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Macro-level language policy and planning to promote and maintain English-taught programmes in Turkish higher education: a Process Tracing perspective

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how higher education governance and macro-level (governmental) language policy and planning (LPP) impact (a) the growth and (b) sustainability of English-medium instruction (EMI) programmes in the Turkish higher education context, an Expanding Circle country (Kachru, 1985). We examine higher education policy documents and regulations and interview elite participants (N = 20), i.e. higher education administrative and governance staff who play significant roles in the decision-making processes of the universities. We make innovative use of a Process Tracing methodology to provide a broader perspective on the growth of EMI. We also examine the impact of macro-level LPP on the regulation and sustainability of EMI programmes. Regarding the growth of EMI programmes in Türkiye, we identify three significant milestones, namely the foundation of the Council of Higher Education, massification, and privatisation. While sustaining the quality and quantity of EMI programmes, higher education actors also implement some language policies. By employing Process Tracing, this study goes beyond simply identifying the relationship between policies and their impact: it sheds light on the causal mechanisms at play, revealing how adopting a 'steering at a distance' approach can have unintended consequences that fuel the growth of EMI programmes.

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Language policy and planning; EMI; macro-level policy planning; higher education governance; process tracing; Türkiye

Introduction

Most of the more recent reviews of English-medium instruction (EMI) highlight the rise in the number of EMI programmes in various higher education settings (e.g. Galloway & Ruegg, 2020; Lei & Hu, 2022; Sandström & Neghina, 2017). Türkiye's higher education landscape, the subject of this research, has seen a striking surge in EMI programmes, particularly at the tertiary level. This trend began notably in the early 2000s (West et al., 2015). Recent studies examining EMI in Turkish higher education indicate an

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exponential rise, with the number of such programmes quadrupling over the past two decades (Yuksel et al., 2022).

The rise in EMI programmes has been attributed to the internationalisation and globalisation of higher education (Galloway et al., 2020). Other reasons that are commonly discussed in the literature include increasing the number of local and international students (Corrigan, 2014; Dafouz, 2018; Doiz et al., 2012), boosting the prestige of educational institutions (Hu, 2019), and getting a better spot in university rankings (Hultgren, 2014). Top-down EMI policy initiatives in many contexts aim to utilise EMI as a pedagogical approach and benefit from it in developing English proficiency (Galloway et al., 2017). However, little research to date has sought to understand how EMI might be brought about by macro-level factors, here defined as supra-institutional policies and actors, such as government agencies. This study investigated two main issues. First, it explored the reasons behind the rise of EMI programmes in Turkish universities via a Process Tracing method to understand the causal factors (also see Yuksel et al., 2024). Second, it examined the language policies set by higher education authorities to manage and control the growth of EMI programmes.

Previous research that examined the relationship between government policies and the growth of EMI shed light on this phenomenon, notably in the Japanese context (Bradford, 2020; Curle et al., 2023; Mulvey, 2017). For example, Bradford (2020) reviewed the government policies that promoted EMI growth and provided insights into how macro-level language policy might have impacted the rise of EMI programmes. Specifically, they argued that 100,000 and 300,000 International Students Plans, initiated in 1983 and 2008, respectively, might be credited with driving Japan's current wave of EMI, as both of these governmental plans aimed to increase the number of international students in Japanese higher education. Mulvey (2017) further argued that the EMI policy began to take shape in 2003 with the Japanese Ministry of Education's action plan to increase the number of Japanese students who can use English.

When compared with the recent research that discussed the growth of EMI programmes within the context of government policies, our transdisciplinary approach responds to recent calls for greater interdisciplinarity within language policy and planning (LPP) in order to integrate the governance of language more firmly into wider policy processes (Gazzola et al., 2023). Specifically, we do this by borrowing and adapting the methodology of Process Tracing from political science to shed light on the causal mechanisms that may lead to English in the interaction between the state and the institution. Further, from public administration, we benefit from a *steering at a distance* theoretical framework, discussed below. The initial results of our interdisciplinary ELEMENTAL (English as the Language-of-Education Mechanisms in Europe: New Transdisciplinary Approaches in Linguistics) project reveal that certain higher education governance reforms, specifically those implementing steering at a distance might be one of the factors that led to the rise of EMI at the macro-level (Hultgren et al., 2023; Nao et al., 2023; Wingrove et al. (under review); Yuksel et al., 2024; Zuaro et al., 2024). To better understand LPP and language-in-education policies, we argue for the need to acknowledge that LPP is a responsibility of governments and relevant bodies across all areas of public policy (Gazzola et al., 2023) and that language-in-education policies are imposed by central authorities such as government agencies and education boards (Liddicoat, 2013; Shohamy, 2006). Therefore, how governments and relevant bodies act

becomes an important question in the understanding of EMI policies. In this paper, we highlight some of the political processes that may cause EMI to grow and be maintained in the case of Turkish higher education. To this end, the use of Process Tracing has been instrumental in allowing us to uncover the causes of the rise in the number of EMI programmes in the Turkish higher education setting.

A brief history of EMI in Türkiye

Türkiye stands out among monolingual countries without a colonial past for being an early adopter of EMI in higher education (Selvi, 2014). The roots of EMI programmes can be traced back to the establishment of the Middle East Technical University in Ankara in the 1950s (Kirkgoz et al., 2023). Even though EMI has been adopted for a long time, Türkiye's long-standing debate on the implementation, effectiveness, efficiency, and success of EMI programmes has never ceased (Aslan, 2018; Selvi, 2022).

