

# THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EMI IN TEACHING: A COMPARISON OF LECTURER AND STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

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## ABSTRACT:

English as a medium for instruction (EMI) is a globally emerging phenomenon and countries have recorded an exponential growth in EMI courses in the past few decades. The implementation of EMI programs in Vietnam, however, confronts a number of problems and constraints. This study attempts to explore EMI teaching effectiveness by comparing students evaluation with lectures self-evaluation as well as required improvements to EMI courses in economics-related disciplines. The findings underscore the need for university administrators to provide content teachers with training on EMI teaching approach. Some pedagogical implications are proposed to EMI curriculum developers and teachers for future effective development of EMI programs.

**Keywords:** English, medium instruction, teacher evaluation, student evaluation.

## 1. Introduction

English as a medium for instruction is defined as the use of the English language to “teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English” [2]. These definitions make a distinction between the use of English as L2 to teach content in contexts where the majority of learners speak English as L1 and in others where learners do not. In non-English speaking countries, English as a medium for teaching has been widely implemented and has become mainstream in higher education since the 1990s [6]. There are many reasons given, of which the main one is the trend of internationalization of education. The dominant role of English-speaking countries in the economy, international politics and the growth of English as a lingua franca in academia as well as on the internet

has greatly impacted on the language policies of countries. EMI adoption is considered an important factor in improving the quality of training, attracting foreign students, professionals and researchers in a global world when knowledge movement is plausible.

Despite unquestionable benefits, much deep concerns have been expressed towards EMI implementation. Published literature has emphasized some essential conditions to the success of EMI programs. Vu & Burm (2014) found four emerging challenges in EMI implementation such as language abilities of teachers and students, learning styles and pedagogical issues [11]. In the context of Vietnam, as indicated in Vu TT at al. (2019) research, the use of English to teach specialized subjects encountered five main difficulties including

foreign language proficiency of students, student learning methods, foreign language proficiency of lecturers, specialized content taught in English and learning environment [12].

## 2. Research methodology

Self-evaluation in which lectures assess their teaching practices against a set of standards of characteristics allows lecturers to reflect on their own teaching activities and conduct self-correction. This method is believed to have great potential in adjusting teaching strategies and improving teaching practices [8]. However, information created by lecturers is the subject of their own biases and misinterpretations. As human beings, everyone tends to lack complete objectivity and can misread the others responses. Regarding students evaluation on lecturers teaching effectiveness, even though it may be affected by current state of students preference, it is multidimensional, reliable, stable, relatively valid against a variety of indicators of effective teaching. This study, therefore evaluates EMI effectiveness based on the comparison of students evaluation and lecturers self-evaluation.

This study also adopts the Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) model - a prevalent methodology to explore actual perceptions and gaps relating to how well an issue is being managed. IPA analysis allows results to be graphically displayed on an easily-interpreted two-dimensional grid. With performance on the X-axis and importance on the Y-axis, the IPA model includes four quadrants, namely "I - Concentrate here", "II - Keep up the good work", "III - Low priority" and "IV - Possible overkill", which refer to the effort made [5]. In the context of education-based studies, IPA can be considered as a quantitative representation of data for course evaluation. Obviously, the important quadrant is "I - Concentrate here" which shows items that participants feel are important but are unsatisfied with. In this research it shows the aspects of EMI courses that require improvement. In other words, these are the challenges to be addressed to improve the quality of EMI practices.

The study was conducted at school of advanced education programs, National Economics

University where both fully and partially EMI-based programs have been offered in forms of Advanced Education Programs(AEP), The Excellent Education Programs(EEP) and Profession-Oriented Higher Education - POHE. The research participants comprised 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> year students who attended at least one EMI courses at advanced education programs from 2018 to 2020 (N = 330), and EMI lecturers from a range of economics disciplines (N = 19). Both qualitative and quantitative data were also collected via a questionnaire and semi-structured interview with a focus group including 5 lecturers and 10 students.

