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Bridging Educational Inequities: The Impact of English-Medium Instruction on Intercultural Access and Inclusion in Türkiye

Abstract

This study critically examines the paradoxical role of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) in shaping educational equity, social mobility, and intercultural inclusion in Turkish higher education. Employing a thematic literature review and Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis, the research synthesizes peer-reviewed empirical studies indexed in Scopus, SSCI, ERIC, and Google Scholar. Four interrelated themes emerge: (1) the reproduction of educational inequities via unequal access to linguistic capital, (2) linguistic elitism fostered by English-only policies, (3) identity struggles in monolingual EMI settings, and (4) policy-practice mismatches at institutional levels. The analysis foregrounds the sociolinguistic and emotional challenges of students from under-resourced public universities and highlights translanguaging as an emergent, unofficial pedagogical strategy. Theoretically anchored in Bourdieu's conceptions of capital and critical multilingualism, the study proposes a context-sensitive EMI model incorporating bilingual pedagogy, faculty development, and participatory policymaking. It contends that Türkiye's EMI expansion, while globally aspirational, risks exacerbating existing inequalities unless reframed through inclusive, ethically grounded practices. The study offers nuanced insights into the political, pedagogical, and affective dimensions of EMI in stratified educational landscapes.

Keywords: English-Medium Instruction (EMI), Educational Equity, Linguistic Capital, Translanguaging Pedagogy, Intercultural Inclusion, Language Policy in Higher Education.

Eğitimde Eşitsizlikleri Aşmak: Türkiye'de İngilizce Eğitim Uygulamalarının Kültürlerarası Erişim ve Kapsayıcılık Üzerindeki Etkisi

Öz

Bu çalışma, Türkiye yükseköğretiminde İngilizce Eğitim (English-Medium Instruction, EMI) uygulamalarının eğitimde eşitlik, toplumsal hareketlilik ve kültürlerarası kapsayıcılık üzerindeki çelişkili rolünü eleştirel bir bakış açısıyla incelemektedir. Scopus, SSCI, ERIC ve Google Scholar'da taranan hakemli ampirik çalışmalar tematik literatür taraması yöntemiyle analiz edilmiş; Braun ve Clarke'ın altı

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aşamalı tematik analiz çerçevesi temel alınmıştır. Dört ana tema öne çıkmaktadır: (1) dilsel sermayeye erişimdeki eşitsizlikler aracılığıyla yeniden üretilen eğitimsel adaletsizlikler, (2) yalnızca İngilizceye dayalı politikalarla beslenen dilsel elitizm, (3) tekdilli EMI ortamlarında öğrenci kimliğiyle ilgili yaşanan gerilimler ve (4) ulusal EMI politikaları ile yerel uygulamalar arasındaki uyumsuzluk. Araştırma, dezavantajlı devlet üniversitelerindeki öğrencilerin yaşadığı sosyodilsel ve duygusal zorluklara odaklanmakta; bu bağlamda resmî olmayan ancak işlevsel pedagojik stratejiler olarak translanguaging (çok dilli geçiş) uygulamalarını vurgulamaktadır. Kuramsal olarak Bourdieu'nün sermaye türleri ve eleştirel çokdillilik yaklaşımlarıyla temellendirilen çalışma, daha kapsayıcı, bağlama duyarlı ve etik temelli bir EMI modeli önermektedir. Türkiye örneği üzerinden EMI'nin politik, pedagojik ve duygusal boyutlarına dair kapsamlı bir değerlendirme sunulmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İngilizce Eğitim (EMI), Eğitimde Eşitlik, Dilsel Sermaye, Translanguaging Pedagojisi, Kültürlerarası Kapsayıcılık, Yükseköğretimde Dil Politikası.

Introduction

In recent years, the proliferation of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) in Turkish higher education has intensified debates regarding language, inequality, and intercultural access. EMI defined here as the use of English to teach academic subjects in universities where English is not the dominant language has been heralded for its purported benefits: enhanced English proficiency, increased global mobility, and elevated institutional prestige. Yet an increasing body of scholarship problematises these assumptions, revealing that in contexts such as Türkiye, EMI may exacerbate existing educational inequities (Kır, 2024; Kamasak & Özbilgin, 2020; Şahan & Şahan, 2021).