In the last four decades, while some other G20 countries made efforts to enhance quality over quantity, Türkiye has witnessed a significant expansion of universities (Ozoglu et al., 2016; West et al., 2015). This trend has been accompanied by a surge in EMI programmes (West et al., 2015; Yuksel et al., 2022). Several external factors, including Türkiye's adherence to the Bologna Process and the globalised economy's economic affordability, might have contributed to the expansion of EMI in Türkiye (Arik & Arik, 2018; Karakas, 2018; Kirkgoz, 2019). Additionally, since the early years, EMI universities have traditionally been more popular among students and parents due to the perceived benefits of attending such institutions (Basibek et al., 2014; Sahan & Şahan, 2024), such as increased job prospects (Altay & Yuksel, 2021) and improved social status (Kirkgoz, 2014), and supporting language development (Yuksel et al., 2023). Recent research has also shown that industry stakeholders preferred EMI graduates in job recruitment (Yuksel & Altay, 2024). When all these arguments are considered together, it might be no surprise to see favourable perceptions of EMI programmes from various stakeholders. However, any relationship between macro-level language planning and EMI has not been explored thoroughly in the Turkish EMI setting, even though there has been a recent interest in this issue (e.g. Karakas & Jenkins, 2022; Sahan, 2024).

Macro-level language policy and planning

Language policy and planning functions at three intersecting levels within any society: macro, meso and micro (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997). Macro-level policy planning is operated by governments, government-appointed agencies, and supra-national bodies such as the European Union and OECD (Vidovich & Slee, 2001). Meso-level LPP is carried out by higher education institutions (HEIs), and the micro-level entails the actions and enactments of individuals (Fenton-Smith & Gurney, 2016; Liddicoat, 2014; Zhao & Baldauf, 2012). Most scholarly work on LPP has focused on macro-level issues (Liddicoat, 2020). The role of government in macro-level language policy fluctuates based on a nation's political structure (Liddicoat, 2005). In centralised countries like France, Japan, and Türkiye, the national government, alongside any delegated agencies, such as the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) in the Turkish setting, is usually in charge. In federal systems like the U.S. and Belgium, where certain responsibilities fall

to regional units (states, provinces), regional entities also play a macro-level role (Weinberg, 2021) in addition to the federal government entities.

While macro-level language policies often manifest in concrete documents like constitutions, laws, and policy papers, they can also exist implicitly, embedded within a society's ideologies and cultural assumptions (Schiffman, 1996). This broader perspective acknowledges that language policy extends beyond explicit statements and encompasses decisions influencing language use at all societal levels (Shohamy, 2006). EMI policies in many contexts fall within this covert category, as Galloway (2023) points out that they are often left unarticulated in policy documents or curriculum guidelines. However, the case of Türkiye, which will be discussed in the next section, might be an outlier, as some explicit macro-level language policy initiatives are expressed in the policy documents and regulations.

Macro-level policy planning in Türkiye

Some of the previous research has examined the EMI LPP in the Turkish higher education context (Karakas, 2018; Karakas & Jenkins, 2022; McKinley et al., 2024; Sahan, 2021), exploring the interplay between various stakeholders that shape EMI policies at institutional (e.g. rectors and university senates) and national (e.g. CoHE, Inter-University Council and Turkish Higher Education Quality Council) levels. According to Sahan (2024), three key actors play significant roles in LPP in the Turkish higher education context when EMI is considered, given that micro-level actors such as teachers and students have limited influence on the decision-making processes that shape EMI programme implementation (Sahan, 2024). They are university senates and rectorates at the meso (i.e. institutional) level and the CoHE at the macro-level. Key decisions concerning EMI policy are made by these three actors, including the decision to open an EMI programme (at the meso-level), the number of students who will be allocated to the programme (at the meso – and macro-levels), assessment processes (at the meso – and macro-levels), determination of the required English proficiency level of the students to enter EMI programmes (at the meso-level), determination of the English proficiency level of the teachers to teach in EMI programmes (at the macro-level), and sustaining the quality of the programme (at the meso – and macro-levels), among others (Sahan, 2024). For the most part, other stakeholders at the micro-level, such as teachers, follow or enact the regulations set by CoHE and the university administrators.

Even though meso-level policy planning has some administrative power, mostly about institutional or classroom-level decisions, Sahan (2024) emphasises the impact of macro-level planning in the Turkish higher education context by arguing that one should acknowledge 'there is a formal, top-down policymaking process concerning university regulations' (Sahan, 2024, p. X) in terms of EMI. As discussed previously, CoHE's constitutionally supported main duties, such as planning, regulating, administering and supervising higher education in teaching, education and scientific research, make it a powerful macro-level actor. This leads to criticism because CoHE 'dominates the whole academic system, ensuring uniformity and creating barriers against diversity and flexibility, which are both essential characteristics of world-class universities' (Tezcan-Unal & Schmitt, 2022, p. 54). CoHE, as a sole authority (Cetin & Sarpkaya, 2022), dominates LPP at the macro-level.

