

## English as a Medium of Instruction in English for Islamic Studies: Students' Perceptions and Outcomes at Islamic Higher Education

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### Abstract

*This study investigates the students' perceptions of using English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in English for Islamic studies courses. Using a mixed-methods design, the research involved 50 students from the English language education department as survey participants, and 10 students were randomly selected for follow-up interviews. The findings reveal that EMI contributes positively to students' comprehension of the subject and significantly enhance their English language proficiency. Students also reported that their confidence and motivation in taking the course improved. These insights can inform future policy and pedagogical strategies, such as implementing translanguaging practices, improving language support, and incorporating Islamic values into EMI.*

**Keywords:** English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI), English for Islamic Studies, Higher Education.

### Abstrak

*Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki persepsi siswa tentang penggunaan Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Pengantar (EMI) dalam mata kuliah English for Islamic Studies. Dengan menggunakan desain metode campuran, penelitian ini melibatkan 50 mahasiswa dari program studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris sebagai peserta survei, dan 10 mahasiswa dipilih secara acak untuk wawancara lanjutan. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa EMI berkontribusi positif terhadap pemahaman mahasiswa terhadap mata kuliah English for Islamic Studies, dan secara signifikan meningkatkan kemahiran Bahasa Inggris mereka. Mahasiswa juga melaporkan bahwa kepercayaan diri dan motivasi mereka dalam mengikuti mata kuliah ini meningkat. Temuan ini dapat memberikan masukan bagi kebijakan masa depan dan strategi pedagogi, seperti penerapan praktik transbahasa, meningkatkan dukungan bahasa, dan memasukkan nilai-nilai Islam ke dalam EMI.*

**Kata Kunci:** Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Pengantar (EMI), English for

## **Introduction**

The use of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in higher education is increasingly prevalent in non-English-speaking countries (Gotti, 2021). This trend extends beyond various academic disciplines, including Islamic studies, as universities aim to internationalize their curricula and respond to the growing demand for English proficiency in both academic and professional contexts (Gotti, 2021).

In Islamic studies programs, the adoption of EMI is driven by the recognition of English as the global language of academia and research. Institutions in non-Anglophone regions, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa, are implementing English-taught programs to enhance their global reputation, attract international students, and prepare local students for the international academic and professional arena (Rahman & Singh, 2022; Ntombela, 2023; Latif & Alhamad, 2023).

However, the introduction of EMI in Islamic studies poses several sociolinguistic challenges. The dominance of English may marginalize local languages like Arabic, which have traditionally been the primary medium of instruction in these programs. Furthermore, both students' and faculty members' English proficiency can affect the quality of education, potentially hindering the depth of content delivery and comprehension (Gotti, 2021).

Proponents of EMI argue that it offers students access to a broader range of academic resources, facilitates international collaboration, and boosts institutional competitiveness (Latif & Alhamad, 2023; Gotti, 2021). Additionally, the increasing use of English in pre-university education necessitates alignment with the language skills of incoming students (Rahman & Singh, 2022).

Yet, critics caution that the prevalence of English could threaten the preservation of local languages and cultural identities. This concern is particularly acute in Islamic studies, where Arabic plays a crucial role in understanding religious texts and scholarship (Latif & Alhamad, 2023; Ntombela, 2023). Furthermore, insufficient language proficiency among students and faculty may impede content comprehension, ultimately affecting learning outcomes.

The debates around EMI in Islamic studies are further complicated by the sociolinguistic implications, with some viewing English dominance as linguistic and cultural imperialism that risks undermining non-English-speaking educational systems' autonomy (Ntombela, 2023).

This article is structured to provide a comprehensive exploration of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in Islamic Studies. Following the introduction, the first section will review the existing literature on EMI, highlighting its global trends, theoretical frameworks, and the impact on language learning outcomes. The subsequent section will detail the research methodology employed in this study, including the mixed-methods approach utilized to gather quantitative and qualitative data. Following the methodology, the findings will be presented, encompassing both the survey results and thematic analyses derived from student interviews. The discussion section will interpret these findings in relation to existing theories and literature, providing insights into how EMI affects students' academic performance and language skills. Finally, the article will conclude with key conclusions and suggestions for improving EMI implementation in Islamic Studies programs, aimed at enhancing student learning experiences and outcomes.

