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A narrative inquiry into the emotional effects of English medium instruction, language learning, and career opportunities

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ABSTRACT

The decision to introduce or expand EMI programs is often accompanied by neoliberal discourses without considering emotional effects of this on the individual. Through the lens of linguistic entrepreneurship, this study investigates the emotional impact of EMI on graduates from engineering programs in Turkey. Using a narrative inquiry design, we collected stories from four EMI graduates about their experiences regarding their academic studies and professional careers during and after EMI study. The results revealed that, although participants experienced different emotional reactions to EMI, including frustration over teaching practices, anxiety about the quality of their learning, and pride at their accomplishments, the interviews were characterized by feelings of obligation to develop English skills to secure a job in the sector. The findings contribute new understandings to the role of EMI on students' emotional wellbeing and graduate outcomes. Results are discussed with respect to English language learning, neoliberalism, and higher education policy.

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1. Introduction

English medium instruction (EMI) is commonly defined as “the use of the English language to teach academic subjects other than English itself in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English” (Macaro et al., 2018, p. 37). As part of global trends toward the internationalization of higher education, the number of universities offering EMI programs has grown exponentially in recent decades (Sahan et al., 2021). The decision by universities to introduce or expand EMI programs is often intertwined with motivations related to the internationalization of higher education, such as a desire to attract international staff and students and improve university rankings (Galloway et al., 2017; Wächter & Maiworm, 2014). These motivations are often closely linked to the importance of English in the global job market and its use as a lingua franca for business and academia, and they are underpinned by the reality that universities are often ‘driven by a neoliberal agenda to maximize financial

profit’ (De Costa et al., 2022, p. 80) during processes of internationalization.

The decision by higher education institutions (HEIs) to teach through EMI is often made without considering the emotional effects of *Englishization* on individuals (Piller & Cho, 2013), even though the decision to switch to EMI from instruction in the home language has notable impacts on the teaching and learning experiences of students. Previous research has examined the challenges that students face on EMI programs, including linguistic challenges (Kamaşak et al., 2021) and reduced learning outcomes (Lei & Hu, 2014; Xie & Curle, 2020). Research has also examined the attitudes of students toward EMI (Galloway et al., 2017; Tatzl, 2011; Kong & Wei, 2019). These studies have found that students are often driven to enroll in EMI programs by a desire to improve their English language skills and enhance their career opportunities (Sahan & Şahan, 2021). While these studies have examined the academic experiences of EMI students from a range of perspectives, the emotional impact of EMI and English language learning on students remains under-examined. Given that EMI is an emotionally-laden educational context closely linked with discourses of internationalization and neoliberal competition (De Costa et al., 2021a), research is needed to understand the effects that EMI has on students' emotional wellbeing, both during their studies and in their careers upon graduation. Addressing that gap, this study aims to examine the emotional impact of EMI and English language learn-

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ing on graduates from EMI engineering programs in Turkey with specific focus on job opportunities and career planning through a narrative inquiry approach.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. English medium instruction and neoliberalism

Neoliberalism has been described as a ‘philosophy of sustaining entrepreneurial and competition-seeking practices under the umbrella of free markets’ (Phan & Barnawi, 2015). Offering a shorter definition, Harvey (2007) described neoliberalism as the “financialization of everything” (p. 33). Common to these definitions is the idea that neoliberalism is grounded in free-market economics but extends to other aspects of the socio-political sphere. In line with this pervasiveness, the values of neoliberalism –which include freedom, privatization, and individualism –are often framed in moral terms (West, 2019).

In higher education, neoliberalism is closely linked to the internationalization of higher education, and motivations to introduce or expand EMI provision are often underpinned by neoliberal discourses which emphasize improving the university’s competitive profile through testing, assessment, and rankings (De Costa et al., 2022; Piller & Cho, 2013). In other words, EMI is often seen as a tool to improve the university’s domestic or international standing and to attract highly qualified staff and students. As Piller and Cho (2013) state, “neoliberalism with its imperative to compete is a covert form of language policy, which imposes English as a natural and neutral medium of academic excellence” – despite the reality of English being far from ‘natural and neutral’ in many contexts. An implicit assumption among many institutions seems to be that switching to EMI will improve the quality of instruction. These assumptions stand in contrast to research findings demonstrating the social costs of EMI, including issues of domain loss (Hultgren, 2014), challenges to the local culture (Selvi, 2014), and inequalities arising from issues of access (Galloway & Şahan, 2021; Sah, 2022).

Such neoliberal discourses in higher education have transformed language learning into entrepreneurial endeavor, “an activity that the learner engages in as a path to better outcomes, such as better employment opportunities” (De Costa et al., 2016). Neoliberal policies in education have resulted “in an ideology of self-development, best accomplished through educational attainment and English language proficiency” (West, 2019). In many contexts, English language education is linked to improving the learner’s market value through this ideology of self-improvement. Duchêne and Heller (2012) argue that the conceptualization of language in terms of added market value treats language as a technical skill, moving it away from notions of identity and culture and instead framing it as a resource which can be exploited for economic gain. In other words, rather than language being linked to notions of ‘pride’ in one’s national identity or culture, language with respect to ‘profit’ is framed in terms of material economic benefit.

Despite its relationship to higher education policies, neoliberalism has been criticized by scholars within the field of applied linguistics for promoting social inequalities (De Costa et al., 2022; Sah, 2022) and negatively effecting the hiring and recruitment practices of English language teachers through the commodification of native-speaker status (Jenkins, 2017; Jenks, 2019). In a longitudinal narrative inquiry study, West (2019) examined how three English language teachers positioned themselves in terms of neoliberal policies and issues of morality. The participants in the study were White, male, ‘native-English speaking’ teachers from North America who were working at a private language institute in South Korea. The study found that English language teachers aligned to neoliberal policies, such as by positioning students as clients and education as a business, but refused to adopt neoliberal

values in their narratives, in which they positioned themselves as moral actors.

