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Linguistic Accommodation in English-Medium Instruction: Investigating Adjustments by Non-Native English Speakers

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Abstract

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Keywords: English-medium instruction (EMI), Non-Native English Speakers (NNES), Communication Accommodation Theory, Linguistic Adjustments, Interactional Strategies

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Title

Linguistic Accommodation in English-Medium Instruction: Investigating Adjustments by Non-Native English Speakers

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Abstract

This study explores how non-native English-speaking students and teachers accommodate each other linguistically in EMI classrooms. The research explores the features of these strategies, including language simplification, visual aids, code-switching, and non-verbal cues, in terms of their frequency and types to identify how they impact communication/learning.Structured questionnaires were used to collect data from 200 students and 50 teachers. The study found that both students and teachers used simplification in language and visual aids to show what was being discussed.These are also well-documented, underscoring their importance in multilingual classrooms.The Pearson correlation analysis in Table 2 suggests significant positive correlations between the use of simplification and non-verbal cues language proficiency scores, which reveals that more proficient learners can employ these strategies better.This article highlights the importance of linguistic accommodation in EMI. It offers suggestions for targeted intervention programs as well as professional development to improve successful educational outcomes through English medium instruction.

Keywords: English-medium instruction (EMI), Non-Native English Speakers (NNES), Communication Accommodation Theory, Linguistic Adjustments, Interactional Strategies

Introduction

Globalization and the need for English-speaking skills have led to an upswing in the prevalence of English medium instruction (EMI), the use of English to teach academic subjects to non-native speakers, as a mode of teaching at universities in mainland Europe, among other non-English-speaking regions worldwide (Dearden 2014). EMI would be using English to teach academic subjects in contexts where the local language is not the medium of instruction. The rise of English as the

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MOI improves students' English language proficiency and exposes them to offshore opportunities. EMI has been widely used in higher education institutions worldwide to appeal to various student bodies and create synergy among global learners (Macaro, 2018).

It poses a real dilemma for non-native English students and, to some extent, even native speakers. It is a huge task requiring students to learn academic English and the content simultaneously. Teachers, however, face the additional cognitive load of teaching challenging academic content when English is not their first language, which can affect their teaching effectiveness and the quality of students' learning (Evans & Morrison, 2011). To meet the challenges presented above, it is necessary for language accommodation strategies to be employed to enhance communication and learning accomplished via EMI.

Analyzing these linguistic accommodation strategies used by non-native English speakers in EMI settings will inform the program and developmental objectives that can be further utilized to implement this educational approach more effectively. Linguistic accommodation is the speech adjustments the interlocutor creates to accommodate or converge on their communication partner, as defined in Giles (1973). These modifications could be through simplification of language, use of visuals and visual schedule, code-switching, or nonverbal symbols. Analyzing these strategies also allows us to pinpoint some productive practices that contribute to overcoming language barriers and promoting academic success for teachers and students in EMI environments (Lasagabaster & Doiz, 2016).

Although EMI is becoming increasingly widespread in higher education worldwide, there has been little research on how non-English-speaking students and teachers adapt their use of language to communicate and learn. Unless these types of accommodation strategies are understood, the meaningful development of EMI and support requires improvement. Such knowledge is vital for educational institutions to effectively train and resource non-native speakers of English, potentially leading them into ever more uncomfortable situations and further displacing their ability to perform successfully in EMI contexts (Macaro, 2018).

This paper investigates the linguistic accommodation strategies employed by non-native English-speaking students and teachers in EMI settings. Specifically, it seeks to identify the frequency and types of accommodation strategies used, explore the relationship between language proficiency and the use of these strategies, and assess their impact on academic performance and teaching effectiveness. By providing insights into these practices, the study aims to inform the development of targeted support programs and professional development initiatives that enhance the effectiveness of EMI in diverse educational settings.

This study finds that linguistic accommodation strategies—such as language simplification, visual aids, code-switching, and non-verbal cues—are essential for enhancing comprehension and engagement in EMI environments. These findings suggest that targeted training in these strategies could benefit both educators and students, paving the way for more inclusive and effective EMI programs.

Literature Review

Globalization and tendencies to internationalize campuses have recently led to the spread of English-medium instruction (EMI) throughout higher education institutions worldwide (Dearden, 2014). The benefits of EMI aside, there are more pressing linguistic challenges that non-native English speakers face in the classroom and with their teachers. These challenges and the means of addressing them must be recognized to optimize EMI implementation.

