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The Impact of EMI (English as Medium of Instruction) Translanguaging on Medical Students' Learning at Sebha University, Libya

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Keywords

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ABSTRACT

In the context of globalization, English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) has become a common approach in higher education, especially in non-English-speaking countries. This study investigates the impact of translanguaging practices, utilizing students' native languages alongside English, on the learning experiences of medical students at Sebha University in Libya. It explores how these practices affect comprehension, retention, engagement, and academic performance in medical education. The research employs a qualitative case study approach, using semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations to gather detailed insights from a diverse group of students at the Faculty of Medicine. Thematic analysis is used to identify patterns and themes within the collected data, illuminating the benefits and challenges of translanguaging in an EMI context. The findings indicate that translanguaging practices enhance students' understanding of complex medical concepts, foster engagement, and improve retention. However, institutional attitudes and policies significantly influence the successful implementation of these practices. This study underscores the necessity for inclusive educational strategies that respect linguistic diversity while optimizing EMI outcomes. Recommendations are provided to enhance translanguaging practices, aiming to improve the academic success and global competitiveness of medical students in multilingual environments.

تأثير الترجمة اللغوية باستخدام اللغة الإنجليزية كوسيلة للتعليم (EMI) على تعلم طلاب الطب في جامعة سبها، ليبيا

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الكلمات المفتاحية:

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الملخص

في سياق العولمة، أصبحت اللغة الإنجليزية كوسيلة للتعليم نهجاً شائعاً في التعليم العالي، وخاصةً في الدول غير الناطقة بالإنجليزية. تبحر هذه الدراسة في تأثير ممارسات الترجمة اللغوية، التي تعتمد على استخدام لغات الطلاب الأصلية إلى جانب اللغة الإنجليزية، على تجارب التعلم لدى طلاب الطب في جامعة سبها في ليبيا. وتستكشف كيف تؤثر هذه الممارسات على الفهم والاحتفاظ بالمعلومات والمشاركة والأداء الأكاديمي في التعليم الطبي. يعتمد البحث على منهج دراسة الحالة النوعية، باستخدام المقابلات شبه المنظمة، ومناقشات المجموعات البؤرية، والملاحظات الصفية لجمع رؤى تفصيلية من مجموعة متنوعة من طلاب كلية الطب. ويُستخدم التحليل الموضوعي لتحديد الأنماط والمواضيع ضمن البيانات المجمعة، مما يُبرز فوائد وتحديات الترجمة اللغوية في سياق استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية كوسيلة للتعليم. تشير النتائج إلى أن ممارسات الترجمة اللغوية تُعزز فهم الطلاب للمفاهيم الطبية المعقدة، وتعزز المشاركة، وتُحسن الاحتفاظ بالمعلومات. ومع ذلك، تؤثر المواقف والسياسات المؤسسية بشكل كبير على نجاح تطبيق هذه الممارسات. تُشدّد هذه الدراسة على ضرورة اتباع استراتيجيات تعليمية شاملة تحترم التنوع اللغوي مع تحسين نتائج التعليم متعدد اللغات. وتُقدم توصيات لتعزيز ممارسات التعليم متعدد اللغات، بهدف تحسين النجاح الأكاديمي والقدرة التنافسية العالمية لطلاب الطب في البيئات متعددة اللغات.

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1. Introduction

In the rapidly globalizing world of higher education, English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) has become increasingly common, especially in non-English-speaking countries. This shift towards EMI aims to enhance students' proficiency in English, thereby improving their competitiveness in the global job market. However, implementing EMI in medical education presents unique challenges and opportunities, particularly in multilingual contexts.

At Sebha University in Libya, the Faculty of Medicine has adopted EMI to facilitate the learning process for its diverse student body. This study explores the impact of translanguaging in EMI on medical students' learning experiences at Sebha University. By examining the interaction between students' native language and English, this research aims to uncover how translanguaging practices can support or hinder academic success in medical education. The findings of this study will provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of EMI in creating a conducive learning environment for medical students in Libya.

1.1. Research Problem

The adoption of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in non-English speaking countries aims to enhance students' English proficiency and global competitiveness. However, the effectiveness of EMI in medical education, particularly in bilingual contexts like Sebha University, remains underexplored. There is a need to understand how translanguaging practices, where students use their native languages alongside English, affect their learning experiences and academic success in medical education.

1.2. Research Question

Does EMI translanguaging impact medical students' learning experiences and interactional academic performance at Sebha University, Libya?

1.3. Research Hypothesis

Translanguaging in EMI may enhance medical students' learning experiences and academic interactional performance at Sebha University by improving their understanding, engagement, and retention of medical knowledge.

1.4. Objectives

This study aims to examine the current translanguaging practices in English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) among medical students at Sebha University. It seeks to assess the impact of these translanguaging practices on students' comprehension and retention of medical knowledge. Through this evaluation, the researchers will also investigate how EMI translanguaging influences students' academic performance and engagement in medical education.

Additionally, the study will identify the challenges and opportunities associated with EMI translanguaging within the context of medical education at Sebha University. Based on the findings, the researchers will provide recommendations for optimizing EMI translanguaging practices to enhance the learning experiences and academic success of medical students.