Critical of neoliberalism’s effects on language learning, Block (2018) has described the language learner as ‘homo economicus,’ an entrepreneur in the neoliberal market. Flores (2013) similarly argues that neoliberalism has contributed to “the conceptualization of the ideal subject (i.e., what it means to be an ideal human being from a neoliberal perspective),” which in turn has affected notions of the ideal language learner. The ideal neoliberal subject is self-enterprising, autonomous, and continually adapts to meet the demands of the job market. Accordingly, the ideal language learner adopts these traits to develop their English proficiency in line with the needs of the global economy (De Costa et al., 2020). Here, the onus to improve one’s English skills is placed on the individual learner and framed as a responsibility in connection with accumulating their linguistic capital.

Analyzing the effects of neoliberalism on the language learner, De Costa et al. (2016) define linguistic entrepreneurship as “an act of aligning the moral imperative to strategically exploit language-related resources for enhancing one’s worth in the world.” They argue that language learning is increasingly framed as an entrepreneurial activity through which learners invest in and understand the importance of their English language skills as a marketable commodity when applying for jobs. In other words, language learning becomes an act of identity, one that entails comporting oneself to fit into the mold of a linguistic entrepreneur. By extension, this recasting of identity bears an affective dimension in that learners need to motivate themselves to mobilize this new identity. Notably, in a follow-up article on pervasive audit culture permeating institutions, De Costa et al. (2019) underscore how “[n]eoliberalism, and its linguistic manifestation, linguistic entrepreneurship, fosters a particular kind of *affective regime*, one where individuals are pressed as a moral imperative to adopt attributes of ‘entrepreneurship, self-reliance, and sturdy individualism’ (Evans & Sewell, 2013)” (p. 389; *emphasis added*). Thus, in keeping with this sociolinguistic reality, the decision to enroll in an EMI program at a higher education institution can therefore be understood as a form of linguistic entrepreneurship through which learners seek to improve their English proficiency in order to enhance their career prospects after graduation (Şahan & Şahan, 2021). However, empirical research has not yet examined the emotional impact of language learning on EMI graduates.

2.2. Student emotions and EMI programs

A number of studies have examined the affordances and challenges of EMI for university students including language-related challenges (Kamaşak et al., 2021), linguistically responsive teaching practices (Chang, 2021), and students’ coping strategies (Soruç & Griffiths, 2018). Studies have also looked at the ways in which students draw on their multilingual repertoires to create new language norms that accommodated their social, academic, and communicative needs (Ou & Gu, 2020; Kuteeva, 2020). However, relatively few studies have considered the affective dimension of EMI learning for students (Al Khalili, 2021; Chun et al., 2017; Chou, 2018; Thompson et al., 2022; Turhan & Kırkgöz, 2018).

From a poststructuralist view, emotions are discursively constructed according to the sociocultural context (Benesch, 2017, 2018; De Costa et al., 2020; Zembylas, 2004) in which learners are embedded. Emotions differ according to individual characteristics, social norms, and the power relations in a particular context (Benesch, 2019; Song, 2016). In an educational setting, this means that the emotions experienced by learners differ according to their individual histories, cultural identities, and the social environment. The discursively-constructed nature of emotions means that they result from “an encounter with objects, including ideas, memo-

ries, people, events, activities, places, and so on" (Benesch, 2017). This view of emotions differs from cognitive perspectives which understand emotions as existing in the individual's mind and as sortable into 'positive' or 'negative' categories (see, for example, Resnik & Dewaele, 2020). Instead, the poststructuralist perspective of emotions recognizes their complexity and capacity to change over time and in response to structural inequalities (Zembylas, 2005).

Research in applied linguistics theorizing emotions from a post-structuralist perspective has generally focused on language teachers (Benesch, 2017; De Costa et al., 2020; Her & De Costa, 2022; Hofstadler et al., 2020; Nazari & Karimpour, 2022; Song, 2016; Yuan & Lee, 2016), including EMI teachers in higher education (Yuan, 2021). Benesch (2018) explored language teachers' emotions in responding to an institutional plagiarism policy, and her work illustrated how emotions can serve as tools of activism in teachers' resistance against the policy. De Costa et al. (2020) used emotions as a lens through which to examine the professional challenges that two English teachers in Nepal faced amid a push for EMI in the country. Song (2016) examined teachers' emotions in interacting with study abroad returnee students, revealing how emotions contribute to language teachers' identity construction and classroom practice. Together, these studies also illustrate the ways in which identity and emotion are inextricably linked, a point to which we alluded in our discussion of linguistic entrepreneurship earlier.

Although research has found that students experience stronger emotions (e.g., enjoyment, anxiety) in foreign language classes compared to L1 classes (Resnik & Dewaele, 2020), few studies have been conducted on the emotions of EMI students. Previous studies have touched upon EMI students' emotions while investigating issues of motivation (Turhan & Kırkgöz, 2018), self-efficacy (Thompson et al., 2022), and language anxiety (Chun et al., 2017; Chou, 2018), but few studies have specifically examined the role of emotions in EMI. In one of the few studies to do so, Hillman (2022) illustrated the complex emotions experienced by EMI students at a branch campus in Qatar through examples of linguistic shame. Her findings suggest that EMI students negotiate a range of complex emotions throughout their studies. In Turkey, Turhan and Kırkgöz (2018) found that EMI students "expressed different feelings such as anger, unhappiness, disappointment, hope and joy" (p. 269) in relation to their studies. The authors concluded that EMI students were primarily motivated by career aspirations, but the study stopped short of examining the relationship between the students' emotions and their career goals, nor did it foreground the neoliberal effects of EMI education.

