

Lecturers' perceptions of English medium instruction in Afghanistan's public higher education

Sayeed Naqibullah Orfan

Takhar University, Afghanistan

The study investigated university lecturers' attitudes towards English medium instruction (EMI), reasons for EMI adoption, effects of EMI on official languages and lecturers' preference for language of instruction. It also examined the impact of gender, English proficiency, country and medium of instruction of lecturers' highest educational degree as well as their education level on their responses. A survey questionnaire was employed to collect data from 234 lecturers at four public universities based in the northeast of Afghanistan. The author used both descriptive and inferential statistics to analyse the data. The results showed that lecturers had strong positive attitudes towards EMI. They were in favour of EMI adoption at universities for various reasons, such as preparing students for national and international job markets. Although the lecturers were aware of the negative impacts of EMI on official languages and challenges against EMI implementation, the vast majority preferred EMI and bilingual education. The participants' English proficiency, country and medium of instruction in their highest educational degree as well as their educational level had a significant impact on their attitudes towards and preference for EMI.

Introduction

English has been an important language and the only foreign language taught at schools and universities in Afghanistan for decades. English education was banned during the Taliban Regime (1996-2001) who also barred girls from attending schools and universities (Noori et al., 2021; Babury and Hayward, 2014; Baiza, 2014). The use of English has been on a rapid rise in Afghanistan since the involvement of the international community in 2001. English is extensively used in many areas in Afghanistan, e.g., education, business, government and media (Coleman, 2019). English education begins from grade four in public schools and from grade one in most private schools. It is one of the required courses for all disciplines at universities. It plays a deciding role in employment and promotion in public universities. Applicants for academic jobs, masters and PhD programs with the exception of Islamic studies are required to pass an English proficiency test. Public university lecturers are required to demonstrate competency in one of the international languages (preferably English) for academic promotion (Orfan, 2020). They are required to publish at least one article in an international journal for promotion and the vast majority prefer to publish in English, although many of them lack the skills to write research articles in English. More recently, the Ministry of Higher Education has required lecturers to translate a book from a foreign language into one of the official languages to qualify for promotion from senior lectureship to assistant professorship. Most senior lecturers have preferred translation of English books, though some of them lack the ability to translate from English to an official language (Orfan & Seraj, 2022).

Farsi and Pashto are Afghanistan's official languages. Farsi functions as the *lingua franca* of the country and is used as a language of instruction by many public and private schools and universities. Pashto is widely spoken in southern parts of the country and is used as a medium of instruction at schools and universities in which the majority of the students are Pashto speakers. Uzbek is considered as the third official language in areas where the majority of the population is Uzbek. It is considered as the medium of instruction at schools based in Uzbek populated areas. It is also the medium of instruction in Uzbek departments at public and private universities (Orfan & Seraj, 2022).

English medium instruction (EMI) has gained some popularity in Afghanistan recently. Some private universities located in big cities (e.g., Kabul, Herat, Mazar-e Sharif) have EMI programs. A few public universities have already started offering partial EMI courses. For instance, Kabul University and Kabul University Medical Sciences have already begun to offer courses in EMI (Kabul University, 2017; KUMS, 2016). Many lecturers, particularly in schools of engineering, agriculture, computer science and medical sciences, in both public and private universities, have utilised teaching materials in English and shared them with their students. Many lecturers from these schools obtained their masters and PhD degrees from universities overseas where the language of instruction was English (Orfan, 2022). Thus, they have made extensive use of teaching and learning materials in English and shared more English references and sources with their students.

Despite the widespread use of English in Afghanistan and both public and private university interest in EMI, particularly in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) fields, the government has not developed an explicit policy to regulate the status of English in the country in general and at universities in particular. Various sectors of the government have taken a variety of implicit actions to promote English in the country, which can be viewed as a partially indirect, covert and invisible policy (Johnson, 2013). Considering the status of English and the growing interest of higher education institutions in EMI, the current study examines perspectives of lecturers, one of the major stakeholders, about EMI in higher education in Afghanistan.

