Harnessing the Power of English in Shaping the Global Higher Education

E. Ram Bhaskar Raju[1] & **Erra Namratha**[2]

Abstract: The increasing universalisation of English as the medium of instruction in higher education has transformed academic settings, offering improved knowledge access, intercultural collaboration and academic mobility. Despite this, non-native English-speaking students experience considerable tensions and strains in their academic and social lives. This article looks at how English functions in higher education. We will assess whether or not this contributes to academic performance, access, and inclusion. The survey and interview of the students and teachers help in identifying the aspects of the English Medium Instruction (EMI) programmes which are posing significant hurdles for the students. The findings show that those with a high level of English proficiency are positively connected with academic achievement and engagement, while children with low English proficiency incur social isolation and academic underachievement. The article highlights the need for better language assistance services, inclusive teaching practices and social integration measures to address these challenges. Universities should create more inclusive teaching practices where English is a medium of inclusion and not exclusion. Thus, all students will have equal access to academic opportunities.

Keywords: English Medium Instruction (EMI), Higher Education, Globalisation, Social Inclusion, Linguistic Equity, Educational Policy, Intercultural Communication

[1] Associate Professor of English, Kakatiya Government College (Autonomous), Hanamkonda - 506001 Telangana, India; ORCID iD: 0000-0003-4287-8914

[2] Research Scholar, Department of English, University of Delhi, New Delhi - 110007 India; ORCID iD: 0009-0005-4625-7762

1.0 Introduction

The establishment of English as the global *lingua franca* for higher education has had a massive influence on the architecture of world education, global research and dissemination and student mobility. In the past decades, English has become the top global language in the field of higher education, transforming academic communication, publication, and cooperation. The growing interconnection of academic communities across countries and continents, and the multiplying globalisation and technological transition are such phenomena. Due to the British Empire's conquests and the rise of the United States to geopolitical and economic power, the English language has spread throughout the world and continues to cover it. English presently is the most widely used second language. In fact, more than 80% of academic research papers are published in English (Fitzpatrick & McMillan, 2020).

Increased globalisation in higher education is the primary reason why English is dominant in academia worldwide. Universities around the world are welcoming students of different languages and cultures, with English as the common language of education. A wide range of countries use English primarily as the medium of academic publication, teaching, research and international outreach. The effort to use English as a medium in programmes worldwide intends to make institutions more competitive and attract international students, while also incorporating research across borders. Due to this, English has become a mark of academic excellence as well as an essential skill for higher education globally.

Even so, the increasing use of English in higher education has great benefits, but it also raises serious questions of equity and access. To non-native English-speaking students, it is often their language proficiency that impedes rather than facilitates their success when studying at international universities. Students in English-medium programmes experience various academic and social challenges. These difficulties include understanding complex academic texts, expressing ideas clearly, and contributing actively in class discussions. This research seeks to look into these issues and make recommendations on how universities can help non-native speakers of English so that English can become a tool of inclusion and not exclusion.

Although the field of higher education all over the world is shifting towards English, non-native English speakers face greater opportunities and challenges under new circumstances. Being proficient in the English language undoubtedly improves access to educational resources, research networks, employment opportunities and more recently, job markets. However, it also creates a divide between students who have the linguistic capacity to succeed in English medium education and those who do not. Students who are non-native English speakers, especially those from disadvantaged educational settings, may encounter very serious challenges which adversely affect their academic performance, socialisation and emotional wellbeing. The need for effective English-language support services and the development of more inclusive educational practices is growing as institutions increasingly adopt English as the medium of academic instruction.

The present study attempts to explain how English in the world of higher education serves both as a tool of empowerment and exclusion. This research evaluates the experiences of non-native speakers in English-medium institutions to offer suggestions for improving language support, teaching methods and institutional policies to create an inclusive learning environment.

2.0 Research Problem and Objectives

2.1 The Contradiction of English in Higher Education

Many students, especially those who do not speak English as their first language, find English a barrier despite it being considered a ladder to academic excellence and global opportunities. EMI programmes are becoming

prominent to the point where students' academic performance is largely dependent on their English skills. As a result, there is a huge gap between proficient and non-proficient English speakers. With more and more instructional material being presented through English, success is predicated on language proficiency. Thus, non-native speakers are placed at a disadvantage or low end of the success spectrum.

This study aims to see how English ability affects the academic experience of non-native English-speaking students. This study investigates how English competence affects the higher education access, academic attainment and social integration of students in vocational schools by focusing on their problems.

