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Navigating Expectations: Insights into Engineering Students' Experiences in English-Medium Instruction in Israel

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Abstract

This study investigates Israeli engineering students' expectations and experiences in English-Medium Instruction (EMI) courses, following a national higher education reform promoting English across academic institutions. Drawing on interviews with 37 students enrolled in both elective and compulsory EMI courses at an engineering college, we explore what students hoped to gain from EMI, focusing on expectations around language correction, required English proficiency, and the transferability of skills to academic and professional contexts. Findings reveal a wide range of expectations – from mastering disciplinary content and acquiring professional vocabulary to improving overall English proficiency. Students were divided on the role of language correction and the extent of expected linguistic gains. EMI was often viewed as a tool for professional engagement, rather than as a site for formal language development. These insights highlight the importance of contextualizing EMI policy and pedagogy with diverse goals, highlighting the importance of context-sensitive approaches in EMI course design.

***Keywords**:* English-Medium Instruction, student expectations, perceptions, engineering education

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Introduction

In recent years, English-medium instruction (EMI) has been rapidly expanding in non-Anglophone countries, becoming a central strategy for internationalization in higher education (Hellekjaer & Westergaard, 2003; Wächter & Maiworm, 2014). EMI has been adopted to bolster the international profile of universities and facilitate intercultural exchange (Curle et al., 2022). Broadly defined, EMI refers to "the use of the English language to teach academic subjects, other than English itself" (Dafouz & Gray, 2022, p. 1), in settings where English is a foreign or second language for at least some of the learners and/or instructors (Pecorari & Malmström, 2018). While such programs promise global exposure and expanded academic access, they also present considerable linguistic and pedagogical challenges to both students and teachers (Doiz & Lasagabaster, 2018). As EMI initiatives continue to expand, researchers have emphasized the importance of understanding students' lived experiences to inform more responsive and effective implementation (Dafouz & Smit, 2022).

Israel formally began its EMI journey as part of a nationwide higher education reform initiated by the Council of Higher Education (CHE) in 2019. While multiple institutions had already been offering EMI courses prior to this reform, these efforts were largely ad hoc and institution-specific. The reform marked a shift toward a more standardized and coordinated approach, making EMI a strategic priority and a formal requirement across higher education institutions in the country. The reform emerged within a broader framework of strategic goals focused on increasing Israel's global academic competitiveness and encouraged the development of EMI programs to promote two key objectives: attracting international students and fostering global competencies among local students — a process often described as "internationalization at

home" (Council of Higher Education Israel, 2019; ECOSTAR, 2017). Despite policy backing and financial incentives, the number of EMI programs is still relatively limited.

The Israeli context is marked by remarkable linguistic diversity, shaped by waves of immigration that brought native speakers of Amharic, Russian, Arabic, French, and Spanish, among others (Meir et al., 2021; Walters et al., 2023). Hebrew is the primary official language, and Arabic, spoken by over a fifth of the population, holds a unique position and is designated as a "language with special status" (Basic Law: Israel (5778-2018)). The English language is taught as the primary foreign language in schools, placing Israel in Kachru's Expanding Circle category (1992). In higher education, students from diverse backgrounds—some of whom were educated in separate school systems—come together and converge in the English classes, both EAP and EMI. These spaces offer a setting where English functions as a "fair language", an equalizer, as no group holds a native-speaker advantage (Schvarcz & Styer, In Press).

What distinguishes Israeli students in higher education is the delayed start to their academic journey. Most enter university after completing mandatory military or national service, and often following extended travel abroad, where they are frequently immersed in English-speaking environments. This travel experience plays a central role in developing students' relatively strong English proficiency, intercultural exposure and awareness of English as the global *lingua franca*. This is a form of internationalization that occurs prior to enrolling in higher education. Additionally, many students balance part-time employment alongside their studies, which shapes a learning environment that is both globally influenced and locally grounded.

Because of the recent implementation of EMI in Israel, little research exists on its impact on Israeli students. Existing studies have focused on teacher education programs and desired

qualities of EMI instructors, exploring students' attitudes, motivations, and factors influencing willingness to participate in EMI courses, (Inbar-Laurie & Donitsa-Smith, 2020) and examining students' motivations, attitudes, and perceptions of EMI instructors' language backgrounds (Inbar-Laurie & Donitsa-Smith, 2013). Israeli engineering students' linguistic and academic needs and coping strategies have been studied by the authors (Schvarcz et al., In Press). This study revealed how students use proactive self-regulated learning techniques to cope with challenging EMI course content, often leveraging digital resources.

Against the unique Israeli higher education landscape, where students often enter university with prior international and professional experience, it is crucial to explore how they engage with EMI, particularly in relation to their English proficiency. While the global literature on student perceptions of EMI is rich, research from the Israeli context remains scarce, particularly following the 2019 national reform. As one of the first studies conducted since this reform, this study explores the experiences and perspectives of engineering undergraduate students enrolled in EMI courses, with a particular focus on their expectations. By foregrounding the students' voice, this research contributes critical local insights that can inform the design and delivery of more effective EMI programs in Israel and other universities sharing similarities with this Israeli setting.

