
BOOK REVIEW

ENGLISH MEDIUM INSTRUCTION PRACTICES IN VIETNAMESE UNIVERSITIES - INSTITUTIONAL, PRACTITIONER AND STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

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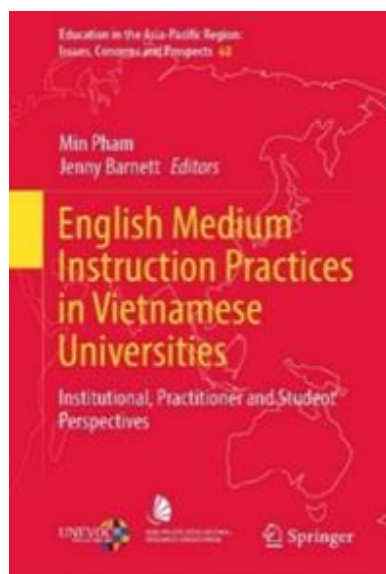
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In the context of internationalization in all aspects of life, the dominance of English as a global lingua franca has been widely affirmed. This trend contributes to the expansion of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI), which allows an increasing adoption of English in teaching specialized knowledge in countries or jurisdictions where the official language is not English (Pun & Jin, 2021). The transition to implement EMI at the tertiary level has become a global phenomenon that has witnessed significant development over the last two decades (Galloway & Sahan, 2021).

There have been several studies investigating the challenges and benefits of EMI programs across the world; however, not much literature can be found about EMI implementation experiences and practices in Vietnam. The book entitled “**English Medium Instruction Practices in Vietnamese Universities - Institutional, Practitioner and Student Perspectives**” takes the spotlight of one among very few focusing on EMI practices in Vietnamese higher education, addressing institutional, practitioner, and student perspectives. It makes itself different from the others in supplying guidance and practical information for universities’ EMI policymakers, rector boards, lecturers, and student support teams in English for academic purposes across disciplines, as well as to the theoretical framing of EMI field itself.

This book, as the first collection dealing with aspects of EMI in Vietnam, is a collection of sixteen chapters presented under three parts. Following Chapter 1, which introduces the

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book, Part 1 (consisting of Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5) entitled “Institutional Perspectives on EMI Practices in Vietnamese Universities” provides a backdrop and frame of reference for the other two parts. Part 2 (Chapters 5 to 11) named “Practitioner Perspectives on EMI Practices in Vietnamese Universities” presents the practitioner's perceptions of designing and teaching EMI courses that support the students to achieve the required content goals. Part 3 (Chapters 12, 13, and 14) – Student Perspectives on EMI Practices in Vietnamese Universities – addresses the importance of students’ experiences and insights as a source of input to policies and practices for moving forward with EMI. The content of each of these chapters will be provided below.

Chapter 1 gives a holistic view of the book's aims, making it a valuable resource for successful EMI implementation not only inside Vietnam but also in other Asian settings. The chapter then restates a standard definition of EMI and briefly reviews EMI as a pedagogical innovation internationally, regionally, and domestically. Three types of EMI programs offered in Vietnamese universities namely Joint Programs, Advanced Programs, and High-Quality Programs are also mentioned and distinguished based on the legal basis of the foundation and requirements. The chapter ends with an explanation of the book’s structure and an overview of sixteen chapters organized into three parts covering institutional, practitioner and student perspectives on EMI practices.

Chapter 2 opens Part 1 with an overall picture of the development of EMI in Vietnamese universities through the theoretical lens of the ROAD-MAPPING framework established by Dafouz and Smit (2016), which is specially designed for the analysis of English-Medium Education in Multilingual University Settings (EMEMUS). In the beginning, the author, also one of the book’s editors, introduces the uses and structure of the ROAD-MAPPING framework. The interrelations of the six dimensions called Roles of English (RO), Academic Disciplines (AD), (Language) Management (M), Agents (A), Practices and Processes (PP), and Internationalization and Glocalization (ING) are also highlighted and illustrated. Together the dimensions conform to the framework as a valuable tool for moving EMI forward in Vietnam. The remaining contents of the chapter focus on analyzing the historical development of EMI in Vietnamese higher education using the ROAD-MAPPING framework. All the factors and agents associated with EMI implementation are explored according to each of the dimensions at national, institutional, and individual levels. It can be concluded from the chapter that the divergence of the agency during the implementation of EMI programs in Vietnam is attributed to several factors that have effects at all levels.

