth in the data analysis. The Likert-scale items allowed for statistical trends to be charted while stakeholders' open-ended responses explained these patterns.

The questionnaires used in this study were approved by the University of Alcalá's ethics committee for research and animal experimentation (approval number CEID/2022/3/046). Participants completed and signed an informed consent page within the questionnaire before answering the items. Table 1 shows an outline of the Likert-scale and open-ended questions. The topics of the Likert-scale items involved common challenges, the relevance of Arabic in EMI, the possibility of applying a language-focused approach, and satisfaction with current professional development opportunities. Teachers' and graduates' responses to these items provided quantitative data. Open-ended questions produced qualitative data, and the items investigated challenges in implementing EMI, recommendations for improvement, and suggestions for professional development.

Table 1. Outline of Questionnaires for Teachers and Graduates.	
Number	Topic
1-9	Informed consent and demographic questions
10-11 (2 Likert items)	Common classroom-based challenges noted in the literature (language gap, materials)
12-14 (3 Likert items)	Arabic's relevance in EMI (assessments, content comprehension, lesson delivery)
15 (1 Likert item)	Relevance of a language-focused approach
16-18 (3 Likert items—teachers' questionnaire only)	Professional development (language teaching, content teaching, modern methodologies)
1 (Open-ended)	Challenges in implementing EMI
2 (Open-ended)	Suggestions for improving EMI programs
3 (Open-ended—teachers' questionnaire only)	Suggestions for professional development opportunities

The online questionnaires were distributed to 50 teachers and 50 graduates from vocational institutes. The inclusion criteria involved teachers who had taught within English medium programs within the last 5 years and graduates who had completed a vocational program that used EMI within the past 5 years. Moreover, teachers were recruited from provinces hosting the most institutions and the largest student populations in the Kingdom (Knight Frank, 2021). The questionnaires were first pre-tested by experts in the area, then EMI teachers piloted the items, and the final responses were collected from November 2022 to March 2023.

When creating the questionnaires, a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was used. To facilitate the ease of responses and data analysis, a continuum with 5 options was applied

(Glasow, 2005). The data analysis involved calculating the mean and standard deviation for each item. Equal ranges of 0.79 or 0.80 from the lowest score (1) to the highest score (5) were found to match the 5 descriptions to the mean values. This scale and the descriptions are shown in Table 2. Unpaired t-tests were calculated to understand if there were statistically significant differences between the average values of the responses from teachers and graduates for each item.

Likert-scale values	1	2	3	4	5
Value on frequency scale	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Mean range	1.00-1.79	1.80-2.59	2.60-3.39	3.40-4.19	4.20-5.00

Considering the free responses from teachers and graduates, the data was categorized into emergent themes. This method of categorizing involved identifying repeated ideas, grouping these ideas into themes, and developing theories based on the grouping of the themes into more abstract concepts (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). To support this analysis, the free responses from teachers and graduates were collected in separate Excel spreadsheets, and additional columns were added adjacent to the texts to enter codes. The total number of texts referencing the codes or themes was calculated, and the results were integrated into the statistical analysis.

RESULTS

Demographics

The responses to the demographic questions about gender, province, and disciplines are outlined in Table 3. The data shows the participation of both male and female stakeholders from provinces with high numbers of vocational colleges and institutes, namely Mecca, Medina, and the Eastern province (Technical and Vocational Training Corporation, 2020). These provinces host International Technical Female Colleges, which are large vocational institutions that use English to teach content. Hence, greater numbers of participants from these regions met the inclusion

criteria related to their previous experience teaching or learning in English. Moreover, the respondents' disciplines align with common programs offered by vocational colleges such as guest relations management, small business management, and software development. The majors of study also include technical and engineering majors, which are typically offered by vocational institutes (Technical and Vocational Training Corporation, 2020).