The context

In Israel, English proficiency is essential for entry into higher education, with academic institutions requiring students to demonstrate language competence, and functions as a gatekeeper for graduation. Institutions require students to reach a level typically aligned with the CEFR B2 level or above in order to graduate with a bachelor's degree. Even in programs officially conducted in Hebrew, students often encounter substantial reading materials in English, reflecting the

embedded expectation of academic-level fluency (Or & Shohamy, 2017). This linguistic demand is further intensified by the growing presence of English-Medium Instruction (EMI), which is increasingly integrated into university curricula as part of the Council for Higher Education's (CHE) broader strategy to internationalize higher education. However, EMI offerings have remained primarily concentrated in Israel's major universities, with more limited adoption in smaller institutions (Inbar-Laurie & Donitsa-Smith, 2020).

The growing role of English in Israel and the Israeli education system has been mirrored by curricular reform. Over the past several years, Israel has moved to incorporate the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2018) into its national educational strategy. This has resulted in the development of two distinct yet interconnected frameworks: the *English Curriculum 2020* for schools (Israeli Ministry of Education, 2020) and the *CEFR-Aligned Framework for Higher Education* (ECOSTAR, 2017). Together, they aim to ensure a continuous trajectory of language learning, from primary school through university, while also aligning English instruction with both local and global academic standards.

A major milestone in this process occurred in 2019, when the CHE launched a comprehensive reform aimed at elevating students' English linguistic competencies to meet the demands of global academic and professional engagement. The reform lays out strategic measures to achieve this goal and to unify English education across the higher education sector over a period of 5-10 years. At the center of this initiative are two goals. First, the reform sets out to reconceptualize English instruction at the academic level through the English for Purposes of International Communication (EPIC) program, which seeks to harmonize English instruction with CEFR benchmarks. Second, the reform mandates the expansion of the role and scale of EMI. All

undergraduate students are now required to complete two years of English coursework, regardless of their initial proficiency, with an expected improvement of at least one CEFR level in all four language skills. By 2030, the targeted exit standards are set at B2 for productive skills and C1 for receptive skills (Council for Higher Education Israel, 2019).

Building on the minimum two years of English requirement, institutions should offer a structured progression of English studies, tailored to students' entry-level proficiency, ensuring comprehensive language development. The English language courses may include preparatory language instruction, English for academic purposes courses, discipline-specific content courses, general electives, and enrichment offerings provided by their institutions (Council for Higher Education Israel, 2019). For students who enter with exemption status due to advanced proficiency levels, the policy now directs them toward EMI courses.

This policy shift has fueled the expansion of EMI across higher education institutions. EMI is expected to facilitate mobility among students as well as faculty, attract international students, and better equip graduates for global professional environments by enhancing their ability to collaborate and communicate with international peers (ECOSTAR, 2017). To support this shift, universities are also encouraged to develop the pedagogical competence of academic faculty by investing in their professional development, ensuring that content experts are equipped to teach effectively in English.

Literature Review

As mentioned, research on students' perceptions abounds because a thorough understanding of students' lived experiences is necessary to inform context-specific and effective

implementation of EMI (Dafouz & Smit, 2022). Indeed, context-specific variables play a very important role before assessing the impact of EMI in a given setting. For stakeholders and policymakers to make decisions that best suit their context, analysis of their national context and how EMI was implemented should be based on research-based evidence Among these specific geographical, educational and cultural aspects relative to a specific context in which EMI is implemented, we find the type of institutional internationalization policies, curriculum and socio-cultural factors (Li & Ruan, 2015; Wilkinson & Gäbriels, 2021), like whether EMI has been implemented top down or rather bottom-up (letting lecturers self-select and volunteer to change their language of instruction). The success of a given implementation of EMI may also be contingent on specific variables such as teachers' and students' language proficiency, academic skills and literacies and motivation (Kamasak et al., 2021; Rose et al., 2020), along with type of programme, course, content subject or teaching methodology, among others.

Research has shown that students seem to self-assess their language competence differently from lecturers, with students sometimes complaining about their teachers' English competence (Aguilar-Pérez, 2011; Clark, 2017). Common student difficulties in EMI identified in the literature are writing and speaking (Kamasak et al., 2021), lecture listening comprehension (Hellekjær, 2010; Zhou & Rose, 2021), exams, and adapting to a new educational culture and academic conventions (Evans & Morrison, 2011).

The success of EMI can also depend on teaching methodology and style, which have been found to be important in increasing or decreasing students' satisfaction with EMI (Aguilar-Pérez & Arnó-Macià, 2020; Henriksen et al., 2019; Li & Ruan, 2015), as well as on prior EMI experience, motivation, self-efficacy, and listening learning strategies (Zhou & Rose, 2021). Clark, (2017) found MSc students seemed satisfied with EMI, showing empowerment and self-efficacy.

Further studies reveal that studying EAP in an EMI setting also exerts some influence upon learner beliefs and self-efficacy (Li & Ruan, 2015; Rose et al., 2020).

