

Implementing English as a Medium of Instruction in Algerian Higher Education: Facts and Challenges

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Abstract

This article explores the implementation of English as a Medium Instruction in Algerian higher education and its role in enhancing content learning and English language proficiency. EMI posits that using English as the medium of instruction can provide a robust framework for effectively delivering academic subjects. The article highlights the historical significance of integrating English across the curriculum and underscores the importance of content faculties in teaching subjects in English. This approach aims to align with global academic standards and elevate the visibility of Algerian higher education institutions internationally. The focus is on reviewing the implementation of EMI in different countries and the challenges faced after adopting such a policy. Finally, the practicalities and prerequisites of implementing EMI in Algeria are examined, considering the potential challenges and benefits.

Keywords: Content Faculty, English as a Medium of Instruction, Higher Education, implementation challenges, language across the curriculum

ملخص

تستكشف هذه المقالة تطبيق تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية المتوسطة في التعليم العالي الجزائري ودوره في تعزيز كل من تعلم المحتوى وإتقان اللغة الإنجليزية. يفترض تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية المتوسطة أن استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية كوسيلة للتعليم يمكن أن يوفر إطارا قويا لتقديم المواد الأكاديمية بشكل فعال. يسلط المقال الضوء على الأهمية التاريخية لدمج اللغة الإنجليزية في المناهج الدراسية ويؤكد على أهمية كليات المحتوى في تدريس المواد باللغة الإنجليزية. يهدف هذا النهج إلى التوافق مع المعايير الأكاديمية العالمية ورفع مستوى ظهور مؤسسات التعليم العالي الجزائرية على المستوى الدولي. ينصب التركيز على مراجعة تنفيذ تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية المتوسطة في مختلف البلدان حول العالم والتحديات التي تمت مواجهتها بعد اعتماد مثل هذه السياسة. أخيرا ، يتم فحص الجوانب العملية والمتطلبات الأساسية لتطبيق تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في الجزائر ، مع الأخذ في الاعتبار التحديات والفوائد المحتملة

الكلمات المفتاحية: كلية المحتوى، التدريس القائم على المحتوى، تدريس الإنجليزية كوسيلة تعلم، تحديات التنفيذ، اللغة عبر المنهج

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Introduction

The rationale for choosing a given language to be the medium of instruction can be very challenging due to many factors. Of course, the historical factor is often the first powerful one. However, one important factor is that aligning the curriculum with students' interests or professional aspirations tends to enhance their motivation. Another crucial aspect to consider is that the course content can provide a meaningful and relevant framework for introducing and further discussing language items throughout the course. By providing examples of their activities during their work, such as the freshman summer program where they assisted students in learning Psychology and language structures, they discovered that students needed to acquire specific language skills to effectively discuss psychology topics.

The curriculum is determined by the topic, and when discussing the adjunct model; it is commonly acknowledged that the decisions regarding what to teach and how to organize it in the syllabus are primarily influenced by the content. The content of this module offers excellent opportunities for second language acquisition. It provides learners with comprehensible input, similar to Krashen's theory, which allows them to focus on language and academic skills. Additionally, it provides opportunities for learners to negotiate the meaning of meaningful content. The exposure to high-level academic material in content allows students to develop academic skills that can be applied across different academic disciplines. This explanation succinctly outlines how content plays a crucial role in helping students attain higher levels of academic language proficiency.

Content-based Instruction (CBI) is based on the language across the curriculum movement, which holds that exposure to material is the greatest way to develop language and academic literacy skills. Brinton (2021) emphasized the importance of subject instructors across fields, in addition to language educators. Airy says that from a disciplinary discourse perspective, all university courses can be said to involve content and language-integrated learning even in monolingual settings. This is not just an issue in countries like Algeria; it is an issue, for example, in the United States. However, things become much more complex when two or more languages are involved in teaching and learning. So you find yourselves in a very complex situation, where not only do you have English and, Arabic or English and French, but you have got all three languages and issues that evolved from all of that.