## Results Literature Review

English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) has gained increasing prominence

in higher education, particularly in non-English-speaking countries, and in academic fields beyond traditional language studies. According to Dearden (2014), EMI refers to the use of English to teach academic subjects in contexts where English is not the first language. This global trend seeks to enhance students' competitiveness in an interconnected world by improving their English proficiency and promoting international academic collaboration (Macaro et al., 2019).

Several theoretical frameworks support the use of EMI as a tool for improving both language proficiency and academic achievement. Cummins' (2000) theory of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) emphasizes that teaching academic subjects in English can help students develop advanced language skills, which are essential for higher-order thinking and professional communication. This framework is particularly useful for understanding how EMI can simultaneously foster language development and academic success.

The adoption of EMI reflects a broader global shift towards the use of English in higher education. This shift is driven by the need for universities to internationalize their programs and remain competitive in a global academic environment (Civan & Coskun, 2016).

EMI can improve students' proficiency in English, particularly in reading and listening skills. However, challenges persist, such as difficulties with technical vocabulary and insufficient language support from instructors (Yildiz & Senel, 2017; Cosgun & Hasirci, 2017). Additionally, students often view their English learning through the lens of dominant native varieties, which shapes their language ideologies and learning experiences (Karakaş, 2015).

Students' perceptions of EMI are varied. On the one hand, many students appreciate the role of EMI in enhancing their global academic access and improving

their English proficiency (Farid et al., 2023). On the other hand, challenges such as difficulties in language comprehension and concerns over cultural identity are prevalent, especially among students with lower levels of English proficiency (Farid et al., 2023).

Alhamami (2021) found that students often view EMI negatively, attributing their dissatisfaction to poorly designed programs and inadequately prepared instructors. Conversely, in Qatar, Graham et al. (2021) reported positive outcomes, with students noting improvements in both English proficiency and academic performance.

The effectiveness of EMI is closely linked to the quality of instruction and the level of language support provided, both of which significantly impact student learning experiences and outcomes (Farid et al., 2023). In disciplines such as science and mathematics, Tai (2022) found that translanguaging—where students alternate between languages—can serve as an effective pedagogical practice for linguistically and culturally diverse students in EMI settings.

The implementation of EMI in Islamic studies is still in its early stages, and research on the topic remains relatively scarce. A systematic review by Alqarni et al. (2024) highlights the need for further studies on the long-term implications of EMI in the social sciences, including Islamic studies. The review stresses the importance of understanding how factors such as instructional quality, language support, and cultural integration influence learning outcomes in this field. Incorporating Islamic values into English language teaching has been proposed as a means of enhancing student engagement and creating a more holistic educational experience (Djamdjuri et al., 2023). Furthermore, the use of multiple intelligence-based instruction has been suggested as an effective approach to accommodating diverse learning styles,



making the EMI learning process more inclusive and effective (Sahril et al., 2024).

## Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. A survey was administered to assess students' perceptions, motivation, comfort, and preparedness regarding English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in Islamic Studies. The survey targeted students from the 2023/2024 academic cohort who were enrolled in Islamic Studies courses taught in English, with a total of 50 participants. Data were collected using Google Forms.

## Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS to calculate descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and frequencies, to provide an overview of the survey responses. This analysis offered insights into the general trends in students' perceptions and preparedness for EMI.

## Qualitative Analysis

To gain a deeper understanding of students' experiences with EMI in Islamic Studies, in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 randomly selected survey respondents. The selection ensured representation across different levels of English proficiency, allowing for a nuanced exploration of how language proficiency influenced student perceptions and experiences. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, and a thematic analysis was conducted to identify key themes and patterns related to students' attitudes and experiences with EMI.