## 3. Results and discussion

The data shows that the majority of students gave an average score for overall evaluation on the effectiveness of EMI courses. In detail, 33.30% of students were slightly content; only 13.33% believed the courses were good and 19.39% gave the highest ranking at level 5 - extremely good. On the other hand, the majority of lecturers gave high overall scores for the effectiveness of EMI courses with 57.89% selecting level 4 - good and 31.58% selecting level 5 - extremely good. The comparison between students and lecturers satisfaction rates shows a significant difference between two groups in which students score of satisfaction for the amount of course content delivered by teachers, materials provided, teaching methods, teachers interaction/feedback and teachers language proficiency are all lower than in teachers self-evaluation. The paper will now discuss student and teacher evaluation on each dimension of EMI course in detail.

### 3.1. Student and lecturer satisfaction with course content and materials

The data revealed that two parties were rather satisfied with the course content and materials. More than half of measurement items were evaluated at level 3 - average - by students while the majority of items were ranked at a higher level by lecturers (level 4 - good).

Both groups agreed that the presentation slides and learning materials were well-prepared and not just simply translated from Vietnamese into English and high-quality references were provided for extensive reading. However, the students were

Table 1. Level of Satisfaction on Content and materials

Label	Items	Students		Lecturers	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
D1	Content and learning materials	4.02	.75	4.12	.62
1	Substantial content	3.98	.72	4.10	.56
2	Tailored content to students level	3.89	.78	4.00	.81
3	Well-prepared presentation slides and materials	4.15	.72	4.26	.56
4	High quality references	4.08	.80	4.10	.56

slightly concerned about the content being unsubstantial (Mean = 3.98). Due to the superiority of English course books to Vietnamese ones, explaining and obtaining the subject knowledge are time-consuming for both lecturers and students. Interviews with students revealed that lecturers occasionally “ran out of time or failed to cover all knowledge of the lessons in class”. Teachers, on the other hand, did not admit delivering insubstantial content, but confessed that students occasionally “took longer time to complete the learning activities” than they expected. Teachers also tended to allocate more time for group work in EMI classes because comprehending the handouts or other learning materials and communicating with group members in English, for students, were both time-consuming. Parts of the lessons, in this case, were assigned as the homework or self-studying tasks. Three out of five lecturers sometimes wrapped up the lessons very abruptly or excluded the conclusion simply because they ran

out of time. These results from the interviews also possibly explained students belief that teachers could have done a better job in tailoring the content to students level of knowledge and English proficiency (Mean = 3.89).

### 3.2. Student and lecturer satisfaction with teaching method

Both lecturers and students did not show high levels of satisfaction with the teaching methods, types of instructions, and preparation activities before class. The demographic information shows that the majority of teachers have not attended training courses on EMI teaching, which is possibly the explanation for their ineffective teaching methods. This is in line with the findings from previous studies in which teachers were found not to be trained adequately to participate in the EMI project. Dearden (1994) pointed out content teachers had been nominated to teach in EMI because they had been abroad, spoke well, or had volunteered.

Table 2. Satisfaction on teaching methods

Label	Items	Students		Lecturers	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
D2	Multiple teaching methods	3.67	.84	.56	15
3	Tailored explanation to students level	4.00	.85	.56	15
4	Various types of instruction/questions	3.87	.86	.73	15
5	Preparation activities before classes	3.49	.95	.78	18
6	Debate/group discussion	4.06	.85	.65	5
7	Self-study activities	4.05	.81	.69	2

Preparation before classes was rated the lowest by both groups. Interview with students reveals that readings as the sole pre-class preparation was not appealing. Pre-class activities are an excellent way for students to gain knowledge of the topic prior to engaging with it in class. Students will be prepared in advance and more ready to ask questions and perform critical thinking activities during class. However, students confessed they were sometimes “overwhelmed with the readings from all the EMI courses” and could hardly accomplish required/recommended readings before classes. Most students did pre-class readings only when it was their turn to deliver in-class group presentations while four other students additionally complained that even when they managed to do some readings, “the knowledge might not be discussed in class”. This means preparation activities should not provide superfluous information; otherwise, classes will be like mental workouts. Also, the study figured out that lecturers who assigned students with pre-class readings tended to ask dreaded questions like “what did you get from the reading?” This is probably not an efficient way to check for students pre-class preparation as well as their reading comprehension unless the reading was really interesting to them. Pre-class readings without guiding questions or instructions on how each section is meant to accomplish turn out to be insufficient.