Province			Discipline		
Province	Teachers	Graduates	Discipline	Teachers	Graduates
Riyadh	6	6	Education	0	0
Mecca	10	9	Humanities	3	0
Medina	17	18	Design	2	0
Eastern province	16	12	Technical	4	9
Qassim	1	1	Engineering	5	9
Other	0	4	Science	4	0
			Hospitality	12	0
Gender	Teachers	Graduates	Health	0	2
Male	18	20	IT	8	13
Female	32	29	Business	12	15
Other/N/A responses	0	1	No answer	0	2
Total	50	50	Total	50	50

Analysis by Dimension

The below sections describe the data related to 3 main areas: challenges associated with EMI programs, views on Arabic's relevance in EMI, and recommendations for improving EMI implementation. Each section analyzes the statistical findings and integrates the main themes of stakeholders' free responses.

Challenges faced in current EMI programs

Table 4 shows the mean and standard deviation for 2 items. One addresses the language gap, which represents the challenge of

transitioning from AMI to EMI, and the other describes comprehension-related difficulties with English-medium materials. Regarding the language gap (item 10), the mean results show agreement amongst graduates and strong agreement amongst teachers. Also, teachers agreed that their students faced difficulties with English-medium materials (item 11), but graduates disagreed. When examining the p-values for both items, they indicate statistically significant differences. Hence, the data shows clear differences in the views of the 2 stakeholder groups.

Table 4. Teachers' and Graduates' Responses Regarding Common Challenges in EMI.						
Item number	Teachers			Graduates		
	Question text	Mean	SD	Question text	Mean	SD
10	The shift of medium of instruction from Arabic at school to English at university was very challenging for my students.	4.33	0.77	The shift of medium of instruction from Arabic at school to English at university was very challenging for me.	3.44	1.30
	P-value: 0.00012					
11	My students had difficulties understanding the course content because the English level of the materials was too advanced.	3.62	0.90	I had difficulties understanding the course content because the English level of the materials was too advanced.	2.51	1.28
	P-value: 4.50E ⁻⁰⁶					

The free responses from teachers and graduates offer some explanation for their contrasting attitudes. Teachers acknowledged that language-related barriers stem from both their students and the resources used, and their free responses regarding challenges in EMI implementation (see Table 5) largely addressed language: 17 described students' limited English language proficiency, 12 commented on shortcomings in specific language skills, and 11 mentioned difficulties with content comprehension. With regard to these issues, one teacher concisely explained that implementing EMI was challenging because "[s]tudents didn't have the requisite language level and this caused poor grades and lack of motivation" (T.Q. 26-Teachers' questionnaire participant number 26).

Table 5. Teachers' Responses Regarding Challenges in Implementing EMI.		
Theme	Keywords and phrases	Vocational Institutes
Level of English proficiency	Low level, secondary, national, elementary high school, not taught well, weak, lack of preparation, issues understanding English/lectures	17
Language skills	Weak reading/writing/listening/speaking skills, pronunciation, not professional, vocabulary, terminology, one-way/poor communication, communication gaps/challenges, hesitate to speak	12
Content comprehension	Lack of understanding, difficult to understand, don't grasp content/concepts/material, don't get the full meaning, simplify, water down, simple/basic content/language, longer time to explain/adapt/understand, delivery in different ways	11

Table 5. Teachers' Responses Regarding Challenges in Implementing EMI.		
Theme	Keywords and phrases	Vocational Institutes
Attitude	Attitude, behavior, weak passion, low attendance, lack of motivation/commitment, disruptive, not focused, no interaction, resistance, absenteeism	9
Use of Arabic	Translation, use of Arabic, overuse of native language	4
Achievement	Poor grades, low achievement, dropping out	2