This study aims to investigate the potential for implementing EMI in Algerian higher education institutions, focusing on identifying the necessary prerequisites and theoretical frameworks that can support this educational reform. Understanding the intricacies of EMI implementation is crucial for policy-makers, educators, and students. This study will provide valuable insights into the benefits and challenges of EMI, offering a comprehensive framework that can guide effective decision-making processes in Algerian higher education. By analyzing qualitative data from various international contexts, this research aims to contribute to the global discourse on EMI and highlight the specific considerations needed for its adoption in multilingual settings like Algeria. To reach this aim, the researcher set the following research objectives:

1. To examine the theoretical frameworks that support the implementation of EMI in a multilingual educational context.
2. To analyze the experiences of other countries that have implemented EMI and draw lessons applicable to the Algerian context.

To achieve these research objectives, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What theoretical frameworks support the implementation of EMI in multilingual educational settings?
2. How can the experiences of other countries inform the implementation of EMI in Algeria?

Literature Review

CBI is based on the idea of using language in all subjects to improve language and academic skills. The main focus of this process involves both the language instructor and educators from different subjects. The main idea here is to mix language and content and emphasize the importance of content faculty teaching language within their fields. According to Airey (2012), all university courses, even in monolingual settings, involve content and language-integrated learning from a disciplinary discourse perspective. Teaching and learning become more complicated when more than one language is used. English is now everyone's responsibility, not just English teachers.

The Language Across the Curriculum Movement

It is important to understand the history of the LAC movement. According to Parker (1985), the LAC movement started in London in 1966. A group of high school English teachers met to discuss how important oral communication is in teaching English. They wanted to learn more about how decisions can be used for learning. They talked about how language and thought are connected when they discussed a variety of topics. They also found that it was impossible to focus only on language classes for their study. Science teachers participated in the debate, which eventually included teachers of other subjects. Next, the discussion turned to the subjects of "language in education" and "language across the curriculum" (Barns et al., 1971, as cited in Parker, 1985, p.173).

English as a Medium of Instruction

EMI, or English as a Medium of Instruction, is a course that is commonly taught at the university level. It is taught in the student's second language by a professional in the subject matter. An L2 population and a high degree of competency are necessary for both the students and the instructor. EMI is a relatively new player in the industry, but it has rapidly gained popularity, not only in the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union but worldwide. EMI is a topic of widespread discussion, with people expressing diverse opinions on its necessity. Recent studies have further underscored the importance of EMI in higher education. For instance, research by Huang (2021) highlighted the challenges and opportunities of EMI in East Asian contexts, emphasizing the need for culturally responsive teaching strategies. Similarly, Smith (2022) explored the role of EMI in European universities, pointing out the significant impact on students' academic performance and language proficiency. Chen (2023) discussed the integration of EMI in STEM fields and its implications for non-native English speakers.

Airy (2012) said that from a disciplinary discourse perspective, all university courses can be said to involve content and language-integrated learning even in monolingual settings. This is not just an issue in countries like Algeria. It is an issue, for example, in the United States. However, things become much more complex when two or more languages are involved in

teaching and learning, and so you find yourselves in a very complex situation, where not only do you have English and, Arabic or English and French, but you have got all three languages and issues that evolved from all of that.

English as a Medium of Instruction in Algerian Higher Education

There is a shortage of accessible research regarding the present state of EMI in Algerian universities. Currently, the implementation at the University level seems to be predominantly influenced by departmental policy. The variation exists across different departments and universities.

The reason for creating the existing curriculum is unclear, as well as how the many contextual aspects were taken into account in the overall course design. Who is the instructor for ESP? Is there anyone in the content department who possesses proficient English language abilities? Who is a content teacher? Is there a language specialist associated with this? There are notable distinctions that are significant because they are influenced by both policy and contextual variables.

Therefore, we need to ask what the motivating factors are for adopting English as the primary language of instruction in specific academic fields or across other disciplines. Brinton (2021) suggested that internationalization appears to be the primary driving force behind many of Algeria's educational and policy decisions. The concept of transforming the university into a more globally oriented institution that addresses global challenges meets worldwide demands, and equips its students to become global citizens. In this context, English proficiency is considered a valuable asset for academic studies, multicultural contact outside of the institution, professional endeavors, and career growth in the worldwide community.

She further emphasized that, as a community of practice, it is essential for us to address and offer recommendations on practical aspects such as identifying faculty members in Algeria who are capable of teaching in English and assessing their language proficiency. Which specific sorts of pre and in-service training will be identified as essential for these faculty members to effectively carry out this task? Which specific model are you referring to? We have been discussing various models and acronyms extensively. Which specific models of integrated content and language; considering the plural marker, would be most suitable?