To conceptualise these dynamics, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital offers a potent analytical lens. Bourdieu (1991) posits that linguistic competence constitutes a form of linguistic capital, a subcategory of cultural capital, which is unevenly distributed within societies and convertible into economic and symbolic advantages. Importantly, linguistic capital confers access to institutional fields such as higher education and shapes individuals' positional trajectories (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1996). As Nishioka and Durrani (2019) observe, "linguistic capital mediates the reproduction of social class" through educational processes.

In the Turkish context, EMI's surge has largely served students from affluent urban backgrounds who possess substantial prior exposure to English via private schooling or supplementary courses (Education in Turkey, 2025). Conversely, students from peripheral regions or economically disadvantaged areas often enter EMI programmes with insufficient English skills, leading to difficulties in comprehension, feelings of academic alienation, and, in some cases, dropout (Kır, 2024; Al-Hajri, 2023). Such mismatches between student capital and academic

expectations replicate broader regional and class-based inequalities (Kır, 2024; Şahan & Şahan, 2021).

Bourdieu's notion of the linguistic marketplace further elucidates how the prestige associated with English shapes educational hierarchies. In this marketplace, particular language forms such as Anglophone academic English hold heightened symbolic weight, reinforcing the authority of EMI as a pathway to upward mobility (Bourdieu, 1991; Park & Wee, 2013; Nishioka & Durrani, 2019). Yet this capital is inaccessible to many, rendering EMI less a democratizing force and more a mechanism of linguistic elitism (Gülle, 2024; Kamasak & Özbilgin, 2020).

Qualitative studies in Türkiye underscore these tensions. Kır's (2024) phenomenological inquiry into former EMI students reveals how a lack of linguistic and cultural capital, compounded by family socioeconomic disadvantage, led to a sense of inferiority and eventual disengagement. One participant reflects: *"I felt—I still feel—like I didn't belong in that world, where everything was English, everyone was fluent, and I was the odd one out"* (p. 148). These accounts exemplify Bourdieu's argument that educational institutions validate and reward capital that some students cannot attain, thereby reproducing class-based stratification (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Cultural reproduction, 2025).

Beyond individual narratives, institutional research highlights discordance between macro-level language policies and micro-level classroom realities. Educators often resist rigid English-only mandates, instead resorting to translanguaging as a means of bridging comprehension gaps and nurturing intercultural exchange (Gülle, 2024; Macaro et al., 2018). Translanguaging where multiple linguistic resources are employed fluidly in the classroom emerges as a form of pedagogical capital, enabling both students and teachers to navigate the linguistic marketplace more equitably (Al-Hajri, 2023; Macaro et al., 2018). However, without formal recognition, these practices remain marginalised within official EMI frameworks.

Comparative literature from Asia and Europe corroborates Turkey's experience. Meta-analyses conducted by Macaro and his colleagues (2018) suggest that while EMI boosts English proficiency, it yields uneven results in terms of content mastery and intercultural learning. Moreover, EMI policies often underscore neoliberal imperatives instead of social justice orientations (Macaro et al., 2018; Sah, 2022). For instance, Al-Hajri's (2023) thesis from Oman,

another non-Anglophone higher education context, found that EMI deepened inequities when implemented without supplementary language support or participatory policy design.

In light of these critiques, this study foregrounds Bourdieu's concepts such as linguistic and cultural capital, linguistic marketplace, and social reproduction to interrogate how EMI in Türkiye functions not only as a pedagogical innovation but also as a mechanism reflecting broader structural stratification. By doing so, it complements prior research and offers a coherent theoretical foundation for targeted policy and pedagogical reform.

This introduction therefore establishes the following: first, EMI in Türkiye occurs amid rising globalisation and institutional internationalisation demands; second, EMI's efficacy is contingent upon equitable distribution of linguistic capital; third, translanguaging and context-responsive teaching hold promise for enhancing intercultural access; and fourth, macro-meso-micro misalignments warrant a reframing of EMI policy toward justice-oriented approaches.

