

## English-Medium Instruction (EMI) in Online Classes: Attitudes of Students with Limited Language Proficiency

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### Abstract

This paper reports the findings of a qualitative study conducted with the purpose of exploring the attitudes of undergraduate students towards the use of English-medium instruction (EMI) in distance education. The participants were volunteers among the freshmen and sophomores majoring in English Language and Literature at a state university in Eastern Türkiye. The research data were collected via a semi-structured interview protocol administered towards the end of 2022-2023 academic year and analysed through deductive thematic analysis. Research findings demonstrated that the students' language proficiency and disciplinary vocabulary were two major impediments restricting the effectiveness of online EMI. Another finding was that the student viewpoints both converged and diverged with respect to the affordances and shortcomings of the online EMI experience. The students also voiced their perspectives on the necessity of translation during EMI classes and on the effects of EMI on their academic performance. In the light of the study results, pedagogical implications are discussed and recommendations are provided.

### Keywords

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## Çevrimiçi Sınıflarda Öğretim Dili Olarak İngilizce: Sınırlı Dil Yeterliliğine Sahip Öğrencilerin Tutumları

### Öz

Bu makale, lisans öğrencilerinin uzaktan eğitimde öğretim dili olarak İngilizce (EMI) kullanımına yönelik tutumlarını araştırmak amacıyla yürütülen nitel bir çalışmanın bulgularını rapor etmektedir. Katılımcılar, Türkiye'nin doğusundaki bir devlet üniversitesinin İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı bölümünde okuyan birinci ve ikinci sınıf öğrencileri arasından gönüllülük esasına uygun olarak seçilmiştir. Araştırma verileri, 2022-2023 akademik yılı Bahar döneminde uygulanan yarı yapılandırılmış bir görüşme protokolü aracılığıyla toplanmış ve tümdengelimli tematik analiz yoluyla analiz edilmiştir. Araştırma bulguları, öğrencilerin dil yeterliliklerinin ve disiplinler kelime dağarcıklarının, çevrimiçi EMI verimliliğini kısıtlayan iki önemli engel olduğunu göstermiştir. Bir başka bulgu olarak, öğrencilerin bakış açılarının çevrimiçi EMI deneyiminin avantajları ve eksiklikleri açısından hem örtüşmekte hem de farklılaşmakta olduğu belirlenmiştir. Öğrenciler ayrıca dersler sırasında çevirinin gerekliliği ve EMI'nın akademik performansları üzerindeki etkilerine ilişkin görüşlerini de dile getirmişlerdir. Çalışma sonuçları ışığında, pedagojik çıkarımlar tartışılmış ve öneriler sunulmuştur.

### Anahtar Sözcükler


Uzaktan eğitim  
EMI  
İngilizce öğretim  
Çevrimiçi eğitim

### Makale Hakkında

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## Genişletilmiş Türkçe Özet

### Giriş

Küreselleşme ve onun beraberinde getirdiği uluslararasılaşma hareketleri, özellikle yirminci yüzyılın ikinci yarısından itibaren *lingua franca* olarak kabul gören İngilizcenin daha fazla tanınırlık için rekabet eden yükseköğretim kurumlarında öğretim dili olarak yaygın bir şekilde kullanılmasına yol açmıştır (Dafouz & Gray, 2022; Smit, 2023). Öğretim dili olarak İngilizce (EMI) üzerine yapılan araştırmalar 21. yüzyılın başına kadar çok az iken (Flowerdew ve diğer., 2000), EMI tercih eden kurumların sayısındaki hızlı artış ile beraber son yirmi yılda bu konuya olan ilgi de artmıştır.

İlgili alan yazın, yüksek öğretim düzeyinde yüz yüze eğitim ortamlarında EMI üzerine çok sayıda araştırma içermektedir (bkz. Macaro ve diğer., 2018; Wu & Tsai, 2022). Pek çok açıdan yüz yüze eğitimden farklı ve kendine has dinamikleri olan sanal öğrenme ortamlarında EMI kullanımı üzerine yapılan araştırmalar ise son zamanlarda yapılan birkaç çalışmayla sınırlıdır (Bälter ve diğer., 2023; Bozbıyık & Morton, 2024; Cicillini & Giacosa, 2020; Murdoch & Lin, 2023). Öğrencilerin EMI aracılığı ile öğrenmeye ilişkin görüşlerini araştıran çalışmalar olsa da, son yıllarda acil durumlarda yaygın olarak kullanılan uzaktan eğitimde EMI kullanımına yönelik öğrenci tutumları yeterince belgelenmemiştir. Ayrıca, bu araştırmanın evrenini oluşturan ve hedef kazanım ve içeriği gereği genellikle öğretim dili tamamen İngilizce olan İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı bölümleri öğrencilerin ve eğitimcilerin dilsel yeterlilik ve farkındalık düzeyleri nedeniyle yabancı dil ağırlıklı olmayan bölümlere göre daha avantajlı görülsede, akademik ve sosyo-dilbilimsel zorluklar bu bölümlerde de mevcuttur (Ataş, 2023). Çevrimiçi EMI deneyimlerini öğrencilerin bakış açısından inceleyecek çalışmalar, bilhassa bu zorlukların tespiti sayesinde alan yazına katkı sunmanın yanı sıra EMI yoluyla çevrimiçi öğretim ve öğrenimde daha yüksek başarı hedefleyen eğitimciler ve müfredat çerçevelerini geliştirmek isteyen kurumlar için önemli çıkarımlar sağlayabilir. Bu düşünceden hareketle, bu araştırma, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı lisans programı öğrencilerinin uzaktan eğitim uygulamaları kapsamında çevrimiçi olarak sunulan bölüm derslerinde öğretim dilinin İngilizce olmasına yönelik bakış açılarını ve tutumlarını incelemek amacıyla ile yürütülmüştür. Bu araştırma amaçları doğrultusunda aşağıdaki araştırma soruları ortaya çıkmıştır:

1. Sınırlı dil yeterliliğine sahip öğrencilerin çevrimiçi eğitimde EMI'ye yönelik tutumları nelerdir?
  - a. Öğrencilere göre çevrimiçi EMI'nın avantajları ve dezavantajları nelerdir?
  - b. Çevrimiçi EMI eğitim alan öğrencilerin çeviri ihtiyaçları nelerdir?
  - c. Öğrencilere göre çevrimiçi EMI akademik performansı nasıl etkilemektedir?