Chapter 3 delves into the challenges of EMI implementation at a university in Danang and places the focus on investigating the impacts of the threefold EMI enhancement practices of non-curricular, curricular, and extra-curricular approaches on the EMI students’ English capacity, self-confidence, and motivation. By employing a longitudinal case study, the research results show that the practices of the threefold positively improve students’ EMI experiences, which is of great significance and sets the base for expanding the models to a larger scale in the university.

Chapter 4 provides insight into the matter of EMI teachers’ job satisfaction through a qualitative case study carried out at a university in Vietnam. The study aims to investigate the factors influencing EMI teachers’ job satisfaction utilizing Hagedorn’s (2000) framework with an additional factor proposed by the researchers. The findings indicate the mediators influencing EMI teachers’ job satisfaction at the university function as both motivators and hygienes, of which the hygienes are more numerous than the motivators. Based on the results, recommendations are made for appropriate policy development and timely support from

institutions to maximize the effectiveness of EMI programs at higher education institutions in Vietnam. The study can be regarded as the gap filler in vast research on EMI implementation with little attention paid to exploring EMI teachers' job satisfaction.

Chapter 5 reviews the three previous chapters of the Part that show the real experiences of EMI implementation in Vietnam universities. The importance of institutional preparation, consultation and support is highlighted as the core of the chapter. The commenter indicates that the top-down nature of decision-making in the Vietnamese context serves to widen the disconnect between the government's understandable desire to internationalize education and the practical needs of the institutions and stakeholders. The chapter ends with a list of questions that need to be answered by the authorities at the national, institutional, and departmental levels before implementing EMI programs.

Chapter 6 provides an interesting window into what really happened inside and outside the class of EMI programs offered at a multidiscipline university in Vietnam. By deploying an exploratory study with the data sources triangulated, compared, contrasted, and synthesized, the authors explore various teaching strategies adopted by the lecturers to facilitate the student's learning and engagement and the students' positive reflections on the usefulness of the practices. Although the research results cannot be generalized due to the study's small scale, they can serve as a helpful reference for EMI practitioners and institutional authorities in similar educational contexts.

Chapter 7 shows another picture of an Advanced Program at Da Nang University where the researcher-practitioner successfully adopted the key principles of the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach in a single course. The researchers also make a succinct distinction between CLIL and EMI and then highlight the benefits of the CLIL-ised approaches. The students' uniformly high evaluation of the course activities and project shows that the lesson activities and the project CLIL-ised practices can help achieve teaching for deeper learning.

Chapter 8 explores the use of first language (L1) in EMI teaching practices in some universities across Vietnam because of the top-down management model regardless of the voice of EMI lecturers and the lack of explicit policy guidelines about the use of L1 in EMI classrooms. Although it cannot be denied that L1 is inevitable in second-language classrooms from the historical views and literature review, the study reveals different views on its use by lecturers and students. Despite the top-down institutional language policy, the lecturers in this study acted actively in their EMI teaching practices since they were aware of the opportunities for their own professional development. However, what has been done is somehow a different story in the hope of offering the best possible ways of supporting their students to achieve the course objectives without adjusting the course content. At the end of the chapter, the researcher suggests several implications for university managers and EMI lecturers for a better move toward EMI.

Chapter 9 goes into another deep teaching practice using translanguaging in EMI classrooms. The term "translanguaging" is clearly explained in its development and promotion thanks to its strengths in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms. This qualitative study, of which the participants are the two teachers of English to non-English major students, provides new insights into EMI lecturers' utilization and perceptions of translanguaging in their teaching practices. The researcher shows that the lecturers have flexible strategies for applying translanguaging inside and outside class to support students' learning process and build rapport with them. The research results set the base for some implications for policy planners and

teacher professional development and training in relation to moving forward pedagogically with EMI.

