Lecturers' Anxiety in English Medium Instruction Tertiary Contexts: A Review

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Abstract

English-Medium Instruction (EMI) is now a common approach in higher education, however, teaching subject content entirely in English can cause significant anxiety on university lecturers while conducting their profession. This study probes tertiary EMI contexts to uncover the main causes of such anxiety by reviewing recent research on certain databases through a range of key words on anxiety and EMI. As a result of the review, 24 research studies found relevant for the scope of the present study, and they were analyzed through content analysis paying attention to general terms and themes. The results indicate that anxiety often results from the expectations of delivering the subject knowledge in a qualified way while teaching it in English, managing culturally diverse classrooms, meeting institutional standards of performance, and managing role conflict between staying an expert in the subject content and being a language facilitator. The research admittedly highlights practical suggestions for reducing anxiety, for instance, tailored professional development activities, diminishing and redistributing workloads, and setting more exact role definitions of EMI lecturers. Finally, the research suggests longitudinal studies such as phenomenological ones. All in all, the research could be significant in highlighting anxiety individually with an aim to guide stakeholders, ultimately enabling EMI lecturers to deliver quality education with confidence.

Keywords: *English medium instruction, EMI, anxiety, professional anxiety*

Recommended Citation: Birgün, M. (2025). Lecturers' Anxiety in English Medium Instruction Tertiary Contexts: A Review. *International Journal of Excellent Leadership, 5*(1), 61-69.

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Introduction

English Medium Instruction (EMI) has been endorsed across the world for the last two decades. In EMI, content courses are delivered partly or fully in English language. Therefore, in EMI, language teaching and learning could be a natural outcome. Since EMI is relatively a new approach to education across the world quite quick transition to EMI has formed concerns on the part of lecturers while delivering courses in English other than their native ones in their professions. The gradual increase in the endorsement of EMI has led to an increase in EMI research studies as well and EMI has been probed mostly regarding student and teacher/lecturer perspectives regarding its challenges and problems. Even if those research studies provide a baseline for pedagogical, linguistic and institutional dimensions they partly allocated room for the concerns and the emotional aspects which can impact the performance and well-being of EMI lecturers in terms of their professions.

As one of the emotional aspects, anxiety, could be regarded among the ones that have received little focus on the part of EMI lecturers so far. While a great many research studies have been conducted in EMI contexts on learner anxiety in terms of speaking, listening and learning aspects (Chou, 2018; Ghani, 2018; Gursoy, 2013; Tsui & Cheng, 2022; Le, 2023; Ucar & Soruc, 2018; Wilang, 2022; Suzuki, 2017; Sun & Yang, 2025; Tai & Tang, 2021), very few research studies (Aydin, 2017; Graham, 2022; Rai, 2024; Rahayu, 2022) have been conducted over the anxiety of teaching stakeholders (Sah, 2023) in EMI contexts. With this in mind, anxiety could be impactful on the quality of the delivery of instruction face-to-face or online, interaction of learners with the course and content and motivation and job satisfaction of EMI lecturers. Therefore, a literature review, specifically focusing on EMI tertiary contexts, is required to display the reasons behind anxiety while conducting their profession with an aim to eliminate them through probable strategies to cope. Ultimately, it attempts to bring forward a range of suggestions for further research.

Conceptual Framework

Anxiety is a feeling that might manifest as a persistent fear of the future (Le Doux, 2001). In educational premises, anxiety is defined as subjective feelings of tension and nervousness and has been broadly acknowledged as an entity impactful on the processes of teaching and learning (Horwitz, 1996; Kyriacou, 2001). Therefore, the worried individual is focused on potential risks that may or may not occur in the near or distant future (Lakeman, 2006). In this context, anxiety could take a longer time unlike the short-term stress feelings and affect, in the long-term, the attitudes of teaching stakeholders towards qualified instruction while conducting their professions. This leads to ineffective and inappropriate teaching behaviors (Ameen et al., 2002) which harm job performance (Durdukoca & Atalay, 2019). Moreover, it may cause, inability to concentrate on lessons leading to forgetfulness (Kunt & Tum, 2010). Such kind of anxieties could limit teachers/lecturers pedagogically decreasing motivation and increasing burnout (Kyriacou, 2001), which lead to professional or occupational anxiety. With this in mind, professional anxiety is pertinent to the professional roles and work expectations of lecturers. It could be vague in providing qualified education and failure in meeting institutional norms and even the professional status of lecturers.