When examining graduates' open-ended responses regarding challenges in implementing EMI (see Table 6), they seemed to downplay the language gap and issues with materials. The standard deviations from the graduates' responses are higher than those from the teachers' data for both items, indicating that their responses may differ depending on factors such as language level and discipline. Their free responses also addressed difficulties related to language, as 6 graduates directly described issues transitioning to EMI, 10 cited weaknesses in English language skills, 4 mentioned their limited knowledge of vocabulary, and 2 commented on challenges applying the language. However, 7 responded that they had faced no issues, and only three graduates mentioned challenges with content comprehension. Hence, graduates' responses seem to indicate that the language gap and limitations in active skills may only be temporary barriers. For instance, the below excerpt highlights issues in communication over comprehension: "The most difficult thing I faced was the inability to simplify ideas and meanings by using synonyms and antonyms of words in order to clarify the meaning or communicate ideas and explain them" (G.Q. 19— Graduates' questionnaire participant number 19).

Table 6. Graduates' Responses Regarding Challenges in Implementing EMI.		
Theme	Keywords and phrases	Vocational Institutes
None	No challenges, N/A, none	7
English language skills	Reading, writing, listening, speaking, pronunciation, grammar, communication	10
Vocabulary acquisition	Terms, terminologies, vocabulary, meaning	4
Transitioning to EMI	Adapting, time, at first, level, low, change, school	6
Applying language	Practice, continuity, use	2
Content comprehension	Translation, understanding, concepts	3
Academic staff	Lecturers, professors, accents, native speakers, lacking English, teaching style	4

The relevance of Arabic in EMI

The next set of questions addresses stakeholders' views on language policies in EMI. Table 7 includes the overall mean and standard deviation for the 3 items. Regarding the mean values, teachers agreed that using Arabic would bolster students' achievement on assessments and their content comprehension. They also agreed that translanguaging between English and Arabic is beneficial. In contrast, the means of the responses from graduates show neutrality. The p-values for the 3 items are also statistically significant, indicating notable differences in the opinions of teachers and graduates regarding the use of Arabic.

Table 7. Teachers' and Graduates' Responses Regarding Arabic's Relevance in Saudi EMI.

Item number	Teachers			Graduates		
	Question text	Mean	SD	Question text	Mean	SD
12	If the assessments were in Arabic, I believe that my students would have gotten higher grades in my courses.	3.77	1.10	If the assessments were in Arabic, I believe that I would have gotten higher grades in my courses.	3.09	1.43
	P-value: 0.012					
13	If Arabic were used in lesson delivery, I believe that students would better understand the concepts taught in my courses.	3.80	0.94	If Arabic were used in lesson delivery, I believe that I would have better understood the concepts taught in my courses.	3.23	1.13
	P-value: 0.0089					

Table 7. Teachers' and Graduates' Responses Regarding Arabic's Relevance in Saudi EMI.						
Item number	Teachers			Graduates		
	Question text	Mean	SD	Question text	Mean	SD
13	Teaching my classes in both Arabic and English was more beneficial for students than only teaching in English.	3.70	1.24	Teachers using both Arabic and English in classes was more beneficial for me than only learning in English.	3.04	1.38
	P-value: 0.020					

When examining the standard deviations, the item with the lowest value relates to the potential of using Arabic for content comprehension was item 13. Item 14, which addresses translanguaging, showed the highest standard deviation. These results may reflect greater conformity in teachers' theoretical support for EMI versus differences in teachers' actual practices. Teachers' free responses offer clarity on this topic. For recommendations for improvement, only 2 teachers mentioned institutional policies such as using Arabic as a means to overcome difficulties (see Table 8). Moreover, 20 teachers addressed language policy within professional development opportunities (see Table 9), and many responses advocated for stricter language policies and expanded language provisions for both teachers and students.

Table 8. Teachers' Responses Regarding Areas of Improvement in Saudi EMI.		
Theme	Keywords and phrases	Vocational Institutes
Language support	Simplify/simplified courses, support classes, more often/courses, beginning courses, language courses, preparation	21

Table 8. Teachers' Responses Regarding Areas of Improvement in Saudi EMI.