2.2 Objectives

- To determine how English proficiency affects academic performance in English Medium Instruction programmes.
- The purpose of this study is to identify the barriers that non-native English-speaking students face in an English Medium Instruction (EMI) environment, which may be language barriers in understanding the course content as well as participating in academic discourse.
- The objective of this study was to ascertain the contribution of social inclusion of non-native English-speaking students to EMI contexts and the role of a language barrier in a sense of exclusion.
- To suggest improvements to policies and institutional processes that better assist non-native English-speaking students in English Medium Instruction programmes.

3.0 Literature Review

3.1 The History of the Globalisation of the English Language

The importance of English as an ultimate world academic language emerges from the growth of the British Empire. In other words, the British forcibly made their colonial subjects English speakers. English was used as a medium of instruction in many parts of the world with the expansion of the British educational system. Throughout the post-colonial period, English expanded not only because of political and economic dominance but also thanks to the cultural and intellectual influence of English-speaking nations, especially the United States of America.

The rapid growth of English began in the latter half of the 20th century, particularly during the time the United States became a global superpower, English gained currency in science, technology and education. Today, English is known as the world's trade and diplomatic language as well as academia. More than 80 per cent of academic publications and scholarly articles are published in English, making it the most widely used lingua franca in the world.

Academics mostly write in English even though several researchers say it creates global, cultural, and imperialistic issues as well as harm indigenous languages and local academic traditions. Holliday (2018) argues that the dominance of English in higher education could overshadow other languages and cultures, denting the diversity of academic discourse. Critics who argue that the adoption of EMI programmes in non-English-speaking countries could lead to an imperialist academic culture that marginalises local traditions and epistemologies support this position.

3.2 EMI Programmes: A Dual-Edged Instrument

The expansion of EMI initiatives in non-English-speaking countries is lauded as a way of promoting global academic mobility, international collaboration and improvement of the competitiveness of institutions worldwide. The programmes are perceived as necessary for attracting overseas students, facilitating access to international research networks and raising academic institutions' profiles. English became a medium of instruction; students who lack an understanding of the language face difficulties.

Studies show that students who speak English as a second language studying in an English Medium Instruction program have severe difficulty in understanding content knowledge, engaging in academic conversation and performing tasks. Liu and Aizawa (2021) claim that students in countries like China, Japan, and South Korea that do not have English as the first language face serious linguistic barriers within EMI contexts. Such challenges hamper their academic growth and prevent them from being able to join as a part of school community. According to Ransom and Poole (2017), limited English language proficiency of students can create barriers in dealing with academic words; this frustration deters students from learning.

Linguistic barriers often interfere with the social integration of non-native speakers in English-Medium Instruction (EMI) programmes. According to Okoli and Nweke (2025), when students have weak English proficiency, they may feel alienated from their friends and lecturers, thereby exacerbating their sense of isolation. When students miss social connectedness, it can hinder their mental health and academic performance. Subsequently, this becomes a vicious cycle.

3.3 The Benefits of Knowing the English Language

Although many non-native speakers of English encounter substantial difficulties in EMI programmes, mastery of the language has many advantages. According to Harbord (2020), students who are more competent in English are likely to do better academically. This is due to their easier access to academic materials, increased confidence to participate, and more effective collaboration with peers and teachers. Besides, speaking in English is considered a key skill for jobs all over the world, as most global companies and organisations expect their employees to know English.

Knowledge of English improves the mobility of students as many study abroad programmes and conferences are held in English. Effective English skills allow students to take advantage of global opportunities with a significant improvement in their academic and professional prospects.

4.0 Contemporary Research Insights

Scholars have been researching EMI and its effects on non-native English language students in recent years. There is an ever-growing body of empirical evidence and revealing insights on the complexity of this issue. This section highlights three significant trends in the literature that frame the research in this study: (1) linguistic, as well as non-linguistic, predictors of academic achievement; (2) pedagogical and policy challenges of EMI; and (3) conceptualisation of EMI in a global higher education context.

4.1 Linguistic and Non-Linguistic Determinants of Academic Achievement

Recent evidence confirms that English proficiency is a key determinant of academic success, though not the only one, in EMI programmes. Recent research also reveals that features that are not language-related, such as learner self-efficacy, motivation, and anxiety, may have negative or positive impacts on students' academic performance in EMI. According to a 2024 study conducted by Soruç, in a Turkish university context, English proficiency and instrumental motivation were important predictors of academic success; however, students with high intrinsic motivation encountered more difficulties despite their English proficiency.