Investigating the experiences of marginalized students at a private university in Lebanon, Al Khalili (2021) found that EMI students felt frustrated with policies concerning prerequisites for intensive English courses. Al Khalili's findings with respect to students' frustration highlighted the link between language learning, career advancement, and social justice in EMI settings, and it suggests the need for more research examining the effects of language learning policies on EMI students' emotions. Responding to this call, our research examines the link between students' emotions and language learning in EMI programs, in the context of neoliberalist global education. Our theoretical framework is grounded in Zembylas' (2021) assertion that neoliberal policies in education are complex affective sites, with the ability to produce or invoke affective responses in teachers and students. Neoliberalism is connected with the affective dimension of an individual's experience since "collective affects emerging from neoliberal policies and practices (e.g., fear, anxiety, anger) are inextricable aspects of the sites, networks and flows of neoliberalism in societies" (Zembylas, 2021). The affective regime of neoliberalism in higher education posits that certain emotions facilitate success (e.g., confidence, resilience)

and that learners embody those emotions on their way to becoming entrepreneurial subjects (for discussion of neoliberal affect and the neoliberal subject, see Anderson, 2016; De Costa et al., 2019; Zembylas, 2022). However, Zembylas (2022) cautions against treating the 'neoliberal subject' as a monolithic notion, instead suggesting that research should respond to contextual specificities and affective complexities. This study responds to that call to address a gap in the literature with respect to understanding the entanglement of emotions and neoliberalism in EMI higher education.

2.3. The Turkish context

The history of EMI in Turkish higher education dates back to the 1950s with the founding of Middle East Technical University in Ankara (Kırkgöz, 2007; Selvi, 2014). Since then, the number of universities offering EMI programs has grown, as has the number of students enrolled on EMI programs. In Turkey, universities follow the preparatory model for offering language support to EMI students (see Macaro, 2022). Within this model, a one-year, intensive English preparatory program is offered to help students attain the minimum level of English proficiency required before they start their EMI classes. Nonetheless, previous research has raised questions about the linguistic preparedness of students enrolled on EMI programs, with a recent systematic review of EMI concluding, "[i]n Turkey, the collective research picture is one of deep concern in terms of level of English in general and vocabulary knowledge in particular" (Macaro et al., 2018, p. 52). Questions over whether students have the adequate level of English proficiency needed to follow their EMI courses has raised concerns over the quality of learning in EMI programs.

In addition to concerns about students' English level, EMI in Turkey has been criticized for 'exacerbate[ing] socioeconomic inequalities in the country' (Selvi, 2014). As in other contexts, English skills are often perceived as a pre-requisite for obtaining certain jobs (Kırkgöz, 2007), particularly at international corporations. Scholars have also criticized the dominance of English in Turkish higher education, raising concerns that EMI is a threat to the local culture and language (see Selvi, 2011). In a recent study, Selvi (2020a) illustrates how grassroots efforts to oppose EMI are embedded in national ideology and a desire to preserve Turkishness against the expansion of English. These studies suggest that EMI in Turkey appears to invoke a strong, negative emotional reaction in some stakeholders, and that this emotional response appears to be tied to questions of identity and culture, themes which emerged in our discussion of linguistic entrepreneurship above (see also Duchêne & Heller, 2012, for discussion of interrelated discourses on language, capitalism, and national identity). However, the emotional experiences of individuals who have graduated from EMI programs remain unclear. This study seeks to address that gap by investigating the experiences of graduates from EMI engineering programs, a discipline commonly taught through the medium of English and a professional field in which English is considered important for career advancement in Turkey.

3. Methodology

This study employed a narrative inquiry to obtain data regarding participants' emotions studying through EMI, with a focus on emotions during and after EMI studies in relation to language learning and career opportunities. Data in narrative studies in the field of applied linguistics have been derived from one or more sources of data, including "records or reflection, published memoirs, written language learning histories, or interviews" (Benson, 2014). Data for this study were collected using open interviews without a fixed agenda or pre-determined questions (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, cited in Barkhuizen et al., 2013). Participants were

Table 1
Demographics of participants.

Participant	Field of engineering	Graduation year	Job Title	Graduate Degree
Banu	Metallurgical and materials	2021	Commodity buyer	Ongoing MA
Ozan	Mechanical	2017	N/A	Ongoing MA
Cemal	Mechanical	2018	Project lead	No
Ilkay	Metallurgical and materials	2018	Project engineer	Ongoing PhD

given an elicitation question only in the beginning by the interviewer to allow them to narrate flexibly their life stories regarding their EMI studies and professional careers.

Narrative inquiry was selected as an appropriate method for investigating the emotional experiences of graduates from EMI programs because “humans tend to understand and construct meaning through narratives” (West, 2019). Narrative research in language education has been used to investigate language teacher identity (Barkhuizen, 2009; 2011; Tsui, 2007) and moral positioning (West, 2019), as well as students’ second language identity (Chang & Chiang, 2021; Yung, 2020). However, it has yet to be used to investigate the experiences of students in EMI settings.

3.1. Data collection

3.1.1. Setting and participants

EMI policy regarding student admission, language support and teacher qualifications are determined by the Council of Higher Education in Turkey. According to the regulations, there are two types of EMI: partial EMI programs and full EMI programs. In partial EMI programs, 30% of course credits are delivered through English while all course credits in full EMI programs are delivered through English. For partial EMI programs, regulations do not necessarily envision the use of L1 (Turkish) and English in a course simultaneously, but rather 30% of courses in a degree curriculum are taught in English. Students are accepted to these programs based on their rankings from the national university examination. If a student is not able to prove sufficient command of English by passing an in-house proficiency exam or certifying the expected proficiency level through national and/or international English tests, they are obligated to receive and pass the one-year English preparatory program before starting their EMI departmental studies. To capture the potential emotionality created by these proficiency requirements and the preparatory program, participants were asked to include their experiences with these aspects of EMI higher education in their narratives.