## Results

### 1. Quantitative results

#### Table 1

*The Descriptive Statistics Offer Insights into Students' Perceptions of Using EMI for*

*Islamic Studies Courses.*

No	Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Self-assessed level of English proficiency	50	3	5	3.94	.620
2	I find learning Islamic Studies in English to be beneficial.	50	5	5	5.00	.000
3	I find learning Islamic Studies in English to be beneficial.	50	5	5	5.00	.000
4	Using English in Islamic Studies courses helps me understand the content better.	50	3	5	3.86	.495
5	I believe that English is an appropriate language for teaching Islamic Studies.	50	3	4	3.50	.505
6	I feel that my knowledge of Islamic Studies has improved due to learning in English.	50	3	4	3.32	.471
7	I am satisfied with the use of English as a medium of instruction in my Islamic Studies courses.	50	3	5	4.34	.772
8	I am motivated to improve my English skills because of my Islamic Studies courses.	50	3	5	4.44	.705
9	Learning Islamic Studies in English makes me more motivated to engage with the course material.	50	3	5	4.30	.735
10	I believe that learning Islamic Studies in English will be beneficial for my future career.	50	3	5	4.22	.679

11	I feel comfortable participating in discussions in my Islamic Studies courses conducted in English.	50	3	5	4.36	.749
12	I am confident in my ability to complete assignments in English for my Islamic Studies courses.	50	3	5	4.42	.702
13	I find it easy to understand the lectures and readings in my Islamic Studies courses in English.	50	3	5	4.24	.687
14	I feel adequately prepared to study Islamic Studies in English.	50	3	5	4.48	.580
15	I have access to sufficient resources (e.g., textbooks, supplementary materials) to help me study Islamic Studies in English.	50	3	5	4.22	.764

#### 1. English Proficiency and Confidence (Items 1, 11, 12, 13, 14)

- Self-assessed level of English proficiency (Mean = 3.94, SD = 0.62): On a scale of 3 to 5, students rate their English proficiency relatively high, indicating they feel moderately to highly competent in English.
- Comfort in participating in discussions (Mean = 4.36, SD = 0.749)
- Confidence in completing assignments (Mean = 4.42, SD = 0.702) show students feel comfortable and confident engaging in English-based academic tasks.



- Ease of understanding lectures/readings (Mean = 4.24, SD = 0.687): This suggests students find English comprehensible in an academic context.
- Preparedness for EMI (Mean = 4.48, SD = 0.580): This high mean indicates that students generally feel well-prepared for studying Islamic Studies in English.

Interpretation: These results suggest that the rise of EMI in Islamic Studies courses has positively impacted students' confidence in their English language skills, which is a significant factor in their ability to engage with the course material and perform well academically.

## 2. Perceived Academic Benefits of EMI (Items 2, 3, 4, 5, 6)

- Perception of EMI as beneficial (Mean = 5.00, SD = 0.000) is consistently high across items 2 and 3, showing unanimous agreement that EMI is beneficial.
- EMI helping content comprehension (Mean = 3.86, SD = 0.495): Students slightly agree that using English in Islamic Studies aids their understanding of the material.
- Appropriateness of English for Islamic Studies (Mean = 3.50, SD = 0.505) and Improvement in knowledge due to EMI (Mean = 3.32, SD = 0.471): These means are lower, suggesting some reservations about whether English is the most appropriate language for Islamic Studies and whether it significantly improves subject knowledge.

Interpretation: While students generally view EMI as beneficial and believe it enhances content comprehension, there is a mild hesitation regarding the appropriateness of English for teaching Islamic Studies and the extent to which it improves their content knowledge.

### 3. Motivation and Future Prospects (Items 8, 9, 10)

- Motivation to improve English skills (Mean = 4.44, SD = 0.705): Students feel motivated to enhance their English skills due to the EMI environment.
- Motivation to engage with course material (Mean = 4.30, SD = 0.735): EMI seems to have a positive effect on students' engagement with Islamic Studies content.
- Belief that EMI will benefit future careers (Mean = 4.22, SD = 0.679): Students perceive EMI as advantageous for their future professional success.

