

English as teaching language at SIMAC

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Abstract:

This paper examines how to implement more subjects instructed fully in English at SIMAC to improve and develop students' English competences. The analysis reveals that few subjects are instructed in English, and an extended use of material in English. The potential offering more subjects in English is significant and most relevant in the last semesters of studies within Maritime Engineering and Maritime Nautical Science. Also, elective subjects, international and communicational subjects are highlighted as suitable for instructions in English. Results show that students have a positive approach to English as teaching language and find their language skills adequate. Professors are less confident in English and question if they have sufficient language skills to conduct lectures fully in English.

Implementing English in more subjects demands a need for language courses, help centres, longer preparation time and a well-planned strategy. Extra resources are needed, teachers must be involved in the planning, alternatives like Danish/English mix and parallel range of subjects offered should be considered. Also, transforming classes into English needs to be supported by a special pedagogic and didactic approach to scaffolding lectures and learning activities which ensures students' activity, interaction and learning objectives. The pedagogic and didactic transformation requires special attention and possibly upgrading.

Keywords: EMI, Implementation strategies, pedagogic- and didactic preconditions, SIMAC

1: Introduction:

Svendborg International Maritime Academy (SIMAC) – is a maritime education centre which features three educational programs with approx. 900 students, 100 employees and a course department, SIMAC Training, which service approx. 800 course participants every year. SIMAC's objective is to ensure that our graduates are ready for a global world and possess intercultural competencies and master English as a working language. Therefore, this paper examines realisable ways to enhance and promote the possibilities of implementing more subjects undertaken, lectured, and instructed all in English.

The international definition used to describe and define courses and lectures all executed in English is EMI, short for English Medium Instruction, it is officially defined:

*“English Medium Instruction (EMI) refers to the use of the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries where the first language of the majority of the population is not English.”
(Oxford University, 2022)*

2: Methodology

The methodological foundation of this project relates to social science in which the need for both quantitative as well as qualitative data is recognized. Furthermore, there has been a need for collecting quantitative as well as qualitative data to fully research, answer the research question and present reliable recommendations for possible strategies of action at SIMAC.

Preliminary research and the systematic gathering of reports, surveys, and reviews of EMI in higher education has been completed via electronic databases, websites and is thus limited to findings made available electronically and of recent date. Sources of articles, reports, surveys, abstract and editorials are listed in the bibliography of this report and has formed the basis and scope of the subsequent quantitative research conducted within SIMAC, in which professors and students have responded to an on-line distributed questionnaire.

2.1: Methodological bias

This report mainly deals with the situation and conditions at SIMAC. Therefore, the analysis is assessed to be biased in this direction but the research question taken into account, the need to collect local data justified the limited scope of the questionnaires and thus the results are valid in terms of relevance to the research question. Concerning the conducted interviews among Danish educational colleges and academies there is also a bias as the respondents have been selected by choice and not randomly. It might be argued that Universities on a broader scale could have been included in the survey, however the argument for not including international universities in the maritime educational sector is that they primarily offer studies and education on a higher level and thus the focus of this report was limited to the level of that of a professional bachelor's degree. Regarding the extensive search for existing, secondary literature it is evaluated that there is very little or no bias to be considered as both national, Scandinavian and International sources, reports and surveys have been included in the outline of the foundation of EMI and the experiences from universities and academies.

3: International research and conclusion on EMI

In this section, some general conclusions about trends, implementation, challenges as well as advantages and disadvantages of EMI in primarily higher educations will be presented.

Over the recent two decades EMI has been expanding within the area of higher education. Universities have used EMI as a strategy for promoting globalization, upgrading national language proficiency and as an internationalization of education but also as means of competitive positioning to attract international researchers and students. (EMI Oxford Research Group, 2022) Hanne Tange, a Danish researcher, claims that EMI at Danish universities etc. is a result of extensive internationalization and a 'must' if researchers and scientists wish to advance and pursue an international career within the academic area (Tange, 2020). She takes a critical stand on the continued growth of EMI programs offered and thinks it's a result of an Americanization, globalization, and an academic system which favours English material and research on the cost of other languages. But at the same time, she recognizes the teaching in English at universities is a fundamental, basic term in the academic world (Tange, 2020)

In Denmark among maritime academies/colleges no full time EMI are offered (Styrelsen for Forskning og Uddannelse, 2018). At DTU a Master of Engineering is offered as full time EMI study. (Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet, u.d.) and a private organization, Danish Shipping offers a full time, all in English trainee program called 'Danish Shipping Education' for students employed in shipping companies within the maritime industry.