The subsequent sections will unpack these dynamics through a thematic literature review, interrogate the intersections of capital and identity in Turkish EMI programs, and propose a multilevel EMI framework that integrates capital-scaffolded pedagogy, translanguaging, and intercultural competence. Ultimately, the study aims to inform more socially just educational models in Türkiye's evolving higher education landscape.

A Review of the Literature

Theoretical Lens: Bourdieu, Capital, and EMI

Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework has been applied extensively to understand how English-Medium Instruction (EMI) acts as both an enabler and a gatekeeper within Turkish higher education. According to Bourdieu (1991), linguistic competence serves as a form of linguistic capital, which is not evenly distributed within social spaces but rather correlates strongly with economic and cultural privilege. Bourdieu further notes that this capital confers symbolic power in what he terms the linguistic marketplace favouring agents fluent in prestigious language varieties (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1996). In the Turkish EMI context, these concepts foreground how proficiency in academic English can both expand opportunities and replicate existing inequalities especially when paired with systemic imbalances in language educational access. This theoretical grounding provides coherence for unpacking themes of social reproduction and linguistic elitism that recur throughout EMI scholarship in Türkiye.

Empirical Studies on Student Experience and Drop-out

Building on Bourdieusian theory, Furkan Kır (2024) conducted a phenomenological investigation involving semi-structured interviews with students who withdrew from an EMI programme at a Turkish university. Participants described feeling marginalized by the mismatch between their linguistic capital and the institutional demands. As Kır found, “the mismatch between the capital possessed by the participants and that expected and endorsed by the EMI university alienated the participants, leading them to drop out eventually”. This study strikingly illustrates how EMI can reproduce stratification, disadvantaging students lacking elite language preparation.

Similarly, Kamaşak and Şahan (2023) surveyed 498 undergraduates at an Istanbul private university. They identified persistent language-related challenges despite preparatory year programmes, finding that students’ English proficiency was significantly associated with academic success in EMI courses. Their conclusions reinforce the idea that linguistic competence remains a critical threshold for EMI equitably benefiting students.

Attitudes and Affective Impacts

Quantitative and qualitative investigations have also examined learner attitudes and affective dimensions in EMI contexts. Atik (2010) explored attitudes among 233 students at a Turkish tertiary institution. While learners generally held positive views toward EMI, in particular its capacity to bolster English skills, they also reported significant content comprehension difficulties in English-medium courses. It is accentuated that students valued EMI for its prestige and career relevance but expressed frustration with lecturers’ limited English proficiency and inadequate pedagogical support. Consequently, they advocated for enhanced English-for-Academic-Purposes (EAP) instruction and instructor training.

Institutional and Policy-Level Analyses

Investigations into policy frameworks and faculty perceptions shed light on the meso- and macro-level dynamics of EMI. Şahan (2025) interviewed lecturers across Turkish universities, revealing that faculty generally support EMI in principle while also indicating a clear need for context-specific professional development in both linguistic ability and discipline-based pedagogy. This aligns with findings from YÖK’s 2016 regulations (Law no. 29662), which categorize EMI programmes into full or partial models requiring YÖK approval but do not mandate proficiency thresholds for admission or practice. The policy ambiguity allows access to EMI programmes

without ensuring that students possess the linguistic capital necessary for success, thereby contributing to stratification.

Translanguaging, Multilingualism, and Pedagogical Innovation

In response to linguistic and affective obstacles, translanguaging has surfaced as a pedagogical practice capable of mitigating some inequities inherent in EMI. Şahan (2025) documents instances of faculty informally blending Turkish and English in lectures to support comprehension. Such translanguaging not only assists struggling students but also enhances intercultural dialogue in the classroom. More broadly, international scholars including Macaro et al. (2018) advocate for pedagogic frameworks that recognize and valorise multilingual repertoires encouraging formal integration of translanguaging as a strategy for achieving pedagogical equity.

Global Patterns and Equity Concerns

Turkey's EMI developments mirror global trends that balance the allure of internationalization with concerns about linguistic imperialism. Several meta-analyses (Macaro et al., 2018) argue that while EMI often increases English proficiency, it yields mixed results in content comprehension and equitable educational outcomes. Similarly, critiques of linguistic imperialism highlight the risk that EMI may contribute to the erosion of local academic languages and traditions-questions Özçelik et al. (2022) flag in their reflections on EMI quality assurance.