Interpretation: EMI positively impacts students' motivation to improve their English proficiency, engage with course content, and perceive long-term career benefits from studying in English. This suggests that EMI not only enhances language skills but also encourages students to take a more active role in their learning and future planning.

### 4. Satisfaction with EMI and Resource Availability (Items 7, 15)

- Satisfaction with EMI (Mean = 4.34, SD = 0.772): Students are generally satisfied with the use of English as a medium of instruction in their Islamic Studies courses.
- Access to resources (Mean = 4.22, SD = 0.764): Students feel they have adequate resources to support their studies in English.

Interpretation: High satisfaction levels and sufficient resource access suggest that EMI is being implemented effectively, with adequate support structures in place to facilitate student learning.

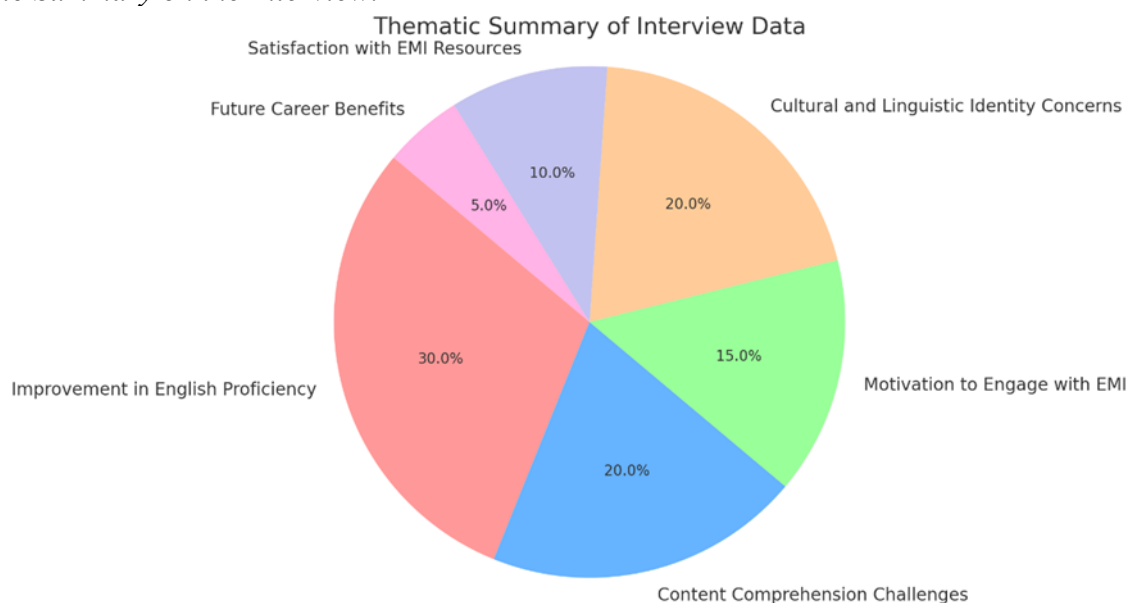
From the data provided, it is clear that the rise of EMI in Islamic Studies is positively influencing both students' academic performance and their language skills. Students exhibit high levels of satisfaction with EMI, feel comfortable and

confident engaging in English-language tasks, and are motivated to improve their English skills. They also perceive EMI as beneficial for their future careers, indicating that the integration of EMI into Islamic Studies is fostering a positive learning environment and preparing students for global opportunities. However, there are some concerns regarding whether English is the most appropriate language for teaching Islamic Studies and whether EMI significantly improves students' content knowledge. These issues could be areas for further investigation or improvement in curriculum design and instructional practices.

## 2. Qualitative results

**Figure 1**

*Thematic Summary on the Interview.*



The pie chart shows that each segment represents a theme, along with its corresponding percentage, giving a visual breakdown of the key insights gathered from the interviews.