This study included four participants who graduated from EMI engineering programs at a university in Turkey. The participants were contacted because they had previously participated in another study examining graduate outcomes in EMI (Şahan & Şahan, 2021) and had indicated that they would be willing to participate in further studies. Two of the participants were male, and two were female. They had all graduated from partial (30%) EMI programs. We have used pseudonyms to refer to participants in this study. Table 1 shows the demographics of the participants.

The participants represented different profiles of EMI graduates in terms of their career and postgraduate study paths. Banu graduated from a metallurgical and materials engineering department in 2021 and was working as a commodity buyer in an international company at the time of data collection. She was also doing her MA studies in mechanical engineering. Ozan graduated from a mechanical engineering department in 2017 and was doing his MA in engineering in the UK. Since completing his BA degree, he had not worked as an engineer. Cemal graduated with a degree in mechanical engineering in 2018 and was working as a project leader in an international company. Ilkay studied metallurgical and materials engineering, graduated in 2018, and was working as a re-

search and development project engineer at an international company. She was also doing her PhD in the same field.

3.1.2. Data collection procedures

Data were collected from participants through online interviews in Spring 2022. Each participant was informed about the purpose of the study and their consent for participation was received before the interviews. Each interview was at least one hour in duration and video-recorded. Given that all the participants were Turkish L1 speakers, the interviews were conducted in Turkish although the participants switched to English at times while talking about some of their study or work experiences. When presenting findings, we have provided English translations of the excerpts. Words or utterances that were originally spoken by the participants in English have been italicized in the excerpts.

All interviews followed the same format: following a short conversation about the research aims, one of the authors (Özgür Şahan) explained the basics of a narrative inquiry interview, noting that the participants would lead the interview by explaining their experiences in as much detail as possible. The researcher then asked an elicitation question at the beginning of the interview in order to allow participants to narrate their life stories about their EMI study and career. Interviewees were not interrupted during their storytelling, and they were asked follow-up or clarification questions to elicit more details at the end of the narration. Through the use of follow-up questions, the researcher tried to elicit critical stories “with strong emotional resonance and impacts on [participants’] self-understanding” (Yuan & Lee, 2016). The follow-up questions, for example, invited participants to elaborate on specific experiences (e.g., the preparatory program, their EMI classes, their careers) and the emotions mentioned in their initial narratives.

3.1.3. Data analysis

Data were transcribed and analyzed using NVivo. The data were analyzed using analysis of narrative (Benson, 2014) with thematic coding following the procedures for qualitative content analysis (Selvi, 2020b). The researchers read the transcripts together, in conjunction with the video-recordings for clarification of emotional signals that might be present in tone or expression. The initial analysis involved a two-phase process of (1) identifying emerging themes, according to how emotions were discursively constructed in the participants’ narratives; and (2) organizing the emerging themes into a framework. While analyzing data, we looked for emerging themes regarding the discursively constructed emotions of participants in three stages of EMI study—before, during, and after. After the coding framework was established, the narratives were reconstructed according to participants’ critical stories in each of these three stages (before, during, after). The ‘before EMI study’ stage focused on participants’ emotions and motivations to choose an EMI engineering program. The ‘during EMI study’ stage related to participants’ stories about their English learning in preparatory programs and the EMI coursework in their departments. The ‘after EMI study’ stage concentrated on participants’ stories about their professional experiences and the role of English in their professional lives after graduation. This approach allowed us to understand and analyze the narratives systematically. Using these stages of analyses, we then reconstructed the narratives with

a focus on the participants' emotional experiences. We present the narratives of each participant separately in the findings section.

3.2. Ethical considerations

Participation in this study was voluntary. Participants were informed about the aims of the study before agreeing to participate, and they consented to participating in the online recorded interviews. The study received ethical approval from the ethical review board at one of the author's institutions.

In addition to addressing macro-ethical considerations through institutional ethical approval, we needed to be especially careful with potential micro-ethical challenges since narratives are social practices comprised of discursive relationships between researchers and narrators within a particular context (see De Costa et al., 2021b, for discussion of the ethical considerations in the use narrative inquiry research). Therefore, we ensured that we had built sincere relationships with our participants before data collection so that they would feel confident and comfortable disclosing their feelings without reservation. As noted above, we had previously worked with these participants on a different research project and had established a good relationship with them. In addition, we provided information about our own experiences teaching English to EMI students in Turkey at the start of the interviews in order to position ourselves as 'researcher as resource' (Sarangi & Candlin, 2003). In this way, participants could refer to our backgrounds to explain their experiences and feelings when necessary. This also helped us decide on our approach to systematically analyze the data in three stages—before, during, and after EMI study—as we knew the context well. Finally, in addition to carrying out member checks, relying on our background knowledge in the research context, and on the rapport that we had developed with the participants, we tried to minimize our intervention in retelling participants' stories. This was done through an iterative process of data analysis through which we continuously compared our summaries of the narratives with the participants' original telling.

4. Narratives

This study examined the emotional effects of EMI and English language learning on EMI students in Turkey through a narrative inquiry approach. The analysis of narratives revealed that students experienced a range of emotions before, during, and after their EMI studies. Commonly narrated emotions included frustration over teaching practices, anxiety about the quality of their learning, and pride at their accomplishments. The following sections present the reconstructed narratives for each participant.

4.1. Banu: aligning with neoliberal values of self-improvement

Banu was aware of her EMI program's language requirements. Although she described the English teachers in the preparatory program as having a positive effect on her language development, Banu emphasized the students' responsibility for improving their English:

They [English teachers] give us what needs to be given, and the rest is entirely our own effort. It's now *background* for us after we've gone to the department, what can we add to it after the department actually.