This variability might depend on the specific field of study and whether it pertains to a university or an École Normale Supérieure (ENS). What is our approach to making this decision? Once a choice has been made to proceed under this model; we need to determine how to develop EMI curricula and build the necessary materials to support student learning and staff instruction. Members should possess the required skills and knowledge to effectively deliver their courses. Furthermore, it is essential to determine the suitable assessment instruments and establish a systematic approach for making these decisions. These practical considerations are not only significant but also crucial. Without them, we may end up in a situation similar to what countries like Korea experienced when they made decisions without taking into account practical factors.

According to Belmihoub (2018), it appears that available research is scarce on the current state of EMI at Algerian universities. This research is severely deficient. While this may be perceived as a negative aspect, it can also be viewed as a positive one, since it indicates ample opportunities for study to be conducted. The implementation at the university level seems to be mostly influenced by individual departments and their policies. It appears that the implementation of EMI varies not just among different departments within a university, but

also among different universities. Some universities and subject areas choose to implement EMI, while others do not participate in this endeavour at all. The current situation is highly inconsistent.

Brinton (2021) asserted that the process by which the current curricula were developed and the extent to which the several contextual considerations particular to the Algerian environment influenced the overall course design remain ambiguous. Comprehensive research on all the previously mentioned issues is necessary to establish a more cohesive policy. If an EMI strategy is to be established for the Algerian higher education system, we must highlight the following conditions as essential. These prerequisites are only the essentials. Numerous factors must be taken into consideration while making this policy decision.

The first evident indication in Algeria is the approval of the policy by the Ministry. Another crucial aspect is obtaining the agreement of all parties involved in the decision, specifically the content area instructors who must be open to re-evaluating their teaching methods and embracing the challenge of teaching in English. Additionally, any language instructors who may be involved in this endeavour, whether through an adjunct model or an embedded EAP/ESP model; must also agree. All affected parties must reach a consensus on the objectives and rationale behind this decision.

These models are being implemented in various places in the world and different contexts, and there may be excellent reasons why to choose an adjunct model over an EMI model, or to choose to do embedded ESP/ EAP in a pre-sessional context; because the students don't have the level of proficiency that they would need to do an EMI course or an ICL course. A consensus must be reached on the most suitable model or models for integrating content and language within the given context.

The Rationale for the Choice of a Medium of Instruction

The rationale for the choice of a given language to be the medium of instruction can be very challenging due to many factors. Of course, the historical factor is often the first powerful one. However, a significant factor to consider is that aligning the curriculum with students' interests or professional aspirations tends to enhance their motivation. Another key point to consider is that the course content can provide a significant and relevant framework for introducing and discussing language concepts throughout the course. Providing examples of their activities during their work, such as the freshman summer program where they assisted students in learning Psychology and language structures. They discovered that students needed to acquire particular language skills to discuss Psychology topics effectively.

The curriculum is determined by the topic, and when discussing the adjunct model; it is commonly acknowledged that the decisions regarding what to teach and how to organize it in the syllabus are mostly influenced by the content. The content of this module offers excellent opportunities for second language acquisition. It provides learners with comprehensible input, similar to Krashen's theory, which allows them to focus on language and academic skills. Additionally, it provides opportunities for learners to negotiate the meaning of meaningful content. The exposure to high-level academic material in content allows students to develop academic skills that can be applied across different academic disciplines. This is a concise explanation of why content is highly beneficial for students in achieving higher levels of academic language competence.

EMI English holds the status of a global language or one that is often used in the region as a lingua franca. EMI English has gained significant popularity in the European Union. This is the point at which it garnered the most of its impetus. The motive behind offering these courses is generally the desire of an institution to provide its students with a more comprehensive international experience. Internationalizing universities and implementing EMI has gained popularity in almost every country. EMI has achieved significant popularity worldwide, particularly in countries like Japan, which was among the pioneering adopters outside of the European Union. Thailand has also made substantial progress in this regard, indicating a global presence of EMI (Brinton, 2021).