Steering at a distance

Our research on the growing prevalence of English in European higher education suggests that the rise in the number of EMI programmes stems from the adoption of a steering at a distance approach to higher education governance (Hultgren et al., 2023; Hultgren & Wilkinson, 2022; Yuksel et al., 2024). Steering at a distance represents a paradigm shift in the governance of HEIs, eschewing traditional command-and-control mechanisms (legislation, prohibitions, regulations) in favour of increased institutional autonomy and self-responsibility (Kickert, 1995). It entails increased autonomy for HEIs on one side and strengthened accountability mechanisms on the other (Fried, 2006; Kickert, 1995). This shift in higher education governance, observed in various European countries since the 1980s (Hultgren & Wilkinson, 2022) and arguably in Türkiye as well (Yuksel et al., 2024), includes the distribution of the centralised control towards institutions and agencies (Cole, 2006; Kickert, 1995). The steering at a distance approach to higher education governance may have contributed to the widespread adoption of English as the primary language of instruction in European HEIs (Hultgren et al., 2023). This shift was driven by the increased competitiveness and aggressiveness among HEIs as they sought to attract more students and enhance their global reputation. While the precise factors and processes involved in this complex phenomenon remain elusive, we aim to shed light on these multifaceted aspects by employing Process Tracing, a methodological approach that helps us make inferences about the growth of EMI programmes in the Turkish context.

Utilising Process Tracing as a methodological tool and steering at a distance as the theoretical framework, our study aimed to find answers to the following research questions:

1. What macro-level LPP factors (i.e. supra-institutional policies) facilitated the growth of EMI programmes in Türkiye?
2. What role have macro-level LPP initiatives played in maintaining the quantity and quality standards of EMI programs?

Methodology

The background

This study is part of a large interdisciplinary project, ELEMENTAL, which employs a fresh, transdisciplinary perspective to situate the rise of EMI in European higher education within the context of steering at a distance reforms and frameworks that grant HEIs increased autonomy while simultaneously implementing stringent accountability measures, such as key performance indicators, performance-related funding, and strategic plans aligned with development contracts (Bleiklie, 2020). To gain a broader understanding of the EMI phenomenon, the study employs Process Tracing in the field of applied linguistics in a novel way, which is already commonly used in political science. This approach sheds light on the factors that have (a) driven the rise in EMI programmes in Türkiye and (b) led to the implementation of policies that have regulated, monitored, and sustained the development of EMI programmes.

Process tracing

Process Tracing, a qualitative case-based research method, meticulously dissects the underlying processes that lead to a particular outcome. Beach and Pedersen (2019) aptly describe it as a technique for ‘tracing causal mechanisms by conducting detailed within-case empirical analyses of how such mechanisms operate in real-world scenarios’ (p. 1). Process Tracing provides a robust means to decipher potential causal relationships by precisely examining the evidence that connects causal processes. Its primary strength lies in its ability to elucidate causal mechanisms, making it an invaluable tool for explanatory analysis (Pickering, 2022). While originating in cognitive and behavioural sciences, Process Tracing has found its most robust application in political science (Thomas et al., 2024), where it is employed to understand the relationship between political decisions and their subsequent outcomes, typically at a macro-level (e.g. Beach, 2016; Smeets & Beach, 2023). Within political science, researchers utilise Process Tracing to delve into causal relationships and draw causal inferences specifically within a single case. This single case can be broadly defined as a hypothesised causal mechanism that links potential causes (or a combination of causes) to a known outcome (or set of outcomes) (Beach, 2020). This method has proven valuable in political science for understanding the pathway between a political decision and its resulting outcome, typically at the macro-level (e.g. Smeets & Beach, 2023). A core strength of Process Tracing lies in its ability to delve into the complexities of real-world processes, offering insights into how and why events unfold as they do (Thomas et al., 2024). While primarily focused on within-case analysis, the method can also contribute to cross-case comparisons when combined with other research techniques (Beach, 2020).

This study adopts Process Tracing to explore the causal factors influencing the growth of EMI programmes in Türkiye. By examining language policies and planning actions within the higher education sector, we aim to uncover the mechanisms driving this expansion. Our approach is informed by the established practices of Process Tracing in political science, adapting the methodology to the specific context of language policy and higher education in the Turkish higher education context. We utilise it as a tool to investigate the mechanisms between the rise in the number of EMI programmes (the outcome) and LPP actions (or lack thereof) of the stakeholders in higher education governance.

Data sources and participants

This study used document analysis and semi-structured interviews (N = 20) as primary data generation and analysis methods sources. We analysed higher education policy documents such as laws, regulations, UNESCO, and state planning agency reports to unravel (a) the mechanisms behind the rise in the number of EMI programmes in Türkiye and (b) macro-level LPP initiatives that regulated and sustained the quality and quantity of EMI programmes. We also conducted interviews with ‘elite participants’ with the assumption that the agency of these individuals can bring about transformative change in higher education settings (Bergh et al., 2016; Solarino & Aguinis, 2021), and they can hold unique insights into how changes were brought about and why (Fitch, 2015). Interview questions were prepared based on the aim of the research and tailored

according to the profile of the interviewees. (Please see the Appendix for the initial list of the questions.)