Banu's framing of the preparatory program as 'background' indicated her view of English learning as an ongoing process and underscored her expectations for English learning through EMI. Her use of the word 'effort' emphasized the individual responsibility she felt as a student to improve her English, a theme which continued during her EMI studies:

When I entered the department, I discovered that I had some problems caused by not knowing the department terminology. It's about me, and right away in the first year I got support for this from books.

Banu noted that the gaps in her knowledge were 'about her', again placing the onus for language development on herself. She displayed resilience in addressing these language-related challenges through her own self-directed study.

While Banu worked hard to improve her English proficiency, she felt frustrated and disappointed at the use of L1 in class, noting that students with lower levels of English proficiency struggled to understand content taught in English:

I mean, they [other students] have come, successfully graduated with an *upper intermediate* level, but they come before you and they don't know [English]. They don't know how to speak, or they don't understand you. There are a lot of problems like that here. So the teachers respond like this. After a while, they use the mother tongue. Now this *process* of transitioning to the mother tongue delays the development of that person's English.

Banu positioned herself as a successful language learner in contrast to her peers, whom she implied did not work as hard to improve their language skills as she did. She felt frustrated and disappointed by L1 use in class, because she believed it hindered her own language learning. Her narrative described feelings of frustration because other students and teachers were not as committed to learning through English as she was:

I don't want to criticize too much but I think the Turkish education system tends to take the easy way out, 100 percent for foreign language education. Especially at medium-sized universities.

Through her narrative, Banu distanced herself from her peers, whom preferred to take the 'easy way out.' Evident in this statement is her frustration that other students did not commit to the challenge of improving themselves – in other words, they did not embody the spirit of a linguistic entrepreneur (De Costa et al., 2016; 2019) continually striving to improve themselves. Banu described the culmination of L1 use in her EMI classes as a lack of confidence in her English speaking skills and a lack of English learning through EMI, framing L1 use as an obstacle to English development.

In response to this frustration with a lack of language learning through EMI, Banu took steps to improve her English skills, such as downloading mobile language learning applications, making English-speaking friends, and practicing English with herself through imagined dialogues. Such examples of Banu's self-study demonstrate an alignment to the neoliberal values of self-improvement and a responsibility for one's own language learning. Key to her spirit as a linguistic entrepreneur, Banu was aware of her language learning needs at different points in time throughout the narrative, including an ongoing need to improve her English skills at work:

Now what I've realized, because I was always talking to myself [in English] then, is that I'm lacking in the area of writing. As soon as I realized this, I began reading English books. I immediately started writing in English. In my daily life, I've started to use English when I'm *texting*, messaging. I looked at what I could do to improve and that's how I'm progressing now.

This process of self-assessment embodies the ideal neoliberal learner (Flores, 2013) taking responsibility for her own language learning.

Banu tied this desire for self-improvement to feelings of foreign language anxiety. She described feelings of anxiety about be-

ing misunderstood, for example, when she “tried to make a joke or two and it’s met with a serious reaction like, ‘it’s not like that.’” She also described concerns about ‘emotional damage’:

[People] shouldn’t suffer *emotional damage*. They certainly shouldn’t start speaking with the fear that someone will make fun of them. Or they shouldn’t start speaking with the fear that they wouldn’t be able to express themselves to the other side. They need to think that they know [English] well and always act like they know it well.

Banu’s description of emotional damage included feelings of fear, embarrassment, and anxiety, and her narrative framed her as motivated to avoid these emotions. Just as she overcame disappointment and frustration with her EMI classes through self-study, she proactively worked to address her ongoing professional language needs and was committed to self-improvement at work to avoid the anxiety associated with being misunderstood.

4.2. Ozan: aligning with neoliberal values of competition

The second narrative is from Ozan, who was studying on a master’s program in the UK at the time of the interview. Ozan described entering his undergraduate EMI program with low expectations for language learning. He enrolled in an EMI program because his secondary school teachers said it would “give [him] a leg up” but he “did not have any big goals about getting an English education.” He was then shocked and disappointed to be placed in the lowest proficiency class in the preparatory program:

At first I was really surprised, when I first started, because before the preparatory program there is a practice exam type of thing, a little placement exam. I mean, I was put in the last class [based on that exam].... I felt like all the education I had received during high school was a complete waste.

Ozan felt ashamed and disappointed because his English level was relatively weaker than the majority of his cohort. In response to this shame, he determined to improve his English:

After being placed in the last class, something happened inside of me, a determination. Like, after I’ve received all this education how I could be placed in the last class? So from our first lesson I focused on that. I worked to improve my English. I tried to reach a certain level [of English] from nothing, until I was satisfied.... After two or three weeks, I looked and slowly things were becoming more familiar, I began to understand what was being said [in English]. I thought, ah look, if I’m able to understand the teachers after only one month, it means I can do even better.

Ozan’s initial feelings of disappointment were replaced by determination and then a feeling of pride when he saw that his English skills were improving. This feeling of pride is described as emerging from his own efforts of self-improvement, similar to Banu’s narrative. Ozan’s emotions of shame and pride are described in terms of his rank relative to his peers, invoking neoliberal values of competition.

Ozan’s motivation to improve his English lagged when he began his EMI classes, in part because the lecturers commonly used Turkish. Whereas Banu described frustration at L1 use in class, Ozan initially felt relieved at L1 use, although this was later replaced with regret:

At first we said, ‘ah okay, we don’t understand but looks he’s switched to Turkish and he’s explaining it well.’ And so on, but then in the later years... I saw it as a weakness. For example, some topics used English terminology or the English name for a certain method, and I realized we skipped them [in English].