A report from 2013 looking into EMI on Nordic universities states that changing the teaching language into English creates multiple challenges for professors as well as students regarding language proficiency, teaching methods and activity levels. The study found a clear indication that classes and lectures took on a more formal shape which resulted in less dialogue between professors and students. Furthermore, it examined and concluded that student activity in general diminished and students tended to take a more passive stand thus the number of questions asked decreased, resulting in a lower level of incentive to enter into a discussion both on teacher/student level and student/student level (Jacob Thøgersen, 2013).

Therefore, it is especially important to focus on didactically preparing and organizing the lessons in a way which promotes student centred multi-didactic learning through discussions, group work, peer feedback etc. and keep in mind that language proficiency includes both reading, listening, and speaking (Jacob Thøgersen, 2013). The findings on the didactic organization of lessons are strongly supported by a Danish study, in which teachers at Århus University participated in a program focusing on improving their pedagogic and didactic approach to teaching in English as well as their language proficiencies (Lauridsen, 2017). Following this program called 'super monitoring' Lauridsen and Lauridsen concluded that teaching in English is not just a question of teacher's language proficiency but equally important is the pedagogic and didactic organization of the lessons and therefore the focus must be on both when implementing EMI. (Lauridsen, 2017)

Securing the quality of teaching in EMI is essential to the success of EMI for both teachers and students and this conclusion is also supported by Anne Holmen, who in her book 'English Medium Instruction in Multilingual and Multicultural Universities' states that not only the level of language proficiency among teachers is important but equally important is the pedagogic and didactic level of teachers to plan lessons. Therefore, universities need to improve both teacher's language skills and pedagogic and didactic skills through well planned competence developments. (Lauridsen, 2017). In the article, 'Pedagogy in English-Medium Instruction (EMI): Some Recommendations for EMI Teachers' recommendations for how to plan and organize EMI lectures to secure a more learner-centred instruction (Denchai Prabjandee, 2022) are offered. The article suggests a 6-stage model for planning of an EMI lecture, the technique or EMI pedagogy implies the following scaffolding: Greeting – Review – Directions – Theory - Tasks – Assessment – Delivery. This model includes also multimodal, interactional strategies as well as consideration about verbal, procedural scaffolding and classroom organization. Finally, it emphasizes the positive aspect of ending classes with reflective practices in which students are encouraged to reflect on learning objectives. (Denchai Prabjandee, 2022).

3.1: Advantages/disadvantages and challenges of EMI from international research

There is a broad consensus that implementing EMI on all levels is costly, time consuming, demands a seriously planned strategy and requires focus on pedagogic and didactic approach to execution of EMI classes otherwise it will damage content learning and students' fulfilment of learning objectives. The advantages of EMI revealed in the reports, surveys and articles are e.g: students experience a positive language proficiency and feel more comfortable in English and EMI improves international career opportunities, intercultural communication and understanding (E. Macaro, 2018) (Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut, 2010), EMI increases internationalization the exchange of international students and does not result in decreased content learning (Jacob Thøgersen, 2013), (E. Macaro, 2018), (Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut, 2010), and EMI attracts better qualified international researchers, scientists, and professors and improves the competitive position of universities in the international competition. (Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut, 2010) Concludingly, the pros and cons of implementing EMI are

many and the challenges seem to outweigh the opportunities. However, there is no doubt that the growth in EMI worldwide has been and will continue to be seen as a mean and path towards enhanced internationalization in an increasingly competitive and global academic educational sector.

4: EMI at SIMAC

The internal analysis among professors at SIMAC supports the above findings and shows that at present very few subjects are conducted in English as only 10 % states that they teach 1 or 2 subjects using EMI and more than 76% states 'no EMI' at all. Nevertheless, the survey also discloses that, when you include the use of English books, material and written instructions in the curriculum, the conclusions are more complex and show that to a large extent English materials are used in the subjects. To implement more subjects in English, teachers were asked to identify suitable and relevant subjects and electives relevant for EMI, but no significant conclusions could be deduced from the answers. A marginal tendency towards electives with a communicative, theoretical, and international aspect is noted and the comments point to subjects of especially international maritime relevance being suitable as students, facing careers on increasingly internationally crewed vessels, will need communicative competencies in English to exercise their positions on board.

Looking into semesters, the analysis establishes only a marginal indication of the last semesters on the studies be more suitable, thus the evidence is weak but marginally identifies the semesters 5, 6 and 8 on the marine engineering studies plus semester 5 and 7 on shipmaster studies to most relevant. In contrast, the data shows strongly that across studies the first semesters 1-4 are not well suited for EMI.