The link between motivation and academic success may be more intricate than people thought. This study shows how personal characteristics influence the learning experiences of non-native speakers (Soruc, 2024).

The research conducted by Feng et al. have confirmed that students' English ability and academic success are strongly correlated. However, anxiety and intrinsic motivation connected to the use of English impacted academic performance, but in a more complicated way. As per the researchers, although

mastering academic English is essential, a pupil's psychological preparedness and confidence are other key factors contributing to their academic success. To claim that language proficiency alone is sufficient for achieving success in EMI programmes is challenging in the light of these findings. Instead, several other characteristics should be taken into account when designing EMI programmes.

In a Vietnamese EMI context, Tam and Chi (2024) found that students' discipline-specific English vocabulary improved. However, there was still a significant lack of writing skills and informal conversational English. This finding indicates that while EMI may help students with certain language skills, it will not help them with everything. Therefore, researchers say that students should get additional language support.

4.2 Challenges of EMI: Educational and Policy Challenges

There is an increasing concern over the implementation of EMI and the pedagogical issues it raises in current research. The study by Shao (2024) on teachers' experiences in EMI programmes in the Netherlands, China and Japan showed varying degrees of EMI implementation across institutional contexts, resource realities and legislative frameworks. In some countries, there is a wealth of linguistic resources to support EMI. In several other instances, the rapid and widespread roll-out of EMI does not have the necessary policy support and instructional changes to enable the success of the students (Shao, 2024).

Karabay and Durrani (2024) undertook a bibliometric analysis of EMI research and found that although EMI programmes are seen everywhere now, research on best practices has failed to keep up. Many institutions adopt EMI but with little empirical evidence to inform optimal pedagogy and language support. The essence of the research gap is that there is a need for more evidence-based practices for the execution of EMI projects.

According to Alhamami (2024), EMI programmes are common in healthcare education. Although many of these programmes highlight possible benefits of EMI in enhancing global competitiveness, valid claims fail to offer a sufficient level of language support to students in technical disciplines. There are disparities in how policy and practice happen in the classroom. Children with limited English proficiency go through more challenges, both academic and emotional. As per the above finding, EMI programmes require stronger institutional support and better alignment of policy and practice to meet the needs of non-native speakers of English (Alhamami, 2024).

4.3 EMI as a Globalisation and Linguistic Equity Issue

EMI programmes of higher education globalisation will raise concerns relating to the linguistic equity of students not belonging to English-speaking stock (or elite). Research by Muttaqin et al. 2024 examined EMI in Indonesia from the point of view of the Diffusion of Innovation theory. It found that students' perception of relative advantage, complexity and compatibility of EMI programmes greatly affect their intention to enrol in the English-medium courses. Muataqin et al. 2023 state that the adoption of EMI is not uniform; in addition, engagement of the students with EMI is subject to various contextual factors. These factors include English competence and cultural attitudes toward English.

In recent years, EMI has been viewed more often as a form of language dominance in areas where English isn't widely spoken. According to Shao (2024), alongside Karabay and Durrani (2024), initiatives using English for instruction—intended to boost international student movement—could deepen existing gaps by favouring learners already skilled in English. Where native fluency in English is rare, access to quality language training separates groups based on income. As a result, students without such resources face exclusion from mainstream academic opportunities worldwide.

The findings highlight the intricate nature of language abilities, particularly their role in academic performance within English-taught settings—key for guiding policy decisions. Further research should aim to strengthen such initiatives while promoting diversity rather than limiting it.

5.0 Research Methodology

5.1 Research Design

This research combines different techniques to examine whether English proficiency affects learning among non-native speakers. Using questionnaires, statistical outcomes show links between language level and academic performance. On the flip side, conversations reveal individual experiences and unique difficulties. As a result, both strategies offer a broader understanding of the subject being studied.

5.2 Sampling Method

The universities focused on in the study are those from non-English-speaking countries where English-language instruction is offered. The selection of universities is conducted meticulously to ensure a wide range. The universities chosen have students from different levels of English proficiency. Undergraduate and graduate students, as well as faculty members, shall form part of the sample to take care of both student and teacher viewpoints. The new approach is designed to ensure a complete understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by non-native English speakers in EMI.

5.3 Data Acquisition

The data had been collected using two main methods. Both students and faculty members were surveyed for quantifiable analysis. The student survey looked into English language proficiency, academic performance, and problems faced in EMI courses. The faculty survey queried about teaching methods, language support and faculty members' views about the difficulties faced by NNES.