We have operationalised elite participants as influential individuals who participate in crucial decision-making processes that shape policy and impact the lives of others. (Dexter, 2006; Hultgren & Wilkinson, 2022). Elite participants have been an integral part of some other previous research in the field of political science that utilised Process Tracing (e.g. Dietrich et al., 2021; Kraus et al., 2023). In our study, elite participants were macro – and meso-level key actors that had an impact on the policies and practices of EMI. Our elite informants included members and presidents of higher education governance bodies, university rectors and vice-rectors, faculty deans, heads of departments, and programme leaders, among others. However, we acknowledge that each of our participants had a varying degree of impact on the transformation of higher education at the institutional or inter-institutional levels. Our participants either participated in higher education governance bodies or held administrative positions in EMI universities and/or programmes. In the selection process of the elite participants, we benefitted from an analysis of previous documents and identified key figures that might have played some role in the growth and sustainability of the EMI programmes. After identifying the key figures (i.e. elite stakeholders), we contacted them via email and invited them to participate in our study. Those who agreed to participate were also asked to provide some further suggestions for the participant pool as a final question of the interviews. After careful consideration of these suggested names, we invited those we believed played a significant role in the development of EMI policies in Türkiye. We cross-checked the suitability of our participants, based on the analysis of the documents and judgments of the other stakeholders and researchers, to enhance the reliability of our findings. In terms of the actors and the nature of their power in LPP, Baldauf and colleagues identify four broad categories: actors who possess power, those with expertise, those with influence, and those with interest (Chua & Baldauf, 2011; Zhao, 2011; Zhao & Baldauf, 2012). Our elite participants were mostly those with power and authority to implement macro-level policies, such as top-level higher education administrators.

Data collection and analysis processes

The research started with the analysis of the previous work and documents on higher education governance in Türkiye. By utilising Process Tracing, the analyses were carried out iteratively. The documents of analysis included laws (e.g. Higher Education Law of 1981; Higher Education Law of 2003, vetoed by the president of Turkish Republic in 2004), regulations published in the Turkish Official Gazette (between 1984 and 2021), books (e.g. Dogramaci, 2007; Mizikaci, 2006), policy reports (e.g. Çetinsaya, 2014; Guruz et al., 1994; State Planning Agency, 2000; 2007; World Bank, 2007), memoirs of various stakeholders (e.g. Bermek, 2014; Erguder, 2015; Guruz, 2015; Kuran, 2002), and scholarly works on Turkish higher education (e.g. Dogramaci, 1992; Gur, 2016; Keskiner & Gur, 2023; Senses, 2007), among others. We highly benefitted from these documents, which allowed us to build a framework of the LPP actions and contextualise the changes and developments in the policies. However, in our analysis, we focused on the laws on higher education and regulations published in the Turkish Official Gazette to trace the

growth and sustainability of the EMI programmes in Turkish higher education. To this end, we traced all laws and regulations published in the Turkish Official Gazette and analysed the ones that specifically focused on the medium of instruction policies. Our analyses suggest that certain stakeholders might have impacted the growth and sustainability of EMI programmes. Specifically, macro – and meso-level key actors became the group of focus as they were the significant playmakers in Turkish higher education. Macro-level participants in our study were recruited from the former members of the CoHE. Based on the data collected prior to the study (Yuksel et al., 2022), which examined the growth of EMI programmes according to the HEIs and EMI programmes, meso-level stakeholders were identified. To this end, we contacted administrators from traditional EMI universities, recently founded public universities and non-profit private universities. Invitation emails were sent to the administrators of the universities which demonstrated a boost in the EMI programmes between 1999 and 2019 according to the data from Yuksel et al. (2022). Our analyses also focused on how English as a medium of instruction was perceived in institutional mission statements, internationalisation strategies, ranking aspirations, and recruitment practices of our elite participants, and whether these perceptions were intertwined with government directives and incentives.

Findings

The growth of EMI in Turkiye

The analysis of the policy documents, regulations, and laws revealed that it was difficult to discuss a structured and unified EMI policy in Turkiye that would lead to an increase in the number of EMI programmes (Hultgren et al., 2023; Yuksel et al., 2024). The lack of a governing policy was also repeatedly acknowledged in the interviews with elite participants. For example, one of the former high-level administrators of CoHE (Participant 18) stated, *‘We did not think carefully about the presence or absence of English in the higher education. That was never an issue for us’*. Instead, when a problem was reported to the council and/or identified in the regular monitoring of the HEIs, he continued, *‘We took precautions to prevent the happening again. Follow each and every modification in the regulations about teaching in English in higher education; there is a problem encountered prior to it, and the modification serves to address that issue.’*

Quite interestingly, the analysis of our interviews with elite participants who played significant roles in the increase of EMI programmes revealed that 12 (out of 20) stated they were in favour of EMI. On the other hand, eight interviewees expressed concerns about using English to teach a subject in higher education and stated they were against EMI in higher education. This finding implies that those who actually did not support the use of English in higher education might have contributed to the growth and sustainability of EMI programmes in Turkiye because they played significant roles, both at the institutional and higher education governance levels, in opening and increasing the available quota in EMI programmes. In fact, one of the former rectors who was against EMI and who worked diligently to offer alternatives to EMI (Participant 4) opened at least six new EMI programmes during his eight years in office.