### Yöntem

Araştırmada nitel durum çalışması deseni izlenmiştir. Çalışmaya, Türkiye'nin doğusundaki bir devlet üniversitesinin İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Programının birinci ve ikinci sınıflarında öğrenim gören toplam 13 öğrenci katılmıştır. Araştırma verileri, kapsamlı bir alan yazın taraması sonucunda araştırmacı tarafından tasarlanan yarı yapılandırılmış bir görüşme formunda yer alan yedi soru aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Sorular temel olarak öğrencilerin acil uzaktan eğitim sürecinde derslerin İngilizce yürütülmesine karşı tutumlarını ve bakış açılarını sorgulamak üzere tasarlanmıştır. İlk soru, öğrencilerin genel bakış açılarını sorgulamayı amaçlamış, ardından bu eğitim yönteminin avantajları ve dezavantajları hakkındaki görüşlerini soran iki soru yöneltilmiştir. Daha sonra öğrencilerden, öğretmenlerin ders içeriğini Türkçeye çevirmesinin gerekliliği ve Türkçe çevirinin en faydalı olacağını düşündükleri belirli dersler hakkındaki görüşlerini paylaşmaları istenmiştir. Bir sonraki soruda, öğrencilerden yüz yüze ve çevrimiçi EMI dersleri karşılaştırmaları istenmiştir. Son soruda ise öğrencilerin uzaktan eğitimin akademik performansları üzerindeki etkilerine ilişkin görüşleri sorulmuştur.

Araştırmacı 2022-2023 akademik yılı Bahar dönemi sonuna doğru bölümdeki birinci ve ikinci sınıf öğrencilerine çalışmayı duyurmuş ve görüşmeler gönüllü öğrencilerin uygunluğuna göre planlanmış ve uygulanmıştır. Araştırmacı, görüşmeleri Zoom üzerinden bireysel olarak gerçekleştirmiş, görüşme formunu ortak bir ekranda görüntülemiş ve katılımcıların onayı üzerine görüşmeleri kaydetmiştir. Deşifre edilen araştırma verileri tümdengelimci tematik analiz yoluyla incelenmiştir. Analiz sırasında araştırmacı transkriptleri tekraren okumuş ve veri setine yeterince aşina olduktan sonra öğrenci yanıtlarından kodlar üretmeye başlamıştır. Ayrıca, Uygulamalı Dilbilim alanında doktora derecesine sahip bir dış araştırmacıdan rastgele seçilen iki görüşme kaydını kodlaması istenmiştir. Araştırmacının aynı iki görüşmeden çıkardığı kodlar daha sonra bu kodlarla karşılaştırılmış ve Miles ve Huberman'ın (1994) modeline göre kodlayıcılar arası güvenilirlik puanı hesaplanmıştır (uyuşma yüzdesi=Uyuşma/uyuşma + uyuşmazlık). Bu formüle göre kodlayıcılar arası güvenilirlik puanı .81 olarak belirlenmiştir. Tematik analiz süreci sonucunda kodlar, araştırma soruları ve mülakat sorularıyla desteklenen temalara göre kategorize edilmiştir.

### Bulgular

Araştırma bulgularına göre, öğrenciler çevrimiçi EMI'ye çoğunlukla olumlu bir tutumla yaklaşırken (N=8), grubun neredeyse üçte biri (N=4) olumsuz bir tutum sergilemiştir. Öğrencilerin çoğunluğu, yüz yüze eğitimde olduğu gibi,

çevrimiçi eğitimin en önemli avantajını İngilizce diline maruz kalma olarak belirtmiştir. Bu sayede, hedef dil formlarına aşinalık kazanma yoluyla dil becerilerinin ve içerik bilgisinin gelişimine katkı sağlandığı dile getirilmiştir. Uzaktan eğitimde EMI, bu avantajların yanı sıra öğrenciler için çeşitli zorluklarla sonuçlanmıştır. Bunlar arasında, sınırlı L2 yeterliliği, fiziksel ve teknik zorluklar, sınırlı etkileşim ve katılım, akran baskısı, olumsuz duygular ve etkisiz öğretim uygulamaları nedeniyle yönergeleri takip etme ve anlamada karşılaşılan problemler bulunmaktadır. Çevrimiçi EMI uygulamasında Türkçe çevirinin gerekliliği sorulduğunda, öğrencilerin yanıtları çeşitlilik göstermiştir. Bazı öğrenciler ana dilin sık sık kullanılmasını talep ederken, diğerleri ayrıntılı Türkçe açıklamaları olmadan zor anlaşılabilir çok teorik ve soyut konular dışında çeviriyi gereksiz bulmuştur. Öğrencilerden, bölüm çalışmalarında çevrimiçi derslerde EMI kullanımının akademik performansları üzerindeki etkilerini değerlendirmeleri istenmiş ve ortaya çıkan sonuçlar, kısa vadeli zorluklarla karşılaşmalarına rağmen, bu eğitim şeklinin uzun vadeli etkilerinin olumlu yönde olduğuna dair görüş bildirdikleri görülmüştür. Öğrenciler, alana dair sınırlı kelime dağarcıkları ve dilsel yeterliliklerinin zayıflatıcı etkilerini kabul ederken, EMI'nın dil ve akademik becerilerini geliştirdiği kanaatindeydi.

