



# Can Students Learn Through EMI? Investigating the Role of English Proficiency

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## Abstract

English-Medium Instruction (EMI) is increasingly adopted in non-English-speaking countries as universities strive to internationalize, improve global rankings, and equip students for international careers. While EMI is intended to enhance both academic content learning and English language proficiency, its actual effectiveness remains uncertain. Despite the growing body of EMI research, limited studies have examined whether students genuinely acquire content knowledge through EMI. To address this gap, this study presents two case studies examining the impact of English proficiency on students' ability to learn through EMI. The first study involved higher-proficiency students (CEFR B1–C1,  $n = 24$ ) who completed pre- and post-tests before and after EMI lectures. The results showed significant improvement in post-test scores. Surveys indicated that most participants did not perceive EMI as a disadvantage and reported gains in both content knowledge and academic English. The second study focused on lower-proficiency students (CEFR A2–B1,  $n = 6$ ) who attended identical lectures delivered in English (EMI) and Japanese (JMI). Results indicated that these students had difficulty comprehending the content in EMI settings. Qualitative data provided further insights into the challenges they faced, revealing factors beyond language proficiency that affected comprehension. Together, these findings underscore the critical role of English proficiency in determining the effectiveness of EMI. To ensure equitable learning opportunities, EMI programs must consider students' language readiness when designing curricula, assessments, and support systems.

**Keywords:** content learning; English Medium Instruction; language readiness; learning outcomes