The Implications of Using English as a Medium of Instruction on English Language Learning (A Case study of Khartoum University, Sudan)

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ABSTRACT :

This paper is designed to test whether using English as a medium of instruction is an effective means of enhancing learners' language proficiency at the University of Khartoum. The subjects of the study were two groups of graduates from University of Khartoum who had completed four-year degree courses in Faculty of Law, Faculty of Economics, and School of Management Studies. Learners of group one studied all their subject courses, in total approximately 12 hours per week, in English. Learners in group two studied all their subject courses in Arabic, and in addition they studied English for two hours a week as a university requirement in their first and second years. Learners were asked to evaluate their proficiency in English, and results for the two groups were compared. The study revealed that group one, for whom English was the medium of instruction, attained overall a significantly higher level of proficiency in English than group two, for whom Arabic was the medium of instruction. In what follows we discuss the advantages of EMI over AMI, in the context of our survey results, for the four skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing.

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المستخلص :

صممت هذه الورقة لاختبار استخدام اللغة الانجليزية كلغة للتدريس وأثر ذلك على تعلم اللغة الانجليزية بالنسبة لطلاب جامعة الخرطوم. الفئة المستهدفة لهذه الدراسة مجموعتان من خريجي كليات القانون والاقتصاد والعلوم الإدارية. الفئة الأولى قد درست جميع مواد دراستها باللغة الإنجليزية حوالي 12 ساعة في الأسبوع. الفئة الثانية درست جميع مواد دراستها باللغة العربية ودرست اللغة الانجليزية كمطلوب جامعة ساعتين في الأسبوع. تم توزيع استبيان على المجموعتين ليقيم الطلاب أنفسهم في مهارات اللغة الإنجليزية الأربع (الكتابة والقراءة و المخاطبة والاستماع). تم مقارنة المجموعتين وقد كشفت الدراسة أن الفئة الأولى التي درست جميع موادها باللغة الإنجليزية كان مستوى اللغة الانجليزية لديها أفضل من المجموعة الثانية التي درست جميع موادها باللغة العربية.

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INTRODCTION :

Sudan was colonized by the British government for more than 56 years. The English language used to be a medium of instruction in secondary schools and at the University of Khartoum, the top university in the country. Braima (2004) claimed that English was used as a medium of instruction in secondary schools and at the University of Khartoum at that time for three reasons. Firstly, all of the teaching staff during the colonial time were either British or foreigners who could not speak Arabic, the language of masses. Second, the official language of the country itself was English, so it was naturally chosen as the language of secondary and higher education. Lastly, the main aim of post-primary education at that time was to graduate government clerks to assist the British government in administering the colony .In 1956 Sudan regained its independence, but English was still used as a medium of instruction in schools, the University of Khartoum, and all official institutions. In 1965 the Arabic language replaced English as the medium of instruction in

secondary schools, with English language being taught as one of the main subjects. English remained the medium of instruction at the University of Khartoum until 1991, when the Ministry of Higher Education in Sudan imposed the policy of using L1 as a medium of instruction in all Sudanese educational institutions. Students at the University of Khartoum must study all their subjects in Arabic, and must in addition study English as university requirement (2 hours per week in first and second yearsBefore the implementation of the Arabicisation(using L1as a medium of instruction) policy in secondary schools and other Sudanese institutions , Khartoum university graduates were distinguished by their high standard of English in all skills: writing, speaking reading and listening. Unfortunately, in our experience as university lecturers in Khartoum, it is clear that this is no longer the case. Most recent graduates taught using L1 as the medium of instruction cannot write or read two sentences perfectly and cannot understand or speak to a foreigner in

English language.This paper tries to answer, against the background of our survey results, the following questions:

1-How does using English as medium of instruction facilitate and promote English language learning at the University of Khartoum?

2-Does using L1 as a medium of instruction have a negative impact on English language learning at the University of Khartoum?