English Medium Instruction (EMI)

EMI refers to the use of English to teach academic subjects in contexts where it is not the main language of the wider community (Macaro, 2018). It has evolved very rapidly in tertiary education around the world, often as part of universities' internationalisation initiatives. EMI requires teaching professionals to present subject matter entirely in English, no matter what their first language is, adding a language element to their professional identity.

Research on EMI in terms of anxiety has so far focused mainly on student anxiety issues such as language anxiety, speaking anxiety and learning anxiety (Kusmayanti et al., 2022; Mai, 2019; Sozer, 2024; Tai et al., 2021; Yuksel et al., 2023). As for the studies on lecturers, they have often examined pedagogical, linguistic, and institutional issues (Dearden & Macaro, 2016; Bradford, 2016; Galloway et al., 2020). However, anxiety in EMI contexts has not been studied in depth as it has been

with learners. This review specifically focuses on lecturers' anxiety in EMI tertiary contexts, aiming to highlight its sources in the literature.

Literature Review Strategy

This study adopted a literature review approach to identify and select existing research on the anxiety experienced by lecturers in EMI contexts at the tertiary level. The aim was to gather a broad yet focused body of knowledge on the topic, while excluding out the studies that fall outside the purpose.

The databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Google Scholar, and DergiPark and Council of Higher Education Thesis Center were screened. The search involved those keywords such as "English Medium Instruction" AND "lecturer anxiety", "EMI" AND "teacher stress", and "English Medium higher education" AND "lecturer well-being".

The review focused on publications from 2010 to 2025, reflecting the period when EMI research began to expand significantly in higher education globally. Inclusion criteria were:

Studies focusing specifically on lecturers, instructors, or professors in EMI settings.

Research conducted in higher education contexts.

Exclusion criteria were:

Studies focusing exclusively on students' anxiety (e.g., speaking, listening, or learning anxiety).

Publications that examine EMI in primary or secondary school settings.

Titles and abstracts were initially screened, followed by a full-text review of relevant studies. Research on EMI lecturers has revealed various challenges, yet only a small number of studies have specifically examined lecturer anxiety in EMI settings (Alruwaili, 2023; Rai, 2024). Therefore, the key words of "English Medium Instruction" AND "challenges" and "English Medium Instruction" AND "problems" and "English Medium Instruction" AND "perspectives" and "English Medium Instruction" AND "professional anxiety" were included in the study and the relevant studies were analyzed through content analysis to uncover professional anxiety of EMI lecturers at university level.

By applying these steps, 24 research studies were subjected to analysis with a critical eye on the anxiety aspects aiming to understand the factors causing to EMI lecturers' anxiety while conducting their profession. The studies are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1
The research studies taking part in the present study

Number	Article Title
1	The nature of teacher anxiety in English-medium tertiary education in Saudi Arabia
2	"Physically I was there, but my mind had gone somewhere else": Probing the emotional side of English-medium instruction
3	Specific Anxiety Situations and Coping Strategies in Full English Medium Instruction Engineering Programs
4	Aligning higher education language policies with lecturers' views on EMI practices: A comparative study of ten European Universities
5	English Medium Instruction (EMI) lecturer support needs in Japan
6	Challenges and Suggested Approaches for EMI Content Lecturers in the Context of Chinese State Universities
7	Comprehension in English Medium Instruction (EMI) lectures: On the impact of lecturer L2 English use
8	Lecturers' Perspectives on English Medium Instruction (EMI): Implications for Professional Development
9	Implementing EMI at a Russian University: A Study of Content Lecturers' Perspectives
10	A case study in EMI: Students' and Teachers' perspective