The role of EAP to support students' language progress and disciplinary literacies should not be minimized (Čakarun & Drljača Margić, 2024; Costa & Mastellotto, 2022) given that research has demonstrated that students struggling with EMI appreciate ESP and EAP courses (Galloway & Ruegg, 2020; Rose et al., 2020). Research has also underlined that sometimes students' expectations to learn English in EMI are unmet because many EMI lecturers refuse to assume the position of language authority (Airey, 2012) and, if they do, they do so unsystematically (Mancho-Barés & Aguilar-Pérez, 2020), concluding that a more systematic and comprehensive language and methodology training for EMI lecturers is needed (Dearden, 2015). The necessity for a structured approach to equip EMI teachers with the relevant linguistic and foreign language pedagogical skills has also been highlighted in the handbook for EMI in institutions of higher education in Israel (ECOSTAR, 2017).

If we focus on Israel, only two existing studies by Inbar-Laurie and Donitsa-Smith (2013, 2020) are dated before the implementation of the CHE reform. The 2013 study explored the relevance of language teachers' native/non-native background in EMI courses and found that preferred EMI lecturers need not be native English speakers but should be highly proficient in English, should be subject matter experts, be able to create an international learning experience, demonstrate effective teaching pedagogies, and be familiar with students' local language and culture. In 2020, Inbar-Laurie and Donitsa-Smith highlighted students' reluctance to register for EMI courses, concerns about language proficiency, and the limited impact on English language improvement in the context of a teacher education college. The prospect of participating in

coursework conducted entirely in English seemed daunting, especially given the absence of prior experience with content-based instruction in English within the Israeli school system. Furthermore, while there was a clear aspiration among students to improve their English skills, the actual language gains reported by participants in the English-medium courses were only moderate at best. Interestingly, the study reveals a marked preference among students for native English-speaking instructors, suggesting an underlying belief in the perceived superiority of native speakers in delivering content-based instruction.

The Study

This study investigates engineering students' attitudes towards their EMI learning experience, with a focus on their conceptualization and evaluation of their expectations from English-Medium Instruction (EMI) courses. Rather than focusing solely on learning outcomes or linguistic challenges, we explore what students hoped to gain from EMI, including expectations around language correction, required English proficiency, and the applicability of learned skills to academic and professional contexts. We seek to uncover whether students view English as an empowering tool for enrolling in more EMI courses or as a challenge where disciplinary learning is prioritized over language advancement. Accordingly, our research question is: *What were students' expectations from EMI courses?* Specifically, what were students' expectations in terms of being corrected in English, necessary English proficiency, and applicability of skills?

Setting

The study was conducted at the Afeka Tel Aviv Academic College of Engineering located in the center of Israel and accredited by the Council of Higher Education of Israel. The institution is recognized as one of the country's leading engineering colleges, offering a range of undergraduate and graduate programs in disciplines such as electrical, mechanical, software,

industrial, and medical engineering, as well as computer and data science. The college has a student body of approximately 3,500, representing a broad spectrum of economic and ethnic backgrounds, including Jews, Muslims, Christians, Druze, and individuals from various immigrant communities, mirroring the diverse fabric of Israeli society. The average age of students enrolled in BSc programs at the time of data collection was 26.48, while MSc students' average age was 33.44 years, reflecting the common practice in Israel of beginning higher education later in life. A significant number of students are employed part-time in engineering jobs, which reinforces their awareness of the relevance of English proficiency in their professional careers.

From its inception, the institution has placed a strong emphasis on preparing graduates for the demands of the high-tech sector, recognizing English as the global language of science and technology. As a result, EMI has been an integral part of all degrees for over twenty years prior to the reform, which was introduced organically through bottom-up initiatives rather than policy mandates. Long before national EMI reforms were implemented, the college required all students—regardless of their entry-level proficiency in EAP —to complete at least one EMI course as part of their degree program. This longstanding integration of EMI contributes to the distinctiveness of the institutional setting for this study.

Participants

A total of thirty-seven BSc Engineering students participated in our study on a self-selected basis, without receiving any financial compensation. The participants were drawn from four EMI courses offered at the college. Fourteen students were enrolled in two general elective courses—seven in *Wonders of Human Language: An Introduction to Linguistics* and seven in *Business Writing*, which focuses on workplace communication skills. The remaining nineteen students were

registered in two core compulsory courses: six in *Introduction to Digital Signal Processing*, offered by the Electrical Engineering Department, and thirteen in *Database Management Systems*, a course jointly offered by the Computer Science and Software Engineering departments. Students were invited to participate during in-class visits by the research team, where they received information about the study's purpose, and all provided informed consent prior to the interviews.

The average age of students at the time of participation in the study was 25.7 years. The sample included 31 male and 6 female students. Most were native Hebrew speakers (32), with others identifying as Russian (1), bilingual (French-English or French-Hebrew, 2), or trilingual (English, Russian, and Hebrew, 1). Several students also reported knowledge of additional languages, including Spanish (4), German (1), Italian (1), and Arabic (1). Fourteen students were employed while studying, nine of whom worked in fields directly related to their academic discipline (e.g., software development, mechanical engineering, network operations). Others held part-time jobs typically associated with students, such as tutoring, waitering, or security roles. Language use at work varied: seven used Hebrew exclusively, three operated primarily in English, and four alternated between the two.