### Tartışma ve Sonuç

Sonuç olarak, EMI hem çevrimiçi hem de yüz yüze eğitim ortamlarında avantajları ve dezavantajları olan bir uygulama olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Her iki açıdan bakıldığında, bu uygulamanın iyi yönlerini geliştirmek ve zayıf yönlerini iyileştirmek mümkün görünmektedir. İlk olarak, özellikle İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı gibi yabancı dil ağırlıklı bölümlerde EMI'dan daha iyi verim alınabilmesi için, bu programlara girmeden önce dil yeterliliği sorunlarının giderilmesi gerektiği yorumu yapılabilir. İkinci olarak, Genc ve Yuksel'in (2020) önerdiği gibi, diyalogik etkinlikler yoluyla öğretmen-öğrenci etkileşimlerinin sıklığını artırmak, çevrimiçi EMI'nın etkili bir şekilde uygulanmasına katkıda bulunabilir. Öğrenci duyguları, çevrimiçi EMI'nın verimliliği ile ilgili olarak ele alınması gereken bir başka tartışma alanıdır. Kaygı, utangaçlık ve baskı/stres, bazı öğrenciler tarafından, özellikle telaffuzla ilgili öz yeterlilik inançları nedeniyle, çevrimiçi EMI deneyimi sırasında tetiklenen duygular olarak dile getirilmiştir. Öğrencilerin olumsuz duyguları ve gerçekçi olmayan varsayımları, olumlu ve destekleyici öğretmen yaklaşımlarıyla hafifletilmelidir, zira öğrenciler için stressiz öğrenme ortamları yaratmak çoğunlukla öğretmenlerin/eğitimcilerin sorumluluğundadır (Horwitz ve diğer., 1986). Ayrıca, katı bir yaklaşım izlemek yerine, özellikle anlamı netleştirmek için ana dil kullanmanın hem öğretim elemanları hem de öğrenciler nezdinde kolaylaştırıcı etkisi olduğu düşünülmektedir. *Küresel İngilizcenin yükselen trendi ve İngilizcenin yalnızca tek dilli bir bağlamda öğrenilmesinin gerekli olmadığı fikri hakkında farkındalık kazanmak*, öğrencilerin dille ilgili kaygılardan kaynaklanan duygusal engelleri aşmalarına yardımcı olabilir (Sahan ve diğer., 2022). Ayrıca, EMI'nın yabancı dil kullanımı ile ilgili zorluklarını azaltabilecek diller arası geçişlilik (*translanguaging*) gibi çok dilli öğretim uygulamalarının (Sahan ve diğer., 2023) kullanılması da düşünülmelidir.

## Introduction

The worldwide spread of English language and its acclaim as a *lingua franca* coincided with the era of rapid internationalization movements, and that eventually led to the ubiquitous use of English language as the medium of instruction in higher education institutions competing for greater international recognition. The number of programs employing English-medium instruction (EMI henceforth), which pertains to using English language in the instruction of other academic subjects in contexts where English is a foreign or second language to at least some of the students and/or teachers (Dafouz & Gray, 2022; Smit, 2023), have increased in the past years. While research on EMI had been scarce until the beginning of 21st century (Flowerdew et al., 2000), the past two decades have witnessed a surge of interest on this matter.

Theoretical underpinnings of EMI, curiously, have not been discussed to a satisfactory extent despite the abundance of relevant work. The paper of Y. Y. Lo and E. S. C. Lo (2014) is among the rare publications articulating the applicability of second language acquisition (SLA) theories to EMI classrooms. According to their argument, such SLA theories as Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982), Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1995) and Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1996) are pertinent to EMI context. Simply put, Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982) advocates the necessity of receiving and understanding comprehensible input in SLA, whereas Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1995) asserts that producing spoken or written language plays a significant role in SLA. Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1996), lastly, places importance on both input and output as well as interaction and negotiation between interlocutors. Macaro (2020) also voiced the transferability of these theories of SLA to EMI classrooms, advocating that effective communication in English is the ultimate goal in these classrooms, and it is attained with an abundant load of linguistic input-output and interaction. Another theoretical perspective to EMI was inspired by postmodern sociolinguistic approaches, which underscored “the fluidity, complexity, and multi-functionality of English and other languages that academics, students, and administrators draw on for their institutionalized practices” (Dafouz & Smit, 2016, p. 4). The present study is theoretically informed by the notions of Input, Output and Interaction Hypotheses in its approach to the EMI phenomenon since English-major programs, which stand as the setting of this study, naturally attach great importance to students’ acquiring sophisticated foreign language (L2) skills, and hence, the comprehensibility of the input, the quality of the output, and interaction exchanges come into prominence in the implementation of EMI in such contexts.

As the expansion of EMI programs continues to escalate, perspectives highlighting plurilingualism and multilingualism voice concerns over the sustainability of linguistic diversity and the potential risk of extinction for some local languages as a result of English-only policy (Liyanage, 2023). English-only EMI has been argued to delimit the multilingual students’ utilization of their linguistic repertoire in communication since different languages are intertwined in one language system for these individuals (Canagarajah, 2011), and they may need to resort to all languages as communication tools during their conversations. Other overriding concerns articulated have been over the limited proficiency and preparedness of students for the English-only instruction and the effectiveness and quality of this type of education (Ekoç, 2020; Gollaway & Rose, 2021; Şahan & Sahan, 2023). As these arguments continue, so does the adoption of EMI by higher numbers of institutions each year.

In addition to EMI institutions, it is also increasingly common to find EMI departments in Turkish-medium instruction universities. Among these stand English-major departments, which intrinsically employ EMI. Although such programs sound to be more advantageous over the non-English-major departments due to an expectation over the linguistic competence and awareness of the students and the instructors, there exist academic and sociolinguistic drawbacks confronted by all parties involved, particularly in departments accepting students with lower scores in central university exam and insisting on English-only instruction, which disregards students’ native linguistic repertoire and L2 proficiency levels (Ataş, 2023). Given the reservations mentioned earlier and the potential challenges, the English-majoring students’ experiences with EMI deserve closer scrutiny. However, relevant literature lacks such research, and with the purpose of addressing this inadequacy, the present research represents an attempt to elucidate EMI experiences of English Language and Literature program students during a compulsory distance education period at a state university in eastern Türkiye.

## Literature Review

Relevant literature embodies a plethora of research on tertiary-level EMI in actual classrooms (see Macaro et al., 2018; Wu & Tsai, 2022, for comprehensive reviews), whereas virtual environments remain as an underresourced area. The dynamics of online EMI should attract more scholarly attention due to the distinct features of virtual learning environments (Querol-Julián, 2023). It is still encouraging to encounter several recent studies.

Among the rare studies on online EMI practices, several examined student satisfaction. Cicillini and Giacosa (2020) reported lower student and lecturer satisfaction in virtual classrooms when compared to face-to-face education, and the dissatisfaction chiefly stemmed from a perceived inconsistency between course materials, the unavailability of interaction, and insufficient linguistic proficiency and technological knowledge. Yüksel (2022) explored the cognitive appraisal of EMI program students in Turkey during the compulsory transition to

emergency remote education (ERE) as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The students' cognitive appraisal was found negatively correlated with perceived quality of interactions and satisfaction with the instruction. Bälter et al. (2023), who compared academic performance development and course dropping out profiles in EMI versus first-language-medium online education, demonstrated a higher degree of dropouts, in addition to lower test scores, among EMI students.