EMI, a subset of Content-Based Instruction (CBI), holds significant importance (see Figure One). This course primarily emphasizes content delivery, conducted in the learners' second language by a subject matter expert. EMI is most frequently implemented in higher education, especially at the university level, and is less prevalent in secondary education. Students are required to have a relatively high proficiency in their second language to participate. Notably, all course materials and assignments are presented exclusively in the second language; with no modifications to simplify the content. This approach provides an authentic learning environment, allowing students to engage deeply with the subject matter in their second language without additional accommodations.

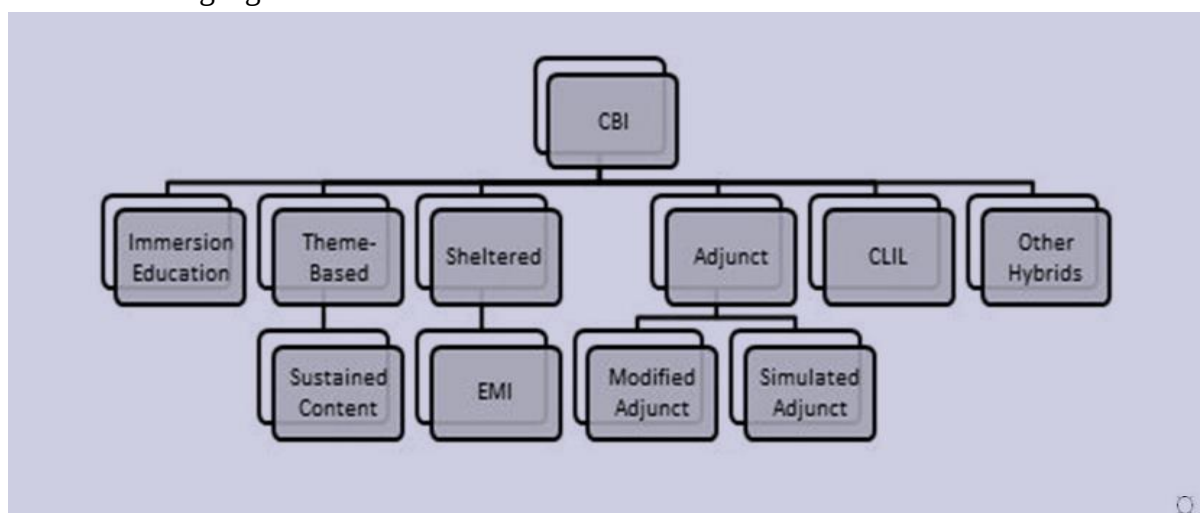


Figure 1. An updated “map” of CBI, circa 2017 (Snow & Brinton, 2017, p. 246)

It is crucial to acknowledge that some experts might disagree with the claim that the course necessarily enhances language skills. The emphasis on language improvement can vary significantly, depending on how EMI is implemented in a particular context. In some cases, there may be a strong focus on language, while in others, there may be little to no emphasis on language enhancement.

Methods and Materials

This study used a qualitative systematic review methodology to investigate the potential of implementing EMI in Algerian Higher Education. This approach enables a systematic and thorough examination of pre-existing qualitative research.

Participants

This research deals with secondary data. The primary data sources will comprise 15 peer-reviewed scholarly publications that explore the experiences and challenges of implementing EMI in higher education.

Research instruments

Relevant studies will be identified by searching electronic databases, including ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, ERIC, ResearchGate, Academia.edu, and Google Scholar. The research selection process will be guided by strict inclusion and exclusion criteria, with a specific focus on qualitative studies that examine the experiences of adopting English as a medium of instruction.

Research Procedures

The 15 randomly selected studies will undergo a thematic analysis to identify and consolidate commonalities, differences, and potential shortcomings in making informed decisions regarding language choice in higher education, as well as the challenges that may arise following implementation.

Results

Having said many good things about using EMI in Higher Education, certain initial findings, which are mostly negative, indicate that content faculty often lacked the necessary language skills to effectively teach courses in English. In Korea, the government mandated that all students graduating from a Korean higher education institution must complete five courses taught in English. Unfortunately, they did not anticipate the lack of faculty members who were capable of delivering these courses, particularly those from disciplinary backgrounds. This scenario became quite challenging. A general observation is that faculty members who taught in English often lacked awareness or understanding of the significance of language within their field. Due to their non-linguistic background, they often struggled to address language-related matters.