Theme	Keywords and phrases	Vocational Institutes
	year, intensive English courses, foundational level, streaming, ESP, CBI, EAP, vocabulary, reading, writing, listening, speaking, English skills, stream	
Language skills	Weak reading/writing/listening/speaking skills, pronunciation, not professional, vocabulary, terminology, one-way/poor communication, communication gaps/challenges, hesitate to speak	12
Methodologies	Participate, presentations, discussions, practice, hands-on, real conversation, communication, focus on speaking, engagement, Situational, realia, technology, PBL, Practical English, assignments, examples, exercises	8
Institutional policies	Test/exam, mix	2
Educational resources	More resources, international standards in resources, language aids, definitions, recorded lectures, international and local cases, companion websites, industry experts, appropriate textbooks, diverse materials, resource development, images, videos	7
Technology	Technology, search	3

Table 9. Teachers' Suggestions for Professional Development.		
Theme	Keywords and phrases	Vocational Institutes
Language	Language awareness, faculty English courses, language trainings, terminology, vocabulary, language skills, low level, literacy	30
Key methodologies	New/modern methodologies/ methods/techniques/ approaches, different, styles, creating tasks, practical skills, relevant, engagement, motivation, interaction	25
Policy	Acceptance, only/all English, Arabic, secondary, elementary, additional courses, medium of communication, mix, foundation year, more lessons, more support	20
Content courses	Specific to courses, Engineering, IT, humanities, social sciences, updates, English translation, match market	15
Technology	Technical skills, IT, ICT, learning technologies, e-learning, hybrid	8
Collaboration	Local organizations, language teachers, communities of practice, professionals, experts	8

Teachers seem to promote alternatives to using students' L1, and some described how integrating Arabic may have a negative impact on these programs. Regarding the challenges faced in EMI (see Table 5), 4 teachers mentioned the use of Arabic, indicating that the integration of students' L1 in EMI classrooms spurs difficulties related to the following:

- Students were not used to teaching & learning in English
- Students tendency to revert to Arabic as it was just easier

- The institution allowed for Arabic to be used in the teaching & learning process so students saw it as an easier option rather than practicing English. (T.Q. 60)

Similarly, 18 graduates cited institutional changes as a recommendation for improvement (see Table 10). Many of these responses mentioned language policy and the need for greater exposure to English: "It must start from KG [kindergarten] and being improved through the years or having a strict english course" (G.Q. 70). Overall, the responses from stakeholders suggest that integrating Arabic into EMI may be somewhat beneficial in theory, but greater leniency in language policies may limit students' exposure to English and opportunities to improve their language skills.

Table 10. Graduates' Responses Regarding Areas of Improvement in Saudi EMI Programs.		
Theme	Keywords and phrases	Vocational Institutes
Methodologies	Skills, reading, writing, listening, speaking, materials, resources, vocabulary, good, basic, conversations, practice, intensive, interaction, simple, communication	10
Institutional changes	Professors, English-only, English and Arabic, accents, courses, strict, occupational	18
Individual efforts	Practice, conversation, homework, assignments, daily life	8

Improving EMI programs

As depicted in Table 11, the results show agreement from both teachers and graduates regarding the relevance of a language-focused approach in minimizing current challenges. The p-value does not reflect a statistically significant difference, further demonstrating how both types of stakeholders are in agreement regarding the potential impact of using this approach. The standard deviation for item 15 is low, indicating that stakeholders from a variety of vocational institutions and disciplines

found this approach to be applicable. Furthermore, these statistical trends align with recommendations for improvement (see Table 8), as 21 teachers addressed the need for language support through methods such as “[a]llowing time for more content related focused language materials to be taught” (T.Q. 26). Ten graduates' suggestions for changes in methodologies may also reflect their preference for this type of approach. For instance, one graduate recommended “[n]ot just focusing on academic language, also practicing the daily life language that we need to interact with others” (G.Q. 77). Perhaps, with a greater focus on language and the integration of interactive activities, they believe that gains can be made in their productive language skills.