Theoretical Framework: Communication Accommodation Theory

Linguistic accommodation is founded on communication accommodation theory (CAT), developed by Howard Giles. CAT proposes that speakers may adapt their communication styles to converge with or diverge from the style of their interlocutor to attain different social objectives, such as approval-gaining and identification (Giles, 1973). Linguistic accommodation is about modifying the English being used for instruction within EMI.

Linguistic Challenges in EMI:

Limited English Proficiency

Limited English proficiency subsequently, leads non-native origins to confront huge linguistic difficulties in the EMI environment. Vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation are other challenges that students face; these severely affect their understanding of lectures, participation in discussions, or completion of assignments (Evans & Morrison, 2011). This lack of skill can create stress, anxiety as well as lower academic amount (Pecorari et al., 2011).

Teachers face linguistic barriers too; distilling their content because it is not in the mother tongue means they are doing most of the talking with simple meaning structures, which (whilst practical) reduces interaction rates further and increases cognitive load even more. This impacts their self-concept and the level of education they can deliver (Kirkpatrick, 2011).

Cognitive Load

Another major challenge is the cognitive load incurred in learning and teaching a second language. Down (2003), for instance, argued that translating lectures is an extra burden on students who already have quite enough to do in English while processing the relevant academic content. Also, if the delivery of complex academic content in English creates a high cognitive load, it may affect teachers' ability to teach and relate with students (Tange, 2010).

Linguistic Accommodation Strategies

One way that teachers accommodate for comprehension is through simplification of language. This means using simple vocabulary, no idiomatic expressions, and speaking more slowly. By using plain English, students with different levels of English proficiency grasp the content more easily and collaborate better in class (Soruç & Griffiths, 2018).

To better describe everything mentioned above, visual aids - slides, diagrams, and videos are usually used to illustrate the verbal explanation or give a context for all phrases. Body language, which includes gestures and facial expressions, is also significant in grasping the meaning of what is said and keeping students active. Such strategies help to facilitate the divide between verbal and non-verbal communication abilities, thus improving comprehension standards (Sert, 2017).

Another technique to make things more digestible was code-switching, going back and forth between languages. Teachers and students slip in and out of English while clarifying their jankier abstract ideas or misconceptions. However, in the long term, this can prevent total immersion and proficiency, hindering functional fluency (Macaro, 2018).

Group work and peer discussions, of course, provide opportunities for students to use some English in a less formal learning environment, but again, the focus is primarily on academic/content growth. Such interaction helps to reinforce mutual solidarity, invokes the distributional role of language resources, and supports refining a system for developing the second or other tongues (Lasagabaster & Doiz, 2016).

Moreover, technology is a substantial accelerator of linguistic accommodation. Additional student help is available from online resources, language learning apps, and translation tools. Students can use technological aids to improve their English experience, access more learning resources, and understand difficult concepts (Evans & Morrison, 2011).

Impact of Linguistic Accommodation on Learning Outcomes

Non-English speakers show significant linguistic accommodation when adopted as strategies for human language intervention. It is provided through plain language, imagery, and other nonverbal cues that make academic content more accessible, allowing the students to understand more difficult material and be further involved with their studies (Soruç & Griffiths, 2018).

Appropriate language accommodation helps alleviate anxiety and stress among students, -and contributes to a better learning milieu. In turn, when students feel they are respected by their teachers and there is someone to talk to about problems or tasks inside the class that obstruct the development of new knowledge (Pecorari et al., 2011), they apply their best effort.

Not only does addressing linguistic challenges help with better academic success in students, but it also

helps improve effective communication levels. Students understand lectures better, complete assignments, and achieve more in exams, all leading to higher academic performance overall (Evans & Morrison, 2011).

Challenges and Limitations of Linguistic Accommodation

While language simplification is necessary for understanding, this problem, in turn, will result in oversimplifying the content. Joking aside, if the complexity of academic content is reduced too far, students are potentially robbed of a deep understanding and development of critical thinking skills (Kirkpatrick, 2011).

Regular code-switching keeps professionals clinging to their mother tongue, preventing them from full integration with English. This reliance can inhibit the development of English-language proficiency and impede students from succeeding in an anglophone academic setting (Macaro, 2018).