The biggest gap in the results of two groups evaluation on teaching method was recorded in the area of self-study activities. Teachers believed that students of EMI classes who were in their 3rd and 4th year possessed a high level of self-regulation,

especially intrinsic motivation. They wanted to acquire disciplinary knowledge in English for future career prosperity, which resulted in their high autonomy and good performance in group and self-studying activities. Consequently, apart from lecturing, group work and self-studying activities were favored teaching approaches of EMI teachers. As mentioned in the previous section, qualitative data revealed not all content of the lessons was covered in class and some were assigned for homework or self-studying. However, “little/brief follow-up feedback or review” provided led to students discontentedness.

**3.3. Student and lecturer satisfaction with interaction and feedback**

Lecturers reported the highest level of satisfaction in the dimension of interaction and feedback while this of students was the lowest. This dimension records significant differences in all measurement items. Both parties seemed to be content with teacher-student in-class interaction; however the scores given by lecturers was much higher than that of students with means being 4.52 and 4.11 respectively.

Students were not quite content with interaction outside class and lectures feedback in either oral or written forms. A high SD score (1.21) reveals a great difference among lecturers attitude. While some lecturers maintained effective external interaction with students outside the classroom, others did not do it initiatively. Both groups of participants mentioned the use of the mother tongue in outside classroom communication in their interview responses. The main gap was recorded in the area of written feedback. Lecturers referred to

**Table 3. Level of Satisfaction on Teacher-student interaction and feedback**

Label	Items	Students		Lecturers	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
D3	Teacher-student interaction & feedback	3.88	.80	4.30	.83
8	Interaction in class	4.11	.65	4.52	.51
9	Interaction outside class	3.77	.87	4.15	1.21
10	Oral feedback	3.89	.81	4.26	.80
11	Written feedback	3.75	.87	4.26	.80

Table 4. Level of Satisfaction on teachers language proficiency

Label	Items	Students		Lecturers	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
D4	Teachers language proficiency	3.99	.85	4.26	.83
12	Lecturers academic English	4.01	.84	4.31	.82
13	Lecturers pronunciation	3.75	.98	4.36	.83
14	Lecturers subject-related vocabulary	4.15	.76	4.21	.78
15	Lecturers communication skills	4.06	.82	4.15	.89

“language proficiency” as the main hinder to their interaction with students as well as providing detailed and sophisticated feedback. They tended to give oral corrective feedback, especially on group works, but found themselves “struggling to give encouraging remarks”. When lecturers actually did, the remarks were rather short and simple like “well done, good, or good job”. Students also stated that teachers tend to provide less immediate feedback, especially on written assignments. Four out of ten students received feedback on final weeks of the semester while for the rest, the assignments were returned with the marks only without detailed feedback.

*Student and lecturer satisfaction with linguistic proficiency:*

Unaligned with common findings in literature reviews, only a minority of lecturers in this study reported language as a problem to their EMI teaching practices. Lecturers positively evaluated their communication skills (Mean = 4.15), range of subject related lexical resources (Mean = 4.21), and especially clear pronunciation (Mean = 4.36).

This is such a surprising result when language ability especially non-colloquial English, poor communication skills and confusion or misunderstanding of subject vocabularies in English have always been reported as the main concern of teachers in delivering EMI courses in previously published literature [3-4, 10]. However, interview responses revealed that the monolingual policy was not strictly followed in class and lecturers, in fact, use some translanguaging strategies in dealing with students language