Contrary to the results indicating low student satisfaction, literature involves research denoting positive student impressions of EMI. Lin et al. (2021) investigated the experiences of Taiwanese students in a blended EMI course during Covid-19 pandemic and revealed moderately high student satisfaction and positive student attitudes, but a demand for more student-centred approaches and more opportunities for language practice. Murdoch and Lin (2023) publicized their study identifying varying levels of online EMI course satisfaction among tertiary-level Korean students from different disciplines and specified factors that determined student satisfaction as academic conscientiousness, academic integration and the use of instructional strategies.

Teachers' use of some teaching strategies peculiar to EMI in virtual learning environments were also studied. In two different studies with a similar scope, Querol-Julián (2021, 2023) explored student-teacher interactions in online EMI courses and identified teachers' use of using various semiotic resources and multimodal strategies with the aim of attaining effective teacher-student interaction and boosting learner engagement. Picciuolo (2023) conducted a comparative analysis of the spatial deixis use of EMI instructors in online versus face-to-face (F2F) settings and found that the use of gestures accompanying to proximal spatial deixis in F2F lectures were more frequently replaced by a range of technology-mediated actions co-occurring with extra visual contexts for teaching disciplinary vocabulary. In a recent work, Bozbıyık and Morton (2024) illustrated EMI lecturers' use of interactional and linguistic resources when introducing course content through exemplification.

The research results reviewed above demonstrate the applicability of SLA theories to EMI. The findings reporting higher student satisfaction and more positive student attitudes with more frequent student-teacher interaction and practice pinpoint the pertinence of Output and Interaction Hypotheses in EMI. In the same vein, teachers' use of varied instructional strategies such as exemplification, semiotic resources or multimodal strategies signify an inclination to create comprehensible input. It is therefore quite relevant to argue that input comprehension, output quality and interaction frequency are pertinent to EMI as well as SLA.

In English-major programs such as language pedagogy or English literature, EMI is considered a necessity rather than a choice. On the other hand, when the performances of the students placed in these departments, especially in universities established in Türkiye within the last 15 years and which have started to accept students in recent years, are evaluated, it is seen that the majority of the students have not acquired the foreign language skills required for the EMI-led courses in the departments (Kamaşak et al., 2021) although they have completed the compulsory preparatory year program, which itself is controversial with regard to its efficacy and adequacy (British Council TEPAV, 2015; Coskun, 2013).

While there are studies investigating students' views on English being the language of instruction, student attitudes towards EMI shaped throughout their experiences in distance education, which has been widely used in emergency situations in recent years, are not well-documented. A study scrutinizing online EMI experiences from the perspective of students could provide significant implications for those aspiring to higher effectiveness in online teaching and learning through EMI, as well as for the policy- and decision-makers determining curriculum frameworks. In addition, the possibility that EMI features may vary in different sociolinguistic and education settings due to potential differences in the perspectives of countries to English as a *lingua franca* (Siegel, 2020) contributes to the significance of those studies in relatively unexplored local contexts.

The purpose of the current research was to examine the standpoints and attitudes of Iğdir University English Language and Literature undergraduate program students towards English being the language of instruction in courses offered online within the scope of distance education practices in the 2022-2023 spring semester. The following research questions aroused from this research objective:

1. What are the attitudes of English major students with limited language proficiency towards EMI in online education?
  - a. What advantages and disadvantages do the students perceive regarding online EMI?
  - b. How do the students perceive their need for translation support?
  - c. How do the students perceive the impact of EMI on their academic performance in an online setting?

## Method

### Research Design

A qualitative case study design was followed in the current study. Qualitative case design provides researchers with the opportunity of deeply and thoroughly analysing individuals, cases, experiences, or occurrences (Creswell,

2014). As the present study endeavoured to access and elaborate on the individual perspectives and experiences of a group of students regarding the use of EMI in a specific learning context, this design was considered to be best pertinent to attaining the research objectives.

### Study Group

A total of 13 students studying at the first and second year of the English Language and Literature Program at a state university in Eastern Türkiye participated in the study. Considering that English is not generally the medium of instruction in earlier levels of education, the freshmen and sophomores were purposefully determined as the target group in the study since the reactions of those students for whom EMI was a novel experience were more intriguing for the researcher. The students' university entrance exam scores and average grades in English language skill courses (Advanced English Grammar, Contextual Grammar, and Advanced English Writing Skills I-II) taught by the researcher in the department indicated that they had limited language proficiency. The information about the students is provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1

*Participants of the Study*

No	Pseudonym	Year of the study
1	Selim	First
2	Nazlı	Second
3	Gül	Second
4	Meltem	Second
5	Asiye	Second
6	Tuba	First
7	Ela	Second
8	Cem	First
9	Gizem	First
10	Nur	First
11	Nihal	First
12	Yasemin	First
13	Rıza	First

The research was administered in 2022-2023 spring semester and the department courses that the students received through EMI in that semester are provided in Table 2 below. The department is officially supposed to provide a partially EMI program, where down to 30 per cent of the courses may be delivered in the target foreign language. However, as the students participating in the present study also confirmed, all department courses were delivered through EMI. In this study, the participant students were requested to answer the interview questions taking particularly the literature courses into consideration rather than the language skill courses in order to avoid a potential confusion over the phenomena of learning a foreign language and learning through a foreign language.

Table 2

*EMI Courses in the Department in 2022-2023 Spring Semester*

Year of study	Courses
1st year (Spring)	Literary Text Analysis Mythology Writing Skills Contextual Grammar
2nd year (Spring)	18th Century English Literature Popular English Literature Short Story Literary Terms and Movements Translation Introduction to Language and Linguistics



All courses were delivered online through distance education as a result of a national emergency situation in the country at the beginning of the semester. The courses were given on videoconferencing platforms of Zoom and Microsoft Teams depending on the preference of the instructors. The students could both attend the course sessions synchronously and watch them later asynchronously on the learning management system (LMS) of the university. Assessment and evaluation processes were also undertaken online. The instructors were allowed to choose among a range of assessment techniques including online tests or examinations, take-home assignments, projects and performance tasks.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

Research data were collected through a semi-structured interview (Appendix A) designed by the researcher as a result of a thorough literature review. The questions were basically designed to interrogate the students' attitudes and standpoints towards receiving EMI courses through distance education. The first question intended to inquire the students' general perspectives of having online EMI courses, followed by two questions asking about their opinions on the affordances and drawbacks of this way of instruction. The students were then requested to share their viewpoints on the necessity of instructors' translating the course content into Turkish; and the specific classes they thought a Turkish translation would be the most helpful. In the next question, the students were requested to compare face-to-face and online EMI classes. Lastly, the students' views on the effects of EMI on their academic performance during distance education were interrogated with the final question.