Previous research has been undertaken on students' and teachers' perceptions of EMI, and the interrelationship between students' and teachers' English proficiency and their performance in content learning and teaching. A recent international survey by Macaro et al. (2020) showed a strong consensus among teachers that teaching had to change in an EMI context. In the context of Western Europe, while much EMI research examines how stakeholders perceive EMI concerning top-down policy and bottom-up pedagogical movements, the European teachers in Earls' (2016) study saw EMI as a tool to explore cultures and 'mental flexibility'.

In Japan and China, empirical studies have examined stakeholders' personal experiences with EMI, exploring both the advantages and disadvantages of this educational approach. In the Netherlands, the initial challenges of implementing EMI focused on the linguistic preparedness of high school graduates. However, more recent issues have shifted towards the ongoing tension between English and Dutch in higher education, and their struggle for dominance in political, economic, and cultural spheres (Breetvelt, 2018). In response to a restructuring of EMI, the plurilingual approach and the inclusion of lecturers' plurilingual resources have been a significant focus of research investigation and policy change. Thus, in the Netherlands, major EMI concerns have shifted from students' lack of English to the perceived problems of using too much English at Dutch universities. Pedagogical challenges Research in diverse global contexts has highlighted that some EMI teachers have concerns over their own and their students' English language proficiency. In Turkey, for example, teachers in more than one study reported a lack of students' general English proficiency and discipline-specific

vocabulary. Students in Bozdoğan and Karlıdağ's study (2013), have reported the same views, in that inadequate English proficiency was an obstacle to content learning. In two Korean studies, the teachers perceived students' English proficiency as being the greatest obstacle to effective content learning, indicating that one-third of the students were linguistically under-prepared to undertake EMI (Kim & Shin, 2014).

Research has shown that when transitioning from L1 (first language) instruction to EMI, teachers need to adapt their curriculum, teaching methods, instructional resources, and both formative (assignments) and summative (exams) student evaluations. These modifications are essential to effectively support students in understanding and succeeding in an EMI environment. According to Dearden's (2015) survey, 83% of the institutions in 55 countries reported that there was an insufficient number of linguistically qualified teachers to match the demand. Bolton and Kuteeva (2012) conducted a study in Sweden to examine how students and teachers perceive teachers' English competency. The study found that, despite teachers' evaluations, many students expressed scepticism regarding their professors' English proficiency. In the Italian higher education system, educators have expressed concerns that using English may create difficulties for students in comprehending the curriculum and potentially mislead them (Campagna, 2016). In a separate study conducted in Italy, it was discovered that 19% of the teachers identified their language proficiency as a significant barrier to effectively teaching EMI programs (Guarda & Helm, 2016). EMI has posed issues for teachers in delivering content. Research has indicated that teachers must modify their curriculum, teaching methods, teaching resources, and student evaluations (both formative, such as assignments, and summative, such as exams) when transitioning from L1 instruction to EMI. This transition requires additional time and effort from teachers. Airey (2011) found that the use of English in instruction can create a disconnect between teachers and their native language (L1), as well as the local cultural environment. It is challenging to incorporate humour and establish a strong connection with students. In addition, a study conducted in China examined the dynamics between instructors and students in high school EMI classrooms. The findings revealed that EMI instruction tends to promote monologue teaching approaches, which are characterized by less contact between teachers and students. Interestingly, this trend was observed regardless of the teachers' proficiency in English. It will be intriguing to observe how the three scenarios in the present study relate and contrast with widely documented pedagogical issues; emphasizing areas of similar concerns.

Discussion

There is some opposition to EMI in many places where it is not typically addressed, and Algeria is likely to be included in that category. In many instances, there was even opposition from regions that initially supported EMI, such as the European Union, but later concluded that it did not facilitate the development of native language or L1 proficiency. Several governments are withdrawing their support for EMI. Thus, the situation is a combination of positive and negative aspects.

In most studies, the faculty members who taught in English were frequently uninformed or ignorant of the significance of language in their field. Since they were not linguists, they lacked the knowledge and skills to address language-related matters. Occasionally, these faculty members show hesitancy in collaborating with the language faculty, and this has been confirmed in multiple instances. Furthermore, other research supports this finding. In certain

exceptional instances, the disciplinary faculty categorically refused to assume the responsibility of handling language-related matters.