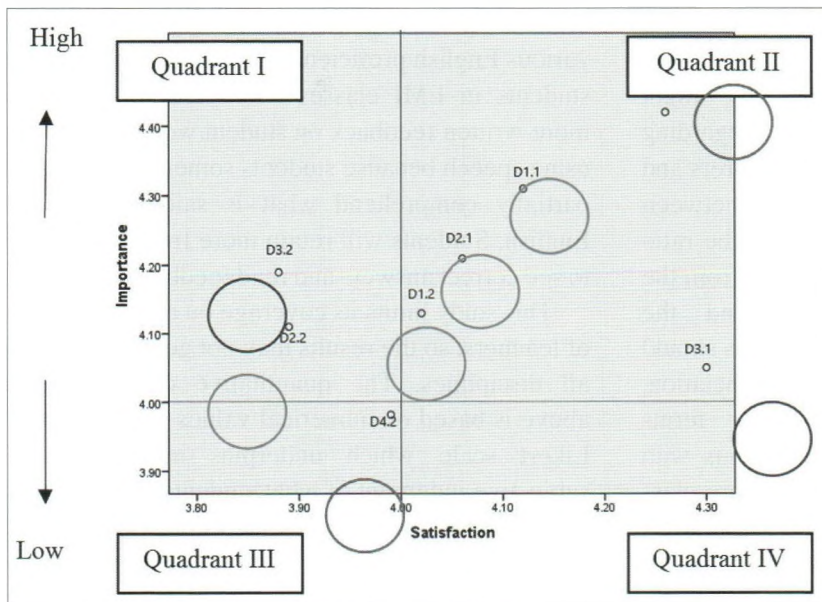
insufficiency. They implemented word-by-word translation and code-switching strategies in explaining important content knowledge according to students reaction. Unlike the findings reported by Tran (2018), students in this study did not think teachers struggle with teaching in English, but their English pronunciation could be improved to not prevent the knowledge transmission [7].

#### 3.4. Importance - Satisfaction analysis

Next, the study conducts importance-satisfaction analysis to identify the most crucial dimensions to the successful implementation of EMI as well as elements of EMI courses that require extra attention or improvement. The data were visually represented in an importance-satisfaction matrix with the vertical axis showing mean of importance and horizontal axis showing mean of satisfaction (Figure 1). The mean = 4.0 which indicates high level of importance and acceptable level of satisfaction on the 5 score scale was used to delineate the horizontal and vertical lines to divide the scatter diagram into four quadrants. The figures were then plotted onto the scatter diagram to illustrate their exact positions in four quadrants.

Based on the analysis of results, no dimension was plotted only Quadrant IV - low importance/high satisfaction while Quadrant III - low importance/low satisfaction includes only students evaluation on teacher language proficiency (D4.2). This was the aspect students were not satisfied with, but ranked it at low priority. This is a surprising result considering language proficiency is always highlighted as the key issue

Figure 1: Importance-satisfaction analysis matrix



for EMI teaching which has caused growing concerns among institutions in recently published literature.

Next, all items from lecturers perspective (D1.1, D2.1, D3.1, D4.1) were spotted in Quadrant II - high importance/high satisfaction. These are significantly important elements to the success of EMI courses but lecturers were satisfied with. In other words, they believed the same level of focus and attention should be maintained for these aspects. Finally, Quadrant I - high importance/low satisfaction includes teaching methods (D2.2) and interaction and feedback (D3.2). These elements, from students perspectives, require additional work and improvement.

What stands out here are different prioritized items which students and lecturers perceived to be critical to successful EMI courses. Both groups agreed on maintaining the current level of effort on course content and learning materials. This is the dimension of the courses that do not require further development or investment of time and resources. While lecturers were rather content with their teaching methods, interaction and feedback in EMI courses, students perceived these to be critical dimensions which course developers and lecturers should focus on. Also, teachers definitely should not stress out too much on their language

proficiency as students do not refer to it as a main determinant to the success of EMI courses.