An important question emerges from the discussion so far: if the growth of EMI was not planned and/or anticipated, then how did it emerge in the Turkish higher education context? Our analysis of the policy documents and interviews with the elite participants revealed that the implementation of a ‘steering at a distance’ approach to governing the Turkish higher education sector may have contributed to the rise of EMI programmes in Türkiye through three key episodes: 1) the establishment of the CoHE in 1981, 2) the rapid expansion of higher education (massification) at two-time intervals, one starting in 1992 and the other in 2006, and 3) the introduction of market-based principles to privatise the higher education sector in 1992. We argue that the last two factors are intertwined, and the precise causal order between them is difficult to determine.

A pivotal step in the Turkish higher education landscape was the establishment of the CoHE in 1981 through Law No. 2547. This marked the introduction of steering at a distance, a governance approach that shifts control from the central government to other intermediaries (Hultgren et al., 2023). CoHE was initially founded as an intermediary institution between Turkish HEIs and the government and was inspired by U.S. state governing boards (Dogramaci, 1992; 2007). Since its foundation, CoHE has been active in ‘planning, regulating, administering, and supervising the education provided by HEIs, to orient the activities of teaching, education and scientific research, to ensure the establishment and development of these institutions in correspondence with the objectives and principles set forth by law, to ensure the effective use of resources allocated to the universities, and to plan the training of the teaching staff’ (Law 2547, Art.131).

The second milestone in the Turkish higher education landscape was the rapid expansion of higher education, known as massification. This was observed both in public universities opened directly by the governments and in non-profit private universities, which were opened and operated by the foundations to satisfy the increasing demand towards higher education in Türkiye (Keskiner & Gur, 2023). Massification was a key aim of the CoHE, as outlined by its first president, Ihsan Dogramaci, who envisioned ‘increasing the number of institutions of higher education for the purpose of offering greater educational opportunities to younger generations’ (1992, p. 1). This expansion was particularly evident after 1992, as enrolment rates soared from 5.9% in 1981–13.8% in 2005, which includes an increase of 233% (Guruz et al., 1994). (However, we should also acknowledge that the population of Türkiye underwent a 53% increase during the same time period.) This growth was accompanied by a significant increase in the number of universities, from 27 in 1983–113 in 2005, highlighting the rapid pace of massification in Turkish higher education. The year 2006 marked a significant expansion of higher education in Türkiye, with the government opening 16 new universities, including 15 public and one non-profit private, followed by 22 new universities in 2007 (17 public and five non-profit private) and 17 new universities in 2008 (9 public and 8 non-profit private). This resulted in a 105% increase in the number of universities from 53 to 108 between 2006 and 2008. Naturally, the increase in the number of universities led to a surge in higher education enrolment, from about 2 million students in 2004–5.5 million in 2013. This higher education expansion can be attributed to the government’s massification strategy, particularly notable since no new public universities were established between 1994 and 2006, while 21 new non-profit private universities opened during that period. Türkiye’s higher education massification policy continues, with

205 universities as of April 2023, representing a 90% increase in the last 15 years. The 2006 massification campaign aimed to establish at least one university in each Turkish city, particularly in less developed provinces (Gur, 2016). In the subsequent section, we will examine how steering at a distance, massification, and privatisation, albeit perhaps inadvertently, contributed to the rise of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in Türkiye. To achieve this goal, we will employ Process Tracing methods.

Another significant milestone in the Turkish higher education landscape is the privatisation of the sector, which began in 1992 with the enactment of the Higher Education Law No. 3785. This legislation paved the way for establishing non-profit private universities in Türkiye, marking a departure from the previously state-dominated higher education system. By 1999, the number of non-profit private universities had grown from one to 20 (as of December 2023, there are 79 foundation HEIs in Türkiye). The government offered various incentives to encourage the formation of this private higher education sector, including state subsidies, tax deductions, and land grants (Senses, 2007). Unlike public universities, which are often bogged down by bureaucracy, non-profit private universities are governed by independent boards of trustees, granting them greater autonomy in financial and administrative matters. Among other factors, such as their small size, their autonomy might have played a pivotal role in expanding higher education enrolment, as they are more flexible in adapting to market demands.

To analyse the impact of these neoliberal policies, utilising the Process Tracing approach, we constructed the following causal mechanisms to demonstrate the growth in the number of EMI programmes in Turkish HEIs (Figure 1; Yuksel et al., 2024). The causal condition has been identified as the foundation of CoHE as a buffer organisation to enable steering at a distance. Later, the neoliberal policies of increasing the number of HEIs (i.e. massification) and allowing the opening of non-profit private universities (i.e. privatisation) were initiated by CoHE and governments. These two policies significantly increased the number of universities and programmes. When the number of universities and programmes increased, because both new Turkish medium and English medium programmes opened in many public and private universities, as an inevitable outcome, EMI programmes also grew. However, from the interviews with elite participants, it appears this increase had never been planned or desired; it was much rather a by-product of the privatisation and massification attempts of Turkish higher education. The number of recently founded private and public universities and thousands of newly opened Turkish medium and English medium programmes are the supporting signs of this phenomenon.