Literature review

There is not a consensus on the labels given to EMI in the literature. EMI is labeled in a variety of ways, e.g., English Taught Programs, English as a Lingua Franca, Partial English Medium, English Content-Based Education, Content and language Integrated learning, Bilingual Education, Parallel Language Education and English Medium Education (Macaro et al. 2018; Gardner, 2012). EMI is a global phenomenon (Dearden, 2015), which may mean different things in different contexts. Such globality makes it hard for the researchers and scholars to present a comprehensive definition of the term. Various definitions of EMI are presented in the literature. Richards and Pun (2021) defined EMI as teaching course content through English instead of the language used by students in a given setting. According to Macaro et al. (2018), EMI is the use of English to deliver courses at schools and at universities where the majority of the population does not speak English as their first language. Pecorari and Malmström (2018) defined EMI as “settings

where English is the language used for instructional purposes when teaching content subjects although not itself the subject being taught, and also a second or additional language for most participants in the setting.” In the current study, the label *English Medium Instruction* (EMI) is used, and it is defined as the use of English to deliver courses either fully or partially in a setting where the majority of students speak a language other than English.

EMI is a growing global phenomenon (Dearden, 2015) and universities in countries, where English has no official status and is viewed as a foreign language, have offered educational programs in English (Coleman, 2006; Evans & Morrison, 2011; Fenton-Smith et al., 2017; Kirkpatrick, 2012). A significantly growing number of universities around the world have been in a hurry to deliver undergraduate and graduate degrees through EMI (Lasagabaster et al., 2014; Earls, 2016), and it is more prevalent in private universities (Macaro et al., 2016; Dearden, 2015). A wide range of factors can account for EMI adoption by universities in non-English speaking countries. According to Gardner (2012), the major reasons for extensive EMI adoption are the fact that English is the language of the vast majority of scientific publications, and English plays a significant, facilitative role in student mobility.

Lack of resources in the official language of some countries, particularly in STEM fields, and accessibility of a huge proportion of the world’s knowledge through English have led universities to adopt EMI (Hamid et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2014). According to Wysocka (2013) and Jenkins (2006), globalisation and international communication have facilitated the widespread use of EMI in countries where English has no official status. Ali (2013) and Basibek et al. (2014) stated that universities adopted EMI in order to improve their students’ English skills and help them make use of their majors, as almost all the resources are in English. Ellili-Cherif and Alkhateeb (2015) concluded that universities have adopted EMI in order to help their students find a better job soon after their graduation. Richards and Pun (2021) believed that universities adopted EMI to provide a common medium of instruction in multilingual societies, to promote economic competitiveness and to help students develop their intercultural communication skills. Other studies (e.g., Doiz et al., 2011; Knight, 2013) reported that universities chose to offer EMI programs in order to attract students from other countries, prepare their students for national and international labour markets and improve their ranking nationally and internationally.

Implementation of EMI in non-Anglophone countries come with challenges and shortcomings. These challenges stem from the setting where EMI is implemented, not the EMI itself. Low English proficiency of students and lecturers is the major challenge (Yildiz et al., 2017), which decreases interactions between teachers and students as well students and students (Jensen & Thøgersen, 2011). According to Salomone (2015), a low level of English proficiency makes the class activities less spontaneous, especially teachers’ lectures. Evans and Morrison (2011) found that EMI programs required students to spend more time to review content and complete assignments. According to Goodman (2014) and Al-bakri (2017), access to teaching and online resources in English is difficult in underdeveloped countries. Vu and Burns (2014) concluded that lecturers in EMI programs switched between English and students’ first language when explaining the

content, which made it harder for students to follow their lectures. Some studies (e.g., Joe & Lee, 2013; Airey & Linder, 2006) have reported that students had problems with understanding lectures and teaching materials and they did not actively participate in the class activities, especially discussions (Kagwesage, 2012).

