Teaching Basic Economics through English in Islamic Higher Education: A Mixed Methods

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Abstract

The integration of content and language learning has increasingly been recognized as an effective pedagogical approach to enhance both subject comprehension and foreign language proficiency. This study examines the effectiveness of using English as a medium of instruction in teaching basic economics within an Islamic higher education context to improve students' understanding of economic concepts and their English language skills. Employing a qualitative descriptive design, the study involved students enrolled in a basic economics course delivered in English. Data were collected through classroom observations, analysis of students' learning tasks, and questionnaires, and were analyzed thematically. The findings reveal that English-medium instruction fosters active student engagement, enriches discipline-specific economic vocabulary, and strengthens comprehension of fundamental economic concepts. Despite initial challenges related to limited English proficiency, sustained exposure and supportive instructional strategies were found to mitigate these difficulties. The study highlights the potential of English-medium instruction as an effective approach to strengthening the quality and global orientation of economics education in Islamic higher education.

INTRODUCTION

In the globalization era, the ability to understand basic economic concepts and use English effectively has become increasingly important (Chahardowli & Sajadzadeh, 2022; Syahza & Hosobuchi, 2021; Zhang et al., 2021). Economics helps students understand how individuals, markets, and societies make decisions related to limited resources. At the same time, English is widely used as the main language in international academic communication and scientific publications (Albshkar et al., 2025; Markhmadova et al., 2025; McKay, 2016). Therefore, integrating economics learning with English instruction is considered relevant for improving students' academic competence and global readiness (Alghamdy, 2023; R, 2025).

Several studies have discussed the integration of content learning and language learning through approaches such as English as a Medium of Instruction and Content and Language Integrated Learning. Morton (2016) state that Content and Language Integrated Learning allows students to learn subject content and language simultaneously in meaningful learning contexts. Dalton-Puffer (2011) also explains that content-based instruction can improve students' academic vocabulary and thinking skills. However, other studies report that students often face difficulties in understanding subject content due to limited English proficiency, especially when instructional support is inadequate (Macaro et al., 2018).

In economics education, learning through English presents specific challenges. Basic economics includes abstract concepts and technical terms that may be difficult for students when taught in a foreign language (Agzamovna, 2024). Although many studies have explored English as a Medium of Instruction and Content and Language Integrated Learning in science and general subjects, research focusing on learning basic economics through English is still limited. This indicates the need for further research to understand how economics content can be effectively delivered in English without reducing students' conceptual understanding.

From a theoretical perspective, this learning approach is supported by constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes active learning and knowledge construction through interaction (Wertsch, 2024). Learning economics through English encourages students to actively engage with content, develop relevant vocabulary, and connect economic concepts with real-life situations. This approach supports interdisciplinary learning and strengthens existing theories on content-based instruction (Rajendran et al., 2024).

The previous studies mainly focus on language development or general subject instruction through English. This study differs from earlier research by focusing specifically on basic economics learning through English and examining both students' understanding of economic concepts and their English language development. Thus, this research contributes to the existing literature by providing insights into the implementation of English-based instruction in economics education.

In the context of Islamic higher education, the development of students' competence in economics is increasingly required to respond to global academic and professional demands. Students of economics in Islamic universities are expected not only to understand fundamental economic principles but also to engage with international literature, many of which are published in English (Akyuni et al., 2025; Hamzah et al., 2025). Consequently, the use of English as a medium of instruction in economics courses becomes a strategic approach to strengthening students' academic competitiveness while maintaining the substance of economics education. However, empirical evidence on how English-based instruction is implemented and experienced by students in Islamic higher education, particularly in basic economics courses, remains limited.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the implementation of learning basic economics through English and to examine its effectiveness in improving students' understanding of basic economic concepts and their English proficiency. The findings are expected to provide useful contributions for educators and institutions in developing effective integrated learning strategies.

METHODS

This study used a mixed methods approach by combining quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative method was applied to measure students' learning outcomes, while the qualitative method was used to describe students' learning experiences during basic economics instruction delivered in English (Costa,

2024; Dawadi et al., 2021; Snelson, 2016; Soicher et al., 2024). This approach was chosen to obtain clear and complete data regarding the effectiveness of the learning process. The subjects of this study were undergraduate students who took a basic economics course taught in English. The students acted as respondents and informants. Quantitative data were obtained from students' test results and questionnaire responses, while qualitative data were collected through classroom observations and students' written responses. The instruments used in this study included a pre-test and post-test to measure students' understanding of basic economic concepts (Campbell et al., 2020; Johar et al., 2024; Salajegheh et al., 2024; Singmann & Kellen, 2019). A questionnaire with a Likert scale was used to collect students' perceptions of learning economics through English. In addition, an observation sheet was used to record students' participation and learning activities during the class.

Data were collected through several steps. First, a pre-test was administered to identify students' initial understanding. Second, the learning process was conducted using English as the medium of instruction. During the learning activities, classroom observations were carried out. Third, a post-test was given to measure students' learning improvement. Finally, questionnaires were distributed to gather students' responses toward the learning process. Quantitative data from tests and questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as mean scores and percentages. The pre-test and post-test results were compared to identify learning improvement (Engkizar et al., 2025; Engkizar et al., 2023; Suárez-Orozco, 2019). Qualitative data from observations and written responses were analyzed descriptively by identifying common patterns related to students' learning experiences and challenges. To ensure data validity, the instruments were reviewed by experts. Data triangulation was applied by comparing data from tests, questionnaires, and observations (Engkizar et al., 2025; Kyngäs, 2020; Naeem et al., 2023).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that learning basic economics through English resulted in an improvement in students' learning outcomes and learning experiences. This improvement can be seen from the comparison between pre-test and post-test scores.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Pre-test and Post-test Scores

Test Type	Minimum Score	Maximum Score	Mean Score
Pre-test	45	75	60.20
Post-test	60	85	72.40

Table 1 shows that students' mean score increased from 60.20 in the pre-test to 72.40 in the post-test. This result indicates that students' understanding of basic economic concepts improved after learning was conducted using English as the medium of instruction. The increase in minimum and maximum scores also suggests that most students experienced learning progress. Classroom observation results indicated that students gradually became more active during the learning process. At the beginning, some students were hesitant to respond in English. However, as the learning activities continued, students showed better participation in discussions and were able to use basic economic terms in simple English expressions.