Ozan frames his regret around the realization that his English is not improving through EMI, and like Banu, he compensates for this through his own efforts. Ozan’s commitment to improve his English culminated in his decision to move to the UK following his undergraduate degree. Even after four years of EMI classes, Ozan felt uncomfortable speaking English and “decided to come to England to practice my English in terms of speaking.”

After arriving in the UK, Ozan was unable to find a job in his field. He described the feedback he received from the recruitment process:

Ozan: More so than how well I knew English... they told me that I got more rejections because they did not know how good the quality of the Turkish education system was and they didn’t know how advanced it was, like because education in Turkey didn’t have a certain reputation.

Interviewer: Hmm.

Ozan: And I understood this from the questions that they asked me during later phone interviews. So when I was talking about where I graduated from and what experience I had, the things I had done at school, they asked me if I had any other diplomas, if I had received any training in England or in Europe. And I understood from this that it wasn’t because of my English level or how well I was able to explain the things I have learned; it was a deficiency with my school and my education.

Again, discourses of neoliberal competition are evident in Ozan’s explanation of his job hunt in the UK: Ozan described the importance of international rankings, according to which his degree from a university in Turkey was valued less, because of the university’s relatively unknown international status – in other words, the university’s profile did not lend the degree credibility in the global market. Perhaps surprisingly, Ozan did not display strong negative emotions when describing this process of being rejected from jobs for which he was qualified. Instead, he expressed determination and confidence, stating that this fueled his decision to enroll in a master’s program:

After I received this *feedback* I said, if it’s not seen like that, you know if the education I received isn’t recognized, I said why don’t I get an education here to certify myself.

Ozan enrolled in a UK university to make himself more competitive in the global job market. He ended his narrative by reiterating his confidence in English, stating that he had experienced no major language-related challenges on his UK master’s course.

4.3. Cemal: aligning with neoliberal values of market worth

Cemal described wanting to experience EMI but being hesitant to study in a full EMI program. He was worried because, “I thought things would be more difficult [in English].... I thought my comprehension of things might be missing.” Despite this initial hesitancy, Cemal’s narrative was characterized by a strong sense of pride in his English language abilities. Cemal compared his EMI program to a Turkish-medium program at a neighboring university:

Because our content courses were in English, it seemed like we were going through a more difficult process, and to be honest, I thought that we saw ourselves as a little higher than them. I had very close friends who studied there, and frankly I felt like what they were doing was easier.

Cemal’s narrative associated studying through English with prestige (*‘a little bit higher than them’*) and a sense of accomplishment (*‘what they were doing was easier’*).

At the time of the interview, Cemal was working at an international firm in a position which required him to use English on a daily basis. He described feeling pride in his English abilities as well as grateful for the opportunity to improve his understanding of technical English terms throughout his undergraduate study:

Being able to come across a technical term in your career and directly understand it without having to ask anyone for help gives us an advantage, frankly. Again, I have colleagues who do not have a good level of English or who didn't come from English [medium] schools and being able to comprehend some things more easily than they can makes me feel both happy and advantageous in my professional life.

The pride he took in his English language skills was evident throughout his narrative but most notably in his description of the process of applying for jobs. Unlike Banu who was accepted to the first job for which she applied, Cemal's job hunt took approximately 1.5 years. However, because his English language skills were advanced, Cemal refused to take a low-paying job; instead he waited for a more favorable job offer:

I went through a lot of steps in this process but I didn't get stuck with my English in any of them, to be honest. I directly passed any stage where there was an English interview or an English exam part.

The places where I got stuck were mostly about my experience. Because I didn't have a job yet, I was getting stuck on the experience part but, for example, my friends who were like me or who had worse English than me, what did they do during that period? They took jobs at lower caliber companies or with underpaid starting off salaries, and they started their jobs with the idea, 'At least it's a start. Our English isn't good anyway. At every corporate job I've applied for, English is necessary, so while we're working, let's improve our English, let's follow that plan.' But because I was little more confident [about my English], I decided to wait. Because, I mean, I kept the scale according to the caliber of the salary I would get. And evaluating that I chose to wait, and as I said, after a year and a half, I got a job at an international company.

Here, Cemal emphasizes his worth in the job market based on the high value of his English language skills. The comparison drawn in the narrative between himself and his peers underscored his relatively higher status as a proficient English user, and it presented a clear framing of English as a marketable commodity in the international economy. By relating his English skills to the salary offers he received from prospective companies (*'the caliber of the salary'*), Cemal's own worth is cast in financial terms, and his professional success is framed as the results of his advanced English, not his technical engineering knowledge. A feeling of pride in his accomplishments – as well as the sense of worth and prestige that comes with working for an international company – is integrated into the narrative.

4.4. Ilkay: building confidence in English

Ilkay entered her EMI program unaware of the English language requirements but was motivated to learn English – a theme evident throughout her narrative, in which she described an up-and-down journey to improve her confidence. Ilkay's narrative was unique among the participants in this study, because she credited her formal education with improving her English proficiency. She expressed feeling grateful for the preparatory program for providing "a great advantage for us, especially in terms of language development."

Ilkay also described her EMI classes as benefitting her language development. Unlike other participants who stated that L1 use was commonly used, Ilkay described her EMI classes as an immersive, English-only environment. She illustrated her immersive experience by recalling one lecturer in particular:

He was very strict. I mean, he absolutely would not accept [Turkish]. You know, there was no possibility, you could not speak Turkish. As soon as we entered through the door, all of sudden it felt like we were drinking our tea with milk in London, that's the kind of atmosphere there was. And he had a British accent. I mean, he spoke really well. Like, all of a sudden, it was like we were transformed to a scene on *Bridgerton*.¹

The use of cultural references (e.g., tea with milk, a *Bridgerton* scene) and humor in Ilkay's narrative foreground a positive experience, although elements of how difficult the experience was come through in her description of the teacher as 'strict.'