From the pie chart, several key conclusions can be drawn:

1. Improvement in English Proficiency is the most frequently mentioned theme (30%), indicating that students perceive significant gains in their English language skills as a result of EMI in Islamic Studies.
2. Content Comprehension Challenges and Cultural and Linguistic Identity Concerns are equally significant (20% each), highlighting both the academic difficulties some students face with understanding course content and concerns about how EMI affects their cultural and linguistic identity.
3. Motivation to Engage with EMI accounts for 15%, suggesting that EMI has a moderate positive effect on students' motivation to participate in their courses.
4. Satisfaction with EMI Resources represents 10%, indicating that while some students find the resources sufficient, this may not be a major point of concern for the majority.
5. Future Career Benefits is the least mentioned theme (5%), suggesting that students may not immediately associate EMI with direct career advantages, or that other concerns are prioritized over career outcomes.

## Discussion

This research aimed at investigating how the rise of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in higher education, specifically within English for Islamic Studies, affects students' academic performance and language skills. Based on both the quantitative survey results and qualitative interviews, the following discussion synthesizes the findings with theoretical concepts and existing literature.

### 1. Improvement in English Proficiency

The most prominent finding from the interviews, reflected by 30% of participants, is

that EMI has significantly contributed to improving students' English proficiency. This aligns with Cummins' (2000) Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) theory, which posits that teaching academic subjects in a second language can foster the advanced language skills necessary for higher-order thinking and professional communication. The students' self-assessed English proficiency scores (mean = 3.94) further corroborate this finding, showing an upward trend in language competence among participants.

The global trend towards EMI, as highlighted by Macaro et al. (2018) and Civan and Coskun (2016), also supports this outcome. Students in non-English-speaking countries tend to benefit linguistically when exposed to academic content in English, particularly in disciplines that are internationally oriented, such as Islamic Studies. By studying in English, students are positioned to engage with global academic discourse, which enhances their competitive edge in the global job market.

## 2. Content Comprehension Challenges

While the proficiency gains are clear, 20% of interview participants indicated that content comprehension remains a significant challenge. This issue is reflected in the relatively modest mean score for the item "using English in Islamic studies helps me understand the content better" (mean = 3.86). This finding echoes Farid et al. (2023) and Yildiz and Senel (2017), who found that while EMI can improve language skills, the simultaneous mastery of both language and subject content can overwhelm students, particularly when technical vocabulary is involved.

The challenge of balancing language and subject content comprehension is critical in disciplines like Islamic Studies, where students may need to grapple with complex theological concepts. This points to the need for translanguaging practices, as



suggested by Tai (2022), where students are allowed to alternate between English and their native language (e.g., Arabic) to bridge comprehension gaps and enhance learning outcomes.

### 3. Motivation to Engage with EMI

15% of participants cited increased motivation to engage with course materials due to EMI, a sentiment further supported by high survey scores for motivation-related items (mean = 4.30). This aligns with Macaro et al. (2018), who argue that EMI can foster greater motivation in students by opening up access to global academic resources and networks.

Furthermore, Farid et al. (2023) emphasize that students who perceive the value of EMI are more likely to invest time and effort in improving their English skills. This is also visible in your study, where students expressed motivation to improve their language skills due to the demands of EMI, suggesting that they see it as an important tool for future academic and professional success (mean = 4.44).

### 4. Cultural and Linguistic Identity Concerns

Another theme that emerged (20% of interview responses) was the concern over EMI's impact on cultural and linguistic identity, especially in a field like Islamic Studies, where Arabic plays a central role in the religious and cultural framework. This concern is supported by Alhamami (2021), who found that students in Islamic Studies programs may feel disconnected from their cultural roots when taught in English. This finding is also reflective of Ntombela (2023), who critiques EMI as a form of linguistic imperialism that can erode local languages and cultural identities. The relatively moderate score for the belief that English is an appropriate language for teaching Islamic Studies (mean = 3.50) further suggests that while EMI has its practical benefits, some students are wary of its potential to distance them from their

cultural and religious heritage.

#### 5. Satisfaction with EMI Resources

The study also found that students were relatively satisfied with the resources provided to help them study Islamic Studies in English, as evidenced by a mean score of 4.22. However, satisfaction with EMI resources was not a major theme in the interviews, representing only 10% of responses. This suggests that while students generally find the available resources sufficient, other factors (e.g., content comprehension, cultural concerns) are more pressing in their EMI experience.

