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## REFLECTIONS ON USING CHATGPT TO ADJUST THE DIFFICULTY OF EMI READING MATERIALS: A CASE STUDY

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**Abstract:** As English as a medium of instruction (EMI) continues to grow in universities where English is a foreign language, many lecturers face difficulties in helping students understand complex academic concepts, particularly those who are not English majors. This case study looks at how five university teachers in a public university in Hanoi used ChatGPT to adjust the difficulty of content for an EMI course on Theories of International Relations. The study was carried out as part of the teachers' reflective practice to make complex academic readings more accessible to undergraduate students. During one semester, ChatGPT was used to simplify authentic materials and create versions suited to different proficiency levels. The data came from classroom observations, teachers' notes, and comparisons between the original and adapted texts. The reflections suggest that ChatGPT helped save time and provided flexible options for text adaptation. However, the tool sometimes altered key disciplinary meanings and required careful checking for accuracy. This study adds to current conversations about how generative AI can be used in EMI classrooms, offering practical lessons on how teachers can use ChatGPT into their teaching in thoughtful and responsible ways.

**Keywords:** ChatGPT, English as a medium of instruction (EMI), non-English major students, reading adaptation, reflective practice

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# NGHIÊN CỨU TÌNH HUỐNG VỀ VIỆC SỬ DỤNG CHATGPT ĐỂ ĐIỀU CHỈNH ĐỘ KHÓ CỦA TÀI LIỆU ĐỌC CHUYÊN NGÀNH BẰNG TIẾNG ANH

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**Tóm tắt:** Khi việc giảng dạy chuyên ngành bằng tiếng Anh (EMI) ngày càng phát triển mạnh trong các trường đại học ở những quốc gia sử dụng tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ, nhiều giảng viên gặp khó khăn trong việc giúp sinh viên hiểu được những khái niệm học thuật phức tạp, đặc biệt với những sinh viên không chuyên tiếng Anh. Nghiên cứu tình huống này xem xét phương pháp năm giảng viên đại học tại một trường công lập ở Hà Nội sử dụng ChatGPT để điều chỉnh độ khó của tài liệu trong học phần Lý thuyết Quan hệ quốc tế được giảng dạy hoàn toàn bằng tiếng Anh. Nghiên cứu được thực hiện như một phần của quá trình chiêm nghiệm của giảng viên, nhằm giúp các bài đọc học thuật phức tạp trở nên dễ tiếp cận hơn với sinh viên đại học. Trong thời gian một học kỳ, các giáo viên đã sử dụng ChatGPT để giản lược các tài liệu gốc và tạo ra các phiên bản phù hợp với trình độ tiếng Anh khác nhau của sinh viên. Dữ liệu được thu thập từ quan sát lớp học, ghi chép của giảng viên và so sánh giữa văn bản gốc với văn bản đã được điều chỉnh. Kết quả cho thấy ChatGPT giúp tiết kiệm thời gian và cung cấp các lựa chọn linh hoạt trong việc điều chỉnh tài liệu. Tuy nhiên, công cụ này đôi khi làm thay đổi ý nghĩa của từ vựng chuyên ngành và đòi hỏi phải kiểm tra cẩn thận để đảm bảo tính chính xác. Nghiên cứu này đóng góp thêm ý kiến cho các cuộc thảo luận hiện nay về việc ứng dụng trí tuệ nhân tạo sinh trong lớp học chuyên ngành bằng tiếng Anh, đồng thời mang đến những gợi ý thực tiễn về cách tích hợp ChatGPT vào giảng dạy nội dung một cách có trách nhiệm và hiệu quả.

**Từ khóa:** ChatGPT, giảng dạy chuyên ngành bằng tiếng Anh (EMI), sinh viên không chuyên tiếng Anh, điều chỉnh tài liệu đọc, đánh giá giảng dạy

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the rapid rise of generative artificial intelligence (AI) has begun to reshape how teachers approach classroom materials and instruction (Ghimire et al., 2024). Among these tools, ChatGPT has attracted particular attention. In higher education, where English is increasingly used as a medium of instruction (EMI), such technology offers both promise and challenge.

