



062

English - medium Instruction - a Friend or a Foe

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English-medium instruction (EMI) has become the norm in most universities. This is the result of internationalization as one of the strategic goals of universities as well as a consequence of the global requirements on English skills of graduates. Furthermore, English is also the main publication language in most fields.

This paper sheds light on the use of EMI and student perspective on both comprehension and the level of lecturers' English skills and whether there is a connection between the two.

Since the international programs have become more common within the past decades and since it can be assumed that this trend will continue, it is essential to gain as much information on them as possible. The present study is a descriptive study on an international Master's Program at Aalto University.

As the background to the present investigation, this paper discusses the situation of English through viewing English as a lingua franca (ELF), English as the language of science and technology, as well as English medium instruction (EMI).

The primary material for this paper is paper-based student questionnaires distributed and collected immediately after 22 video-recorded lectures in an EMI Master's Program. The secondary material in the present study is the interviews held with selected EMI lecturers included in the video-recorded lectures.



A set of five statements (7, 8, 9, 16, and 17) from the questionnaire were seen to relate to student comprehension of the lectures. Based on these statements, a comprehension value was calculated for each lecture. The main purpose for the questionnaire was to provide information on students' perception of lecture comprehension.

The main result of this paper is that the student evaluated language skills of the lecturers do not correlate with their perceptions of lecture comprehension.

Considering the prevalent native speaker model on English and the possible feelings of inadequacy by the non-native speakers based on accent and mistakes based on prescriptive grammar and rules on language use, it is encouraging to see that, despite the language skills being evaluated as less than perfect, the lecture itself can be evaluated as comprehensible.

When we think of English skills in academia, they, most often, are high when we speak of university lecturers and professors. These professional are, not only the experts in their fields, but also used to using English in various situations. What influences students' perception of the lectures is, most likely are the other features in the lectures rather than the specific English skills. ■