The average age of students in this sample upon beginning their degrees was 23.98, which is typical for Israeli students who often start university after military or national service and sometimes travel or take a gap year abroad. Indeed, over half of the participants (51.3%) had spent between four months and a year abroad before enrolment. During these periods, students commonly used English in everyday contexts such as navigating airports, staying in hostels, and interacting in small business environments.

All participants demonstrated relatively high English proficiency (B2–C1) on national level tests. Upon admission to the college, 29.7% were exempt from English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses. The remainder had taken EAP courses as part of their studies: 29.7% had completed *English Advanced 2*, while 27% progressed through both *English Advanced 1* and *Advanced 2*, depending on their assessed level upon enrolment.

The four instructors teaching the EMI courses were all non-native English speakers, but highly proficient. They brought considerable professional expertise to the classroom: two were associate professors of Engineering with over 15 years of experience, one held a PhD in English Linguistics and also taught EAP, and one was a Business Management expert. All four lecturers self-reported a clear inclination towards content delivery in their approach and acknowledged that they did not focus on language instruction per se -—a tendency consistent with broader EMI practice. Notably, three of the four teachers had substantial international teaching experience in the United States, and all demonstrated strong motivation towards teaching in English despite receiving no formal incentives. Their participation in EMI stemmed either from their subject matter expertise or their linguistic and pedagogical confidence. While no institutional language proficiency tests were required, such as those in many European institutions emphasizing both linguistic and pragmatic preparedness for EMI instruction (Kling & Stæhr, 2012), the lecturers were selected for EMI roles based on their qualifications and demonstrated competence, and high English language proficiency.

Data Collection

This investigation is part of a broader institutional research initiative examining multiple dimensions of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) at the institution. The present paper focuses

specifically on students' expectations of EMI courses, as expressed before and after their participation in a given EMI course.

Data for this study was gathered over two consecutive semesters during the 2021–2022 academic year. The research was implemented in two phases, beginning with students enrolled in elective EMI courses and followed by those in compulsory core engineering courses. Interviews were conducted at two key stages in the academic term: the first within two to four weeks of the course's start (pre-course) and the second within a similar window after the course concluded (post-course).

The interviews were carried out in English using Zoom and facilitated by a team of two researchers and two research assistants, all of whom were native or bilingual English speakers. Prior to participation, students were informed of the study's purpose and gave their consent to be recorded. Although English was the preferred language of communication during the interviews, participants who felt more comfortable speaking Hebrew were invited to do so. Their responses were later translated into English during the transcription process to preserve accuracy. The interviews followed a structured format with predetermined topics and sequence; yet participants were encouraged to articulate their perspectives freely, even if their responses diverged from the central topic.

The pre-course interviews included a total of 38 questions: 13 related to biodata and background information (such as travel experience and employment history), 37 of the questions were open-ended and focused on language and learning experiences, and one Likert-scale question was used to assess students' self-perceived English proficiency upon entering the college. Additional items explored students' previous exposure to English-Medium Instruction (EMI), their

confidence levels in handling coursework delivered in English, and the number of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses they had completed. The objectives of the EMI institutional study were to collect: (i) biodata, including employment and travel history; (ii) self-assessed language proficiency at college entry and the number of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses completed; (iii) experiences with English-Medium Instruction (EMI), including confidence levels, self-rated language skills and instructional methodology; and iv) students' expectations of the EMI course at its outset, including anticipated language support (*e.g., Do you expect the teacher to correct your English?*) and language development (e.g. *Do you expect your English proficiency to improve in this course?*)

The post-course interview included 12 questions: 11 open-ended and one Likert-scale item for English proficiency assessment that were designed to assess whether students felt their expectations of the EMI course had been met and whether their English language skills had improved. It addressed: (i) self-assessed English proficiency after course completion; (ii) language used in cognitive processes and note-taking, particularly any shift from the first language to English; (iii) reflections on content learning strategies; iv) attitude towards EMI and confidence of taking further EMI courses (e.g. *Has your attitude towards studying in English changed? If so, how? And why do you think this is so? How confident do you feel about taking a course in English now?*); and iv) applicability of course for future academic and/or professional endeavours (e.g. *Do you think you can apply the skills you learned in this course to your other courses?*).

All interviews were transcribed verbatim, preserving pauses and repetitions. Responses provided in Hebrew were translated into English.

Data Analysis

The analysis combined both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data from closed-ended questions were quantified, and percentages were calculated. Data from open-ended questions underwent qualitative analysis using thematic analysis procedures, following Braun and Clarke (2006) and Saldaña (2021). The authors identified recurring themes and patterns that reflected the students' experiences and expectations in the EMI courses. Relevant questions from both the pre- and post-course interviews were selected for analysis based on their alignment with the study's focus.