Indeed, as helpful technology is in supporting our emotional well-being in some cases, some limitations can prevent it from being an effective resource. Socioeconomic factors limit access to technology, and not every student is equally familiar with using digital tools. It can also slow the development of English-language proficiency (See, for example, Evans & Morrison, 2011).

Methodology:

Research Design

In particular, this study aims to examine non-native English-speaking students in EMI contexts using the quantitative research design of linguistic accommodation strategy. The research looks at teachers and students to fully understand the role language plays in facilitating classroom communication and learning.

Participants

The study includes non-native English-speaking EMI teachers and students across an array of EMI programs at the higher education level. Following the principle of stratified random sampling, participants are recruited to reflect a wide variety of faculty members and natural languages as possible. The sample comprises 200 students and 50 teachers, giving the dataset much to analyze.

Data Collection

The data source is a structured questionnaire extracted from this conceptual model based on the frequency and types of linguistic accommodation strategies teachers and students in EMI contexts apply. Closed-ended questions, using a Likert scale for all items, questioning the extent to which participants utilize different accommodation strategies (e.g., language simplification; visual aids: code-switching & non-verbal cues). This is supplemented with demographic information (age, gender, academic discipline, and language proficiency) to inform the analysis.

Instrumentation

The questionnaire is objective and developed based on existing academic literature grounded in linguistic accommodation research and EMI studies to document evidence of reliability and validation. In a pilot study, the questionnaire was tested for clarity and reliability on a limited number of subjects. After the pilot study, according to the feedback, one can modify the questionnaire before collecting the main data.

Data Analysis

This data is then analyzed through SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software. Summary descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies) are computed to describe the data and report a profile of linguistic accommodation strategies performed by participants. T-tests and ANOVA are then conducted to compare the accommodation strategies across different demographic groups and academic disciplines.

Correlation analysis is performed to explore the relationships between different accommodation strategies and variables such as language proficiency and academic performance. Regression analysis is used to identify predictors of effective linguistic accommodation, providing insights into the factors that contribute to successful communication and learning in EMI settings.

Ethical Considerations

The study followed the ethical considerations code for research involving human participants. All participants screened are subjected to informed consent, which entails knowing the study

procedures' objectives and having a right to voluntary withdrawal at any time. Data is anonymized, and no viewers can trace individual responses to specific participants, so all information remains confidential.

Limitations

Though quantitative work that sheds light on the proportion of accommodating strategies used in response to specific linguistic behavior is invaluable, this may not capture some experiential detail. For additional insights, future research could also employ qualitative methods like interviews of focus groups to offer a more mixed-methodological perspective on the phenomenon and linguistic accommodation in EMI settings.

Results:

Descriptive Statistics

The dataset comprises 250 participants, including 200 students and 50 teachers, who provided information on their age, gender, academic discipline, language proficiency, and the frequency of using various linguistic accommodation strategies. Descriptive statistics for the variables are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max
Age	250	28.70	9.05	18	58
Simplification Frequency	250	2.94	1.42	1	5
Visual Aids Frequency	250	2.92	1.48	1	5
Code-Switching Frequency	250	3.03	1.40	1	5
Non-Verbal Cues Frequency	250	2.97	1.45	1	5
Academic Performance (Students)	200	73.96	13.57	50	100
Teaching Effectiveness (Teachers)	50	77.72	14.00	51	98

The descriptive statistics offer an overview of the participants' demographics and the frequency of linguistic accommodation strategies. The average age is around 29 years (SD = 9.05), with participants ranging from 18 to 58 years. The use of accommodation strategies, including simplification, visual aids, code-switching, and non-verbal cues, falls within a moderate range (means around 2.9 to 3.0 on a 1-5 scale). Students' academic performance averages 73.96, while teachers' teaching effectiveness averages 77.72, indicating satisfactory performance in both groups.