### **Data Collection Process**

After receiving the ethical approval, the researcher announced the study to freshmen and sophomores in the department towards the end of the subject semester and the interviews were planned and administered according to the availability and convenience of the volunteer students. The researcher conducted the interviews individually in Zoom conferences, displaying the interview form on a shared screen, and recorded and stored the meetings on consent of each participant. The interviews lasted 15-25 minutes. The recordings were later transcribed and made ready for analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

The transcribed research data were examined through thematic analysis. In this type of qualitative analysis, researchers thoroughly read the data, which is typically transcripts of voice or video records or written responses to open-ended questions, and then proceed to extract codes to be later grouped into categories and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, a deductive approach, through which the researcher resorted to the interview questions while categorizing the research codes, was adopted. Analysis details are provided in the following section with reference to the credibility and dependability of the study.

### **Credibility**

During the analysis, the researcher read and reread the transcripts and after achieving a sufficient acquaintance with the data set, started to generate codes out of student responses. Meanwhile, an outside researcher with a doctoral degree in the field of Applied Linguistics was requested to code two randomly selected interview records. The codes extracted by the researcher from the same two interviews were later compared to these codes and an inter-coder reliability score was calculated according to Miles and Huberman's (1994) model (per cent of agreement =  $\frac{\text{Consensus}}{\text{consensus} + \text{disagreement}}$ ). The inter-coder reliability score was calculated to be .81 according to this formula. As a value of .80 has been proposed to be the threshold for good reliability (Miles & Huberman, 1994), this result confirmed the dependability and credibility of the research findings.

The codes with relevant content were first subsumed under categories in initial draft tables. The researcher also frequently noted down memos of reflections and comments as they emerged throughout the reading and coding processes. The initial drafts were later analysed to detect overlaps or irrelevance in the categories. The final draft as a final product of this iterative process was intended to encompass all relevant codes in a concise and organized manner in overarching categories and themes. Elaborate explanations about the phases of analysis and abundant sample extracts from student interviews were provided in order to ensure transferability and consistency.

### **Results**

As a result of the thematic analysis process explained above, codes were categorized according to themes underpinned by the research questions and interview prompts. The themes and the codes subsumed under them are demonstrated in Figure 1 below.

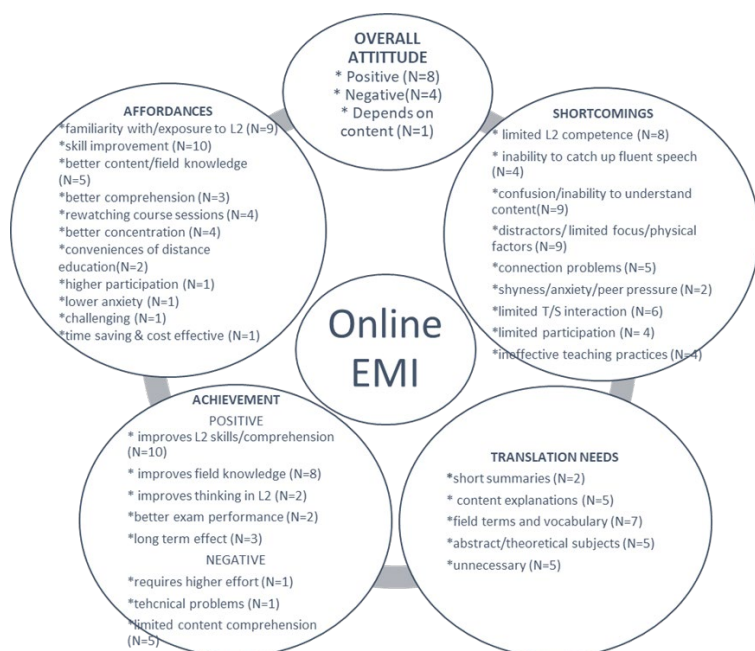


Figure 1. The Resulting themes and codes after thematic analysis

As illustrated in Figure 1, the students mostly approached online EMI in a positive attitude (N=8), yet almost one third of the group (N=4) displayed negative attitudes. Tuba was the only student who did not openly state a negative or positive attitude but thought the effectiveness of online EMI depended on content.

### Affordances of online EMI

The *affordances of online EMI* was determined as one of the salient themes. For the majority of the students, the most important outcome of online EMI, much alike face-to-face EMI practice, was its contribution to the development of language skills and content knowledge through exposure to English language and hence, gaining familiarity with the target language forms. Following quotations exemplify this:

*The advantages may include, as we always say about learning another language, exposure. I think it improves both familiarity with the language and writing skills as we are always exposed to that language. (Tuba)*

*I think the advantageous aspects include, for example, better listening comprehension. Also, pronunciation develops, and it is also very important for grammar development. That is why I believe it (EMI) is very beneficial. (Nur)*

*Since you (instructors) speak in English, we need to first understand what you are saying. In time, our comprehension improves. Not only in the classroom, but also when we meet a foreigner outside the classroom, we understand their speech better. Our speaking skills are also positively affected. (Meltem)*

*The more we are exposed, the more we can speak or understand, in both face to face and online (EMI). That the lessons are given in English is an advantage. We improve our vocabulary, we improve ourselves more both in speaking and understanding. The more you (the instructors) talk, the more we learn new things. (Gül)*

Asiye was another student with a positive attitude towards online EMI. She further explained the difference online EMI created by challenging her to comprehend course content despite limited student-content interaction and accordingly, further develop her L2 skills:

*(...) We were already experiencing this (EMI) in face-to-face education.(...)I feel positive about it because it actually helped improve my ear for English. You know, there is nothing on the screen, some lecturers do not share anything at all, but I try to take notes just by listening ... Therefore, I honestly like English instruction because it improves both my vocabulary and oral skills.*

The advantages of EMI in distance education over face-to-face instruction, according to the students' perspectives, included the opportunity to asynchronously view the course sessions, better concentration and comprehension due to the silence that may not be achieved in large classes in face-to-face education, and other conveniences of online education such as being time-saving and cost-effective. The illustrative interview extracts are as follows:



*I find it more useful because we have the chance to listen to it again. Sometimes there are some terms and some subjects that we do not understand at school, or there may be important tips that our teacher gives about the exam. It is a great advantage for us that we can watch the lecture afterwards. (Selim)*

*For me online and face-to-face (EMI) were the same, online even better. (...) I could listen to it (any course session) offline. That is an advantage. (Cem)*

Nihal had a different perspective. Although she believed the supremacy of face-to-face education over online instruction, she believed that department lectures involved limited discussion and negotiation already, and therefore, online EMI could be better owing to its potential to save time, energy and money. She said:

*Normally, what I always expect in face-to-face education is that there should be a discussion environment (...) But if we take a course that is purely at the level of knowledge transfer, (...) the students take notes, memorise, and take the exam, then it can actually be thought that online courses are more useful. (...) The students can take notes, study and not spend too much money or a lot of time.*

Rıza was another student who mentioned the convenience of online EMI: “(...) at home, at least we can sit and focus completely. In the classroom, some students make noise, another says something, and we miss the lecture. At home, we may use headphones.”