Sustaining the quality and quantity of EMI programmes in Türkiye

Even though EMI has often been contextualised as a pedagogical approach aiming to develop the students' English proficiency and content knowledge, most of the policies and curriculum guidelines do not explicitly state it in many contexts around the world (Galloway, 2023). Kaplan and Baldauf (2003) suggest that language-in-education policy goals entail identifying 'criteria for those processes in the educational system that determine what languages will be taught to whom, for what latency, in what manner, using what material as well as how success will be assessed' (p. 217). Our review of macro-level LPP documents in Türkiye revealed that most of these criteria

Causal condition	Part 1	Part 2	Outcome
A mediatory body was needed to regulate HEIs	Massification of higher education	Privatisation of higher education	The rise of EMI in Turkish universities
A steering at a distance tool (i.e., intermediary governance council) was established as a buffer tool between the government and HEIs.	Many public and private universities opened.	Both CoHE and governments followed a privatisation strategy in higher education with the aim of massifying higher education and increasing the higher education enrolment ratio. Foundation universities mostly opened EMI programmes in some popular subjects (for example, in engineering and health-related subjects but not in agriculture).	A four-fold increase in the number of EMI programmes has been observed.

Figure 1. The simplified causal mechanism for the rise of English in Turkish universities (modified version of the process from Yuksel et al., 2024).

were explicitly stated. For example, according to the 1984 regulation, the purpose of teaching in a foreign language (i.e. EMI) at the higher education level was initially determined as ‘equipping students with the power and skills to spectate broadcasts, to contribute to international meetings and discussions in the intended foreign language with the help of scientific and technological advancements’ (Turkish Official Gazette, 1984, p. 4). These aims might appear to be quite ambitious. They were later revised in 2016, with the following aim: ‘enabling the students to gain foreign language proficiencies related to their fields’ (Turkish Official Gazette, 2016, Article 5(1)), which might appear to be vague as specific foreign language proficiencies are not explicitly identified. The previous aim mentioned in the 2008 regulation included more specific aims in terms of specific language skills: foreign language medium of instruction (MoI) aims to improve the mental lexicon, enabling students to comprehend what they read or hear and express

themselves both via writing and speaking in a foreign language (Turkish Official Gazette, 2008). One can also notice a positive change from general English skills in 2008 to discipline-based language proficiency in 2016.

One of the former rectors of an EMI university (Participant 4) discussed this initial aim with the metaphor of ‘killing two birds with one stone’, which is now quite popular in EMI literature (Macaro, 2015). He also highlighted that EMI was not the only option in the higher education setting, citing extra resources such as online courses, use of language learning applications, and additional elective courses, that can help students develop their language proficiency without studying their subjects in English, which he had tested in the university where he worked previously. The former rector stated that EMI was not bringing the desired ‘language proficiency development’, and he tried to provide other opportunities to his students which might support their language learning process.

Our review of policy documents revealed that 1984 was an important milestone in implementing EMI. This is mostly because the first official regulation concerning foreign language medium of instruction programmes was established in 1984 (Turkish Official Gazette, 1984). According to Kirkgoz (2009), this regulation ‘marks the beginning of the macro policy regulations on the teaching of English at the level of higher education’ (p. 671). This regulation is important because even though foreign language higher education MoI programmes opened in 1956 (when Middle East Technical University was founded), there had been no implication of LPP when the documents and regulations were reviewed. The 1984 regulation also identified the criteria to open a foreign language MoI programme at the associate or bachelor’s degree levels, namely, having lecturers who can teach a subject in that language and the necessary teaching materials necessary to teach in the foreign language (Turkish Official Gazette, 1984, p. 4, original in Turkish translated by authors). However, as some later research has demonstrated, in practice, EMI programmes in Türkiye suffered from the lack of adequate proficiency of teachers (and also students) and required teaching materials (West et al., 2015)

With these two basic (and somewhat vague) criteria, universities were given some guidelines to open foreign language MoI programmes. The 1984 regulation included national standards to study in a foreign language MoI by specifying the success threshold and content of the tests to be used as well as course contents of the Preparatory Schools. Another significant event of 1984 was the foundation of the first non-profit private university of Türkiye, Bilkent University in Ankara, even though non-profit foundation universities would not be allowed to operate legally until 1992.

Since 1984, policies about teaching a foreign language in higher education have been substantially updated four times (in 1994, 1996, 2008, and 2016). There have been many small modifications in between and after these regulations as well. As a natural outcome of the revision, each updated version of the regulation had several common and distinct features regarding objectives, prerequisites to establish a foreign language MoI programme, and requirements to study one of these programmes. We have reviewed these macro-level LPP documents in Table 1 by emphasising the content of the new regulation (i.e. action), its focus (i.e. either on the quality of EMI programmes or quantity), and its perceived impact on the regulation and sustainability of EMI programmes.

As seen in Table 1, CoHE took different initiatives in different years to regulate both the quality and quantity of EMI programmes. When the impact of these initiatives was

Table 1. The review of macro-level LPP actions (based on the regulations published in the Turkish Official Gazette) and their focus and impact.