After graduating, Ilkay completed an internship in Portugal. At first, she lacked confidence speaking and was nervous communicating in English. However, through the internship, Ilkay realized that her English skills were good enough to communicate effectively:

When I compared myself—I mean, for example, I went to Portugal, and that's actually not a native-speaker country. It's an environment where Portuguese, Spanish is spoken. My self-confidence grew there. Like, I said, 'Look, they're speaking and I'm the same.' In fact, after this I began to realize that our proficiency in terms of grammar was far more advanced. Actually, our knowledge [of English] was a lot more. I mean, I experienced the first breaking point of that shell of embarrassment there.

Ilkay 'breaks the shell of embarrassment' after comparing her English skills to others – similar to themes of competition in Ozan's narrative. However, unlike Ozan, Ilkay's narrative was characterized by feelings of humility, as she repeatedly downplayed her accomplishments. This humility was evident her retelling of a major presentation she had given in English at work:

They invited our firm [to a business conference], and it was like, 'Who is going to give the presentation? Is it going to be like this? Is it going to be like that?', and I was the one who did it. I went and said, 'This is our project', in English. There were a lot of people there from the European Commission and such. Everyone was like, 'wow, she gave a presentation in English. Look at what she did, did you see? She went and gave a presentation in English.' But actually, it wasn't a big deal. I basically just explained what we know, what we wrote, what we did for the project.

In describing the positive feedback that she received, Ilkay distanced herself from the accomplishment (*'it wasn't a big deal'*). Her humility here is similar to the emphasis she placed on the preparatory program's role in improving her English, rather than emphasizing her own responsibility for language learning.

Like other participants, Ilkay emphasized the importance of English in her job. She did this by using a metaphor which played on the Turkish expression *'ekmek parası'*, which can be literally translated as 'money for bread' and understood as income to support one's expenses:

Actually, it's become mandatory for us now [to know English]. Really, if you don't know English, there's still bread but it's not the same level of bread. One is chia seed bread, the other is

¹ *Bridgerton* is a historical-romance television series set in Regency era of British History, focusing on the lives of young members of high society in search of love.

normal stone oven ((laughs)) wheat bread, wheat bread. I mean, there's a big difference, you know, we experience that a lot. I mean, I should say between individuals, there's an organizational difference. So even within the projects you work on, if your language skills and your speaking abilities are more advanced, if you can use them actively, you can take part in different global projects. But not everyone's ability to learn a foreign language is at the same level, after all. Some may prefer not to learn, of course there are people like that.

Although she initially states that it is 'mandatory' to know English, she uses the metaphor to describe the nuanced ways in which English skills affect engineering salaries and the types of projects on which they work. According to the metaphor, an engineer with limited English proficiency may still find a job but their salary would buy them 'normal wheat bread', whereas an engineer with a high level of English proficiency could afford chia seed bread – a more expensive type of bread. İlkay's point about the status of English skills is further enforced in her statement about 'taking part in different global projects.' In addition to the financial incentives associated with learning English, English language skills also provide the learner with the capital to afford participation in high-level, international projects. Although İlkay would be the 'chia seed bread buyer' in this metaphor, she did not refer to her own English skills as advanced, and she expressed empathy with colleagues who struggled to learn English. These emotions of humility and empathy stand in contrast to themes of pride and self-confidence evident in other participants' narratives.

5. Discussion

This study examined the emotional experiences of graduates from EMI engineering programs in terms of language learning and career opportunities. The participants' narratives illustrated how emotions are constructed in line with discourses of neoliberalism in higher education (Benesch, 2017). We found a range of emotions expressed by the participants in their narratives, including frustration over L1 use in the classroom, anxiety over their ability to communicate in English, and pride at their accomplishments. Some emotions were shared between the participants while others were not. These differences illustrate the ways in which the emotional experiences of EMI students are unique and underscore that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' experience of EMI (see Şahan et al., 2021). They also underscore Zembylas's (2022) assertion that neoliberal policies in higher education are not experienced uniformly by individuals, nor is there a simple relationship between neoliberal discourses and affective experiences in higher education.

Despite the diversity of their narratives, one emotion that was common across participants was the obligation or pressure they felt to develop their English language skills for professional advancement (Yung, 2020; Chang & Chiang, 2021). According to the participants' narratives, they would not have been hired to their current positions nor able to perform as well without adequate English skills. Both Banu and Ozan described feelings of frustration, disappointment, and regret leading to self-improvement in their language learning journeys. While Banu was motivated by a desire to continually improve her skills, Ozan appeared motivated by a fear of failure, first a fear of finishing last in his English preparatory class and then by his inability to get a job in the UK. We also found a difference between these two participants in the tactics they took for self-improvement: Banu committed to improving her English language skills through self-study, while Ozan acquired credentials through formal education. Nonetheless, in both narratives, we saw an alignment with neoliberal values that transform language learning into an activity for self-improvement and better economic outcomes (De Costa et al., 2016; West, 2019),

and discourses emphasizing the imperative to compete (Piller & Cho, 2013). Similarly, Cemal's narrative connected his English language skills with his worth on the job market, and he leveraged his linguistic capital to secure a more lucrative job. These activities align with those of the ideal neoliberal subject who is a self-enterprising and autonomous learner (Flores, 2013), and they capture the 'the moral imperative' of the linguistic entrepreneur to 'exploit language-related resources for enhancing one's worth in the world' (De Costa et al., 2016, p. 696). They also reveal connections between neoliberal discourses and affective responses such as frustration, disappointment, and pride. In this way, the findings of this study advance theoretical understandings of neoliberalism and the complex emotions experienced by EMI students during and after their studies. With respect to pride in particular, these findings are reminiscent of Duchêne and Heller's (2012) argumentation on the tropes of 'pride' and 'profit' in the globalized economy, whereby language is perceived as a technical skill to be applied in the pursuit of profit. The 'pride' felt by participants was described in terms of the 'added value' afforded to them through their English language abilities, specifically access to prestigious global or international opportunities – such as Cemal's ability to work for an international company.