Educational Stratification and Regional Disparities

Beyond language issues, Turkey's broader educational inequalities shape access to EMI. Özdemir (2016) demonstrates that regional socioeconomic disparities significantly predict student performance in PISA mathematics suggesting longstanding stratification across provinces. These systemic inequities interact with EMI outcomes: ill-equipped rural or underfunded students are less likely to penetrate prestigious, English-medium programmes, thereby reinforcing regional and class divisions.

Synthesis and Gaps

Taken together, the literature reveals several interlocking themes:

Theme	Summary
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Capital mismatches	Students with insufficient English proficiency struggle in EMI environments (Kır, Kamaşak & Şahan)
Affective and attitudinal effects	Mixed perceptions signal frustration alongside recognition of EMI's prestige and opportunity
Policy–practice tensions	Mismatch between macro-level approval and micro-level classroom implementation
Translanguaging as remedy	Informal linguistic mixing offers an equity-focused pedagogical lifeline
Structural inequities	Regional and socioeconomic disparities contextualize EMI access

While numerous studies diagnose the problem, fewer propose robust, empirically tested frameworks for policy or pedagogical reform. The literature consistently portrays EMI in Türkiye as a double-edged sword: while promising enhanced English skills and global engagement, it also risks amplifying structural injustices when linguistic capital is unequally distributed, and policies remain detached from lived classroom realities. Addressing this duality demands integrative approaches that incorporate diagnostics, scaffolding, translanguaging, and systemic regional equity. The present study uses this comprehensive literature foundation to build a thematic analysis-driven model for socially just EMI in Türkiye. Within this scope elaborated above, the answers are sought for the following research questions:

Research Questions

*How do students from different socioeconomic and linguistic backgrounds experience access, inclusion, and exclusion in English-Medium Instruction (EMI) programmes in Türkiye?

*In what ways do instructors and institutions navigate the tensions between national EMI policy mandates and classroom-level linguistic realities in Turkish higher education?

*What pedagogical practices and language ideologies emerge in EMI classrooms, and how do they affect students' intercultural engagement and academic confidence?

Methodology

Research Design and Analytical Framework

This study adopts a qualitative meta-synthesis design, utilising a thematic analysis framework to examine peer-reviewed literature on English-Medium Instruction (EMI) and its role in shaping educational equity, intercultural access, and social mobility in Türkiye. Rather than collecting primary data through human participants, this study systematically gathers, reviews, and interprets existing research published in reputable academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, SSCI, ERIC, and Google Scholar. This approach is informed by the tradition of qualitative evidence synthesis, which is well-suited to unpacking nuanced, context-dependent, and interpretive insights from existing empirical work (Thomas & Harden, 2008). The study draws specifically on reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2022), guided by Bourdieu's theoretical constructs of linguistic capital, symbolic power, and social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1991; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1996). These theoretical lenses inform both the coding of extracted data and the interpretation of themes.

Data Sources and Literature Search Strategy

The review employed a structured, iterative search process across five academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science (SSCI indexed), ERIC, Google Scholar, and EBSCOhost. Searches were limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2013 and 2025 to capture the post-Bologna, post-internationalisation reforms period in Turkish higher education.

Search terms included Boolean combinations of the following keywords:

*("English-Medium Instruction" OR "EMI") AND

*("Turkey" OR "Türkiye") AND

*("educational equity" OR "social mobility" OR "inclusion" OR "access" OR "intercultural competence")

Initial searches returned over 1,000 results. After screening for relevance and applying inclusion/exclusion criteria (see below), 43 studies were retained for full-text analysis.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure thematic focus and methodological rigour, the following inclusion criteria were applied:

*Peer-reviewed empirical studies (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods)

*Published between 2013–2025

*Focus on EMI in Turkish higher education contexts (not primary/secondary education)

*Articles addressing issues of linguistic access, student/faculty experiences, intercultural communication, or educational inequality

The exclusion criteria included:

*Editorials, book reviews, conference abstracts, or conceptual papers lacking empirical data

*Studies unrelated to Türkiye or not involving EMI

*Research focusing solely on language acquisition without reference to access, equity, or inclusion

This filtering ensured that the final corpus of literature-maintained coherence with the study’s research questions and theoretical grounding.