EMI has come under attack. It widens the gap between social classes; higher and middle class families can afford tuition fees for EMI programs, while working families cannot afford it. Students graduating from EMI programs can obtain a better job than those graduating from a non-EMI programs (Barnard, 2014). EMI leads to discrimination against students whose English proficiency is low (Al-Bakri, 2013; Shohamy, 2012; Troudi & Jendli, 2011). According to Marsh (2006), the use of EMI may result in confusion, disappointment and dropout. In addition, some studies have reported that participants were concerned of the negative impacts of EMI on their first language. For instance, participants in Brock-Utne and Holmarsdottir's study (2001) expressed their concern about losing their native languages as a result of the widespread use of English. Similarly, the participants in AlBakri's study (2017) reported that the use of EMI affected their ability to use their first language.

A variety of studies investigated lecturers' perspective on EMI. Jensen and Thøgersen (2011) studied Danish University lecturers' attitudes towards EMI. They concluded that the lecturers had positive attitudes towards EMI, and they suggested more EMI courses in Danish universities in order to attract more foreign students. The key reason for adopting EMI was the fact that English was a crucial part of internationalisation. A study by Başıbek et al. (2014) revealed that Turkish lecturers had more positive attitudes towards EMI than Turkish medium instruction and they believed that EMI could help their students in their academic efforts and after they graduate. Dewi (2017) investigated Malaysian lecturers' perceptions of EMI in several public and private universities. He used both a questionnaire and interviews to collect data from 36 lecturers. The results revealed that the participants had positive views about the use of EMI in their universities, which could be accounted for by the fact that English facilitated accessibility and understanding of English textbooks. Iranian lecturers preferred EMI although the government has a strong support for Persian medium instruction (Zare-ee & Hejazi, 2017).

Roothoof (2022) investigated beliefs of Spanish lecturers about EMI and made a comparison between STEM and humanities lecturers. The findings showed that the main focus of the vast majority of lecturers in both STEM and humanities was on the content not on the language. Compared to STEM fields, more humanities lecturers focused on both content and language. Furthermore, lecturers changed their teaching styles as a result of EMI, which was more pervasive among humanities lecturers. Rahman et al. (2021) comparatively studied Malaysian and Bangladeshi lecturers' views of English medium instruction, and found that lecturers from both countries had positive attitudes towards English and EMI. Studies in other countries also revealed that lecturers held positive attitudes towards EMI, including Turkey (Ozer, 2020), Germany (Earls, 2016), Iran (Ghorbani & Alavi, 2014), United Arab Emirates (Wanphet & Tantawy, 2018), South Korea (Kim & Kim 2014), Malawi (Reilly, 2019), and Bangladesh (Hamid et al., 2013). However, a few studies reported that lecturers had negative attitudes towards EMI. For

instance, Olcu and Eroz-Tuga (2013) reported that Turkish lecturers from EMI and non-EMI programs had negative attitudes towards EMI and they supported Turkish as the medium of instruction. Di Martino and Di Sabato (2012) found that both teachers and students had negative attitudes towards EMI. They associated the negative attitudes towards EMI to inadequate preparation of teachers and students for shifting to English medium instruction.

English is widely used particularly in education in Afghanistan, and many lecturers at both private and public universities have used English in their teaching activities. However, there is little information about lecturers' views of EMI and its implementation in higher education in Afghanistan. The current study provides insights about public university lecturers and may serve as a baseline for further research on EMI in Afghanistan. It adds to the growing body of literature on EMI in the context of Afghanistan. It also offers insights for EMI studies into variables such as gender, level of education, English proficiency, country of education and the language of instruction of lecturers' highest educational degree. The following research questions are used to guide this study's examination of lecturers' perspectives about EMI in Afghanistan's higher education sector:

1. What are lecturers' attitudes towards EMI?
2. What are their reasons for EMI adoption in Afghanistan's higher education?
3. What are the effects of EMI on official languages and challenges against EMI implementation?
4. What are lecturers' preferences for language of instruction?
5. Are there any statistically significant differences between the participants' responses by gender, level of education, English proficiency, place of education and the language of instruction for their highest educational degree?

Methods

Participants

There were 234 participants for the study who were teaching in schools of engineering, medicine, computer science, education, agriculture, and economy in four public universities (Badakhshan, Baghlan, Kunduz and Takhar) based in the Northeast of Afghanistan. These institutions were government-funded and managed by the Ministry of Higher Education of Afghanistan. They were teaching institutions and were offering similar programs. None of these universities were offering an official EMI program at the time of the study with the exception of English departments where English was used as the medium of instruction for required and core courses, though a few elective courses (e.g., psychology) were delivered in official languages.