Conceptual Background

There is general agreement in the literature that using English as a medium of instruction across all subjects has significant benefits for English language learning. Thus Gass and Selinker (1994) point out that using EMI across all courses offers students and teachers more opportunities to speak English in lectures, comments, discussions, presentations and seminar interactions, thus developing the learner's fluency and accuracy. Duputy (2000) concluded that teaching courses in English can promote students' interest and motivation in learning the

language and hence improve their proficiency. Wongsthorn et al (2002) argue that EMI is particularly useful for students who have no exposure outside the classroom. Ibrahim (2001) also found that the increased exposure to English involved in EMI increases proficiency, but that it probably does not develop the four language skills(listening, speaking, reading and writing) equallyWu, (2006**)** tested the reactions towards English-medium instruction of 28 engineering graduate students at Chung Hua University. The results showed that most students, even those who confessed that they did not have a good command of English, thought that English- medium instruction helped them improve their English proficiency. Hasieh and Kang (2007) carried out a study into the effectiveness and influence of English-language instruction for subject courses in Taiwanese universities. In their study students were divided in two groups .The first group was taught in English and the second group was taught the course in their mother tongue. By the end of the semester the study showed in

terms of grades obtained there was no difference, but the students receiving English –medium instruction tended to show a more positive learning attitude and they also felt that their proficiency in English in the four skills had been improved. In his paper which tries to evaluate the positive effect of English as a medium of instruction for content courses at a private university, Change (2010) reveals that most of the students surveyed agreed that English instruction helped them improve their English language proficiency, especially in terms of listening.Many studies have been carried out on the implications of Arabicization for English language learning at the University of Khartoum.Andrews (1984) claimed that "one inevitable consequence of Arabicization in schools and colleges has been a falling standard among students".Hadra(1998) agreed that the Arabicization in secondary schools and at the universities affected the standard of English negatively, especially at the University of Khartoum. Hadra believes that what was called a "Sudanization" policy –that is, the change of staff of

the administration of the country from British to Sudanese and the establishment of Arabic as a medium of instruction at secondary schools and at the University of Khartoum - are the first policies that led to decline **in** the standard of English and motivation for learning English.Braima ,(2004) noted that, subsequent to the introduction of Arabic as the medium of instruction in secondary schools, the standard of English fell dramatically in the Sudan Certificate Examinations. In 1979 the percentage of students who passed the English exam was 21.4.This case dropped the pass mark in English in Sudan Certificate to 30% instead of 50%. One consequence was a sharp fall in the level of English proficiency at the University of Khartoum.

1. Methods

This section describes the subjects of the survey, the questionnaire, and the procedures followed in collecting the data.

3.1 Subjects

The sample of this consisted of 60 graduates from the University of Khartoum from three faculties (Faculty of Economics, Faculty of Law and School of Management Studies) .The subjects were divided into two groups. Group one consisted of 30 graduates who studied all their subjects in English (English was the medium of instruction (EMI)).Group two consisted of 30 graduates who studied all their subjects in Arabic. (Arabic was a medium of instruction (AMI)).

1.2 Instrument

Each student responded to a questionnaire in which they were asked to provide a self-assessment of their proficiency in each of the four English language skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening. For each skill they were asked to choose one of four descriptions of their level of proficiency, ranging from completely incompetent to fluent**.**

1.3 Procedures

After the questionnaire was verified for validity, it was sent the participants. It took three weeks to send and collect the questionnaires from the participants, because some of the graduates work outside the university. Responses were

then classified and tabulated according to membership of each group, EMI or AMI, and the chi-square test was then applied to determine the probability that the variation between the two groups was more than chance.