When teachers are asked to rank what is important when screening subjects and semesters and assess if they are suitable for EMI, teachers quite clearly state that they want to be involved in the selection process and that the most important criteria for a subject suitable for EMI is its vocational, professional, international, and practical relevance and content. As mentioned earlier, maritime, and communicational subjects which the future seafarers to a large extent will need to fulfil and practice in English are thus the most logical choice. Subjects taught in English should also be examined in English to motivate and emphasise the importance of EMI. The analysis also surveyed fundamental requirements for implementing EMI and found that professors identify more preparation time, upgrading of language skills, and help to produce material in English as essential requirements to be met. In general, teachers at SIMAC feel competent and ready in especially within pedagogic/didactic areas.

The collected data uncover an insecurity in respect of securing quality and learning output in the subjects, primarily because teachers (93,4 %) judge students to be 'not at all' or 'reasonable' ready to receive lectures in English. This conflicts strongly with the views and results of the students' questionnaire as they evaluate themselves to be quite ready to receive lectures in English. Do teachers have too little confidence in the abilities of their students or do students have too high opinions about their own readiness? The data cannot answer this difference, but it remains an interesting divergence, even though teachers' comments reveal concern for students' understanding of vocational content if no explanations are offered in Danish and a concern for weak students who might find it even harder to meet the required learning objectives if lectures are in English.

Generally, students have a very positive approach to English and teaching in English. The results reveal that most subjects, according to students, could be taught in English. Subjects with a maritime, international, and shipping related content are especially appropriate, as students face working and communicating in English in their future careers at sea and in many large, international companies. Additionally, students strongly agree to statements that EMI will enhance their job opportunities, improve international focus, but the success of EMI depends on the language skills of the teachers. Interestingly, students disagree to the statements that EMI will

make it harder for them to complete their studies, that EMI should be a requirement, and that English as language of instruction would influence their activity or make them ask fewer questions. Students don't see EMI as a barrier to complete their studies, nor would they deselect subjects due to classes/lectures being conducted in English. Adding to the positive approach of students, they recognize that implementing EMI and conducting classes fully in English would require e.g. up-grading of language skills, more lectures and more time for preparation, homework, and resources allocated into a help-centre, where students could receive help and assistance in relation to language, assignments in English.

Concludingly, the overall findings regarding students' opinions of EMI are positive, they have a positive approach and see more pros than cons, but at the same time they recognize the need for language up-grading, help centre facilities and emphasize that success depends on teachers' language proficiency and ability to convey the content as well in English as in Danish. Thus, the success of EMI depends on these central parameters; namely a well-planned process of selection and implementation.

5: Recommendations for how to implement EMI at SIMAC

The experiences collected among other colleges and academies show that like SIMAC few subjects are offered in English but those actually offered are popular among students and appeal to students' wish for an international perspective. These experiences are used in the development of 3 strategies for implementation of EMI at SIMAC.

The first strategy suggests **selection of one or more semesters where all subjects are offered in English**. The decision and selection of semesters should be taken in collaboration between the teachers involved in the semesters, management and it is essential that the involved teachers are included in both the selection, planning and implementation to secure alignment, motivation, commitment, and success. This scenario might not appeal to a lot of international students as it might be difficult for international students to incorporate a whole semester in their own individual educational plan.

The second strategy comprises a **more limited selection individual subjects and electives which are suitable for teaching in English because of the international, vocational, communicative, and professional relevance**. These subjects and electives should be offered continuously and permanently in English by teachers who have volunteered and committed themselves to conducting the subjects and electives in English thus gaining confidence and experience in teaching these subjects using EMI. This scenario might offer a broader appeal to international students who might possibly find it easier to include single subjects into their educational plans and thus be attracted to apply for a stay at SIMAC

A **third strategy** proposes offering **parallel studies, subjects and the selected semesters in both English and Danish**. This includes double up on classes, lectures, teachers and physical facilities. However, it would leave the students with a broader choice and appeal to students who are less confident to receive classes in English. This alternative requires a stronger and more extensive investment into the implementation. However, this option has been suggested by several teachers as a good way of introducing and incorporating EMI at SIMAC.

6: Conclusion

Regardless of choice of strategy, the decision must include economic investments; money allocated into e.g., more preparation time for the teachers involved, more lectures allocated to the subjects on the chosen semesters,

resources for language courses, pedagogic and didactic up-grading, help center and support functions for both teachers and students. Otherwise, the prospects of lack of success will be too high. Thus, the above-mentioned strategies must contain plans and resources for the mentioned preparations and functions for both teachers and students as well as evaluation and follow up programs to continuously investigate the need for adjustments. International and national research show that transforming classes into EMI needs to be supported by an EMI pedagogic and didactic approach to scaffolding lectures and learning activities which will ensure students' activity, interaction and securing learning objectives. EMI pedagogic and didactic approaches require a special attention from teachers and possibly upgrading. The success of EMI depends not solely on language skills but as much on initiating the adequate teaching forms and lay-out of classes which facilitates the use of English as means of instruction.

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