Year	Action	Focus	Impact	Source
1984	Determining the criteria for teachers, course materials, and goal of teaching in a MoI	quality of EMI programmes	Positive	Turkish Official Gazette, 1984
1994	Limiting the opening of new EMI programmes to 'elite' universities	quantity of EMI programmes	Negative	Turkish Official Gazette, 1994
1994	Allowing graduate programmes to be taught in English	quantity of EMI programmes	Positive	Turkish Official Gazette, 1994
1996	Allowing partial (multilingual) EMI programmes	quantity of EMI programmes	Positive	Turkish Official Gazette, 1996
2008	Updating the aim of foreign language MoI (EMI aims to improve all language skills).	quality of EMI programmes	Positive	Turkish Official Gazette, 2008
2016	Updating the aim of foreign language MoI (EMI aims to improve foreign language proficiencies related to students' fields)	quality of EMI programmes	Positive	Turkish Official Gazette, 2016
2021	Increasing the language proficiency threshold for teachers from 80 to 85	quality of EMI programmes	Negative	Turkish Official Gazette, 2021

examined, we noticed that some of the actions were to slow down (e.g. 2021 regulation) or limit (e.g. 1994 regulation) the growth of EMI programmes by adding up extra criteria to open and sustain EMI programmes, including giving the permission to open new EMI programmes to only 'elite' universities and increasing the language proficiency threshold for teachers from 80 to 85 (out of 100). On the other hand, some other initiatives, such as allowing graduate programmes to be taught in English and giving permission to the opening of partial (multilingual) EMI programmes, had a positive impact on the rise of EMI programmes in Türkiye. Partial (or multilingual) EMI, in general, refers to a form of EMI practice that entails the use of bilingual communication (in first language MoI and English) at varying degrees and phases of the courses (e.g. assessment, instruction) (Chou, 2018). In the Turkish context, CoHE regulations provide a more structured framework and definition of a partial EMI programme, where a minimum of 30% of the courses are offered in foreign language MoI and the rest in the first language of the students, i.e. Turkish (Curle et al., 2020). We also interpreted any action to increase the quality of EMI programmes as positive because these actions would increase the popularity of EMI programmes by boosting the satisfaction of various stakeholders.

Discussion and conclusion

Our analysis revealed that at one level, Turkish higher education governance was not directly involved in the growth of EMI because the increase in the number of EMI programmes basically appears to have been a by-product of the general massification and privatisation attempts in Turkish higher education. Our findings also led to the understanding that they have indirectly contributed to the growth of EMI programmes by massification and privatisation of Turkish higher education. At another level, higher education governance published policy documents and regulations, when needed, to regulate, control and sustain the quality and quantity of EMI programmes with various actions and initiatives (see various Official Gazettes mentioned throughout this manuscript). This finding echoes what one of the former high-level administrators of CoHE stated during the interviews:

We did not think carefully about the presence or absence of English in higher education. That was never an issue for us. However, when we became aware of a problem or encountered it [a problem] during the regular audits, we took precautions to prevent it from happening again. This might be seen in the update and modification of the regulations about teaching in English in higher education; one can assume that there is a problem encountered prior to it, and the modification serves to address that issue. (Participant 18, former administrator of CoHE)

Our aim in this paper was two-fold. First, we unravelled the causal mechanisms that led to the increase in the number of EMI programmes in Turkish universities via a Process Tracing methodology. The steering at a distance policy of Turkish governments through allocating power to the government-supported organisations (i.e. CoHE), together with massification and privatisation attempts (e.g. Onal, 2012; Yilmaz, 2023), might have caused the exponential growth in EMI programmes in Türkiye that has been commonly discussed in previous literature (West et al., 2015; Yuksel et al., 2022). In this manuscript, we argue that the growth in the number of EMI programmes was unintentional and unplanned at the macro-level, especially among the stakeholders that we interviewed who played significant roles in higher education governance.

Our second aim was to identify the macro-level language policy actions and initiatives that higher education governance took to regulate, control, and sustain EMI programmes. Our findings revealed that CoHE and governments took various precautions and implemented policies to sustain the quality of the EMI programmes and regulate their quantity. The year 1984 emerges as an important milestone in the MoI regulations because this year marks the beginning of macro-level LPP of foreign language MoI programmes in Türkiye (Kirkgoz, 2009), even though EMI programmes had started some thirty years ago. The 1984 regulation included some specific criteria about opening a foreign language MoI programme at the associate or bachelor's degree levels and adopting national standards to study in a foreign language MoI by specifying the success threshold and content of the tests to be used as well as course contents of the Preparatory Schools. These policy documents support our second argument: higher education governance, directly and indirectly, took action when they wanted to control and maintain the quality of the EMI programmes. This was also mentioned by one of the top higher education administrators during the interviews (Participant 18).

Another important milestone in macro-level language planning was the 1994 regulation, which allowed the opening of partial (multilingual) EMI programmes. Karakas and Jenkins (2022) argue that a major increase in the number of EMI programmes was observed after this policy change. Our interviews with elite participants also confirm this phenomenon, especially among public universities, such as Istanbul Technical University, which chose the middle way (between teaching in English fully or adhering to Turkish medium instruction) in the late 1990s. Partial EMI is favoured in the literature because it provides an alternative between full EMI, which has the potential drawbacks of spreading linguistic imperialism (Pennycook, 2021; Phillipson, 1992, 2001) and increasing the linguistic challenges faced due to lack of proper language support. On the opposite side, first language MoI might potentially interrupt the communication and exchange with the international scholarly community and present extra barriers to studying at higher levels (Reagan & Schreffler, 2005).

Our findings also have some implications for policy development in Turkish higher education. Considering the unintended growth of EMI programmes, there is a need for comprehensive strategic planning for EMI in Turkish higher education. This plan or roadmap might outline clear goals, objectives, and implementation strategies, for example, strengthening quality assurance mechanisms for EMI programmes, including rigorous accreditation processes, standardised language proficiency requirements, and regular programme evaluations can be monitored by CoHE and its affiliates (i.e. Turkish Higher Education Quality Council). Based on the implications of our study, we also believe that the planning of EMI needs to be co-thought with general policy processes, such as massification and privatisation as EMI may come about as a result of these higher education policies. Moreover, investing more in teacher training and development programmes and schemes to equip faculty with the necessary pedagogical and linguistic skills for effective EMI teaching can be coordinated and regulated at the macro-level by CoHE. Supporting students via adequate language support services for those enrolled in EMI programmes, including language proficiency testing, tutoring, and academic counselling might be among other macro-level policy considerations.

