Turkish Universities and EMI

A collaborative intervention project
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Higher Education Background

Turkey

- Turkey has been increasing its EMI university offer
- 1984 the first private university was established, which was 100% EMI.
- 109 state universities in Turkey, 23 use EMI.
- Government universities that deliver courses through EMI perceived as being more prestigious.
- Since 2000 the number of private universities has rocketed: key marketing point that they deliver courses through English.
- A number of universities have begun adopting a ‘flipped methodology’
Higher Education Background

Turkey

- Since 2005 Anatolian High Schools lost their special status which included having a 1 year PYP

- Turkey is one of a handful of countries to have adopted the PYP model for the introduction of EMI. Saudi Arabia has also adopted a PYP in some of its universities.
Some previous research in Turkey

- Kilickaya (2000) provides evidence of some resistance to the introduction of EMI
- (some) Turkish EMI teachers would prefer to adopt Turkish as the instructional language
Previous research in Turkey

- (McMullen 2014): PYP course should substantially enhance students’ productive skills (speaking and writing),
- PYP is not achieving this
research questions

- How does collaboration in planning evolve between a PYP teacher and an EMI teacher?
- Is there mutual benefit to both teachers from these collaborations?
methodology

• mixed method research design which included a quasi-experimental intervention
• Four universities agreed to form the ‘collaborating pairs’ of PYP and EMI teachers, = ten pairs initially with nine of those completing the intervention as planned
• One university as comparison (one class)
a framework to develop the discussion of ‘the pairs’ on lesson planning,
we devised a **Collaborative Planning Tool (CPT)**
The ideal sequence

1. EMI teacher sends the materials to be used in the lecture to the PYP teacher;
2. PYP teacher determines the key lexical level linguistic points;
3. during the collaborative planning sessions PYP teacher identifies language points which may cause students difficulties and starts a discussion and awareness raising on the part of the EMI teacher;
4. EMI teacher amends (if need be) the language content of the lecture;
5. EMI teacher delivers the planned lecture;
6. In the subsequent planning session EMI teacher provides PYP teacher with the feedback on the delivered lecture.
Pre-intervention categories extracted from interview transcripts

- EMI teachers’ own English language proficiency; time spent in an Anglophone country;
- Pedagogic training they had received in relation to EMI
- Students’ English language level and more general academic skills
- Their thoughts on the PYP
- Their conceptualisation of planning curriculum/syllabus and lessons
- Material preparation for lectures and their linguistic awareness in relation to these
- Self-monitoring and use of feedback in lesson planning and delivery.
For many EMI teachers:

- students’ language skills were not at a satisfactory level to start their academic studies through English.
- “[T]his is my biggest concern, not all of them (students) but some of them, they cannot even ask proper questions.”
The PYP

- lack of discipline-specific language in English.
- “I think they (PYP) prepare (students) just for regular English lectures not for scientific lectures not for physics not for other scientific lectures”.
Lesson planning (pre-intervention)

- “I don’t write this (lesson plan) down (because) I have all this in my mind, automatic”
Collaboration with PYP teachers

“we don’t come together with my colleagues... they are too busy”.
In minds of lecturers, crucially:

- no separation of language and content.
- If students showed lack of understanding by not answering questions, no attempt to identify whether this was a language problem or a conceptual/content problem.
Post-interventions extracted categories

- The use and benefits of the CPT
- Success of collaboration with a PYP teacher in terms of
  - Effective planning with better awareness of language issues
  - Better understanding of the work done in PYP
  - Gaining a self awareness of their language competence
- Continuation of collaborative planning with a PYP teacher in the future?
Post-intervention

“[...] in the first session we used it (CPT) step by step, in the second session the same, but starting from the third session we started to continue without looking at the tool and the prompts there and later we got back to the tool to see if we missed any parts or questions.”
For some, beliefs about the interplay between language and content had evolved:

“We have two languages in physics; one is mathematics, the other one is English. Before this project, I thought mathematics as a language was more important but now I feel that the first medium should be English and this may be a little more important than mathematics for teaching undergraduate level, English must be more important in teaching physics in undergraduate level”
Complexity of relationship (content and language)

- The complexity seems to lie in whether mathematics (as it is used in the exploration of physics) is sufficient as a linguistic code *in itself* or whether it has to have an additional referent – general academic language and the vernacular.
Future collaboration

Engineering teacher

“I’d love to do that (continue to plan collaboratively). I got criticism (feedback) when I prepare the videos and the other materials for my lectures. My presentations became better and better, this project helped me. I asked the principal and the university admin to continue to this collaboration, in the same way I experienced, being in communication with PYP. We want to continue this because this (collaboration between the Engineering Department and PYP) is good for our students and also for our instructors”.
Case study: Positive

Adnan (Physics):

“[....]for me it (planning collaboratively) was effective because I was enlightened about the language level of the students. Before I saw this is a continuation of education you go to primary school secondary school high school and university. But when I had a chance to think about PYP and English education of the students, I started to see is that it (language education) is not part of a continuation”.