The researchers had conducted interviews with chosen groups of students and faculty members. The interviews focused on students' lived experiences with EMI, looking into language fluency issues, academic engagement, and social integration issues. Faculty interviews dealt with the problems of teaching non-native speakers and the effectiveness of current services offered.

6.0 Research Findings

The findings of the study contribute meaningfully to the understanding of the English proficiency and academic experiences of non-native English-speaking students in EMI programmes. The information is derived from quantitative survey data and qualitative interview data from students and teachers. The results show that being proficient in English is important for achieving academic success, integrating socially, and overall involvement.

6.1 Academic Performance and English Proficiency

The key finding of the study is that English proficiency and academic performance have a strong positive correlation. Due to proficiency in English, students were high in knowledge with regard to the course topics. Also, their overall grades and academic standards were high. This is current research that language proficiency is important for academic achievement, especially in EMI contexts where the medium of instruction is English.

High-level English speakers found it easier to follow academic texts, grasp lectures, and finish tasks effectively—yet confidence also played a role. Some learners reported feeling sure about grasping complex topics or contributing during class discussions—but this wasn't universal. In contrast, students with lower language skills struggled with subject-specific vocabulary and keeping up academically. Comprehension issues impacted their reading, lecture engagement, and written output—notably reducing clarity. As a result,

many faced challenges finishing exams or coursework on time, therefore affecting grades directly.

The results point out the mental load that students with limited English face. These students often have limited capacity to grasp the academic content of their courses due to their excessive focus on language acquisition. Their academics suffered, while also increasing their stress and burnout levels.

6.2 Engagement and Taking Part in Research Tasks

The study also examined the relationship between English proficiency and students' engagement in academic activities. Students with higher language skills are more likely to engage in classroom discussions and work on group projects and other related tasks. According to these students, they became more comfortable in expressing their ideas, asking questions and working together.

On the other hand, students with limited English proficiency often experience reluctance to participate. Many students who doubt their ability to express themselves in English feel embarrassed about it and avoid making contact academically. Because they did not engage in school very often, they did not learn much, which hurt their education and social isolation. The research found that students who do not participate in discussions or groups feel lonely and alienated more often.

Also, students' unwillingness to engage in academic pursuits negatively impacted their overall learning experience. Many students who did not speak English very well had difficulty making friends, limiting their academic success. Due to a lack of association and participation in educational activities, they feel isolated and less belonging.

6.3 Social Cohesion and Well-being

As per the findings, competence in English influences social integration in the academic world. The students who had better profi-

ciency in English were more likely to meet their peers in social events and other activities. Students who felt increasingly part of their academic community reported feeling more connected and healthier as a result.

In contrast, those with limited English proficiency experienced difficulties integrating with their peers. Students encountered obstacles while attempting to initiate contact with their classmates or engage in a group debate or in informal and intellectual debates. As a result, these students often faced social exclusion and alienation from their peers, impacting their emotional health and school motivation. The research revealed that non-native English-speaking pupils suffer more when socially isolated.

The findings suggest that social marginalisation due to language barriers harmed the mental health of students. Various students who experienced social exclusion had a lot of stress, anxiety and sadness. The emotional barriers made their schoolwork more difficult and led to a disconnection from school life.

6.4 Organisational Help and Language Service

Evaluating how effective the language support services provided by institutions are was a key focus of the study. According to the research, many colleges offer language support programmes such as tutoring, writing workshops, and conversation clubs, but these were often seen as inadequate or inefficient by the students. Students not fluent in English said the current language support programmes were too generalised and quite a few of their particular academic needs were not being met, especially for discipline-specific words and academic writing.

Students in these fields, which have specialised communication requirements, indicated that the generic language support provision was unable to engage with technical books and assignments. Students in the humanities and social sciences reported that the writing seminars offered were not tailored to the disciplinary conventions relevant to their fields.

Growth fears were revealed at the faculty interviews about the language. The lack of sufficient help to non-English speaking students was a concern raised by many faculty members. Many students made use of the Language Support Services within classes. However, teachers found that many students were not aware of them or had difficulty using them. The lack of support services has made it difficult for non-native speakers to perform academically.

6.5 Faculty Insights on Instruction in EMI Environment

Members of the faculty volunteered important insights into the problems faced while teaching non-native speakers in EMI programmes. Many teachers understood the importance of English for academic success. Still, they noticed that speakers who were not native speakers often did have problems understanding the academic ideas because they were too complex. Problems worsened as students were less proficient in English, which prevents them from being able to follow lectures, participate in class and complete assignments.