There were 595 lecturers in these institutions at the time of the study (MoHE, 2020), and an estimated half of them were teaching in target schools. A small number of the participants were women (7%), and it can be accounted for by the fact that women made up a small fraction of faculty membership (14%) in public higher education (MoHE,

2020). Almost 74% of the participants obtained their highest educational degree overseas and 81% of them could speak English at the time of the study. The language of instruction of around 55% of the participants' highest educational degree was English followed by the official languages (35%), and 10% of them obtained their highest educational degree through other languages (e.g., Chinese, Russian and Turkish). The vast majority of them (82%) held a masters degree at the time of the study while a very small fraction (5%) had a PhD degree. Most of the participants (69%) used English in their teaching activities (e.g., preparing slides in English, using English sources in teaching, sharing English sources with students, using English terminologies), although they were not required.

Instrument

The author used focus group discussions to develop questionnaire items (Stork & Hartley, 2009). He conducted a discussion with 5 lecturers about impacts of EMI, reasons for EMI adoption and the effects of EMI on official languages. He developed 14 items from the group discussion, and adapted 16 items from other studies (Koksal & Tercan, 2019; Rahmadani, 2016; Kim & Kim, 2016; Ellili-Cherif & Alkhateeb, 2015; Chapple, 2015; Byun et al., 2011). The questionnaire comprised five sections. The first part with 6 items sought participants' demographic information (e.g., gender, educational degree). The second (10 items), third (10 items) and fourth (9 items) sections asked the participants about their attitudes towards EMI, reasons for EMI adoption, impact of EMI on official languages and challenges for EMI implementation at universities. The participants were required to express their views on a four-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=agree; 4=strongly agree). The last part elicited the participants' responses about their preference of language of instruction.

The questionnaire was read by three of the author's colleagues in the Department of English, and the problematic items were identified and improved based on their feedback. The English questionnaire was translated into Farsi and was given to three faculty members in Farsi Language Department for revision. It was modified based on their feedback. The wording of the questionnaire is of significance, and therefore a pilot test should be carried out to ensure its success. The author ran a pilot test (Cohen, et al. (2000) with 25 randomly selected participants at Takhar University. An analysis using *SPSS version 26.0* showed Cronbach alpha values over 0.8 for each category of the questionnaire (Table 1). The questionnaire was presented in Farsi because some participants' English was not fluent enough to make sense of the items and that the author wanted to avoid the possibility of misunderstanding the questionnaire items in English.

Table 1: Reliability value of questionnaire items

Category	No. of items	Cronbach's alpha
Attitudes	10	0.902
Reasons	10	0.926
Effects and challenges	9	0.818

Procedure

The author designed the questionnaire online using *Google Forms*, with a snowball sampling technique for data collection. The link of the questionnaire was shared with lecturers who were teaching in Badakhshan, Baghlan, Kunduz and Takhar universities through email, social networking sites (e.g., *Facebook*) and messaging applications (e.g., *WhatsApp*). They were invited to complete the questionnaire and to share the link with their colleagues to take part in the study. Furthermore, the link was shared with a *Messenger* group (General Assembly of Lecturers of Afghanistan) with hundreds of members. The participants had to express their consent through ticking a box with a statement “I am willing to take part in the study” prior to proceeding to complete the questionnaire. The data were collected from 15 March to 25 April 2021.

Analysis

The author downloaded the data as an *Excel* sheet and examined them closely to ensure that the participants completed the questionnaire appropriately. He numerically coded the data and imported into *SPSS version 26.0* for further analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to determine frequency, mean, and percentage of the data. Inferential statistical analyses were used to examine the differences between various groups of participants. An independent samples *t*-test was used to explore the differences between two groups of participants (e.g., gender), and one-way ANOVA was used to determine the differences between more than two groups of the participants (e.g., level of education). A chi-square test was used to examine differences in lecturers’ preference of language of instruction by various variables.