Lower anxiety was another advantage of virtual contexts for EMI use owing to low attendance. Gül claimed:

*In distance education, we can participate classes more easily because very few people attend the lessons. Since the classroom is very crowded, when you (instructors) ask a direct question, I feel shy, but in distance education, it is always the same people. (...) That is why; I do not feel that shyness.*

Overall, whereas some students (e.g. Tuba, Gizem and Nur) stated the advantages such as improving vocabulary, pronunciation and listening, which mostly applied to EMI in any context, other students (e.g. Gül, Rıza and Selim) articulated the outcomes of online EMI mainly comparing it to face-to-face education. Those who favoured the virtual settings for more effective EMI reported higher impact on their listening comprehension, lower distraction and shyness, and cost-effectiveness as well as the opportunity to replay the lecture videos.

### **Shortcomings of online EMI**

Receiving EMI in distance education resulted with several challenges for the students besides the abovementioned conveniences. Among them, the most commonly and frequently voiced challenges were reportedly encountered when following and comprehending instructions due to their limited L2 competence, physical and technical inconveniences, limited interaction and participation, peer pressure and negative emotions, and ineffective teaching practices.

Selim, for instance, explained how he and his classmates had difficulty in catching up with their instructors' speech due to their language level. He said, “*Sometimes in the lesson, our teachers speak fast or we cannot understand them at that moment. There are such long words and we cannot even write them down.*” Similarly, Cem claimed that “*EMI can be disadvantageous due to the limited listening comprehension of some students, although the teachers may think that they are at a normal level.*”

The students' L2 proficiency level also affected their willingness to participate in classes because of peer pressure. Selim expressed, “*(...) As you know, we cannot speak fluently (...) Halfway through an English sentence, we immediately start to say 'ummm'. Then our friends can say 'if you can't do it, don't do it', so most of my friends don't want to participate in the classes.*”

For Selim, peer pressure was stronger in online education as their classmates had the opportunity to rewatch a session that he would have preferred to be forgotten. He stated:

*Our voice and pronunciations are sometimes perceived very differently online. (...) However, since that video can be watched many times online, you can open a video 60 times a day and listen to that sound again or hear it many times. That is why most of our friends do not talk in online class.*

Rıza protested the technical adversities of distance education as they impeded their following the courses. He said “*(...) When we are at home, sometimes we have internet problems. Sometimes the internet is very unstable and sometimes there is no internet at all, so we cannot join the sessions.*”

Similarly, Selim responded:

*(...) When we are at school, we can follow lessons better. Because we have internet connection problems, some of my friends may not be able to attend classes. OK, we can watch it later. But at that moment, if we have a question in our mind, we have to wait until next week so that we can ask it. (...).*

When the ineffective teaching methods of the lecturers were added to the inadequate language proficiency of the students, the online EMI process proved to be quite difficult and frustrating for some students. Nazlı expressed her frustration with these words:

*(...) Some instructors do not turn on their camera. And I don't understand the lesson. I really don't. There is this course. Seriously, the camera is off. You know, you cannot see the lecturer's face, or his expression. Nothing. I don't understand anything at all. (...) We don't know all the words in English. That is a problem for us, for me. I sometimes listen to a lecture 10 times. (...) There are some instructors who do not even share slides. We look at the black screen, and it is really hard to follow it.*

Asiye shared incorrect spelling as another drawback of online EMI practiced without material and image sharing. She complained that *"Some teachers do not share the screen. Spelling can also be a problem then. I can learn a word I heard for the first time incorrectly. (...) I even misspelled many words in my exams because of mishearing."*

While some students found it easier to concentrate on the lectures than in-class teaching, as mentioned in the previous subsection, some others had difficulty in focusing during online EMI sessions. Example extracts are presented below.

*We cannot focus in distance education even when classes are in our mother tongue, so when it is in English, focusing becomes harder and it becomes more disadvantageous for us. (Gül)*

*(...) It is actually more effective to speak English in face-to-face education. Also, since no one can focus too much at home, when they (instructors) teach in English, it is worse. (Ela)*

Studying home brought about physical factors that affected the students' attendance and willingness to participate. Nazlı said she did not feel like a student, but *"more like a housekeeper"* while at home, and Nur complained that she *"lived in a crowded house and could speak in online classes"* although she wanted to actively participate. She also reported that they had adaptation difficulties in online sessions and did not interact much with the instructors in EMI-led sessions. She said *"in distance education, we cannot concentrate on the lesson very much, you know, everyone just listens to the teacher silently."* Tuba was another student who found online EMI less effective due to limited teacher-student interaction:

*I think it is more effective in face-to-face education because there is classroom environment (...) There is interaction. We are willing to participate or to answer questions. It is more efficient and more understandable. You (instructors) repeat your explanations, etc. It is different in distance education.*

Obviously, technical adversities and physical inconveniences added to the limited lexical and linguistic background knowledge of the students impede the effectiveness of online EMI practices in the department.

### Translation needs

When they were asked about the necessity of translation into Turkish during online EMI, the students' responses varied. Some students demanded frequent use of L1 instruction, whereas others found it unnecessary except for very theoretical and abstract subjects that may hardly be understood without elaborate L1 explanations. Sample extracts from student responses are provided below.