Revisiting the concept of academic discourse communities, it is asserted that the discursive objectives of parallel language teaching cannot be discussed. In the absence of such a discussion, lecturers will persist in their refusal to acknowledge their role as language teachers and argue that this responsibility should be delegated to others. Consequently, this becomes a major obstacle when attempting to introduce English medium instruction without the necessary foundations to ensure its success.

What specific training requirements do we observe for individuals serving as EMI instructors? An evident factor that we have already discussed is the requirement for a proficient command of the English language to effectively teach their subject matter. Frequently, foreign universities select professors who have received their education in a country where English is the main language of instruction. Proficiency in the principal language of instruction is essential for effective teaching since English Medium Instruction requires adopting new methods for delivering course material, gaining technical skills, and developing intercultural competencies. This is particularly significant in situations where EMI is being utilized as a strategy to entice students from different regions of the globe.

Many multinational institutions are using EMI programs as a means to attract students from different nations and consequently generate substantial revenue for the institution. This phenomenon is extensively documented in the literature, particularly in Japan and South Korea. Therefore, we must examine the fundamental rationale behind the choice to provide EMI courses. What is the rationale behind applying this to many governments? The motivation behind this action is driven by the current trend, as well as the belief that it is beneficial for pupils to possess multilingual skills and have a more globalized or internationalized perspective. However, it is not advantageous for the students. Hence, it is essential to thoroughly evaluate the reasons for offering EMI courses. How diverse is the student population in different EMI programs around the world? We should focus on skills that meet the students' needs and the program's goals. Consequently, a detailed needs analysis is necessary.

Pedagogical Implications

The available information does not provide a definitive conclusion on whether EMI has a positive impact on language acquisition or a detrimental effect on subject learning. Researchers are still studying the effects of EMI on language competence, content acquisition, educational effectiveness, and access inequalities. It is crucial to prioritize understanding the necessary skills for effective EMI teaching. To sum up, although EMI is unavoidable, thorough research is essential to achieve a harmonious equilibrium between language acquisition and efficient knowledge transmission in higher education.

Recommendations

English as a Medium Instruction (EMI) in Algeria faces mixed reactions, similar to other regions. Although it has the potential to improve language proficiency and attract international students, several challenges exist. Faculty members often lack the training to integrate language instruction effectively, leading to resistance. Implementing EMI requires a clear rationale, thorough needs analysis, proper faculty training, and consideration of Algeria's sociolinguistic context. Balancing language and content instruction is crucial, supported by

ongoing research and supportive policies. Overall, while EMI holds promise, it must be approached with careful planning and support to be successful.

Conclusion

When discussing the implementation of EMI, there are several factors to consider. Firstly, we need to address the fundamental question of how we can justify the decision to offer EMI courses: is this objective considered suitable within a specific institution and educational setting? There are specific matters that we need to address and discuss. How do we identify and acknowledge the presence of diversity within the student population, and how can we prioritize the acquisition of skills which are pertinent to the needs of learners and the objectives of the program in our EMI courses? Furthermore, how can we set standards by which we can assess the effectiveness of our EMI programs? Before initiating the implementation of these programs, it is imperative that we carefully consider this matter and above all, what role can the mother tongue play in teaching not only languages but also exact sciences. In addition to these considerations, it is essential to recognize the potential challenges and benefits observed in international contexts. Studies have shown that implementing EMI can enhance students' language proficiency and academic performance, as evidenced by research in European and East Asian universities. However, these benefits are often contingent upon the effective integration of language and content instruction; and the availability of adequately trained faculty members. Moreover, it is crucial to examine the implications of EMI within the unique sociolinguistic landscape of Algeria, where multiple languages coexist and interact. The successful implementation of EMI requires a supportive policy framework, ongoing professional development for educators, and a comprehensive strategy that addresses the specific linguistic and educational needs of the student population.

About the Author

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Declaration of AI Refined

This document has benefited from the application of AI-driven tools, including Grammarly and Scholar AI Chat, to refine its linguistic aspects. These tools were utilized to correct grammar and spelling and improve the overall writing style. It is acknowledged that the use of these technologies may introduce certain AI-generated linguistic patterns. However, the core intellectual content, data interpretation, and conclusions presented remain the sole work of the authors.

Statement of Absence of Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to the research, findings, or recommendations presented in this paper. All conclusions drawn are independent and unbiased.

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