Number	Article Title
11	University lecturers' perceptions of the role of English in their teaching
12	EMI in Indonesian Higher Education: Stakeholders' perspectives
13	Exploring EMI lecturers' attitudes and needs
14	Dealing With Language Issues During Subject Teaching in EMI: The Perspectives of Two Accounting Lecturers
15	The Effectiveness of EMI in Teaching: A Comparison of Lecturer and Student Perspectives
16	EMI Lecturers in International Universities: Is a native/non-native English-speaking background relevant?
17	"EMI Is a War" – Lecturers' Practices of, and Insights Into English Medium Instruction Within the Context of Sri Lankan Higher Education
18	Engineering lecturers' views on CLIL and EMI
19	Lecturers' readiness for EMI in Malaysia Higher Education
20	Comparing Teacher Priorities and Student Uptake in EMI Lectures: An Exploratory Study
21	Main Challenges of EMI at the UCLM: Teachers' Perceptions on Language Proficiency, Training and Incentives
22	Teachers' Perspectives and Challenges towards English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI)
23	The content lecturer and English-medium instruction (EMI): Epilogue to the special issue on EMI in higher education
24	Teacher's Language Anxiety in Using English as A Medium of Instruction in ClIL Context.

The studies were examined and the basic theme `professional anxiety` became evident with five basic sub-themes. In this review, I did not follow a strict line-by-line coding process as is common in empirical qualitative studies. Instead, I looked for recurring patterns across the selected studies and grouped them together. From these patterns, I formed sub-themes and then broader theme, which are shown in Table 2. For this reason, I did not include separate codes in the table. The aim was not to provide a detailed coding procedure, but rather to highlight and synthesise the common insights emerging from the literature.

Findings, Discussion and Conclusions

Based on the review of the research studies on EMI, the themes in Table 2 became evident. The table shows that EMI lecturers often experience anxiety in several interconnected ways.

Table 2
EMI lecturers` professional anxiety while conducting their profession

Theme	Sub-themes
	Language Proficiency-Related Anxiety
	Role Conflict and Identity Tensions
Professional Anxiety	Institutional Pressure but Lack of Support
	Classroom Interaction Challenges / Diverse Cultures
	Fear of Negative Evaluation

One main theme, professional anxiety and five sub-themes show that lecturers in EMI contexts are concerned about their English skills, especially when they have to explain complex ideas on the spot. They also feel caught up between being subject experts and language teachers and it somehow creates uncertainty about their professional roles. Institutional demands to expand EMI increase their workload and expectations, and support for the elimination lacks and does not always match these pressures since mostly those trainings for professional development are top-down (Birgun, 2022). Another concern is in the classroom, and dealing with students from diverse cultural and communication backgrounds can be mentally and emotionally demanding on the part of the lecturers. On top of this, there is a constant worry about being judged negatively by students, colleagues, or

administrators in terms of their language proficiency, pronunciation and fluency as well as their subject knowledge.

In EMI settings, anxiety often stems from both the way EMI is structured and the way it is taught in practice. Structurally, institutions expect lecturers to deliver their courses entirely in English, which sets the overall framework for teaching and assessment. Pedagogically, lecturers need to put advanced, subject-based knowledge into a form accessible to students, often by interactive pedagogic approaches. This is a twofold challenge: the capacity to master the material alongside the capacity to convey it clearly and accurately in a second language. For teachers working in non-English contexts, it can be cognitively challenging, particularly in those spontaneous occasions such as answering the inquiry of a student on the spot (Birgun, 2022, 2024), conducting debates, or paraphrasing technical descriptions (Basturkmen, 2018; Galloway et al., 2020). It is a concern that strongly resonates with Horwitz's (1986) theory of foreign language classroom anxiety, which highlights how language-related challenges can cause feelings of tension. Over time, though, this constant negotiation between subject expertise and language skills can become a persistent cause of anxiety, especially if lecturers themselves feel their own English is not sufficient with regard to measuring up to the demands of their subject and their students. What evidently emerges is that EMI lecturers are not only worried about their English but about explaining complex disciplinary ideas in a manner that is clear spontaneously. The real challenge is having to perform two demanding roles at the same time: being a subject expert and a second-language communicator.