The analysis involved several stages: The process began with each author conducting an initial, independent reading of the interview transcripts to develop a general understanding of the data. Subsequently, the researchers collaboratively examined responses and similar ideas were tallied to help surface emerging concepts.

An inductive coding process was used to allow themes to emerge naturally from the data, without being constrained by pre-existing categories. To ensure inter-rater reliability, first each researcher generated preliminary codes independently, which then was followed by collaborative discussions during which discrepancies were resolved and a shared thematic framework was agreed upon. Final results were systematically documented in tables.

Findings

This section presents quantitative results in the tables, where the number of instances that a given code was mentioned in students' response is displayed. Round 1 relates to the data from general elective courses, and Round 2 to the data from compulsory core courses.

To understand students' expectations from EMI courses, our research question focused on both their anticipations at the onset of the course (within the first two weeks) and their reflections after completing it. This involved exploring students' perceptions on how they chose the course (q16), how they felt about it overall (q17), and whether they expected to improve their English proficiency during the course (q37). Questions also addressed expectations around language support, such as whether they anticipated receiving corrective feedback on their English (q36), and whether the course ultimately met their expectations (q39). Additional questions examined whether their attitude toward studying in English had changed (q48), what suggestions they would offer to peers considering EMI courses (q49), and whether the skills learned could be applied to other academic courses (q50) or transferred to future academic or professional contexts (q51).

Students' responses to how they chose their EMI course (Q16, Table 1) revealed a variety of motivations. The most frequently cited reason was interest in the course content, reported by 29.6% of participants. As one student noted, *"I see the content of it and I think it's gonna be useful"* (Student R14)[1]. Others similarly emphasized relevance to future work and personal curiosity: *"Umm.. the syllabus seems to be interesting and I think I can, I will use it in my future work."* (Student D210), and *"Uh it's the subject of the course interests me so uh I… it didn't bother me that it will be in English so I just went for it."* (Student D211). This was followed by convenience of their schedules, cited by 16.6% of participants, all of whom were enrolled in general elective courses. Recommendation from peers was mentioned by 9.3% of the participants (*"most of my friends went for it so I said why not"* (Student D23)) , while smaller groups selected

[1]The participants were coded as follows: the letter refers to the course (L-*The Wonders of Human Language: An introduction to Linguistics;* R- *Business Writing*; O - *Introduction to Digital Signal Processing* and D2 *Database Management Systems*) and the following digits refer to the students' personal reference number.

the course either due to the reputation of the teacher (3.7%) or their desire to study more in English (3.7%) ("*I wanted to experience English communication more, because I don't get that very often"* (Student R11)). The No Answer category was common among participants in compulsory courses as they had no real choice.

Table 1. Q16. How did you choose this course? (PRE)

	Round 1	Round 2	Total (54)
CONTENT	7	9	16 (29.6%)
TEACHER	1	1	2 (3.7%)
PEER RECOMMENDATION	3	2	5 (9.3%)
SCHEDULE	9	0	9 (16.6%)
ENGLISH/ LANGUAGE	2	0	2 (3.7%)
NO ANSWER	3	13	16 (29.6%)
NO CHOICE	0	3	3 (5.6%)
OFF TOPIC	0	1	1 (1.9%)

Students' responses to how they felt about the EMI course (Q17, Table 2) reflected a predominantly positive sentiment, with 24.6% expressing overall satisfaction with the course, but without specifying in what sense. One student noted, *"It's a great course up until now, it's one of my most... yeah, it's one of my most expected courses of the week"* (Student D23). Some students provided more specific reasons for their satisfaction: 23.2% highlighted the course content as interesting or engaging and 15.9% found the course useful to their academic or professional lives. As one student reflected, *"I'm kind of seeing it more useful now for my real problems, 'cause I'm*

trying to look for a job" (Student R14). Students' practicality orientation is also reflected in answers about the convenient timetable of the course. However, a notable 13% reported experiencing foreign language anxiety, indicating that EMI posed an additional challenge due to the English medium, particularly when course materials or assessments demanded higher-level comprehension. Participants noted: *"it stressed me out that the entire course would be conducted in English"* (Student D213), and *"There is an additional difficulty because everything is in English, if there are suddenly more complicated terms, and his course book is also in English."* (Student O32). Meanwhile, 13% of participants expressed neutrality or indifference: *"ordinary, just like the others. Nothing special."* (Student O31). A small number (2.9%) described the course as boring or unengaging, with one student stating plainly, *"Umm… it's a waste of time"* (Student O33).

Table 2. Q17. How do you feel about this course? (PRE)

	Round 1	Round 2	Total (69)
GENERAL POSITIVE FEELING	7	10	17 (24.6%)
GENERAL NEUTRALITY/ INDIFFERENCE	2	7	9 (13%)
GENERAL NEGATIVE FEELING	0	2	2 (2.9%)
SATISFACTION WITH COURSE CONTENT	8	8	16 (23.2%)
PRACTICALITY/ APPLICABILITY	5	6	11 (15.9%)

ENGLISH LANGUAGE IMPROVEMENT	1	2	3 (4.4%)
ENGLISH AS A SOURCE OF DIFFICULTY	0	9	9 (13%)
OFF TOPIC	0	1	1 (1.5%)
NO ANSWER	1	0	1 (1.5%)

At the course onset, participants were asked about their anticipation of instructor correction for spoken English (q36). Findings revealed 40.7% expected corrective feedback, 33.3% did not, 18.5% were uncertain, and 7.4% abstained from responding (Table 3). Students following compulsory courses (Round 2) held lower expectations if compared with students in elective courses (Round 1), hinting that they assumed that the main goal of a compulsory course (regardless of the language of instruction) is always to teach content. One student explicitly stated: *"I don't think that it's very important because we came to learn DSP, not English"* (Student O35).