1.5. Significance of the Study

This study is vital for higher education in multilingual, non-English-speaking countries like Libya. It focuses on the Faculty of Medicine at Sebha University to assess the impact of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) on medical students' learning experiences and academic performance.

The research explores how translanguaging, using native languages alongside English, affects students' comprehension, retention, and engagement in medical education. Understanding this interaction can help educators enhance teaching methods, improving academic performance and global competitiveness.

By providing empirical evidence from Libya, the study contributes to

the broader discussion on EMI, offering insights that can aid other institutions facing similar challenges. It highlights the importance of creating an inclusive learning environment that respects linguistic diversity and informs policies and curricula that better support EMI, leading to enhanced student outcomes and a stronger workforce.

2. Literature Review

The adoption of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in higher education has been a growing trend, particularly in non-English-speaking countries. This shift aims to enhance students' English proficiency and global competitiveness. According to Dearden (2014), "EMI is seen as a way to improve students' English language skills and prepare them for the global job market." This perspective underscores the importance of EMI in equipping students with the necessary language skills to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world.

However, the implementation of EMI in medical education presents unique challenges. Wilkinson (2013) highlights that "medical students often struggle with the dual burden of mastering complex medical concepts while also learning in a non-native language." This dual challenge can impact students' comprehension and retention of medical knowledge, potentially hindering their academic success.

Translanguaging, the practice of using multiple languages in the learning process, has been proposed as a solution to these challenges. García and Wei (2014) argue that "translanguaging allows students to draw on their full linguistic repertoire, facilitating deeper understanding and engagement with the content." This approach can help medical students at Sebha University navigate the complexities of EMI by leveraging their native language alongside English.

Research has shown that translanguaging can positively impact students' learning experiences and academic performance. Mazak and Carroll (2017) found that "students who engaged in translanguaging practices demonstrated improved comprehension and retention of subject matter." This finding suggests that incorporating translanguaging into EMI can enhance students' academic outcomes. Allowing students to use their native language can boost their confidence and motivation, as they can express themselves more freely and participate actively in classroom activities. (Aboushala and Amarif, 2024).

In the context of medical education, translanguaging can also support students' professional development. According to Lin and He (2017), "translanguaging practices can help medical students develop better communication skills, which are essential for their future careers." By allowing students to use their native language alongside English, translanguaging can foster more effective communication and understanding in medical settings.

Despite the potential benefits, there are also challenges associated with translanguaging in EMI. Creese and Blackledge (2010) note that "institutional policies and attitudes towards language use can either support or hinder the implementation of translanguaging practices." Therefore, it is crucial for educational institutions to create a supportive environment that encourages the use of multiple languages in the learning process.

In summary, the literature highlights the potential benefits of translanguaging in EMI, particularly in medical education. By allowing students to use their native language alongside English, translanguaging can enhance comprehension, retention, and communication skills. However, successful implementation requires supportive institutional policies and attitudes towards language use.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the impact of translanguaging in English as a Medium of Instruction

(EMI) on medical students' learning experiences at Sebha University. The qualitative approach is chosen to gain in-depth insights into the students' perspectives, experiences, and challenges related to EMI and translanguaging practices.

3.1. Research Design

A case study approach is utilized to provide a comprehensive understanding of the specific context of the Faculty of Medicine at Sebha University. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the unique dynamics and interactions between students' native languages and English in their learning process.

3.2. Participants

The study involves a purposive sample of medical students and staff members from different academic years at Sebha University. Participants are selected based on their willingness to share their experiences and insights regarding EMI and translanguaging practices. The sample includes a diverse group of students to capture a wide range of perspectives.

3.4. Data Collection Methods

1. **Semi-Structured Interviews:** In-depth interviews are conducted with selected students and staff members to gather detailed information about their experiences with EMI and translanguaging. The semi-structured format allows for flexibility in probing deeper into specific areas of interest while maintaining a consistent framework for comparison.
2. **Focus Group Discussions:** Focus groups are organized to facilitate discussions among students about their collective experiences and perceptions of EMI and translanguaging. This method encourages interaction and the sharing of diverse viewpoints, providing a richer understanding of the phenomena under study.
3. **Observations:** Classroom observations are carried out to document the actual use of translanguaging practices in the learning environment. Observations focus on how students and instructors navigate between languages during lectures, discussions, and other academic activities.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval is obtained from the relevant institutional review board at Sebha University. Informed consent is obtained from all participants, ensuring their voluntary participation and the confidentiality of their responses. Participants are assured that their identities will be anonymized in the reporting of the findings.

4. Data Analysis and Findings

The collected data are analyzed using thematic analysis. This method involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. The analysis process includes the following steps:

- a. **Familiarization:** Transcribing interviews and focus group discussions, and reviewing observation notes and documents to become thoroughly familiar with the data.
- b. **Coding:** Generating initial codes to organize the data into meaningful groups. Coding is done manually to ensure a deep engagement with the data.
- c. **Theme Development:** Identifying and refining themes that capture significant patterns and insights related to the research question. Themes are developed iteratively, with constant comparison and refinement.
- d. **Interpretation:** Interpreting the themes in relation to the research question and the existing literature. This step involves drawing connections between the findings and the broader context of EMI and translanguaging in medical education.