Questionnaire results revealed that most students responded positively to learning basic economics through English. Students reported that this approach helped them improve their English vocabulary related to economics and made them more familiar with English academic terms. The data were the result of the questionnaire on the students responded, the questionnaires were distributed to the students through Google Forms. The students were requested to fill out the

questionnaire at a specified time and in the class. The students can answer the questionnaires based on their experiences and learning in basic economic concepts. Here are the results of students' improvement in learning basic economics through English. This section presents the results of the questionnaire data

Table 2. The improvement of students' understanding of basic economic concepts through English medium instruction

Aspects	Very helpful	Neutral	Less Helpful
Implementation and Students' Perception	78%	15%	7%
Conceptual Understanding of Basic Economics	82%	54%	6%
Language Skill Development	85%	30%	10%
Learning Motivation and Attitude	80%	42%	8%
Total	81%	35%	8%

The aspect of implementation and students' perception shows a positive improvement in students' perception of the implementation of basic economics learning through English. Most of the students stated that the learning process was clear and understandable. Based on the data, 78% of students agreed that the teacher's explanation using English was easy to follow, while 15% stated it was moderately clear. It is only 7% of students reported difficulty in understanding the explanation. The conceptual understanding of basic Economics results the significant improvement in students' understanding. It is reported better comprehension of key concepts such as supply, demand, scarcity, and opportunity cost. The data reveal that 82% of students felt that they understood basic economic concepts better after learning through English compared to 54% before the implementation. In addition, 6% of students stated that they were not able to explain economic concepts English sentences.

Following that data, in language skill development shows improvement in students' English language skills, especially in vocabulary and reading skills related to economics. According to the data, 85% of students stated that they gained new English vocabulary related to economics. Meanwhile, 30% of student's fair respond in reading simple economics texts in English, and 10% conscious using English during class discussions. Last, the aspect of learning motivation and attitude indicates an increase. It is on students' learning motivation and positive attitudes toward the subject. The data show that 80% of students felt more motivated to learn economics when English was used as the medium of instruction. Additionally, 42% of students reported that the learning activities were challenging in a positive way. But, 8% in a small minority of students poor in motivation.

The data indicate a positive result in students' understanding of basic economics through English. Overall, the total from the aspects indicates an improvement. Nevertheless, several students mentioned difficulties in understanding explanations when complex economic concepts were delivered fully in English. The findings indicate that learning basic economics through English can improve students' understanding of economic concepts. The increase in post-test scores shows that the learning objectives of this study were achieved. This result supports the concept of Content and Language Integrated Learning, which emphasizes learning content and language at the same time (Merç & Subaşı, 2015; Morton, 2016).

The observation results also suggest that English-based instruction encourages student participation. As stated by Dalton-Puffer (2011), content-based learning helps students engage more actively because language is used in a meaningful context. In this study, students became more confident in using English to explain simple economic ideas, even though they initially faced difficulties. The challenges

reported by students are consistent with previous studies on English as a Medium of Instruction. Students in non-English-speaking contexts often experience difficulty when learning content through English (Macaro et al., 2018). However, the findings of this study show that these difficulties can be reduced through simple explanations, repetition, and the use of familiar examples.

Overall, the results confirm that learning basic economics through English is a practical and beneficial approach. This study contributes to previous research by providing evidence from economics education, which is still limited compared to other subject areas. The findings can be used as a reference for educators who plan to implement English-based instruction in basic economics courses, especially in similar educational contexts. This study concludes that learning basic economics through English is an effective instructional approach to improving students' understanding of basic economic concepts and supporting their English language development (Gudza et al., 2021; Jamal & Alroaia, 2021; Korõtko et al., 2023). The findings show that students experienced improvement in learning outcomes and demonstrated increased participation during the learning process. The use of English as a medium of instruction did not hinder students' comprehension when appropriate teaching strategies were applied (Baroud et al., 2025; Rahman et al., 2025).

Although some students initially faced difficulties due to limited English proficiency, these challenges were gradually reduced through simple explanations, contextual examples, and continuous exposure to English. Overall, learning basic economics through English is considered feasible and beneficial for higher education contexts, particularly in supporting interdisciplinary learning and preparing students for future academic demands (Az-Zahra et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that learning basic economics through English as a medium of instruction is an effective and feasible approach in higher education. The findings demonstrate a clear improvement in students' understanding of basic economic concepts, as reflected in the increase of post-test scores compared to pre-test results, as well as in students' learning experiences. Classroom observations and questionnaire data further indicate that English-based instruction enhances student participation, motivation, and discipline-specific vocabulary development. Although some students initially encountered difficulties due to limited English proficiency, these challenges were gradually mitigated through supportive instructional strategies, including simple explanations, repetition, and contextual examples. Overall, the results support the principles of Content and Language Integrated Learning by showing that content mastery and language development can occur simultaneously without compromising conceptual understanding. This study provides empirical evidence that English-medium instruction in basic economics can contribute positively to interdisciplinary learning and better prepare students for global academic demands.

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