2. Analysis and Discussion of Results

Table (1) Listening

Statements	AMI		EMI			
	No	%	No	%	Chi-square	P-value
I understand conversations and lectures without effort.	2	6.7	14	46.7		
I understand almost everything when speaking is slow and clear.	5	16.7	14	46.7	**31.1**	**0.000**
I understand with difficulty; I need repetition and occasional translation.	18	60	1	3.3		
I cannot follow conversations and lectures at all.	5	16.7	1	3.3		
Total	30	100	30	100		

Table (1) summarises the self-evaluation in the listening skill of each group of learners. There is a substantial difference between the two groups, with a chi-square value of 31.1 and a P value of 0.00. 93.4% of EMI students self-assess as fluent or fairly competent, against 23.4% of AMI students.For EMI students, competence in listening is fundamental to progress in their 12 hours each week of subject classes. The course material involves new and difficult abstract concepts and technical vocabulary, and students will rely on exposition and explanation during lectures to understand it. With traditional methods of university teaching, listening and note-taking will account for the bulk of student activity in class. They will have a variety of lecturers, some with English as their first language, and thus exposure to a

range of accents and idiolects.In contrast, AMI students only receive two hours per week exposure to English in university classes. And although the teacher directs the class by speaking, much of the class activity, such as completing a written exercise, may not require much detailed listening. Understanding familiar, frequently repeated instruction patterns is very different from understanding more extended speech. Also, the fact that the English examinations take written form, so that the listening skill is not assessed, means that students have less incentive to improve their proficiency at listening.

Table (2) Reading

Statements	AMI		EMI			
	No	%	No	%	Chi-square	P-value
I can read and understand without difficulty.	2	6.7	21	70.0		
I must read slowly, but I understand the context.	7	23.3	7	23.3		
I have some problems in understanding the text and I must use a dictionary often	19	63.3	2	6.7	**31.5**	**0.000**
I cannot understand even simple texts.	2	6.7	0	0.00		
Total	30	100.0	30	100		

As with listening, there is a considerable disparity between the two groups as regards their self-evaluation in reading, with 93.3% of EMI students self-assessing as fluent or fairly competent, against 31.0% for AMI students. The result is statistically significant, with a chi-square value of 31.5 and a P value of 0.00.For EMI students the self-evaluation is even better than for listening, with 70% self-assessing as fluent and a further 23.3% as competent. There is a range of reading material across subjects – handouts, textbooks, some articles – and variety of technical vocabulary.

Reading is fundamental to preparing assessed coursework, and to examination preparation. Reading reinforces their understanding of lectures, particularly since the material is complex and unlikely to be fully mastered in class. Also, at the University of Khartoum most of the staff teaching EMI subject content received training in teaching the English language four skills in addition to the core subject content.. Thus EMI learners are taught skimming and scanning techniques, how to identify the key vocabulary in the textbook passages, how to read with comprehension and to develop reading

strategies. 31% of AMI students self-assess as fairly competent or fluent at reading, a rather better result than for the other three skills. Along with instructional cues from the teacher, reading is probably the main way in which students 'orient' themselves in class. However, their exposure is limited to 2 hours per week, and the reading techniques they are taught are applied to material much less complex than that available to EMI students. Most students simply don't read enough, and what they do read is not complex enough to bring them to anything approaching fluency.

Table (3) Writing

Statements	AMI		EMI			
	No	%	No	%	Chi-square	P-value
I can write fluently with no mistakes.	0.00	0.00	9	30		
I can write adequately with few mistakes.	8	26.7	16	53.3		
I can write with difficulty and make many mistakes.	19	63.3	5	16.7	**22.8**	**0.000**
I cannot express simple ideas in writing	2	10.0	0.00	0.00		
Total	30	100	30	100		

Once again there is a statistically significant disparity, with a P value of 0.00, between the two groups, with 83.3% of EMI students self-assessing as fluent or moderately competent at writing English, against 26.7% of AMI students self-assessing as moderately competent and none as fluent.Among EMI students the self-assessment is rather poorer than it is for reading and listening, with 30% self-assessing as fluent in writing against 70% for reading and 46.7% for listening. Perhaps we should expect this, because writing is a production skill and because of the vagaries of English spelling. However, writing adequately is a condition of success in their degree course, since all forms of assessment – essays, other homework, and examination answers – are written in English. Moreover, note taking in lectures is probably done in English, because of the difficulties of note taking and simultaneous translation, and also because there may be no agreed Arabic equivalent for the technical terminology in each subject. In addition, subject lecturers are trained in helping students to develop a writing technique adequate for writing essays and taking examinations.For AMI students, writing is one of their main activities during English lessons, but exposure is limited to 2 hours a week. As is the case with reading, teachers can only develop their writing technique to a limited extent, both because of time constraints and because they rarely reach the stage of writing material sufficiently complex to bring their writing skills to maturity.