#### 4. Conclusion

Even though both students and lecturers did not show an extremely high level of satisfaction with the EMI courses, course content and materials were slightly more valued than the other dimensions. Students thought highly of lecturers effort in preparing power point/learning materials and references, range of subject-related lexical resources, and in-class interaction. The study

results reveal the exaggeration of teachers self-confidence for their English pronunciation, performance in giving oral and written feedback in English. Align with much of the literature, this study indicates the language flexibility in EMI practice when lecturers switch between native and foreign language for instructions. Although teachers do not express much concern over linguistic accuracy in English or anxiety over their mastery of academic vocabulary, some problems in EMI do relate to lecturers language proficiency. Also, not many changes in teaching style were depicted. While students expect lecturers to use various teaching approaches, lecturing is still the most prevalent form of teaching. Collaborative and self-regulated learning approaches were adopted to some extent but the results were poor due to the lack of detailed and immediate feedback in written English. Even though teaching academic vocabulary is not the responsibility of EMI lectures, students do expect some pre-class preparation activities. Also, English as the language of instruction does affect the lecturers rapport, feedback and interaction with students outside the classroom. Their feedback and complement in English tend to be short and rather simple.

The findings imply that the top task of institutions is to provide teachers with training in

language for monitoring classes and giving effective feedback as well as EMI teaching approaches to design appealing activities for different learning styles and especially a light explanation to students' English levels. Regarding the use of English as instruction, both lecturers and students recommended the combination between Vietnamese and English in teaching and the ratio should be 80%-20% to reduce the burden from the curriculum, content comprehension and the pressure of examinations. Thirdly, teachers should put extra effort on their English pronunciation, check the pronunciation of unfamiliar terms carefully before class and provide students with pre-class preparation activities such as pre-class readings with succinct guidance or questions. Most importantly, the preparation activities should be tapered to what will be discussed in class. Fourth, scaffolding strategies such as a lesson check-list or the lecture video uploaded to the course virtual platform are commonly recommended [1]. In addition, using gap-filling, mini quizzes, visual aids

and interactive live polls are possibly useful scaffolding strategies in dealing with students of various English proficiency. Lastly, it is helpful for students in EMI classes when teachers provide more written feedback on student work rather than using speech because students sometimes can only partially comprehend what is said to them in English. Students will retain more from being able to see correct answers and read feedback [9].

This study limits its coverage on a small sample of teachers, so the results may not be generalizable to all disciplines. The quantitative data provided above is based on numerical values accorded on a Likert scale which underpins individual and subjective judgment of what students and lecturers considered important and what they were satisfied with. Further studies can fulfill these limitations with investigations into the correlation between challenges and students' satisfaction level and variables such as students' EMI experience, disciplines, lecturers' language proficiency as well as specific language-related determinants ■

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## HIỆU QUẢ CỦA VIỆC ÁP DỤNG PHƯƠNG PHÁP EMI TRONG VIỆC GIẢNG DẠY NỘI DUNG MÔN HỌC: SO SÁNH GIỮA QUAN ĐIỂM CỦA GIÁNG VIÊN VÀ SINH VIÊN

● **NGUYỄN THỊ THIÊN HƯƠNG**

Trường Đại học Kinh tế quốc dân

### **TÓM TẮT:**

Tiếng Anh như một phương tiện trong giảng dạy và nghiên cứu (EMI), là một xu hướng giảng dạy đang nổi lên trên toàn cầu. Số lượng các khoá học áp dụng phương pháp EMI đã tăng theo cấp số nhân tại các quốc gia trong vài thập kỷ qua. Tuy nhiên, việc triển khai các chương trình áp dụng phương pháp EMI ở Việt Nam gặp phải một số khó khăn, vướng mắc. Nghiên cứu này nhằm đánh giá hiệu quả giảng dạy của phương pháp EMI thông qua so sánh đánh giá của sinh viên với sự tự đánh giá của giáo viên, cũng như phân tích các cải tiến cần thiết đối với các khoá học trong lĩnh vực kinh tế áp dụng phương pháp EMI. Các kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy, các trường đại học cần đào tạo giáo viên về nội dung áp dụng phương pháp EMI trong quá trình giảng dạy. Một số hàm ý sư phạm dành cho những người phát triển chương trình học sử dụng phương pháp EMI và giáo viên được đề xuất trong nghiên cứu này nhằm giúp nâng cao hiệu quả triển khai các chương trình học có áp dụng phương pháp EMI trong tương lai.

**Từ khóa:** tiếng Anh, phương tiện giảng dạy và nghiên cứu, đánh giá của giáo viên, đánh giá của học sinh.