Table 11. Teachers' and Graduates' Responses Regarding the Potential Impact of a Language-Focused Approach.

Item number	Teachers			Graduates		
	Question text	Mean	SD	Question text	Mean	SD
15	A focus on both language and content in English-medium courses can minimize classroom-related challenges.	3.96	0.85	A focus on both language and content in English-medium courses can minimize classroom-related challenges.	3.70	0.88
	P-value: 0.16					

Table 12 depicts the means and standard deviations for 3 items related to teachers' satisfaction with current professional development opportunities. Although the means show agreement, the themes of teachers' free responses seem contradictory. As shown in Table 9, the main areas of recommendation for professional development largely align with the topics of the Likert-scale items: 30 teachers address language awareness, 25 mention key methodologies, and 15 describe content courses. Perhaps training sessions in these areas are taking

place, but they need to be strengthened as a means of improving EMI delivery. For example, teachers may require constant training in modern methodologies to keep pace with updates in the field of education: “More functions can be used to teach (more situational, using more realia, more use of technology and PBL)” (T.Q. 83). Moreover, responses addressing language awareness and content teaching indicate that training sessions should address the integration of both areas: “Involve the English classes material with the technical material given in subjects” (T.Q. 136). Overall, professional development opportunities may need to be adjusted in line with modern practices and efforts to incorporate language support in EMI classrooms.

Table 12. Teachers' Responses to Statements about Professional Development.			
Item number	Question text	Vocational institutes	
		Mean	SD
16	My institution offers sufficient training sessions that allow me to develop my skills related to teaching content (e.g., creating materials/resources, planning activities, creating assessments).	3.88	1.14
17	My institution offers sufficient training sessions that allow me to develop my skills related to teaching language (e.g., addressing language awareness, literacy, functional language).	3.62	1.11
18	My institution offers a sufficient number of training sessions that address modern approaches to teaching and learning.	3.76	1.11

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate trends regarding difficulties in implementing EMI and suggestions for improving these programs. The findings suggest that language-related difficulties may only be temporary, which does not necessitate the integration of Arabic in EMI.

In contrast, improvements related to the overall approach and methodologies applied, language support mechanisms, and training are recommended as more viable solutions.

Considering challenges in implementing EMI, language-related difficulties represent the foremost challenge. These can be seen when students first transition to EMI, yet graduates' responses indicate that these issues may only be temporary. Graduates seem to have adjusted to EMI as their language skills developed, reflecting the idea that EMI students with higher proficiency levels face fewer difficulties learning content in English (Lasagabaster, 2022). Moreover, the language gap may relate to limitations in students' initial active language skills (writing and speaking) rather than passive language skills (reading and listening). The greater focus on challenges faced in communication aligns with Saudi-specific (Alanazi, 2021) and general trends (Pérez Cañado, 2021) regarding limitations in active language skills amongst EMI students.

Regarding the relevance of Arabic in EMI, the results show that teachers and graduates have opposing opinions regarding language policies. Teachers also describe differences in theoretical support for using students' L1 versus their use of Arabic in practice. Stakeholders' responses seem to reflect a paradigm shift toward translanguaging. While the theoretical belief that limiting the use of students' L1 in EMI could lead to gains in English was pervasive in the past (Curle et al., 2020), there is less stigma attached to language mixing in educational contexts nowadays (Coleman et al., 2018). Perhaps, there is greater understanding regarding the benefits of integrating Arabic, yet there are also practical challenges in applying this approach as found in Louber and Troudi's (2019) study.