Another cause of anxiety for EMI lecturers is the pressure put on them by their institutions. While universities prefer to launch EMI programs as a component of their internationalization strategy (with expectations of attracting more foreign students, improving international rankings, and enhancing research output), the instrumental support provided to teachers at times may not be enough to support such ambitions. It is stated that lecturers want more precise professional development more closely tailored to their requirements in their teaching practice (Birgun & Kirkgoz, 2025; Karakas & Kirkgoz, 2025). Over time, this can lead to teaching staff feeling undervalued and overwhelmed, fostering a sense of performance-related anxiety that affects teaching. This mismatch can render lecturers exposed and under stress.

Another point that can lead to lecturer anxiety in EMI classrooms is the cultural diversity of the students. As EMI is an enlarging entity to be part of internationalization policies, it inevitably attracts students from many countries, languages, and cultures. These students may have very different styles of communicating for instance pronunciation, cultural norms while interacting with their lecturers. For example, some students may demand step-by-step explanations probing content with direct questions such as `can you explain again` while others are more indirect in which they expect lecturers to understand what is going on through their facial expressions and tone of voice. Bradford (2016) indicates that one lecturer may be used to a highly interactive teaching style, while another is accustomed to a more passive teaching style. Trying to meet all these different expectations at the same time can be cognitively exhausting and can cause anxiety. Multicultural classrooms enrich learning but also increase anxiety. Diverse communication styles, accents, and cultural conventions render classroom interaction unpredictable, requiring skills most lecturers have never received training in.

Finally, many EMI lecturers face a type of role conflict that is likely to trigger identity-related anxiety (Birgun & Kirkgoz, 2022). Based on EMI lecturers, they are expected to be competent at subject knowledge and fluent in English (Birgun, 2022; Dearden & Macaro, 2016). This can provoke anxiety since their professional training was only within their field and not language teaching or teaching through English. This dual responsibility can sometimes make lecturers question whether or not they are actually doing their job well or delivering the course content with a fluent and smooth English. The majority of lecturers internally struggle with the feeling that they are meant to be both subject specialists and English teachers at the same time. This identity tension routinely erodes confidence and makes them question whether they are doing justice to their role. Over time, this uncertainty can demolish their confidence, make them less engaged and interactive in the classroom, and ultimately affect the quality of their professions. Ultimately, with the thought of being evaluated by students, administrators or even by peers, it is recognized that it is a burden on the shoulders of

lecturers in EMI contexts. The fear of "not being good enough" has a way of overshadowing their passion and ability to teach.

All these interrelated factors - language and content requirements, classroom cultural diversity, institutional needs, and role/identity conflict - combine to create a context in which anxiety can emerge for EMI at tertiary level. Therefore, classroom anxiety alleviation in EMI classrooms needs more than the simple improvement of lecturers' English. Professional development needs to integrate subject knowledge expertise and English medium teaching competence that is practical, to make lecturers confident in explaining complex concepts and managing spontaneous classroom interaction. Universities can minimize the pressure by offering lowered teaching loads during the transition towards EMI, enabling peer mentoring, and encouraging continual language and teaching development. Intercultural communication and classroom management workshops can also be of great assistance. Clarification of expectations of what is expected of lecturers - both as subject matter experts and language communicators - can also clear up the uncertainty that frequently underlies anxiety.

This leads to the observation that future research must more carefully investigate EMI lecturer anxiety in different disciplines and university contexts since some disciplines may have issues that others may not. Longitudinally tracking lecturers, for example phenomenological studies would enable us to observe how anxiety develops with experience and what kinds of support proves to be effective and pertinent. All in all, as for the limitations, this review synthesizes data from research conducted mainly in Asian and European universities. Being based on published research and not on direct data collection, the picture is complete in that the present study focus on general themes on anxiety. Regional differences or problems specific to the disciplines have not been exhaustively addressed.

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Ethical Declaration and Committee Approval

In this research, the principles of scientific research and publication ethics were followed.

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Proportion of the Author Contribution

The entire study was conducted by the author.