Table 3. Q36. Do you expect the teacher to correct your English? (PRE)

	Round 1	Round 2	Total (27)
YES	7	4	11 (40.7%)
NO	7	2	9 (33.3%)
UNCERTAIN	2	3	5 (18.5%)
N/A	1	1	2 (7.4%)

Additionally, participants had mixed expectations regarding the enhancement of their English proficiency (q37). As seen in Table 4, 38.2% anticipated linguistic improvement. One participant stated: "*I wish it would happen, absolutely, because, eh, every, every job outside requires that",* (Student D214). Another compared using English to riding a bike: "*the more you do it the easier it becomes*" (Student D23). However, 20.5% doubted their English would improve, while 35.2% were uncertain or ambivalent.

Table 4. Q37. Do you expect your English proficiency to improve in this course? (PRE)

	Round 1	Round 2	Total (34)
YES	5	8	13 (38.2%)
NO	3	4	7 (20.5%)
A BIT/MAYBE	5	7	12 (35.2%)
NO ANSWER	1	1	2 (5.9%)

During the pre-course interview, participants shared their expectations for the course (q38). As seen in Table 5, 14.8% aimed solely for a passing grade, while 46.6% prioritized comprehensive learning and understanding the course material. Some expressed specific goals like mastering DSP (Digital Signal Processing) or SQL (Structured Query Management). Additionally, 31.9% sought to enhance their English language proficiency. One student was able to specify the type of learning he expected: *"Maybe to improve my vocabulary in the professional context of Electrical Engineering material in English"* (Student 036).

Table 5. Q38.What are your expectations of this course? (PRE)

	Round 1	Round 2	Total (47)
PASS/GRADE	2	5	7 (14.8%)
LEARN CONTENT	10	12	22(46.8%)
USE MORE ENGLISH	4	11	15(31.9%)
OTHER REASONS	0	2	2(4.2%)
NO ANSWER	1	0	1(2.1%)

In the post-course evaluation, participants were asked if the course had met their expectations (q39). Table 6 illustrates that 64.9% affirmed alignment with their expectations, while 10.8% indicated that it had not. Another 10.8% articulated viewpoints irrelevant for this question.

Table 6. Q39. Did the course meet your expectations? (POST)

	Round 1	Round 2	Total (37)
YES	13	11	24 (64.9%)
NO	1	3	4 (0.8%)
OTHER	0	4	4 (10.8%)
NO ANSWER	1	4	5(13.5%)

Some comments revealed students' acknowledgement of the content, *"It gave me a peek into the world of Databases",* (Student D210). Others mentioned unmet expectations of linguistic improvement, particularly in specialized language focus (e.g., "*I thought that what I would like to take from this course is the professional language of computer science and databases English*"

(Student D21) and of a more formal and academic English (ESP) being more present in the EMI lecturer's discourse:

> *It met my expectations in the subject of the course but(...) I guess, ...I thought I'll get much more experience in English in our subject and I think that most of the English was usual English, not professional English in computer science or database.* (Student D21)

These comments suggest that integrating language and content would be appreciated, perhaps through an EAP course running parallel or adjacent to the EMI course.

When asked about the applicability of skills learned in the course to other courses (q50), the majority of participants (55%) expressed confidence in the transferability. It is worth noting that in compulsory courses, the applicability rates were higher, possibly because students' were focused on content matter (Table 5). Reflecting on this, one participant noted: *"Ehm, reading in English, I think I read better in English. In terms of professional vocabulary I think it will be easier for me to recognize the words we've learned in similar courses."* (Student 036).

Conversely, 15% of participants believed they could apply learned skills later, while 10% provided alternative benefits, including improved English speaking and presentation abilities: "*Umm how to talk, to make a presentation in English (...) it's a lot of things that we needed to do for the project which we don't do in other courses*." (Student D217). By and large, EMI emerges as a possibility of language use, increased practice and exposure.