Results

Attitudes towards EMI

Descriptive statistics were used to answer the first research question “What are lecturers’ attitudes towards EMI?” The overall mean score for the participants’ attitudes towards EMI is 3.4 (Table 2), which indicates that lecturers have strong positive attitudes towards EMI. Furthermore, over 87% stated that EMI was necessary at universities and that they were interested in teaching their courses through EMI. Around 83% and 76% believed that EMI was more reliable and effective than official languages medium of instruction, respectively. Over 94% of the participants agreed and strongly agreed with the statements that sought their responses about the effects of EMI such as improving students’ English skills, overseas educational opportunities, access to most cutting-edge resources, publication and lecturers’ and students’ participation in international programs.

Reasons for EMI adoption

The author used descriptive statistical analysis to answer the second research question “What are their reasons for EMI adoption in Afghanistan’s higher education?”

Table 2: Lecturers' attitudes towards EMI (N=234)

No.	Statement	% A and SA	Mean
1	EMI is necessary at universities.	89.7	3.28
2	I am interested in teaching courses through EMI.	88	3.26
3	EMI is more effective than official languages instruction in my field.	76.1	3.07
4	EMI is more reliable than official languages medium instruction.	82.9	3.22
5	EMI helps improve students' English skills.	96.6	3.44
6	EMI helps students get a good job after graduation.	96.6	3.45
7	EMI provides more overseas educational opportunities for students and lecturers.	100	3.73
8	EMI increases lecturers' and students' access to up-to-date resources.	94.9	3.61
9	EMI helps lecturers and students publish articles in international journals.	100	3.74
10	EMI increases lecturers' and students' participation in international programs.	100	3.74
Overall mean			3.42

A = Agree (3); SA = Strongly agree (4)

As Table 3 shows, around 92% stated that English should be adopted for improving students' English proficiency, and 98% believed that EMI should be adopted to prepare students for the national job market, improve access to up-to-date resources and improve the national ranking of universities. Moreover, over 96% believed that EMI should be adopted for international purposes such as preparing students for global job markets and overseas education, international publication, international ranking of universities in particular and Afghanistan in general. Around 84% believed that EMI should be adopted for attracting international students.

Table 3: Lecturers' perception of reasons for EMI adoption (N=234)

No.	Statement: Universities should adopt EMI to:	% A and SA	Mean
1	Improve students' English skills.	91.5	3.26
2	Prepare students for national job market.	98.3	3.36
3	Increase students' and lecturers' access to cutting-edge resources.	98.3	3.44
4	Improve their national ranking.	98.3	3.36
5	Prepare students for international job market.	98.3	3.46
6	Prepare students for overseas studies.	98.3	3.54
7	Help students and lecturers publish their works in international journals.	98.3	3.45
8	Improve their international ranking.	96.6	3.49
9	Raise Afghanistan's academic standing.	98.3	3.49
10	Attract foreign students.	83.8	3.23

A = Agree (3); SA = Strongly agree (4)

EMI effects on official languages and challenges against EMI implementation

The author used descriptive statistics to answer the third research question “What are the effects of EMI on official languages and challenges against EMI implementation?” As Table 4 shows, 41% stated that EMI would undermine official languages and decrease their scientific terminologies. Half of the participants (49.6%) believed that EMI would decrease publication in official languages, and 58% stated that EMI would cause more borrowings from English to official languages. However, less than 10% believed that EMI would undermine their identity and patriotism.

Table 4: Lecturers’ perception of EMI effects on official languages and identity (N=234)

No.	Statement	% A & SA	Mean
1	EMI will undermine official languages as a scientific tool at the university.	41	2.46
2	EMI will decrease the development of official languages scientific vocabulary and terminologies.	41	2.41
3	EMI will cause more borrowings from English to official languages.	58.1	2.58
4	EMI will reduce the publication of articles in official languages.	49.6	2.52
5	EMI will weaken students’ and lecturers’ identity.	8.4	1.49
6	EMI will undermine students’ and lecturers’ patriotism.	5.8	1.46

A = Agree (3); SA = Strongly agree (4)

Furthermore, Lecturers are aware of the major challenges of EMI adoption in higher education. Over 89% stated that lecturers’ and students’ low English proficiency would be the major challenges for implementation of EMI (Table 4). Furthermore, 44% believed that the society would be a challenge for EMI implementation.