*I want it to be half English and half Turkish because sometimes there are a lot of words that we do not really understand, and then we cannot focus. When we cannot focus, we completely lose track of the statements. (Ela)*

*We have some courses which are a bit harder. We cannot understand when the teacher starts in English right away; sometimes we cannot speak because we get confused. Well, I think if they explain it in Turkish afterwards, it will stay in our minds better. (...) And our brains cannot translate immediately. Therefore, I think a short Turkish summary would be better for students. (Selim)*

*Some literature courses are very hard because there are so many words we do not know. So the translation is really important at that point. (Rıza)*

*(...)if we are learning a subject no one is really familiar with, it should first be explained in Turkish so that we can understand the English more accurately. (...) It is difficult to understand such abstract subjects, which we cannot understand even in our own language, directly in a foreign language. (Meltem)*

Cem similarly believed the necessity of Turkish translation when it was obvious that the students did not understand the content in English. He argued *"Students may not be able to understand even though it is repeatedly explained in English. So that part can be in Turkish to emphasize it clearly."*

Asiye criticised the use of L1 in an English major department. She contended that *“I am going to be a teacher or I will continue my postgraduate studies. I don't have much to do with Turkish anymore, so I don't think it is beneficial for me when it is in Turkish.”* Nihal was another student who objected to Turkish translation in the department courses. She argued how that would accustom students to laziness as follows:

*Actually, I think this pushes the students to be lazy, because the lessons are not only the responsibility of the teacher. The student also has to do his/her own duty here. I think it is not a very correct approach for students to expect everything from the instructors (...) or think that the instructors should constantly load them with information, and that they should constantly give this information in Turkish.*

Yasemin also believed the necessity of English-only EMI because of its potential of improving both language and cognitive skills. She said *“I think instruction should be completely in English, I mean, I think it improves focusing and comprehension as well as thinking skills and further, speaking skills.”*

The students' arguments over the use of L1 translation apparently varied parallel to their perceptions. Selim, Gizem, Meltem and Nazlı considered L2 instruction as a factor impeding their comprehension and learning and therefore insisted on the necessity of translation, whereas Asiye and Yasemin acknowledged the role of L2 instruction in promoting their improvement. The complexity of the course contents was also an important factor determining the students' preferences regarding the medium of instruction.

### Online EMI and achievement

The students were requested to evaluate the effects of receiving online EMI in their department studies on their academic performance and the revealing results indicated that although they faced short-term challenges, the long-term effects of this way of instruction was in a positive direction. They acknowledged the debilitating effects of their limited field vocabulary and linguistic competence, whereas they could also perceive that EMI improved their language and academic skills. Following extracts from their responses exemplify these findings.

*The lecturer explains the subject, I understand all of it or more than half of it, maybe I understand 70% of it in the classroom, but it is not like that online. For example, I can understand 30 or 40 per cent of that subject. I have to make higher effort; I have to work harder. (Nazlı)*

*It (the effects of online EMI on achievement) varies from course to course. (...) but I think it is better to use translation in courses teaching literary terms. I think that taking these courses completely in English affects our success negatively. (Rıza)*

The long-term versus short-term effects of EMI on success was evaluated by several students. Cem, for instance, said *“To be honest, if the instruction was in Turkish, maybe achievement would be higher, but this would be a short-term effect. So I don't know how much sense it would make for the future.”* Nihal shared the same perspective. She disclosed her opinion with following words:

*(...) Although it (EMI) seems to have a quantitatively negative effect (refers to lower exam scores), it actually increases quality. Since it is our mother tongue, Turkish content is much better, we comprehend it quickly, we learn things quickly. But in the other language, we are at the beginner level or we are new to literature. Therefore, I think that decreases academic success, but I believe that it will increase gradually over time.*

There were others who could see an improvement in their academic performance over the time they spent in the department. Nur, for instance, revealed that *“When I compare myself to last year, I have done a lot of things. I do listening; I do reading. The instructors speak in English, for example, and I understand what they say. I think I have improved by speaking in English.”* Yasemin was another student who believed that EMI improved their skills, especially their ability to think in English, not in the native language. She maintained that *“We read and assimilate new information in English. At the point of understanding, interpreting and comprehending what we read... We do not do that in Turkish. At that point, that encourages us to think in English as well.”*

Tuba explained the advantage of receiving EMI in assessment as follows:

*Since the questions (in exams) are directed in English, it is more advantageous for the language of instruction to be in English because at least it stays in your mind while the teacher is explaining. At the time of the exam, you use that sentence, or similar expressions. In this respect, I think English is more useful.*

Asiye advocated the learning outcomes resulting from EMI as follows:

*The fact that my courses are in English is a great advantage for me. Our teachers also encourage us a lot by forcing us to speak a little more, asking questions in English in the lesson or speaking completely*

*in English. In fact, we also see our mistakes. We also overcome our excitement. I mean, in terms of academic success, I think it is very good that we study completely in English.*

To summarize, the findings of this study were grouped and presented in five categories, students' overall attitudes, perceived affordances and shortcomings, translation needs and the online EMI and academic achievement relationship, which were predetermined by the research scope. The overall study findings demonstrated student viewpoints and attitudes both diverging and converging with respect to the use of English as the language of instruction in distance education.

## Discussion

The present study sought to delve into English literature major students' attitudes towards the use of EMI in synchronous online classes during an emergency distance education period. An open-ended online interview was administered to obtain research data and thematic data analysis with a deductive approach was adopted while resolving the data set. The overall attitude with EMI was found to be positive for most students although contradicting perspectives were also identified.

The students mostly evaluated EMI with respect to its contribution to their L2 development. This might be due to their English levels; they evaluated any language input that would serve the development of their L2 skills. In most cases, they even explained their mere ultimate learning attainment as learning English. A recent work on student satisfaction with online EMI courses during the Covid-19 pandemic showed that language and literature major students' had higher satisfaction when compared to other discipline majors (Murdoch & Lin, 2023). The positive student attitudes might therefore primarily stem from the field-related aspirations in these departments.

The advantages of online EMI, much alike the face-to-face mode, involved its contributions to L2 development. Earlier research lends credence to the conclusion that the students possess positive attitudes towards EMI and mostly report satisfaction with the improvement in their spoken and written skills and development in their technical vocabulary (Fernandez-Costalez, 2017). It still has to be noted that, notwithstanding the students' beliefs, the efficiency of EMI in developing students' language learning remains as a moot point (Kamaşak et al., 2021). While argued to be inevitable by many, the assertions that EMI improves linguistic competence is not well-evidenced (Macaro et al., 2018, Querol-Julián & Camiciottoli, 2019).