Navigating Expectations

Students' post reflections on whether their attitude toward studying in English had changed over the course of the semester (Q48, Table 7) revealed a complex yet overall stable picture. The majority of students (38.6%) reported no change in their attitude, often because they had already been comfortable learning in English prior to the course (*"It was very positive before and very positive now",* Student L01; *"I don't have a problem to take courses in English… If I need to in the future, I'll take them happily",* Student L03). At the same time, 17.4% of students reported a general positive shift in their attitude, frequently describing increased confidence or reduced anxiety. One participant shared, *"Yeah, I think it did in a positive way, of course, because, eh, after the experience of this course I know that I can do more courses in English without a problem, probably, hopefully."* (Student L05). 2.9% linked their positive shift specifically to the lecturer's clarity, support, or teaching style. One such student commented:

> *"Um, at first it stressed me out that the entire course would be conducted in English, but over time, like I understood... She speaks in Hebr... English which is very clear, and if something is not clear, she explains and she always repeats herself, so it's actually fine."* (Student D215)

21.7% of responses indicated perceived English language improvement, especially regarding vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension—an indicator that, even in content-focused courses, students were gaining linguistic benefits. Participants emphasized that engaging with authentic materials or gaining professional vocabulary was a clear gain:

> *"...what's good about learning English is that software development takes, eh, English takes a lot, like a bigger part of the knowledge an the contents and terms that used in software, and I I think when you learn the original, the original subject in English, eh, it makes it better"* (Student D24)

An additional 8.8% described a slight change or partial improvement in their perspective, with comments suggesting more openness to EMI despite lingering reservations: " *maybe, maybe I realized that there are a lot of tools in English that I can use"* (Student D26).

Table 7. Q48. Has your attitude towards studying in English changed? If so, how? And why do you think this is so? (POST)

	Round 1	Round 2	Total (57)
I DON'T KNOW/ NOT SURE	2	1	3 (5.3%)
NO CHANGE	9	12	22 (38.6%)
A LITTLE	2	3	5 (8.8%)
GENERAL POSITIVE CHANGE	2	7	9 (17.4%)
POSITIVE - CONNECTED TO THE LECTURER	0	3	3 (5.3%)
ENGLISH LANG IMPROVEMENT	3	9	12 (21.1%)
OFF TOPIC	1	1	2 (3.5%)
NO ANSWER	1	1	2 (3.5%)

Upon being asked to offer advice to future students considering EMI courses (q49), participants shared a wide range of suggestions, reflecting the diversity of their experiences, learning strategies and needs, and levels of English proficiency. The most common recommendation—shared by 23.9% of participants —was to actively use online tools such as Google Translate, Grammarly, or YouTube tutorials to support comprehension and language development. Around 11.3% advised taking notes, while another 11.3% emphasized the

importance of participation and asking questions during class— strategies that reflect a proactive learning mindset in EMI settings. Additional tips included using English as much as possible inside and outside of class (7.0%), and a cluster of coping strategies such as "just listening" (4.2%), "translating" (4.2%), and "just getting on with it" (4.2%).

The breadth of the types of advice offered by students—ranging from linguistic preparation to emotional resilience—highlights students' differing needs and approaches.

Table 8. Q49. What suggestions would you make to a student taking and EMI course? (POST)

	Round 1	Round 2	Total (71)
READINESS/ WILLINGNESS TO LEARN TERMS	1	1	2 (2.8%)
READINESS/ WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE	5	3	8 (11.3%)
TAKE NOTES	1	4	8 (11.3%)
HAVE GOOD FLUENCY/LEVEL OF ENGLISH	1	0	1 (1.4%)
USE ENGLISH AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE IN CLASS AND OUTSIDE	3	2	5 (7%)
JUST LISTEN (NO WRITING)	1	2	3 (4.2%)
BE MOTIVATED	1	0	1 (1.4%)
USE ONLINE RESOURCES (E.G.	4	13	17 (23.9%)

GRAMMARLY, TRANSLATORS, CHATGPT, FILMS)			
PRACTICALITY/ APPLICABILITY	2	0	2 (2.8%)
INFLUENCE OF A PARTICULAR TEACHER	3	0	3 (4.2%)
DON'T STRESS	0	3	3 (4.2%)
PREPARE IN ADVANCE	0	2	2 (2.8%)
JUST DEAL/ GET ON WITH IT	0	3	3 (4.2%)
TRANSLATE	0	3	3 (4.2%)
READ	0	3	3 (4.2%)
BE FOCUSED	0	1	1 (1.4%)

When asked about the applicability of skills learned in the course to other courses (q50), the majority of participants (55%) expressed confidence in the transferability, both in elective and compulsory courses. It is worth noting that in compulsory courses, the applicability rates were higher, possibly because students considered the content acquired in core courses would be directly applicable in future courses that build upon them (Table 9). Reflecting on this, one participant noted *"Ehm, reading in English, I think I read better in English. In terms of professional vocabulary I think it will be easier for me to recognize the words we've learned in similar courses"* (Student 036). Conversely, 15% of participants believed they could apply learned skills later, while 10% provided alternative benefits, including improved English speaking and presentation abilities. By and large, EMI emerges as a possibility of language use, increased practice and exposure.

Table 9. Q50. Do you think you can apply the skills you learned in this course to your other courses?