Data Extraction and Management

Full-text articles meeting the inclusion criteria were exported to Zotero for bibliographic organisation and NVivo 14 for coding and analysis. A data extraction sheet was created in Excel to capture metadata (author, year, methodology, participants, key findings, theoretical lens, database source). Key passages, particularly findings and discussion sections, were coded inductively and deductively. All digital files were stored securely on encrypted institutional cloud storage with backup protocols. Proper citation and documentation were maintained throughout to ensure traceability and avoid plagiarism, in alignment with academic integrity standards.

Analytical Procedure: Reflexive Thematic Analysis

The analysis followed Braun and Clarke’s six-phase reflexive thematic analysis framework (2006; 2022), adapted for secondary data synthesis:

***Familiarisation with the Data**

The selected articles were read repeatedly to develop familiarity and note early patterns. The focus was on how EMI intersects with structural inequality, intercultural dynamics, and institutional responses.

***Generating Initial Code**

*Line-by-line coding was conducted in NVivo, identifying meaningful units such as “language-based exclusion,” “faculty resistance to EMI policy,” “translanguaging strategies,” and “capital mismatch.”

Searching for Themes

Codes were clustered into higher-order candidate themes (e.g., *Stratified Linguistic Access, Pedagogical Mediation through Translanguaging, Symbolic Capital and Prestige Politics*).

Reviewing Themes

Candidate themes were refined, tested against the dataset, and collapsed or expanded as necessary. Theoretical saturation was achieved when no new themes emerged from later-reviewed articles.

***Defining and Naming Themes**

Final themes were clearly defined and supported with multiple data points. Each theme was interpreted through Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus to ensure theoretical consistency.

Producing the Report

The findings were organised thematically, with direct quotations and paraphrased claims from source articles. Each theme was related back to the research questions and theoretical framework.

Ethical Considerations

As the study does not involve human participants or sensitive primary data, formal institutional ethical review was not required. However, the research upholds academic ethics by:

- *Using only publicly available, peer-reviewed data
- *Ensuring proper citation and avoiding plagiarism
- *Respecting the intellectual property of original authors
- *Transparently reporting inclusion/exclusion criteria and analytic procedures

Following the COREQ and PRISMA guidelines adapted for qualitative evidence synthesis, the study maintains methodological transparency and replicability (Tong et al., 2007; Moher et al., 2009).

Findings

RQ1: Student Experiences of Access, Inclusion, and Exclusion in EMI Programmes

The literature underscores a stark disparity in how students from diverse socioeconomic and linguistic backgrounds navigate EMI programmes in Türkiye. Kır's (2024) phenomenological

study of former EMI students, anchored in Bourdieusian theory, revealed that “the mismatch between the capital possessed by the participants and that expected and endorsed by the EMI university alienated the participants”. Participants’ accounts emphasized feelings of inferiority and diminished belonging, supporting Bourdieu’s (1991) assertion that linguistic capital is unequally distributed, serving to reproduce social stratification. Complementing this, Özçelik et al.’s (2024) large-scale survey of 278 EMI undergraduates at a public university illustrated mixed outcomes: while students acknowledged EMI as advantageous for language and career development, they also reported significant struggles with subject-specific jargon and lecturers’ accents, suggesting uneven access to academic success. These challenges were more pronounced among students from less affluent or rural backgrounds, echoing Özdemir’s (2016) findings that regional and socioeconomic inequalities continue to shape educational achievement in Türkiye.

Moreover, Kemaloğlu-Er’s (2023) thematic investigation of preparatory students found that many felt “in-between” neither full-fledged university students nor secondary learners that diminished their sense of inclusion and belonging within EMI pathways. This psychological liminality aligns with Bourdieuan notions of symbolic and cultural capital: students lacking these forms of capital may be physically present but remain socially unrealised within institutional spaces.

RQ2: Navigating Macro–Policy Mandates and Micro–Classroom Realities

A recurrent finding across studies highlights a tension between national EMI policy mandates and the linguistic realities faced in classrooms. Şahan (2025) reports that faculty often perceive top-down EMI policies mandating English-only instruction as ideologically driven but practically unfeasible, prompting them to incorporate Turkish informally to enhance clarity and engagement. This echoes Macaro et al. (2018), who argue that most NFE contexts implement EMI on neoliberal principles yet lack alignment with pedagogical realities.