21
Case study: Positive

- Before the intervention, Adnan appeared to believe that language was not an issue in mathematical problems.
- “They mostly need to calculate, the language doesn't come into play”, and some problems “don't require any language skills such as multiplying two entities”.
Case study: Positive

- Adnan was aware that language became an issue when you got to the
- ‘more Physics types of questions’ which had a narrative “such as an object is thrown at a certain angle at a certain speed and it bounces back from a certain object”
- it was this sort of problem that students could not easily solve.
Case study: Positive

- By the time of the post-intervention interview Adnan’s understanding of the importance of language had changed noticeably:

  - “We take Maths as a language, we give formulas, we say F is equal to Mxa. Technically speaking if the students are perfect in Maths they don't need to know the language you are using, they will perfectly understand what you mean. But in reality we need to explain these formulas, we need to support mathematics with language".
Case study: Positive

- In the pre-intervention interview Adnan had cited the example of capacitors which consist of two parallel ‘plates’.
- “Whenever I say 'plates' I expected my students to understand flat geometrical structures”
- After the intervention the PYP teacher made him realise that the student learned 'plate' as an “eating from thing” and this was a revelation: “when she made me realise that, it was enlightening!”.....now it's different. I need to define better even for native and non-native speakers and go a little deeper to make sure they understand”.
Case Study: less positive

Deniz, an experienced professor in a Department of Chemical Engineering

According to her: level of her students' English varied quite widely depending on:

- their family background,
- whether or not they had travelled and
- if they came from an Anatolian High School.
Case Study: less positive

- Deniz was disappointed with the outcome of this project:
  "I thought in this project we could see many changes in our lessons but they didn’t change too much in our lessons".
Case Study: less positive

- the pair did not find it easy to collaborate
- not a personal issue: "We like each other so much. We are friends but on the subject of this was nothing".
- they do not have any idea about our lesson...
- " [Burcu {PYP teacher}] didn't understand the lesson and she didn't know what to change in my lecture. .... she couldn’t make any suggestions"
Case Study: less positive

"I also learnt English in the Preparatory Year. They taught us English with poems and songs. But when we came to our lecture room ....I was in shock."

Her concerns:

- English should not be blamed only on PYP year; High Schools should play their part
- English being taught on PYP was not appropriate to her subject,
- her students, who studied 100% through EMI had the same PYP lessons and the same final PYP exams as students who went on to study only 30% of their degree through EMI.
- 100% EMI students should be educated in a more specific English for their studies in Chemical Engineering
- PYP exams should be adapted to the needs of a department teaching 100% through EMI
Case Study: less positive

- Deniz in a state of self-contradiction: did not believe there were language problems in her class:
- "First of all we don't have any language problems. ....The 'real' subject is Chemical Engineering, not English.
- "they don't listen to you and play with their phones". Deniz gave her students explanations, solutions, quizzes but "When I ask about the questions, they say they didn't understand because of the language".
Case Study: less positive

- Deniz sent her slides to Burcu before the planning session but this pair did not use the CPT to work together, preferring to send each other emails.
- “in the end she suggested one word in one sentence”
Tentative conclusions

- Collaboration is possible and can be beneficial but:
- There needs to be greater awareness that both can learn from each other
- PYP teachers need to know a lot more about what goes on in the EMI subject
- EMI teachers need to accept that knowledge and understanding is inseparable from the language used
- Like all tools, the CPT can only be efficacious if it is used for the purpose to which it was intended
Email message from one participating Turkish university

- We at XXXX University were delighted to be a part of the study and made some interesting, significant steps as a result of the process. We heard, for example, through the grapevine that there were hierarchical issues at some institutions regarding input from PYP to faculty. Fortunately for us, we avoided this issue and would say with some confidence that the paired research made PYP practitioners much more aware of the constraints and opportunities available in terms of faculty making new lexical items more accessible, within the domain specific vocabulary, and for faculty, ways in which ELT practitioners can accommodate learner language needs more easily and simply with the subject specific area.

- We plan to continue this EMI collaborative initiative through our Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning on a voluntary basis ... a recommendation of the current participants!

- We had the good fortune to observe our faculty instructors and provide/receive feedback. This meant taking a much closer look at the materials prepared by faculty for a flipped context, in the language used in problems and subject context, and how we could work together more efficiently to devise ways to highlight the use of English. For example, we found that the videos were TOO long and amended them to a shorter format. We then started flying in the new lexical items, even aiming to link them on the video to the Turkish/English subject glossaries available online (a tricky one, still pending!).
We certainly learned much more about the ways in which faculty kept students using English consistently, ways to anticipate awkward or difficult concepts and vocabulary, how PYP can step up and provide sufficient and timely input with efficacy.

We came to realize how unique our approach to English is within the academic program at XXX. We have a rather more practical, some might even say, pragmatic outlook, with a focus of using English in context. For example, due to our circumstances, speaking is our number one priority, and this definitely isn't the case at other university prep programs in Turkey.