As the findings of this study indicated, students may experience difficulty in comprehending the content due to a variety of reasons. The results of the present study showed that the students' L2 competence and disciplinary vocabulary were two major impediments restricting the effectiveness of online EMI. Following EMI courses itself is quite demanding and involves heavy cognitive load (Jensen & Thøgersen, 2017) even in face-to-face education. I. Kym and M. H. Kym (2014) similarly argues that the efficacy of EMI depends to a large extent on the language proficiency and discipline-specific background knowledge of the students. A strand of research focusing on the challenges of EMI converged on the point that students' language proficiency is the most influential factor in the efficacy of EMI (Soruç et al., 2021). Students suffer from the disadvantages of their L2 inadequacies in their attempts to grasp discursive context (Querol-Julián & Camiciottoli, 2019). Likewise, investigating the EMI-related difficulties freshmen face in their first semester at university, Evans and Morrison (2011) found that the major problems involved understanding and adopting field vocabulary and mastering genres of the discipline.

In the context of the present study, the subject group had received preparatory year English education program, however, as clear from the students' statements, neither the freshmen nor the sophomores have reached the proficiency level that is necessary to fulfil the requirements of the department courses. Although the major focus in this study is on the EMI experiences in virtual settings, it is evidenced with student responses that the L2 proficiency stands as the major problem irrelevant of the teaching/learning context. In line with these results, earlier empirical research posits that increased English proficiency brings about better comprehension of academic subject matter in EMI in social sciences (Yuksel et al., 2023). Aizawa et al. (2020) and Yuksel et al. (2023) demonstrated that students with lower English proficiency had comprehension and active participation difficulties in classes, which delimited the positive outcomes of EMI. It may therefore be interpreted that in order to yield better effectiveness from EMI in particularly English majoring departments, language proficiency problems should be eliminated before entering these programs.

Student emotions is another area of discussion that needs to be addressed in relation to the effectiveness of online EMI. Anxiety, shyness and pressure/stress were voiced by some students as emotions triggered during the online EMI experience, especially due to their pronunciation-related self-efficacy beliefs. Earlier research already identifies pronunciation anxiety as a skill-specific language learning anxiety type (Baran-Lucarz, 2013; Erdel, 2023) and has acknowledged its relation with students' willingness to communicate (Baran-Lucarz, 2014). Students' negative feelings and unrealistic assumptions should be alleviated with elaborate and insightful teacher approaches, as it is mostly the teachers/instructors' responsibility to create stress-free learning environments for their students (Horwitz et al., 1986).



Another prominent drawback of online EMI for the students was limited interaction. Earlier research supports the premise that interaction is essential in EMI classes and that inadequate instructor-student interaction in online classes impede student comprehension and effective learning (Cicillini & Giacosa, 2020; Yüksel, 2022). Yuan et al. (2023) found that student feelings were complex and mixed, and further, they experienced high emotional labour due to non-systematic and inefficient EMI employment. The results of Murdoch and Lin's (2023) study also showed that instructor care and warmth was associated with higher satisfaction. Therefore, it would not be too assertive to conclude that this online EMI could have culminated in higher student satisfaction with stronger teacher-student interactions and more effective teaching strategies.

Instructors' teaching styles and strategies were also found to have an impact on the quality of the students' online EMI experiences. Earlier research lends support to these findings, contending that instructors' organization of course content, approach and skills exert impact on student learning (Lim et al., 2022). Picciuolo (2023) reflected on the available literature on online EMI and concluded that online instruction has led to the absence of non- and para-linguistic cues EMI instructors utilized to enhance student comprehension and concentration. As an implication, it is a necessity that EMI instructors teaching online courses be acquainted with the conveniences and challenges of digital environments and use adaptive strategies to facilitate learning. Furthermore, multimodality is apparently crucial since, as Querol- Julián (2021) also argues, discourse strategies can foster simultaneous interaction and compensate for the absence of eye contact with students in online EMI.

### Conclusion

EMI has its merits and demerits, both in online and face-to-face instructional settings. It appears to be possible to assess them both; thrive the merits and ameliorate the demerits. In the first instance, students' L2 incompetence must be overcome in order to alleviate its direct impact on students' academic performance and the indirect impact on their affective well-being. Secondly, the significant role of teacher-student interaction and students' demand for more of it must not be neglected. As Genc and Yuksel (2021) also suggest, increasing the frequency of teacher-student interactions through dialogic activities may contribute to the effective application of online EMI. It is a disquieting fact that academia still embodies unidirectional teaching practices in which students are expected to *learn* by passively listening to some lectures or following some course content from slide shows, which they can easily find or even create themselves with the help of artificial intelligence tools. Especially in virtual contexts, student involvement is an urgency but not a choice in EMI for checking for understanding and learning about the extent of students' need for further clarification. Also, rather than following a strict English-only approach, using L1 especially for meaning clarification is considered to be facilitating by both lecturers and students of EMI. As one implication, gaining an awareness regarding the rising trend of World (or Global) Englishes and the notion that English is not necessarily learned in a monolingual context could benefit students in overcoming the affective barriers stemming from language-related concerns (Sahan et al., 2022). As another recommendation, the use of plurilingual teaching practices, such as *translanguaging*, which may lessen L2-related challenges of EMI (see Sahan et al., 2023) should also be welcomed in EMI classrooms.

As teleconferencing platforms have become a common alternative to classrooms in emergency situations or simply by preference owing to the temporal, spatial and economic benefits of distance education, the use of EMI, as one prominent mode of instruction, deserves scrutinized scholarly interest. The present study is promising as it spotlights this underexplored context for English-medium instruction. Still, the study has some limitations to be noted. Due to the subjective and individualized nature of qualitative data, the findings of the present study cannot be generalized to other groups with similar features or from similar contexts. Additionally, the student responses to the interview questions were the only resource of research data. Further studies could benefit from other sources of data using different or multiple methods and techniques to collect information. Instructor experiences could alternatively or additionally be elucidated in order to gain deeper insight into the effectiveness of EMI in online learning contexts. Furthermore, cross-cultural studies could also shed further light on how students with diverse backgrounds experience and react to this phenomenon.

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### Declaration of Competing Interest

The article was written by a single author, and the author declares no competing financial or non-financial interest that may affect the study.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Interview Questions**

1. Please, share your general attitude towards receiving distance education instructions in English.
2. What are the advantages of using English as the medium of instruction in distance education courses? Explain.
3. What are the disadvantages of using English as the medium of instruction in distance education courses? Explain.
4. Do you find the Turkish translation of course content necessary in distance education? Explain with reasons.
5. Which course(s) in particular would you find it useful to receive instructions in Turkish? Explain with reasons.
6. Compare distance education and face-to-face education in terms of English as the language of instruction.
7. Discuss the relationship between the English language of instruction in distance education courses and your academic success.