Table 5: Lecturers’ perception of challenges of EMI implementation (N=234)

No	Statement	% A & SA	Mean
1	Lecturers’ low English proficiency will be a challenge against EMI at universities.	89.7	3.28
2	Students’ low English proficiency will be a challenge against EMI at universities.	91.5	3.40
3	The public will resist EMI implementation at universities.	44.4	2.53

A = Agree (3); SA = Strongly agree (4)

Preference for medium of instruction

The author employed descriptive analysis to answer the fourth research question “What is the lecturers’ preference of language of instruction?” Around 50% of the participants stated that they would prefer English as the medium of instruction, while a small percentage (13.7%) would choose official languages (Table 6). Furthermore, around 37% stated that they would choose a combination of English and official languages as the language of instruction.

Table 6: Lecturers' preference of language of instruction (N=234)

No.	Statement	Items	Frequency	%
1	I prefer to use ... as the language of instruction at the university where I teach.	English	116	49.6
		Official languages	32	13.7
		English and official languages	86	36.8

A = Agree (3); SA = Strongly agree (4)

Gender, English proficiency, education level, country and language of instruction

The researcher utilised inferential statistics to answer the last research question, "Are there any statistically significant differences between the participants' responses by their gender, level of education, English proficiency, country of education and the language of instruction of their highest educational degree?" An independent samples *t*-test was used to determine the influence of the participants' gender, their English proficiency and the place of their highest educational degree. As Table 7 shows, the *p*-value for gender is 0.153, which is greater than the alpha level (0.05). Thus, it is concluded that gender did not have any significant influence. However, the *p*-values for English proficiency and country of the highest degree (0.000, 0.022) are less than the alpha level (0.05). The lecturers with English proficiency and with a degree from overseas had stronger attitudes towards EMI than those with little or no English proficiency and with a degree from their home country. A one-way ANOVA test was also conducted to explore the impact of the participants' level of education and the language of instruction of their highest educational degree on their attitudes. The *p*-values (0.010, 0.000) for both level of education and medium of instruction are less than the alpha level (0.05), which indicates significant impact. Lecturers with a masters degree and those who obtained their highest educational degree through EMI held stronger attitudes. On the other hand, those who obtained their highest educational degree through other languages (e.g., Turkish, Russian) had the weakest attitudes towards EMI.

Table 7: Participants' attitudes towards EMI by various variables (N=234)

	Category	No.	Mean	SD	<i>p</i> -value
Gender	Female	16	3.66	0.437	0.153
	Male	218	3.4	0.493	
Can you speak English?	Yes	190	3.54	0.417	0.000
	No	44	2.91	0.478	
Country of the highest degree	Home country	62	3.25	0.548	0.022
	Overseas	172	3.48	0.458	
Language of instruction of the highest educational degree	Official languages	64	3.21	0.549	0.000
	English	128	3.61	0.333	
	English and official languages	18	3.4	0.399	
	Other	24	2.99	0.630	
Level of education	Bachelor	30	3.11	0.650	0.010
	Masters	192	3.48	0.443	
	PhD	12	3.19	0.5078	

In addition, the author conducted a chi-square test to determine the differences between the participants' preference of language of instruction by their gender, English proficiency, level of education, country and language of instruction of their highest educational degree. As Table 8 shows, the p-values for gender, country of the highest educational degree and education level are greater than the alpha level (0.05); therefore, it is concluded that they did not have any significant impact on their language preference. On the other hand, there are significant differences between lecturers with and without English proficiency, $X^2 (2, N = 234) = 62.8, p = .000$. Those who could speak English were more likely to prefer English as the medium of instruction while those who could not were more likely to prefer official languages. Furthermore, the medium of instruction for the lecturers' highest educational degree significantly impacted their language preference, $X^2 (6, N = 234) = 38.8, p = .000$. Those who obtained their highest educational degree through EMI were more likely to prefer English as the medium of instruction. Interestingly, the lecturers who obtained their highest educational degree through other languages (e.g., Russian, Turkish) were more likely to prefer official languages as the medium of instruction. Lecturers who obtained their highest educational degree through official languages were more likely to choose a combination of English and official languages.