We believe that utilising two major tools of data collection in this study (i.e. document analysis and interviews with elite participants) helped us observe the different dimensions of LPP in the Turkish higher education context. A single perspective, for example utilising solely document analysis would have portrayed a pleasant picture with rigorous attempts to maintain the quality and quantity of EMI programmes. Conversely, interviews with elite participants alone would have depicted a gloomy picture of LPP, demonstrating a lack of focus and interest among stakeholders. Benefitting from both of these sources of data, we believe, has helped us to demonstrate a more even-handed portrayal of LPP for EMI in the Turkish context. Furthermore, as discussed previously, most of the recent research on LPP has focused on macro-level implementations. However, the current EMI research lacks this supra-institutional macro-level angle for the most part. We argue that EMI policy literature should be more allied with LPP theories.

As we delve deeper into the burgeoning phenomenon of EMI within Turkish higher education, we must remain cognizant of the intricate web of factors at play. Attributing this growth solely to discrete policy interventions would be a reductionist fallacy. The drivers of EMI are multifaceted, encompassing not just top-down policy agendas, such as steering at a distance or other governance reforms, but also a confluence of socio-economic, cultural, and political forces. The government-level policy changes concerning international students and internationalisation are also worth considering when it comes to the growth of EMI programmes in Türkiye (Aras & Mohammed, 2019; Gokturk et al., 2018; Gur, 2016). Specifically, the role of the Turkish government scholarship programme (also known as Türkiye Bursları-Türkiye Scholarships) in developing and sustaining Türkiye's soft power among the neighbouring countries, Africa, and other dominantly Muslim-populated countries, is worth considering to understand the internationalisation attempts of the recent Turkish governments.

Our ongoing fieldwork and analytical endeavours offer an important preliminary sketch of EMI's trajectory in Türkiye. This sketch is meticulously crafted through an interdisciplinary lens, recognising the interplay of diverse spheres – educational, economic, and geopolitical – on the broader canvas of multi-level governance. Such a

multifaceted approach is crucial to illuminate the nuanced dynamics shaping EMI's rise not just in Türkiye but across numerous European higher education contexts. Moreover, we have benefitted from Process Tracing, which has enabled us to identify critical milestones and macro-level policies. We further recognise the possibility that some outside forces within the university governance structure might be acting with deliberate purpose, but this has not been evident in the areas we have directly investigated. Finally, we hope that these implications will encourage policymakers, not only in Türkiye but also in contexts where a sudden rise of EMI has been observed, to think more carefully and thoroughly about the EMI phenomenon. Developing national and supra-national frameworks to trace the *growth* and *sustainability* of EMI programmes can be a step forward.

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Data Availability Statement

The data will be available at the following URL (under Turkey section): <https://doi.org/0.21954/ou.rd.c.7215450>.

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Appendix

Semi-structured Interview Questions

1. Could you please briefly introduce yourself.
2. Could you talk about your academic and administrative duties?
3. In your opinion, as someone who has held various roles in higher education administration, what are the main driving forces of programmes that use English as the medium of instruction?
4. During your administrative duties, did some Turkish-medium instruction programmes switch to EMI? If you have observed this situation, what factors do you think were effective in the change?

5. During your administrative duties, were some newly opened departments opened as EMI programmes? If you have observed this situation, what factors do you think were effective in the change?
6. To what extent does the idea that the autonomy and independence of universities in their administrative structures (i.e. CoHE) indirectly leads to English seem reasonable to you?
7. Given your academic management experience so far, how much has EMI emerged as part of discussions and decision-making processes? To what extent were the activities followed up and implemented?
8. Especially during your period as [the main duty of the interviewee], to what extent was the opening of EMI or the use of English for research and publication purposes desirable? Do you think it was regarded as problematic by some of your colleagues in the administrative boards?
9. Especially during your period as [the main role of the interviewee], were you aware of any challenges related to EMI for faculty and students and any training or institutional resources that may need to be implemented? If so, what could these consist of? So, in your other roles (such as a faculty member teaching courses), do you think EMI offers an attractive and applicable model?
10. It has been argued that the transition to marketized, managed and performance-driven universities has pushed aside the traditional role of universities in civil leadership, advancing intellectual pursuit, and critical and creative thinking. To what extent do you agree with this claim? To what extent is this a generally accepted view or expressed concern by higher education policymakers and university administrators?
11. Do factors such as attracting international students/academics to the university, department students benefiting from exchange programmes, and students coming from exchange programmes from Europe contribute to the increasing demand for EMI?
12. Since the 1980s, a number of reforms have been made in the Turkish higher education system. What do you think were the most radical changes for universities? What do you think were the results of lowering the language requirement for associate professorship from 65 to 55? What do you think about the requirement of 85 points to be able to teach in EMI programmes?
13. Is there anything else you would like to say? Are there any other scholars we can consult on these matters? What are your recommendations on this?