Chapter 10 discusses the aspects of assessment in EMI practices at a public university in Vietnam aiming at providing several types of assessment employed, the reasons for their employment and the students' views on their effectiveness. The students' difficulties in participating in EMI lessons and both the advantages and disadvantages of the assessment types are also examined in the chapter. The findings reveal that the activities of assessment for and of learning practices in the EMI courses are limited and depend on individual teachers' professional competence. Most of the assessment methods applied in EMI classes are the same as those of Vietnamese Medium Instruction lessons in terms of the content complexity and test format and not all the students are quite satisfied with the test results.

Chapter 11 showcases an overview of the five constituent chapters on EMI practitioners' perspectives. It highlights the core of the research-based chapters and makes it easier to catch the points of EMI implementation in Vietnam where there may still be a lack of readiness for EMI. The commenter suggests that to move EMI forward and effectively contribute to Vietnamese society with "competitiveness, prosperity, and international engagement," a static picture of EMI should become situated and accommodated to the context-specific needs.

Chapter 12 opens Part 3 with a study on students' views and experiences of EMI policies and curricula, and classroom activities by exploiting in-depth interviews with the participants. The findings show that although the students completed the first year of English tuition as the preparation period, they were shocked in moving to the second year with a focus on learning content without any language support. Before EMI lessons, the lecturers provided them with PPT slides and topic-related Vietnamese videos; however, they still had to struggle to comprehend. Consequently, translanguaging was used as a solution. Besides, the students spent a huge amount of time reading related Vietnamese books and materials and searching for videos in L1 after class. The chapter contributes to raising a voice to assure the importance of close relationships between institutional decisions and the role of lecturers and learners as agents regarding moving forward with EMI.

Chapter 13 shifts the focus to students' learning experiences in a provincial university where most of the students come from different areas and have little exposure to English outside class. The research was done in a single EMI course, also the first EMI course experienced by the participants. By employing a mixed method, the research shows that although the students faced a lot of challenges during the course due to their limited English proficiency and exposure, the course was greatly beneficial to them in terms of content knowledge and English improvement. It is noteworthy that scaffolding among the students in collaborative working can result in enhancing English language use. Besides, learner diaries were seen to be helpful for the students and lecturers to track the learners' improvement in both their content acquisition, teaching skills and English levels. In addition, once again, the use of L1 during the EMI course was traced for the best support to the students and proved to be useful in mediating knowledge construction. The findings of the research propose pedagogical implications for moving forward with EMI in Vietnamese universities, especially those in difficult areas.

Chapter 14 reveals students' difficulties in doing EMI courses and their strategies in response to those difficulties. The data analyzed under six themes such as listening comprehension, grasping academic content, workload, assessment, speaking in English and teaching methods gives full details of how the students struggled with their EMI courses. The

research implies that the causes of the difficulties are both intrinsic and extrinsic. Accordingly, the students had to adapt themselves to a variety of strategies to cope with the obstacles both personal and interpersonal before class, during class and after class. Although the so-called approaches indicate the students' sense of responsibility for finding the solutions themselves, it seems that they are not aware of their rights or responsibility in making their voice in calling for institutional actions to improve EMI offerings. The implicit feedback from this study of student perspectives suggests several implications for moving forward with EMI covering all the parts of the stakeholders and for further research.

Chapter 15 comments on the key issues of three chapters of Part 3 in terms of socio-ecological perspective at the macro, meso and micro levels. At each level, from the reflection of the three research-based chapters, the commenter gives her main insights into the student's problems and challenges they faced in doing EMI courses and then highlights the implications which are of excellent value for those most directly affected in moving forward with EMI. The utilization of a wide range of qualitative methods by the researchers is also highly appreciated in this commentary since they help to uncover not only the cognitive but also the affective experiences of the students. It can be learned from this commentary that Vietnamese universities have been grasping effective models to initiate and maintain EMI. Though the journey is very much in progress, this proposes a need for more priority on investigating the students' experiences and the lecturers' professional development.