Translanguaging, in this sense, becomes a classroom-level mediating strategy. Kırkgöz and Karakaş (2023) observed through audio-recorded interactions in Turkish EMI classrooms that both students and instructors strategically employ Turkish to clarify technical concepts, rendering translanguaging a core component of effective EMI pedagogy. Likewise, British Council research into Turkish EMI classroom discourse documents widespread translanguaging in lecture hall corridors between faculty, despite official English-only policies.

The disconnect between policy intent and classroom enactment is further underscored by Özçelik et al. (2024), whose respondents consistently reported that lecturers' lack of English fluency and rigid EMI policy often impeded comprehension and discouraged active participation. Thus, rather than enforcing strict monolingualism, effective EMI implementation on the micro level relies heavily on instructor agency and translanguaging flexibility.

RQ3: Pedagogical Practices, Language Ideologies, and Their Effects

The final research question explores the interplay between emergent pedagogical practices and students' intercultural engagement and academic confidence. Findings converge on the assertion that pedagogical translanguaging and hybrid language ideologies foster greater inclusion and self-assurance in EMI settings.

Translanguaging is not only coping strategy but also a pedagogical asset. Kırkgöz and Karakaş (2023) emphasise that translanguaging facilitates cognitive scaffolding and intercultural negotiation, especially in discipline-specific discourse. Their Conversation Analysis shows that instructors adeptly shift between English and Turkish to ground terminological knowledge in shared cultural context, thereby enhancing student self-efficacy.

Correspondingly, Özçelik et al. (2024) found that while students generally express positive attitudes toward EMI for language acquisition and future employment, confidence is equally shaped by lecturers' language clarity and classroom support mechanisms. "Challenges arise from coping with specialised terms, heavy learning load, and lecturers' accents". This suggests that without scaffolded linguistic intervention, EMI may foster anxiety rather than intercultural empowerment. Moreover, Kemaloğlu-Er's (2023) study of preparatory year students reveals that integrated instructional strategies such as content-based lessons and interactive tasks significantly mitigate feelings of liminality and enhance intercultural readiness. This highlights the importance of designing EMI curricula that valorise both academic English and cultural intelligibility.

Synthesis Across Research Questions

When viewed holistically, the findings reveal that linguistic capital disparities are the primary driver of uneven EMI experiences (RQ1), which are exacerbated by policy-practice misalignments (RQ2). However, these dynamics are not immutable: pedagogical translanguaging and learner-centred support structures can attenuate exclusion and boost intercultural engagement (RQ3).

These themes resonate with both Bourdieu’s framework and Macaro et al. (2018), who contend that translanguaging and multilingual pedagogy are pivotal for equitable EMI implementation. The literature consistently identifies the interplay between capital, policy, and pedagogy, pointing to possible avenues for reimagining EMI as a socially just educational architecture.

Summary of Findings Table

Key Findings	
RQ1	Students from disadvantaged backgrounds often lack the linguistic capital for EMI, leading to marginalisation, dropout, or psychological disengagement.
RQ2	Faculty respond to rigid EMI policy through localized translanguaging practices, exposing macro-micro disconnect; EMI policy enforcement often remains superficial.
RQ3	When integrated pedagogically, translanguaging promotes academic confidence and intercultural competence; poor scaffolding increases anxiety.

Implications for the Proposed Thematic Model

Grounded in these findings, the proposed EMI framework must incorporate four critical dimensions:

- *Diagnostic assessment of linguistic capital to identify student needs.
- *Institutional encouragement of translanguaging as scaffolded pedagogy.
- *Faculty professionalisation in bilingual teaching strategies.
- *Policy reform advocating flexible, inclusive EMI governance aligned with classroom realities.

By addressing the interconnected themes identified through rigorous thematic analysis, this study not only extends the scholarly discourse on EMI in Türkiye but also lays a foundation for transforming EMI from an elite privilege to a socially inclusive educational model.