Djamdjuri et al. (2023) proposed integrating Islamic values into EMI to enhance engagement and satisfaction, a point worth considering to increase resource satisfaction further. By providing culturally relevant materials in both English and Arabic, educators can help bridge the gap between linguistic proficiency and content mastery. This study has added to the existing body of research in exploring the content and culture that are integrated into education and teaching (Lailatussaadah, Jamil, et al., 2023; Lailatussaadah, Hayati, et al., 2023).

#### 6. Future Career Benefits

Finally, the theme of EMI's benefits for future careers emerged as the least mentioned (5% of interview responses), though students still see EMI as valuable for their professional development, as reflected in a relatively high mean score of 4.22 for this survey item. This indicates that while immediate academic challenges are more salient, students recognize the long-term advantages of being proficient in English, as highlighted by Graham et al. (2021).

This finding also ties into the internationalization framework discussed in the literature. Macaro et al. (2018) note that EMI plays a crucial role in preparing students for the global workforce, making them more competitive in both academic

and professional fields. In your study, students seem to be aware of these potential advantages, even if they are not currently the most immediate concern.

## **Conclusions and Suggestions**

### **Conclusions**

The study investigated the effects of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) on students' academic performance and language skills in English for Islamic Studies. The findings reveal several key insights:

1. **Enhanced English Proficiency:** The majority of students reported an improvement in their English language skills as a result of studying Islamic Studies in English, aligning with the theoretical framework of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). This enhancement is crucial for fostering higher-order thinking and effective communication.
2. **Content Comprehension Challenges:** Despite the positive impact on language proficiency, many students expressed difficulties in understanding the course content, particularly due to technical vocabulary and the complex nature of Islamic studies.
3. **Motivation and Engagement:** Students displayed increased motivation to engage with course materials and improve their English skills, recognizing the value of EMI for their academic and professional futures.
4. **Cultural and Linguistic Identity Concerns:** Some students voiced concerns about the potential erosion of their cultural and linguistic identities, indicating a need to balance language instruction with cultural relevance, particularly in a field rooted in Arabic.
5. **Resource Satisfaction:** While students were generally satisfied with the resources available for studying Islamic Studies in English, the qualitative data suggest that

improvements could be made to address comprehension challenges and cultural concerns.

It is important to note that these research findings are specific to the context in which the study was conducted, and results may vary in different locations or educational settings.

### Suggestions

Based on the findings of this study, the following suggestions are proposed for enhancing the implementation of EMI in Islamic Studies:

1. **Increase Language Support:** Institutions should provide additional language support for students enrolled in EMI programs. This could include offering English language workshops focused on academic vocabulary relevant to Islamic studies and integrating language instruction into the curriculum.
2. **Implement Translanguaging Practices:** Encourage instructors to adopt translanguaging strategies that allow students to use both English and their native languages (e.g., Arabic) in the classroom. This approach can facilitate better comprehension and help students bridge gaps in understanding complex concepts.
3. **Integrate Cultural Relevance:** Develop course materials that incorporate Islamic values and cultural contexts while being taught in English. This can help students feel more connected to the content and address concerns about cultural identity.
4. **Professional Development for Instructors:** Provide training for instructors in EMI pedagogy and strategies for teaching culturally sensitive content. Instructors should be equipped to address the unique challenges of teaching Islamic studies in a non-native language.

5. Regular Feedback Mechanisms: Establish regular feedback mechanisms to gather student input on their experiences with EMI. This can help identify ongoing challenges and areas for improvement, ensuring that instructional methods align with student needs.
6. Longitudinal Studies: Conduct longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of EMI on students' academic performance and language skills. This will provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of EMI and inform future educational policies.

By implementing these suggestions, educational institutions can enhance the effectiveness of EMI in Islamic studies, ensuring that students not only achieve language proficiency but also maintain a strong connection to their cultural and academic roots.

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