Table 8: Lecturers' preference of language of instruction by different variables (N=234)

Category	Pearson chi-square	df	p-value
Gender	1.128	2	0.569
Can you speak English?	62.888	2	0.000
Country of the highest educational degree	3.495	2	0.174
Level of education	4.444	4	0.349
Language of instruction of the highest educational degree	38.791	6	0.000

Discussion

The study investigated public university lecturers' perspectives about EMI. The results showed that they carried strong positive attitudes towards EMI and that they were interested in teaching their courses through EMI. Furthermore, lecturers believed that EMI would have a wide number of benefits for both students and lecturers, e.g., increasing students and lecturers' access to more up-to-date resources. This can be accounted for by the fact that the majority of the participants (55%) obtained their highest educational degree through EMI. Moreover, lecturers with English proficiency were at an advantage in their institutions. For instance, all overseas workshops and seminars funded by the Ministry of Higher Education required proficiency in English. Only lecturers with good English proficiency in the target universities could participate in such overseas workshops. The findings concur with those of the studies carried out by Al-kahtany et al. (2015), Başıbek et al. (2014), Reilly (2019) and Zare-ee and Hejazi (2017) who reported that their participants had positive attitudes towards EMI and were aware of the benefits of EMI for both lecturers and students. However, it is

inconsistent with the result of the study by Olcu and Eroz-Tuga (2013) who concluded that their participants including lecturers from EMI programs favored Turkish medium of instruction.

The vast majority of the participants suggested EMI adoption at universities in Afghanistan for various international purposes including preparing students for overseas employment and education, attracting international students, publication in international journals, improving the international ranking of universities, and raising Afghanistan's academic standing. It corroborates the findings by Ghorbani and Alavi (2014) and Wysocka (2013) whose participants recommended EMI adoption in their country's universities for similar reasons. The participants in the current study also believed that EMI should be adopted by universities for academic and economic purposes at national level such as improving students' English skills, increasing both lecturers' and students' access to the most up-to-date resources and improving universities' national rankings. This finding is in line with the findings by Zare-ee and Hejazi (2017) and Kim et al. (2014) who reported that their participants recommended EMI adoption in their institutions in order to help students improve their English skills and help them land a job soon after their graduation.

The participants had mixed feelings about the effects of EMI on official languages in Afghanistan. Less than half of them believed that EMI would undermine official languages as a scientific tool and would reduce their scientific terminologies. On the other hand, over half of the participants believed that EMI would cause more borrowing from English into official languages, and half of them stated that EMI would decrease publications in these languages. These findings are similar to the results of the study by Al-kahtany et al. (2015) who reported that their participants raised concerns about the negative effects of EMI implementation on their home language. A small fraction of the current study's participants believed that EMI would affect their identity and patriotism.

Furthermore, the findings showed that the lecturers were aware of the challenges against EMI implementation at universities of Afghanistan. The vast majority of them believed that lecturers' and students' low English proficiency would be the major challenges against EMI implementation. It can be explained by the fact that many students, particularly those from remote parts of the country where the quality of education is poor, do not have a basic knowledge of English when they start their undergraduate studies, although English is taught from grades 4 to 12 at public schools and from grades 1 to 12 at private schools (Orfan, 2021). There are many lecturers particularly in STEM fields in public institutions of higher education of Afghanistan who understand their fields' terminologies in English, and they extensively use them in their teaching on a daily basis. They can be

prepared to use EMI in their courses through offering them English preparation classes. These findings are on a par with those of Salomone (2015) and Yildiz et al. (2017) whose participants considered low English proficiency of students and lecturers as significant challenges. Less than half of the participants of the current study also believed that the public might resist against EMI implementation at universities. This can be accounted for by the fact that many people are still illiterate and traditional beliefs and values are dominant in Afghanistan. The public may see EMI as a Westernised phenomenon imposed on universities.