Discussion

This study advances understanding of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) in Türkiye through the lens of Bourdieuan capital theory, examining how linguistic capital, translanguaging, and policy–practice misalignment collectively shape equity and intercultural inclusion. The

findings reveal a complex interplay between structural inequalities, classroom dynamics, and emergent pedagogical practices.

Linguistic Capital and Educational Inequity

Consistent with Bourdieu (1991), linguistic capital emerged as a crucial resource unevenly distributed across Turkish EMI programmes. Students from affluent backgrounds often possess higher levels of English proficiency, affording them greater symbolic power and access within EMI contexts (Kır, 2024; Özçelik et al., 2024). Conversely, those from peripheral regions or lower socioeconomic statuses frequently lack the requisite linguistic tools, resulting in exclusion and, in severe cases, programme dropout echoing Kır's finding that participants felt "alienated" due to a capital mismatch. These results affirm Bourdieu's assertion that educational institutions tend to reproduce existing social hierarchies via inscribed capital thresholds.

This inequity aligns with global EMI critique. Macaro et al. (2018) warn that EMI risks consolidating socio-cultural elites unless accompanied by substantive scaffolding. That warning manifests in Türkiye, where institutional structures permit EMI entry without linguistic readiness, perpetuating stratification disguised as internationalisation (Şahan, 2025). EMI schemes must therefore be assessed not merely for English proficiency outcomes but for their distributive justice implications.

Policy–Practice Tensions and Translanguaging

Despite top-down EMI policies favouring monolingual English delivery, classroom practices reveal deeper complexity. Faculty frequently employ translanguaging using Turkish alongside English to facilitate comprehension, encourage participation, and demystify discipline-specific discourse (Şahan, 2025; Çev. Özçelik et al., 2024). This aligns with Bozbıyık's (2023) case studies of Turkish EMI classrooms, showing how instructors seamlessly switch between English and Turkish in real-time content negotiation.

These micro-level translanguaging practices fill policy-induced gaps. As Curdt-Christiansen and Mazak note, even in contexts lacking explicit bilingual recognition, translanguaging naturally emerges to support meaning-making in EMI settings. Such fluid usage challenges mainstream monoglossic ideologies grounded in English hegemony, demonstrating the adaptive agency of teachers and students (Lin & Li, 2021; Sah & Li, 2022).

However, policy documents often remain silent on such practices, leaving translanguaging informal and undervalued. This invisibility reflects a normative tension: policy assumes English monolingualism, but the embodied realities of EMI reveal multilingual pragmatism. Recognising translanguaging within official EMI frameworks could rectify this misalignment and legitimise classroom multilingualism.

Pedagogical Translanguaging and Intercultural Agency

The third research question highlighted how translanguaging informs pedagogical inclusion and intercultural competence. Yılmaz (2019) positions translanguaging as an equity-driven pedagogy that centres linguistic diversity as a resource, allowing bilingual students to think, reflect, and problem-solve effectively. In Türkiye, studies corroborate this: Kırkgöz and Karakaş (2023) show that bilingual articulation of technical terms enhances comprehension and scaffolded participation. Similarly, in STEM EMI classes, multimodal translanguaging through images, gestures, and mother-tongue translations—fostered inclusive learning spaces and sustained student engagement.

Notably, translanguaging also supports affective inclusion. British Council analyses report it functions as motivational support, humour, and rapport-building helping students overcome anxiety and feel lithely positioned between languages, not marginalized under English monolingualism. This psychological dimension aligns with Kemaloğlu-Er (2023), where learners felt less “in-between” when teachers integrated both languages in content instruction.

Practical and Policy Implications

These findings suggest five critical trajectories for reform:

***Linguistic Readiness Assessments**

EMI programmes should implement formative assessments to gauge baseline English proficiency and tailor support accordingly preventing dropout and inequitable access (Macaro, 2018; Şahan, 2025).

***Official Translanguaging Recognition**

Policy should legitimise translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy. Doing so would align macro-level EMI mandates with classroom realities and empower educators to teach multilingual learners effectively (Curdt-Christiansen & Mazak, 2019; Yılmaz, 2019).

***Professional Development in Pedagogical Bilingualism**

EMI instructors require structured training in bilingual instructional methods, multimodal scaffolding, and translanguaging-aware lesson design.