Chapter 16 brings the key themes presented in the previous chapters into a review and meta-analysis using the ROAD-MAPPING Framework (Dafouz & Smit, 2016). The chapter begins with the introduction of a newly emerged term called EME (English-Medium Education), of which the concept of "education" is much broader and more learner-centered than "instruction" (Dafouz & Smit, 2020). It is argued that the important perspectives presented in the previous chapters show a closer alignment with the EME approach because of the promotion of students' content learning as the key concern as well as the importance of institutional, practitioners and student agency that illustrates many features of EME approach in Vietnamese higher education. As an illustration of the point, the following sections of the chapter focus on analyzing the reported studies of the previous chapters using the six dimensions of the ROAD-MAPPING framework and the EME principles they associate with each dimension. Interestingly, in each section under a ROAD-MAPPING framework's dimension, after summarizing and analyzing related key points of the previous chapters, the editors propose potential ways that the EME approach could be applied and help to address the existing problems. Finally, it is strongly recommended that an EME approach should be adopted at all levels – from national policy to classroom interaction, contributing to the sustainable and effective development of EMI and the internationalization of higher education in Vietnam.

One of the book's strengths is the collection of diversified research methods, making it a valuable source for novice researchers or those who are confused with their research designs and methods in the field of EMI. Almost all types of research designs can be found in the book such as Case study (Chapters 3, 7, 14), Qualitative research (Chapters 4, 8, 9, 12), Mixed-method (Chapter 10), Exploratory study (Chapter 6), and Practitioner-researcher research (Chapter 13). The researchers enhance their studies' reliability and validity by exploiting triangulated data sources. The data generation methods are also of common use such as student and lecturer interviews, classroom observation, questionnaire surveys, and pre and post-tests. Of these, student and lecturer interviews are the most frequently used in the chapters since this is one of the best ways that facilitate access to participants' sense of agency in EMI, by eliciting

insights into how practitioners and students see their own actions and the reasons for them.

As a novice researcher attempting to study EMI for the first time, personally, this book is a great reference for me and my Ph.D. dissertation in this field. There are many reasons why I feel I have been so lucky to have access to it. Firstly, the book is reader-friendly and well written and structured, making it easy for the readers to understand EMI development and implementation in higher education in Vietnam where EMI is becoming an increasingly common phenomenon but with little literature. Secondly, the threefold design of the book according to the three associated aspects of EMI implementation named institutional perspectives, practitioner perspectives, and student perspectives enables the flexibility for the readers to choose to read in any order of their need. Thirdly, the commentary concluding each part of the book is written by an international scholar whose name is widely seen in EMI-related research and practices. They are Andy Kirkpatrick (Part 1), Marta Aguilar-Pérez (Part 2), and Anne Burns (Part 3). The commentaries present the outsider's comments on the issues addressed in the chapters and share the voice for implications for more successful EMI implementation in Vietnamese universities under diversified contexts. In addition to this, they offer the readers opportunities to refer back to the key points of the previous chapters and draw important lessons from the cases. Fourthly, theoretically, the book offers an excellent explanation of the ROAD-MAPPING framework as the frame for the review of EMI in Vietnam universities and the suggestion for a pedagogical transition from EMI to EME, which really interests me and makes me decide this will be a valuable guideline for my Ph.D. dissertation. Lastly, methodologically, it is noteworthy that the book can function as a “how-to” guide for an inexperienced researcher like me in EMI. There is so much to learn about the research design and data collection tools in response to the research aims and objectives in EMI research and practices in Vietnam.

In conclusion, the book “English Medium Instruction Practices in Vietnamese Universities – Institutional, Practitioner and Student Perspectives” successfully achieves its purpose of providing a resource for the effective implementation of EMI programs and courses in Vietnam and other Asian settings. It has a clear pedagogical significance and suggests particular directions for moving forward with EMI, which serves as an informative source of reference for all stakeholders of EMI in similar educational contexts.

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