Both teachers and students in EMI face lots of difficulties. Lecturers are often subject specialists rather than trained language teachers, yet they must ensure that their students can engage meaningfully with complex academic texts in English. For students, limited proficiency can make it difficult to follow lectures, interpret readings, and participate confidently in discussions. As a result, teachers working in EMI contexts need to make the materials “accommodate the needs of EMI learners and provide proper scaffolding for both content learning and language learning” (Wilang et al., 2024). It is particularly visible in subjects like International Relations, where abstract theories, dense argumentation, and specialized terminology can easily overwhelm learners who are still developing their academic English skills. In that context, ChatGPT offers new possibilities for content adaptation and scaffolding in EMI contexts; yet their use in this specific role is not well documented. Against this

background, the present study, focusing on five university teachers in a public university in Hanoi who used ChatGPT to adjust the difficulty of readings in an EMI course on *Theories of International Relations*, seeks to fill this gap. The study examines how teachers employ ChatGPT in text-adaptation, and what benefits and difficulties emerged in that process. By doing so, it contributes to both EMI pedagogy and the emergent field of AI-supported academic text adaptation, particularly within the Vietnamese context.

This case study explores how five university teachers at a public university in Hanoi integrated ChatGPT into their teaching of a course on *Theories of International Relations*. Over one semester, the teachers used the tool to simplify authentic academic texts and make them more comprehensible to their students. Their use of ChatGPT was part of a reflective teaching process aimed at supporting comprehension without compromising the integrity of the subject matter. The study seeks to understand two main questions:

(1) *In what ways did teachers employ ChatGPT to adjust the difficulty of EMI course materials?*

(2) *What benefits and challenges did they encounter during this process?*

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. EMI in Higher Education

Over the past decade, the practice of EMI has become increasingly visible in higher education worldwide, especially in non-Anglophone contexts (Walkinshaw et al., 2017; Richard & Pun 2023). The spread of EMI has been particularly rapid across Asia, Europe, and Latin America, driven by universities' ambitions to elevate their global profile, attract international students, enhance graduates' employability, and facilitate access to global scholarship (Piller & Cho, 2013; Bradford, 2016, Rose & McKinley, 2018).

EMI generally refers to the use of English to teach academic subjects in countries or regions where English is not the primary language. As Dearden (2014, p. 2) defines it, EMI is "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". In practice, EMI is not simply about translating lectures or materials into English. It represents a broader pedagogical shift toward internationalization in higher education. According to Macaro (2018), EMI lies at the intersection of content learning and language development, where students are expected to acquire disciplinary knowledge through a foreign language while still achieving subject-specific outcomes.

EMI was first introduced in Vietnam in the early 1990s as part of collaborative programs between Vietnamese universities and foreign higher education institutions (Nguyen et al., 2017). In these early initiatives, courses were often co-delivered by both local and international lecturers, marking the beginning of Vietnam's experimentation with English-taught degree programs. From the 2000s onward, the Vietnamese government began to formalize this trend through a series of policies and national projects that actively encouraged, or (in some cases) required higher education institutions to adopt EMI. These policy directives called on universities to identify high-quality programs in key disciplines offered by top-ranked international universities and to either import or co-develop these programs for delivery in Vietnam, typically through English as the medium of instruction. Dang and Moskovsky (2019) stated that the overarching aim of these initiatives was to enhance the quality of higher education and raise the international profile of Vietnamese universities.