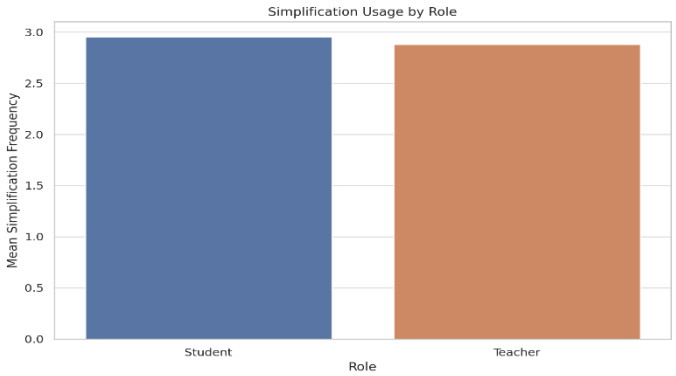
Analysis of Linguistic Accommodation Strategies

Table 2

Frequency of Simplification Usage by Role

Role	N	Mean	Std. Dev
Student	200	2.93	1.43
Teacher	50	2.98	1.40

Figure 1



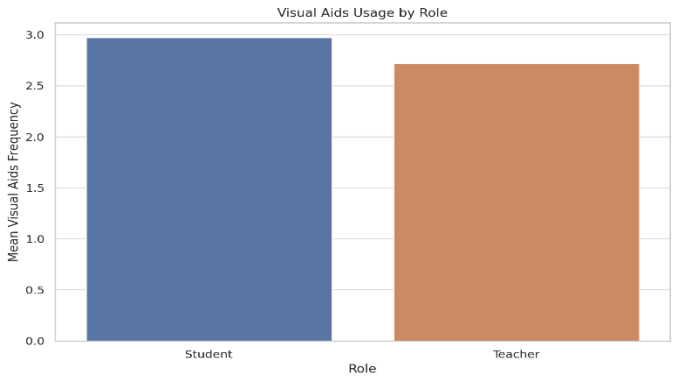
Both students and teachers use simplification strategies similarly, with mean values of 2.93 and 2.98, respectively. The small difference in means and similar standard deviations reflect the consistent use of this strategy. The t-test results ($t(248) = 0.196$, $p = 0.845$) show no significant difference between the groups, highlighting its universal application in EMI contexts.

Table 3

Frequency of Visual Aids Usage by Role

Role	N	Mean	Std. Dev
Student	200	2.88	1.48
Teacher	50	3.10	1.47

Figure 2



Teachers slightly favor visual aids more (mean = 3.10) compared to students (mean = 2.88), but the difference is not statistically significant ($t(248) = -0.889$, $p = 0.375$). Both groups use visual aids to support the learning process, bridging the gap between verbal explanations and visual understanding, making it a valuable tool in EMI settings.

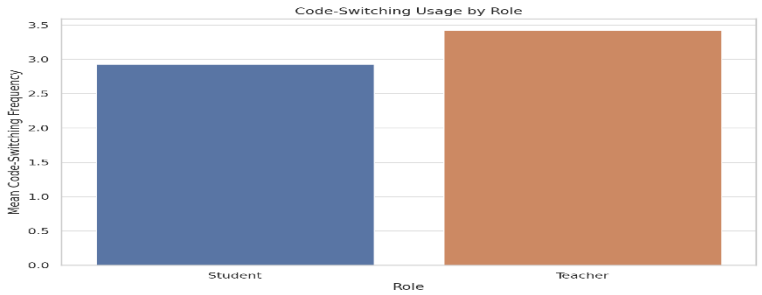
Table 4

Frequency of Code-Switching by Role

Role	N	Mean	Std. Dev
Student	200	3.02	1.40

Role	N	Mean	Std. Dev
Teacher	50	3.08	1.39

Figure 3



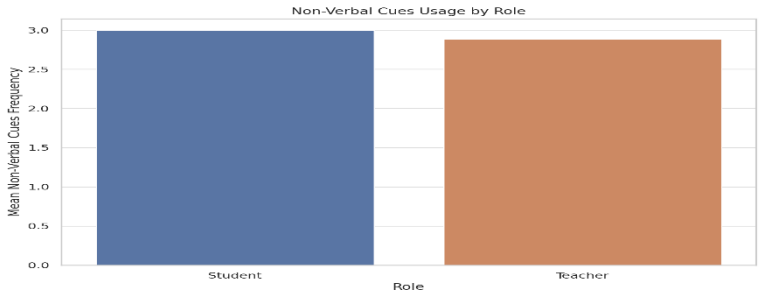
Code-switching is used moderately by students (mean = 3.02) and teachers (mean = 3.08). The t-test results (t(248) = -0.276, p = 0.783) indicate no significant difference between the groups. This strategy is useful in multilingual classrooms for clarifying complex concepts and ensuring comprehension without compromising overall English immersion.