The analysis of the data reveals a great impact of EMI translanguaging on Sebha University medical schools. This impact varies from attitudinal and psychological to linguistic and pedagogical. The observation conducted by these researchers has shown more participation and engagements performed by the students (subjects) when their professor allowed using their mother language (Arabic) during the class. Subsequently, the medical

students have shown more motivation while applying translanguaging. They associated such attitude with the lessening of anxiety and panic provided by employing EMI translanguaging.

Similar perception has been described by the medical professors interviewed in this study. They postulate that both, them and their medical students, interact in a smooth and panic-free manner when applying translanguaging. They can explain new medical terms and expressions in Arabic in a spontaneous mode causing no hassles for both. Furthermore, this study's interviewees (professor and students) have emphasized on more advantages of translanguaging such as providing more understanding of complex medical concepts, foster engagement, and improve retention.

In addition, analysis and findings of the focus group discussion conducted in this study exhibit a large perceptual and practical agreement (among the targeted medical school students) regarding the use of translanguaging. For instance, when the subjects discussed how has EMI translanguaging impacted their understanding of medical content, they almost agree that it can bridge gaps in comprehension by linking English terms to their Arabic language equivalents (e.g. insomnia/ *أرق* و *وقلة النوم*). Moreover,

translanguaging enhances their retention through code-switching of medical information. Nonetheless, a few numbers of participants have unveiled their concern on some challenges that translanguaging performance might face. They argue that some Latin-based anatomical terms have no equivalents in Arabic which may cause occasional confusion (e.g. corpus callosum/ *الجسم الثفني* "a broad band of nerve fibres joining the two hemispheres of the brain). Another challenge faces EMI translanguaging practice could be the over-reliance on native language (Arabic) which might slow the medical students' English academic writing improvement.

Interestingly, this study's participants have provided very practical examples of using their native Arabic language alongside with English in their medical learning. They claim that in peer study sessions, translanguaging helps in clarifying challenging topics (e.g. pharmacokinetics/ *الحركية الدوائية* "the branch of pharmacology concerned with the movement of drugs within the body") during group revision. Furthermore, translanguaging helps in personal notes taking by annotating diagrams or textbook margins with Arabic language translations to "reinforce memory". Practically speaking, our medical practitioners/ students (participants) have on the positive role EMI translanguaging plays during patients' diagnosis interactions.

These researchers have extracted more exciting findings related to EMI practice in Sebha University medical education. Most medical students participated in this study have noticed that some of their instructors are very supportive in providing bilingual glossaries and/or allowing explanations in Arabic/English language during office hours. In contrast, a few numbers of medical staff (instructors) are very restrictive by emphasizing discussion to be run in only English language, which sometimes stifled deeper conceptual questioning to the students.

As results of using EMI and translanguaging in medical education and practices at Sebha University, our subjects have explicated the improvements/advantages and challenges/disadvantages they encounter in academic performance which due to EMI and translanguaging. The seen improvements are: "increased fluency in reading research papers and presenting case studies in English" in addition to "better performance in standardized exams (e.g. Libyan Fellowship Examination) due to familiarity with English medical terminologies. Moreover, EMI translanguaging can assist medical students to well prepare for global collaboration and placements as well as provide access to up-to-date large medical literature in English. On the other hand, a number challenges can be faced such as initial slower note-taking during lectures and difficulties participating in debates requiring spontaneous English responses.

Moreover, EMI translanguaging could create potential gaps in foundational understanding if language barriers persist, alongside with inequity for students with weaker English proficiency.

Finally, this research's subjects have explicitly recommended a number of points to improve the use of EMI and translanguaging for medical students at Sebha University:

- a. Integrate Translanguaging by allowing bilingual explanations in tutorials or supplementary materials.
- b. Language Support by offering medical English workshops focused on terminology and academic writing.
- c. Cultural Context by including case studies from Multilanguage speaking regions to bridge theory and local practice.

5. Conclusion To sum up, the analysis and findings of this study's data have revealed that the use of EMI and translanguaging in the medical contexts at Sebha University has significant number of advantages and benefits to the medical students. These prevailing advantages can be conceptual, educational, and practical. EMI and translanguaging practitioners (professors/students) have expressed their appreciations to the educational and practical outcomes subsequently unveiled in the analysis and findings discussed above. Hence, the use of IME (English as a Medium of Instruction) translanguaging in medical education at Sebha University has shown great positive impacts on the students in all levels: conceptual/psychological, educational/linguistical, and practical/professional. Accordingly, more recommendations should be provided to enhance translanguaging practices, aiming to improve the academic success and global competitiveness of medical students in multilingual environments. Finally, these researchers would take the chance to furthermore recommend that further researches need to

be undergone in this context of medicine and others such as engineering, agriculture, tourism, business management, etc.

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