Table (4) Speaking

Statements	AMI		EMI			
	No	%	No	%	Chi-square	P-value
I can speak fluently and correctly, and I am easy to understand.	1	3.3	0.00	0.00		
It is easy to speak, but not always fluently or correctly.	4	13.3	9	30		

I can speak with difficulty and I sometime need translation.	21	70.0	16	53.3	**36.3**	**0.000**
I cannot express simple ideas in spoken English.	4	13.3	5	16.7		
Total	30	100	30	100		

As indicated in Table (4), the self-evaluation of the speaking skill among both EMI and AMI students is much poorer than for the other skills. 30% of EMI students self-assess as competent, against 16.6% for AMI students (a statistically significant result with a P value of 0.00).The disparity between speaking and the other skills is particularly marked for EMI students, with none self-assessing as fluent and only 30% as competent, whereas 93% self-assess as fluent or competent in reading and listening, and 83% in writing. This may be a reflection of the fact that in large classes with a traditional lecturing style individual students get limited opportunities for student-teacher interaction and thus speaking, and speaking is not normally assessed either in examinations or in coursework.Because of the generally low level of self-assessment among AMI students, the disparity is slightly less pronounced, with 16.6% self-assessing as competent or fluent in speaking, compared with 23.4% for listening, 26.7% for writing and 31% for reading. The factors that inhibit development of the speaking skill will be similar for AMI and EMI students, but in addition AMI students' exposure is limited to 2 hours per week.

3. Conclusion

The results of our study clearly support the generally accepted view that using English as the medium of instruction across all undergraduate subject courses has significant benefits for English language proficiency. Indeed, in our study the gap between the proficiency of learners for whom English was the medium of instruction and that of learners taught using L1 is more substantial than in the studies of Wu (2006) and Hsieh and Kang (2007). On a self-assessment basis, the overall level

of proficiency in three of the four skills is very high, with over 90% self-assessing as fluent or competent in reading and listening, and over 80% in writing. As regards speaking, the situation is less positive, with only 30% self-assessing as competent and none as fluent, which suggests that attempts should be made in the design of curriculum and assessment to increase

the prominence of speaking, perhaps by assessing the speaking skill in coursework, if not in examinations.For AMI students, on the other hand, this self-assessment study suggests that 2 hours of English each week is relatively ineffective in developing proficiency in the language, and particularly ineffective in developing the speaking skill.

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Faculty of Arts Department of English Dear Graduates;

Below is a questionnaire to collect data for a study entitled "The Implications of Using English as a Medium of Instruction on English language Learning.(A Case study of Khartoum University, Sudan)" You are kindly requested to tick on the statement that best describes your assessment on English language learning. Best Regards; Dr : Gamar A. Albooni . Dr. Eiman Abbas Hassan.

1.	**Reading**	
	I can read and understand without difficulty	
	I must read slowly, but I understand the context	
	I have some problems to understand the text and I must use a dictionary often	
	I cannot understand even simple texts	
2.	**Writing**	
	I can write fluently with no mistakes	
	I can write adequately with few mistakes	
	I can write with difficulty and make many mistakes	
	I cannot express simple ideas in writing	
3.	**Speaking**	
	I can speak fluently, correctly, and it is easily to understand	
	It is easily to speak, but it is not always fluent or correct	

	I can speak with difficulty and I sometime need l translation		
	I cannot express simple ideas in spoken English		
4.	**Listening**		
	I understand conversations and lectures without effort		
	I understand almost everything when speaking is slowly and clearly		
	I understand with difficulty; I need repetition and occasional translation		
	I cannot follow conversations and lectures at all		