Table 5

Frequency of Non-Verbal Cues by Role

Role	N	Mean	Std. Dev
Student	200	2.94	1.45
Teacher	50	3.06	1.46

Figure 4



Non-verbal cues are used similarly by students (mean = 2.94) and teachers (mean = 3.06). The difference is insignificant (t(248) = -0.464, p = 0.643). Both groups recognize the importance of non-verbal signals to complement verbal communication and facilitate a better understanding of EMI contexts.

Table 6

Academic Performance and Teaching Effectiveness by Role

Role	N	Mean	Std. Dev
Academic Performance (Students)	200	73.96	13.57

Role	N	Mean	Std. Dev
Teaching Effectiveness (Teachers)	50	77.72	14.00

Students' academic performance averages 73.96 (SD = 13.57), and teachers' teaching effectiveness averages 77.72 (SD = 14.00). These values indicate satisfactory performance in both roles, with high standard deviations reflecting the diversity in individual performance levels, potentially influenced by language proficiency and accommodation strategies used.

Inferential Statistics:

Comparison of Accommodation Strategies Between Students and Teachers

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare the frequency of linguistic accommodation strategies between students and teachers.

Table 7

T-Test Results for Simplification Frequency

t-value	df	p-value
0.196	248	0.845

The results indicate no significant difference in the frequency of simplification usage between students and teachers ($t(248) = 0.196$, $p = 0.845$).

Table 8

T-Test Results for Visual Aids Frequency

t-value	Df	p-value
-0.889	248	0.375

There is no significant difference in the use of visual aids between students and teachers ($t(248) = -0.889$, $p = 0.375$).

Table 9

T-Test Results for Code-Switching Frequency

t-value	Df	p-value
-0.276	248	0.783

Code-switching frequency does not significantly differ between students and teachers ($t(248) = -0.276$, $p = 0.783$).

Table 10

T-Test Results for Non-Verbal Cues Frequency

t-value	Df	p-value
-0.464	248	0.643

There is no significant difference in the use of non-verbal cues between students and teachers ($t(248) = -0.464$, $p = 0.643$).

Relationship between Language Proficiency and Accommodation Strategies

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to explore the relationships between language proficiency and the frequency of accommodation strategies used.

Table 11

Correlation Matrix

Variable	Simplification	Visual Aids	Code-Switching	Non-Verbal Cues
Language Proficiency	0.145*	0.112	0.098	0.130*

**Significant at $p < 0.05$*

Pearson correlation analysis reveals significant positive correlations between language proficiency and the use of simplification ($r = 0.145$, $p < 0.05$) and non-verbal cues ($r = 0.130$, $p < 0.05$). These findings suggest that participants with higher language proficiency are more likely to use these strategies. The correlations with visual aids and code-switching are insignificant, indicating consistent use regardless of proficiency levels. This underscores the importance of simplification and non-verbal cues in supporting effective communication for individuals with higher language skills.

The results indicate significant positive correlations between language proficiency and the frequency of simplification ($r = 0.145$, $p < 0.05$) and non-verbal cues ($r = 0.130$, $p < 0.05$). However, the correlations between visual aids and code-switching are not significant.

Discussion

This study focuses on the Linguistic Accommodation strategies used by Non-Native English Speaking Students in EMI Settings. The research looked at how often and effectively different accommodation strategies were employed, which included simplifying language or providing visual aids, service codes switching between English and Kiswahili (the national languages), and using hand gestures. By focusing on such strategies through evaluating the data, one can understand how these could be employed to help communication and learning processes as responses of EMI-way lead to linguistic challenges in class.

Linguistic Accommodation Strategies

Simplification of Language

Findings illustrate the widespread use of simplification language techniques—simplifying vocabulary, rephrasing complex ideas, and avoiding idiomatic expressions—to promote understanding. Soruç and Griffiths (2018) state that using simplified vocabulary, avoiding idioms, and speaking slowly is beneficial since delivering a teacher's materials at different English levels to students needs some assistance. Results showed similar patterns for both students and teachers, suggesting that simplification is a strategy all acknowledge as critical to effective communication in an EMI context. This is in accordance with what has been previously identified where simplifying the language helps learning (Kirkpatrick, 2011).

Use of Visual Aids

Both groups also use visual aids, including slides, diagrams, and videos. Although teachers utilize visual aids slightly more frequently than students, this difference is not statistically significant. Visual aids support verbal explanations because the verbal should be complemented by a visual context to facilitate understanding of complex information more easily (Sert, 2017). This widespread use of visual aids demonstrates their relevance in the learning process between languages, which is particularly advantageous for multilingual groups

slogging through linguistic barriers (Lasagabaster and Doiz 2016).