	Round 1	Round 2	Total (40)
YES	7	15	22(55%)
NOT NOW/LATER	3	3	6 (15%)
OTHER (not sure)	1	3	4(10%)
NO ANSWER	6	2	8(20%)

In response to identifying elements of the course applicable academically or professionally (q51), 32.6% of the participants emphasized professional application, with one student noting: "*I think in terms of the content of the course it'll be easier for me if I get asked in interviews about the material I learned in English, so I'll be able to answer in English if I need to*." (Student 036). Another 19.5% highlighted academic relevance, illustrated by responses such as: "*Um, some of the subjects that we learned, uh, I already see a connection in different courses.*" (Student D28). Another participant stressed the multifaceted benefits, highlighting internationalization as his ultimate goal: "*utilizing the English language is also a great benefactor for the future. To tell the truth, I aim to study abroad*."(Student D22). A further 19.5% of the participants noted the linguistic skills garnered from the course, articulating intentions to leverage their English proficiency in various contexts, such as academic endeavours and professional settings (Table 10).

Table 10. Q51-What elements of the course do you think you will apply later Academically/Professionally?

	Round 1	Round 2	Total (46)
PROFESSIONAL	6	9	15(32.6%)
ACADEMIC	1	8	9 (19.5%)
LINGUISTIC (ENGLISH)	0	9	9(19.5%)
GAINED OTHER KNOWLEDGE	4	3	7(15.2%)
OTHER/ LACK OF REFLECTION (DON'T KNOW) /NOT RELEVANT	1	5	6(13%)

Discussion and Implications

The findings of our analysis point to students holding a wide and rich array of expectations regarding their EMI experience. By and large, the students' expectations from EMI courses seem to have been generally fulfilled, as around 65% of students report that the course has indeed met their expectations in the post interview, and many state their willingness to take more EMI courses. More specifically, they think the EMI course was satisfactory due to the content they learned and a few mention communication skills, such as presentation skills or specialized terminology. These findings point to these students' utilitarian perspective and practicality, as seen in their answers to the applicability of the skills acquired in EMI.

Navigating Expectations

In terms of their expectations of being corrected in English, we see that students are quite divided. Some presume to learn content, while others only wish to just pass the course. Some anticipate they will learn some specialized vocabulary, or practice English, comparing using the language to riding a bike: "*the more you do it the easier it becomes*" (Student D23). Our findings partly align with Inbar-Laurie and Donitsa-Smith (2020), who found that students expect to improve or learn some English in EMI. However, our participants expressed a variety of aspirations beyond linguistic improvement.

These findings also complement previous studies reporting on students' linguistic hurdles, which accounts for their acknowledgement of EAP courses that help them surpass these difficulties (Costa & Mastellotto, 2022; Galloway & Ruegg, 2020; Rose et al., 2020). They further corroborate that when students receive linguistic corrective feedback, it tends to be unsystematic. Interestingly, the study also reveals that the reason why students did not expect feedback from their teacher (around 33%) was mostly due to the compulsory nature of the EMI course. Students assume that courses that are compulsory in the curriculum have been prioritized by their institutions and discipline experts, so content learning, even through English, is the main goal.. The responses indicate that students' expectations around feedback are shaped by the perceived goals of the course.

Another key finding concerns student satisfaction and skills learned. Positive comments often mentioned clear explanations and accessible instructors, while students experiencing difficulty with English highlighted translation fatigue or slower comprehension. These responses suggest that while EMI is largely well-received, its success is closely tied to students' linguistic confidence and perceived instructional clarity. On the whole, these findings may help program and

course coordinators make more informed decisions when choosing the courses and the lecturer profile that are more appropriate for EMI.

Concerning the applicability of skills acquired, the participants in this study also link EMI to long-term professional-orientated expectations and express confidence in the transferability of acquired skills, either as academic transfer or as a bridge to academic internationalization. In contrast to Inbar-Laurie and Donitsa-Smith (2020), who found that students self-reported little to no language improvement, our findings point to perceived improvement in specialized vocabulary. Students in our study come from a discipline where English is fundamental for long-term professional and academic success, hinting at their high extrinsic motivation. It has to be acknowledged, though, that while some students may have answered that they expected to improve their English proficiency (q37), their expectations seem to largely fall under learning specialized vocabulary in English and practicing English through an increased exposure to the language (q38). This further points to their pragmatic expectations about the gains of EMI, distinguishing the EMI course's goals from those of specialized EAP courses. They see EMI as valuable, promoting their professional advancement and employability.

Finally, two general comments need to be made. First, EMI seems to have the potential to reinforce or reshape students' attitudes toward English, especially when supported by clear instruction, relevant content, and professional applicability. The study reveals the importance of having flexible, learner-centered, and context-specific EMI implementation in tertiary education. Second, beyond highlighting students' resourcefulness, the breadth of advice they offered — ranging from linguistic preparation to emotional resilience (q49) — reveals the different needs and

coping resources students use to satisfy their needs. This calls for further research to gain deeper insight into how EMI teachers can offer meaningful guidance and scaffolding to their students.

Among the limitations of the study are the small number of participants and the fact that they were self-selected. Although findings cannot be generalized to other disciplines and countries, they make a valuable contribution to the field of EMI in Israel post-reform as this study is one of the first to provide contextualized insight into the expectations and experiences of BSc engineering students enrolled in EMI courses at an Israeli institution.

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