As for recommendations for improvement, the results reveal the importance of language support, the methodologies applied, and training opportunities. Both teachers and graduates acknowledge that institutions need to offer robust English language courses, and EMI programs should integrate language and content. Moreover, teachers' calls for professional development in language awareness and content teaching suggest that EMI may be improved through including a more overt focus on language. This aligns with trends promoting content and language integrated learning along with EMI, which may strengthen students' language development and content comprehension by explicitly addressing English in EMI courses (Hu, 2023; Pérez Cañado,

2021). To improve teaching practices, stakeholders should address the need to employ interactive methodologies and offer training in modern methodologies, aligning with previous studies that underscore the importance of integrating student-centered, interactive learning in EMI programs (Cots, 2013; Rose, 2021; Wilkinson, 2017). Overall, the findings reflect the notion that pedagogy outweighs the medium of instruction in teaching and learning in EMI (Coleman et al., 2018), as stakeholders focus on pedagogical solutions rather than recommending the use of students' L1.

Recommendations

In light of the findings of this study, some recommendations are made to strengthen language support mechanisms and professional development opportunities. Regarding language support, offering robust English language courses can ensure that students have the minimum level of language skills needed for EMI. Within EMI programs, incorporating language provisions alongside content courses and focusing on disciplinary language in EMI courses can also help students develop their English proficiency. As for training, professional development opportunities addressing language awareness, content and language integrated learning, and language teaching methodologies can equip EMI teachers with the needed language teaching skills. Training sessions may also help content teachers integrate language objectives within their lessons and use interactive tasks to reinforce communication skills.

Finally, the results and limitations of this research spark recommendations for future studies. The data used in this study reflects the experiences and attitudes of teachers and graduates. Future studies can collect data from classroom observations to compare stakeholders' views on EMI implementation with their current practices. Consequently, recommendations can be more specific and tailored to each institution. Moreover, this study collected responses from graduates who had successfully completed their vocational programs. Additional future studies could engage vocational students who did not manage to graduate to better understand the difficulties they faced. Their input may help determine if EMI represented a major barrier in their studies. Lastly, this study did not use a control group to represent the opinions of stakeholders from Arabic-medium programs. Future studies could compare the attitudes of teachers and graduates from Arabic-medium and English-medium programs regarding the challenges they faced. In turn, this type of study would clarify whether the difficulties observed are

specifically due to language barriers rather than other factors associated with the transition from school to university.

Implications

The results of this study have implications for policymakers and practitioners both in the context of Saudi vocational education and community colleges in a broader context. For policymakers, EMI is often implemented without thoroughly considering teacher training, pedagogical issues, and methodological implications (O'Dowd, 2018; Sahan et al., 2021). Rather than applying EMI in a top-down fashion, policymakers should work with academic staff and faculty in each vocational institution to ensure that EMI support mechanisms and necessary training sessions are in place. Moreover, bottom-up policies can help align de facto classroom practices with language policies while addressing topics such as translanguaging. For practitioners, EMI teachers need to ensure they play a strong role in students' language and skills development. Although content teachers may not always view themselves as language teachers (Coleman et al., 2018; Macaro et al., 2018), integrating an explicit focus on language can strengthen students' disciplinary language development. Moreover, keeping abreast of developments in educational methodologies can help teachers integrate best practices. Considering the importance of communication as a key 21st-century skill (Allmnakrah & Evers, 2020), practitioners must assist both native and non-native English speakers in making gains in these skills.

Conclusion

Overall, this study aimed to explore the main challenges in implementing EMI, the relevance of Arabic in these programs, and recommendations for improving EMI in the context of Saudi vocational education. The results reveal that students' limited language skills represents the greatest barrier to student success in EMI. While stakeholders believe that translanguaging in Arabic has theoretical benefits, this method is associated with practical obstacles and concerns about its long-term impact. Lastly, stakeholders recommend offering more provisions for language support, using interactive methodologies, and expanding professional development opportunities. Recommendations were made to strengthen institutional language support mechanisms, develop teacher training sessions, and conduct future case studies that integrate primary data. In light of the findings, implications for policymakers

underscore bottom-up policymaking while encouraging practitioners to play a stronger role in their students' language and skills development. As EMI continues to expand worldwide, vocational institutions such as institutes and community colleges must ensure that language support is addressed at each stage of the students' academic journey.

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