Although EMI often comes with promises of access to a globalized world, such 'access' is limited by the inequalities created and replicated through neoliberalist education policies (Sah, 2022). Ozan's degree in engineering was not recognized (as highly) in the UK because his Turkish university – and the Turkish higher education system, more broadly – lacked a strong international reputation. An EMI degree, therefore, may not be enough for students some certain contexts to achieve their aspirations of working abroad, a commonly cited motivation in the literature (Galloway et al., 2017; Turhan & Kırkgöz, 2018), and further research is needed to interrogate these inequalities. While Ozan's narrative did not invoke strong emotions (e.g., anger, frustration) in reaction to this inequality – perhaps because he was content with his postgraduate studies – further research is needed to explore the impact that such barriers to access have on students' emotional wellbeing.

Inequalities perpetuated by neoliberalist education policies were also evident in the orientation towards native-speakerism and monolingual ideologies found in this study. Banu and Ozan felt frustration and regret at L1 use in their EMI classes, because they saw this as a deterrent to English development. Similarly, İlkay praised her lecturer's British accent and the immersion experience of English-only instruction. Her confidence speaking English grew in Portugal because it was 'not a native-speaker country'. These findings illustrate the ways in which neoliberal discourses in language education that favor a monolingual, immersive orientation to EMI invoke emotional responses in students, as these students' affective experiences seem to align with discourses of English-only instruction. The findings also suggest that participants associated English-only instruction with assumptions of better language learning outcomes. These assumptions of language learning persist despite a lack of empirical evidence (Macaro, 2022; Macaro et al., 2018), and they stand in contrast to a growing body of research highlighting the benefits of L1 use for teaching and learning (Şahan & Şahan, 2021; Chang, 2021).

Even though some participants (e.g., Cemal, Ozan) did not enroll on their EMI programs with the aim of developing English skills for their professional careers, we see a spirit of linguistic entrepreneurship (De Costa et al., 2016) develop throughout their EMI studies, culminating in the alignment of language learning activity with career prospects (e.g., Cemal's job search and Ozan's decision to move to England). İlkay serves as a possible counter-example to this narrative of the self-made linguistic entrepreneur: although she acknowledges the role of English as an economic commodity, she does not align herself with notions of self-improvement or the

self-made language learner. While she does not reject the neoliberal narrative of English as a skill for success, she does not seem to accept its universal imperative for ongoing self-improvement.

Nonetheless, Ilkay's narrative was also characterized by a commitment to developing her English, framed in terms of building confidence and underscoring themes of neoliberal discourses which position English as a gatekeeper to international opportunities. Unlike the other four participants in this study, humility was a main theme in Ilkay's narrative. The ways in which she downplayed her accomplishments in English stand in contrast to Cemal who expressed pride in his language abilities. Cemal's pride in his English abilities was evident in his refusal to accept low-paying job offers. In her narrative, Ilkay also acknowledged the importance of English skills for obtaining 'better', higher-paying jobs; however, she distanced herself from the story in her narrative by using metaphoric language and she credited the preparatory program with improving her English skills. Nonetheless, Ilkay noted that it was her English skills which afforded her access to participation on international projects. In contrast to Ilkay's acknowledgement of the preparatory program, Banu's emphasis on self-directed learning reflected the ideal neoliberal learner (Flores, 2013). Banu's self-directed efforts were tied to feelings of frustration, disappointment, and anxiety about her own shortcomings, illustrating a relationship between neoliberal discourses and the emotions experienced by EMI students. As evident through the four narratives presented in this study, the discursive relationship between neoliberalism and emotions is complex, individual, and contextually dependent (Benesch, 2017; 2019; Zembylas, 2022), since the same emotional responses to the neoliberal demands of English learner were not evident in each narrative. We call for further research to investigate the entanglement of neoliberal discourses and students' emotional experiences in EMI settings.

6. Conclusion

Increasingly, universities are turning to EMI as a quick and easy solution to questions of internationalization, and EMI policies are often rooted in neoliberalist internationalization agendas without consideration for the emotional impact on students. This study examined the emotional impact of EMI on graduates from engineering programs in Turkey. The study is limited in terms of its scope, as it reports the narratives of a small number of participants and relies on data collected through interviews with participants at one point in time. The participants in this study could arguably be considered as examples of 'successful' EMI graduates, because they were all working and/or pursuing postgraduate studies in their chosen field. As such, it is not necessarily surprising that many aspects of their experiences were described positively. Nonetheless, their narratives included a range of negative emotions (e.g., frustration, disappointment, anxiety, embarrassment) associated with their language learning experiences during and after EMI. The findings of this study have illustrated ways in which students' emotions in EMI contexts are constructed in line with neoliberal discourses of self-improvement, competition, and market value. The narratives in this study have also challenged assumptions of EMI leading to better English skills or improved international job prospects; rather, they have underscored the complex and subtle ways through which neoliberal discourses transform language skills into a marketable commodity and language learning into an act of entrepreneurship (De Costa et al., 2016; 2019).

We call for more research investigating the emotional wellbeing of students in diverse EMI settings, including the experiences of marginalized groups (e.g., Al Khalili, 2021) and longitudinal research examining students' emotional experiences at different time points (see Chiang & Chang, 2021). Different results with respect to students' emotional wellbeing might be found among EMI grad-

uates with different profiles, including those who have chosen to leave their field or who were unable to find jobs or postgraduate study in their desired field. Future studies of this kind are needed to examine the effects of neoliberalist education policies on the emotional wellbeing of EMI students.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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