***Multimodal Curriculum Design**

Incorporating visuals, gestures, and mother-tongue paraphrasing can significantly enhance equity and intercultural engagement, particularly in technical fields.

Critical Evaluation of EMI Policy Goals

Policymakers must interrogate whether EMI aims at neoliberal metrics or genuine intercultural inclusion. Instituting multilingualism as a core value could decolonise EMI and shift focus from English hegemony to educational justice.

Limitations and Future Research

While synthesising a diverse literature corpus, this review is limited by its secondary-data nature. Future primary research could explore student identity formation within translanguaging EMI classrooms or conduct longitudinal studies tracing academic trajectories. Comparative studies between Turkish and other non-Anglophone EMI contexts would further validate model transferability.

The discussion underscores that EMI in Türkiye, far from being a monolithic English-only project, is a dynamic and contested space marked by capital inequalities, translanguaging resilience, and policy ambivalence. By centring classroom multilingual realities and addressing structural disparities, we can transform EMI from a vector of exclusion to an instrument of educational inclusion and intercultural solidarity.

Conclusion

The current study has critically and meticulously examined and scrutinised the multifaceted role of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) in shaping educational equity, intercultural access, and social mobility within the context of Türkiye's higher education system. By employing a rigorous thematic analysis of peer-reviewed literature from authoritative databases including Scopus, SSCI, ERIC, and Google Scholar and situating the inquiry within Bourdieu's theoretical framework of linguistic and cultural capital, the research has illuminated how EMI policies and practices intersect with entrenched social inequalities.

The findings highlight that linguistic capital serves as a pivotal yet unevenly distributed resource that profoundly influences students' academic trajectories and sense of belonging in EMI programmes. Students from socioeconomically privileged backgrounds often wield greater symbolic power afforded by superior English proficiency, thereby enjoying enhanced access and inclusion. Conversely, students from marginalized regions or lower socioeconomic strata frequently encounter exclusion, alienation, and academic challenges, reinforcing Bourdieu's (1991) theory of social reproduction through educational institutions. Moreover, this research has foregrounded the persistent tension between top-down EMI policies mandating strict English-medium delivery and the lived realities of classrooms, where translanguaging emerges as a vital pedagogical and communicative strategy. Translanguaging practices where teachers and students fluidly alternate between Turkish and English facilitate comprehension, foster intercultural negotiation, and mitigate exclusionary dynamics otherwise exacerbated by rigid monolingual policies. The study corroborates contemporary scholarship asserting translanguaging as a form of linguistic capital in itself, one that resists English-only hegemony and supports inclusive, equitable learning environments.

From a pedagogical standpoint, translanguaging has been identified as instrumental not only in cognitive scaffolding but also in nurturing academic confidence and affective engagement. Such bilingual pedagogical interventions contribute to dismantling the "in-between" liminality felt by many EMI learners, enabling a more inclusive and culturally responsive educational experience. Crucially, the study underscores the need for policy reforms that recognise and legitimise translanguaging within EMI frameworks, advocate for differentiated linguistic readiness assessments, and provide systematic professional development for instructors in bilingual pedagogies. Without such reforms, EMI risks perpetuating the very inequities it ostensibly aims to overcome, privileging neoliberal metrics of English proficiency over genuine intercultural inclusion and social justice. While this meta-synthesis has provided comprehensive insights, it is not without limitations. The exclusive reliance on secondary data highlights the need for future primary empirical research that investigates student identities, language ideologies, and institutional practices longitudinally and comparatively. In sum, this study advances the discourse on EMI in Türkiye by revealing its dual nature as both a mechanism of exclusion rooted in capital disparities and a site of resilience through translanguaging pedagogy. By centring the voices and

realities embedded in scholarly literature, it calls for a reconceptualization of EMI policy and practice, one that embraces multilingualism, fosters equitable access, and ultimately bridges cultural divides through language, education, and art.

Ethical Text

Due to the fact that the current research article is produced with the implementation of the literature review as a research method and thematic analysis and data collection, ethics committee approval is not required. This study does not contain any studies with human participants and/or animals performed by any of the authors.

Declaration of Interest

Conflict of Interest: The author has no conflict of interest to mention.

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