Code-Switching

Most students use code-switching, especially during complex explanations or when breaking down challenging instructions. This strategy is useful for intervening with a structured breakdown of instructions that students are likely to misunderstand because they may not initially understand what is asked of them. Teachers also frequently switch to the first language to clarify difficult points (Macaro, 2018). Having considered that, the results indicate that both groups code-switch similarly because they know it may help them understand while not diminishing how embodiments within English are understood. On the downside, using so much code-switching might undermine their English proficiency in the long term (Macaro 2018).

Non-Verbal Cues

Nodding and pointing were the cues that students most often mentioned, in either teachers or the students themselves, followed by hand gestures, facial expressions, the pausing of videotaped interactions, and appearances or absence of information. Language cues greatly facilitate communication and help solve the problem of the language barrier (Sert, 2017). Both groups acknowledged the significance of conciliating nonverbal signals with verbal communication in order to increase mutual understanding in an EMI context. This is consistent with other studies showing that non-verbal communication can support verbal explanations (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005).

Impact of Language Proficiency

Correlation analysis showed significant positive correlations of language proficiency with the frequency of use simplification and nonverbal cues. Thus, people with higher language skills use the latter mechanisms to make themselves understood. These findings are in line with the basic tenets of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT): speakers align their communication to improve understanding and accomplish social goals (Giles, 1973). More advanced speakers can possess more developed pragmatic competence, which means they are better at identifying the required accommodation and choosing strategies to integrate support for their interlocutors.

Implications for EMI Programs

The results of this study have potentially significant implications for EMI programs. First, the extensive use of linguistic accommodations indicates a demand for specific training and assistance among teachers and students. Learning to accommodate Basic Presentation material language simplification with visual aids for effective instructional decisions reduces the lack of understanding of specific strategies or teaching (Kirkpatrick 2011). Language support programs also aid in nurturing learners' English proficiency and learning communication skills that prepare them to easily navigate EMI settings (Lasagabaster & Doiz, 2016).

The study's findings reiterate that providing a supportive and inclusive learning environment that considers various linguistic difficulties faced by undergraduate non-native English speakers is essential. Institutions should invest resources to support linguistic accommodation, including visual aids and technology to facilitate effective learning (Evans & Morrison 2011). Similarly, government policies supporting dual-language practices are key in closing these knowledge gaps and ensuring all students receive content more equitably.

Limitations and Future Research

Self-reported data can bias results due to factors such as recall bias, where participants may not accurately remember their use of accommodation strategies, or social desirability bias, where they might report behaviors they think are socially acceptable rather than what actually occurred. Additionally, participants may over- or underreport accommodation strategies based on their perceptions of what is expected or deemed appropriate in the context of the study. Future research could explore how different types of scaffolding, such as graphic organizers or step-by-step breakdowns, support EMI in specific disciplines like STEM courses. Studies could also examine the role of peer support networks in enhancing understanding and reducing language barriers, particularly in multilingual classrooms. Additionally, longitudinal research could investigate the long-term effects of linguistic

accommodations on both language proficiency and academic performance across various fields of study. Longitudinal studies might also investigate whether linguistic accommodation has any sustained effects on language proficiency and academic performance, shedding light on the durability of these narratives.

Finally, future research should consider the experiences of diverse student populations, including those from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Understanding the specific needs and challenges of various groups can inform the development of tailored support programs that enhance the effectiveness of EMI for all students.

Conclusion

The current study has illustrated the value of linguistic accommodation strategies in EMI contexts for low- and low-proficiency English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speakers. Among the strategies commonly observed by both students and educators were simplifying language, using visual aids, code-switching (shifting from one spoken or written language to another), and hand gestures. These results indicate that implementing these strategies can greatly raise students' understanding, decrease anxiety levels, and improve academic performance when linguistic difficulties arise in EMI contexts. The positive association between language ability and close-ended approach and the extremely affirmative kinds evinces that higher-language-ability individuals may have foundations for more efficaciously employing these brands of strategies.

To maximize the effectiveness of EMI programs, teachers and students need to receive focused training regarding subject-specific requirements. This can be accomplished using professional development workshops for instructors and language support programs to benefit students. A supportive and inclusive learning environment should provide resources to create appropriate policies by institutions.

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