Faculty expressed worries over offering clear guidance to students who speak limited English, particularly when essays were hard to follow. Teachers stressed that more preparation could improve support for learners with varying language skills—focusing on comments and handling wording issues in tests or written work.

Some teachers tried to assist learners; however, broader backing from the institution became necessary. Such involvement could offer additional tools plus methods effective in EMI instruction. Seasoned staff suggested that ongoing aid be given during a student's entire programme—this might include language-focused help like writing labs or peer-led tutoring.

The findings of the research show the critical significance of English ability on the academic achievement, social assimilation, and experi-ence of non-native-English-speaking students in English-medium education. Findings show there is a correlation between English compe-tence (L2) and academic, social and effective involvement. Students with low English pro-ficiency face many challenges. These difficul-ties affect students academically and socially. Thus, they feel like outsiders and do not get along well.

The recommendation encourages many useful techniques for ensuring English is used for inclusion rather than exclusion. Universities must focus their investment on language sup-port initiatives that are tailored and suitable for international students. Also, faculty mem-bers should train in inclusive pedagogical methods that match students with different levels of English proficiency. Thirdly, institu-tions should facilitate peer mentorship pro-grammes and activities that promote social inclusion, helping non-native English speakers build relationships and feel more at home in their surroundings.

When colleges implement these ideas, they are creating a better, fairer, more inclusive aca-demic environment for students from differ-ent linguistic backgrounds. Thus, benefiting the educational and social success of all stu-dents.

7.0 Policy Implications

7.1 Comprehensive Language Support Programmes

According to the results, non-native English-speaking students need improved and indi-vidual language support programmes. Lan-guage programmes in universities should be designed according to the requirements of students in different fields of education. The focus of these programmes should be on im-proving overall language abilities, in addition to discipline-specific language support, so that students may learn the technical and academic language relevant to their discipline.

Also, these language support services should be embedded into the academic programme so that students receive constant support.

Universities should not just offer remedial language help. They should also offer services such as a writing centre, peer tutoring, conversation clubs, and more to strengthen the academic and conversational English of students.

7.2 Professional development for faculty members

Teaching educators how to support language learners plays a key role in strengthening education systems. As material becomes clearer, outcomes tend to rise noticeably. Strategies include using plain language, offering extra tools, or building spaces where asking questions feels safe. Instructors need advice on giving responses that match individual proficiency levels—this supports consistent growth and better results throughout schools.

Further, universities should prepare teachers working in English to help global students more effectively. This could mean adjusting class resources, supporting students facing language challenges, or applying clearer ways to measure learning. Through prioritising teacher development, schools make it possible for every student—even those with basic English—to achieve academic progress.

7.3 Encouraging Social Integration and Inclusion

Getting along with others affects how well students do at university, yet those who don't speak English natively may struggle to build friendships. Colleges could offer activities designed to bring learners from different linguistic and cultural settings into contact. Such initiatives might involve peer mentoring, where skilled students support newcomers in language skills or coursework, while also organising informal gatherings that promote mutual understanding through shared experiences.

Colleges ought to offer areas where non-native English speakers can share personal stories while gaining peer support. Such spaces might take the form of student-led groups or informal gatherings centred on linguistic and cultural exchange—connecting people from different departments or campus sec-tors. By promoting these interactions, institutions help lessen feelings of separation among language-minority learners. At the same time, they foster a learning atmosphere that feels more welcoming due to stronger social bonds.

8.0 Conclusion

This research sheds light on how language proficiency influences academic performance, social integration, and everyday experiences among international students in higher education. Results show that solid English skills boost success; however, those facing difficulties often deal with challenges impacting their learning progress, along with peer relationships—both linked to educational attainment.

Learners who speak another language at home may struggle to fit in. Such isolation can affect both academic performance and mental health. Institutions need stronger language help, along with classroom methods that welcome diversity, while also creating activities tailored to various English abilities. Pairing newcomers with fellow students could work—these connections might grow through casual gatherings where conversation flows naturally. Study circles or relaxed hangouts can boost self-assurance while forming real bonds across cultures.

When colleges address these issues, they can make English a way for students to take part and to work with others rather than a barrier to success. If universities put these ideas into practice, students whose first language is not English will make better progress in their studies and will find it easier to join the social life of the campus and to take their place in international academic life.

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