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English Medium Instruction at Crossroads: Students' Voice and Way Forward

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Abstract

Globalisation and extensive use of technology have enhanced the status of English as an international language and increased its value as an important commodity in various fields. This has encouraged the use of English in the teaching of content subjects especially those related to science and technology in many countries across Asia. This paper starts with an overview of English medium instruction policy in the region with an emphasis on the ongoing debate regarding the teaching and learning of Science and Mathematics in English in Malaysia. Drawing on data from a longitudinal study which utilized questionnaires and the paper presents empirical evidence on the learners' views and experience in learning Science in English, as well as their performance in the standardized national examination. The data gathered from a total of 1000 students from urban and rural schools in Sarawak, Malaysia, indicate they have rather positive view about their ability in English, had positive experience in learning Science in English. Their positive view and experience conform to their performance in the subject. The results also correlate with the majority of the students' language preference for learning Science which is English and bilingual instruction in English and Bahasa Malaysia. The paper ends with a discussion on possible amicable options for medium instruction issues in ESL/EFL contexts.

Keywords: English Medium Instruction (EMI), English as an International Language (EIL), Bilingual Education

Introduction

English has become a language used not only for communication purposes between people whose first languages differ but also a pivotal medium for transmission of information and knowledge exchange. With the ever-increasing importance of English, it is of no surprise that the language is becoming even more integrated into the field of education across the globe (Lucktong & Pandey, 2020; Tsai, 2019). The adoption of English as the medium of instruction at various levels of education is apparent (Coleman, 2006; Crystal, 2004). Many countries are compelled to review their educational policies and practices in order to ensure the education system remains competitive and relevant (Nunan, 2003). In addition, English as medium instruction (EMI) has become an area of