Although lecturers were aware of the challenges against EMI implementation, the vast majority of them favored EMI and bilingual education (a combination of English and official languages) over official languages as medium of instruction. It can be accounted for by the fact that lecturers with English proficiency have access to more resources and can make use of the opportunities for which English is one of the major requirements. The result is consistent with research by Zare-ee and Hejazi (2017) who reported that lecturers favored English over Persian despite the Iranian government's support of the latter. It indicates that university lecturers realise the significance of English for their own growth, students' growth and the development of universities in particular and Afghanistan in general. A small fraction of the lecturers preferred official languages medium of instruction to EMI, typically being those who could not speak English and those who obtained their highest educational degree through languages other than English.

The findings also revealed that the lecturers' gender did not have a significant impact on their attitudes towards EMI and their preference of language of instruction. It mirrors the findings of the study by Ismail et al. (2011) who reported no differences between female and male participants' attitudes towards EMI. However, their English proficiency, country and the language of instruction of their highest educational degree and level of education impacted their attitudes towards EMI. Lecturers with English proficiency and a masters degree, and those who obtained their highest educational degree through English in a foreign country, held more positive attitudes towards the use of EMI in higher education. Furthermore, lecturers' English proficiency and the language of instruction of their highest educational degree had a significant impact on their preference of medium of instruction. Lecturers who could speak English were more likely to prefer English as the language of instruction than those who could not. Similarly, lecturers who obtained their highest educational degree through English were more likely to prefer EMI. Lecturers who obtained their highest educational degree through other languages (e.g., Turkish, Russian) were more likely to prefer official languages as the language of instruction.

Conclusion

The global spread of English has led many universities in non-Anglophone countries to adopt English as their medium of instruction for various purposes. The results of the current study revealed that Afghanistan public university lecturers had strong positive attitudes towards EMI, and they suggested that universities should adopt EMI for various international and academic purposes, e.g., attracting international students. Despite their concerns about the effects of EMI on official languages and challenges against EMI implementation, the vast majority of lecturers preferred EMI and bilingual education (a combination of English and official languages). Variables including English proficiency, country and language of instruction of highest educational degree as well as education level had a significant impact on lecturers' attitudes towards EMI.

The main limitation is that hopes for research-informed and professional approaches to issues such as EMI in higher education of Afghanistan have been waning since the handover of the country to the Taliban in August 2021. Since then, many scholars and researchers have left Afghanistan, and the Taliban has continued to impose their draconian restrictions on higher education in addition to their efforts to turn universities into religious madrasahs (schools). Follow-up actions and further research may not be feasible in the country. Studies of comparative nature may be possible, but the prospective researchers may encounter difficulties in data collection due to the growing restrictions on higher education and research. Nonetheless, the author hopes that his findings will provide a baseline for further studies about EMI in the future. Afghanistan universities maintain strong support for publications in international journals though they do not provide grants or financial supports. It keeps the avenue open for international scholarly communication and participation, even though many academics and postgraduate students may encounter much difficulty in finding an appropriate publisher. Therefore, the author suggests that the international academic publishing industry should adopt more supportive policies and services for authors from Afghanistan and similar emerging countries.

The author used an online survey to collect data from lecturers in schools of engineering, medicine, computer science, agriculture and economy based in four government-funded universities in the northeast of Afghanistan. Therefore, the results may not be generalisable to all schools, e.g., humanities and universities, particularly in the private sector. It may be also not generalisable to lecturers without access to the Internet. If possible, further research with larger sample from both public and private HEIs universities across the country is recommended. Future research can focus on perspectives of other stakeholders of institutions of higher education including administrators and the public about EMI.

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Sayeed Naqibullah Orfan is a senior lecturer in the Department of English at Takhar University, Taloqan City, Afghanistan. He has a Masters degree in applied linguistics from Montclair State University, New Jersey, USA. He is a Fulbright scholar and an advocate for gender equality in Afghanistan. His areas of research are language and gender, learning in higher education, and outcomes-based education.
 ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4584-1965>
 Email: sayeed.naqibullah@fulbrightmail.org

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