## **2.2. Adapting Academic Texts for EMI Learners**

Research has shown that many students in EMI settings struggle to grasp the content of textbooks and course materials written in English. As Al-Bakri (2013) and Nguyen and Ngo (2018) note, reading subject materials remains one of the most demanding tasks for learners. To make sense of complex texts, some students resort to translating passages into their first language (Eser & Dikilitaş, 2017). Across studies, restricted vocabulary knowledge and slow reading speed consistently emerge as the most common barriers preventing students from effectively engaging with English-language academic readings. Empirical evidence collected through interviews and classroom observations by Keuk and Tith (2013) indicates that EMI students encountered several significant difficulties related to vocabulary-new words and key terms and content or disciplinary knowledge. Therefore, they often spend a considerable amount of time consulting dictionaries to decode unfamiliar words and technical terms. Such lexical gaps are among the main factors undermining reading comprehension. Similarly, Chang (2010) identified several contributors to students' difficulties in understanding academic texts, including low English proficiency, lack of vocabulary, and the challenging linguistic level of reading materials. In the Vietnamese context, the study by Lam et al. (2022) also identified challenges related to the use of EMI from the perspectives of students in technology and engineering disciplines. The students' narrative journals revealed difficulties in understanding discipline-specific content and vocabulary and they could lead to further challenges in reading comprehension and academic writing.

To address these challenges, many EMI instructors choose to adapt academic materials. Coxhead and Boutorwick (2018) conducted a study with 468 students attending an international secondary school where English was used as the medium of instruction. They found that learners with lower English proficiency often struggled with academic vocabulary and required additional support. The researchers suggested that these students could benefit from teacher-designed materials or simplified reading texts that make content more understandable across different subjects (Coxhead & Boutorwick, 2018).

In this context, *simplifying learning materials* means adapting authentic English texts which are originally written for native speakers by reducing their linguistic and structural complexity. This process aims to make the texts more accessible and suitable for learners' language levels (Crossley et al., 2012; Rets & Rogaten, 2021; Rets et al., 2022). Several studies have shown that such simplified texts can improve reading comprehension compared to unmodified, authentic materials (Crossley et al., 2014; Long & Ross, 1993; Tweissi, 1998; Yano et al., 1994).

## **2.3. ChatGPT in EMI Pedagogy**

The emergence of generative AI tools has rapidly shifted conversations in higher education about how teaching and learning are conducted. Among these, the language-model chatbot ChatGPT has drawn particular attention for its capacity to generate, summarise, and reframe texts in seconds. In a global survey of 23,218 students from 109 countries and territories, Ravšelj (2025) found that most students relied on ChatGPT mainly for brainstorming ideas, summarizing readings, and locating research sources, while a smaller number used it for creative or professional writing tasks. Students reported that the tool was helpful for simplifying difficult concepts and condensing information, but they viewed it as less dependable for delivering accurate content or enhancing classroom learning. Nonetheless, some participants felt that ChatGPT's explanations were clearer and easier to understand than those provided by their teachers or classmates.

Recent studies have begun to explore how generative AI tools such as ChatGPT can support learning and teaching in EMI environments. Chen (2024), for example, examined the use of ChatGPT among Chinese students studying in EMI programs in Macau. The study found that regular use of ChatGPT helped reduce students' foreign language anxiety by allowing them to clarify difficult content and practice English in a low-stress, self-paced manner. Similarly, Wang (2024) conducted a review of university teachers' perceptions of ChatGPT in EMI contexts. The findings highlight both enthusiasm and caution: teachers valued the tool's ability to personalize learning, simplify disciplinary texts, and provide immediate feedback, but they also expressed concerns about over-reliance on AI-generated materials and the potential dilution of disciplinary rigor. He also argued that AI tools, such as ChatGPT, "exhibit considerable potential in English Medium Instruction contexts. These technologies provide linguistic assistance and scaffolding to aid students in comprehending academic information delivered in a second language".

In a related study, Thomae et al. (2024) explored ChatGPT integration in a medical education course delivered in English. Although the context was not explicitly labeled EMI, the students faced similar linguistic and conceptual challenges typical of EMI settings. The study revealed that ChatGPT helped students comprehend specialized terminology and engage more deeply with academic materials. Together, these studies suggest that ChatGPT holds considerable promise as a pedagogical aid in EMI classrooms, especially for mediating linguistic barriers and fostering learner confidence. However, they also underscore the importance of guided, reflective use to ensure that disciplinary accuracy and critical engagement are not compromised.

Although EMI has become a major focus in higher education research, very little is known about how teachers actually adapt academic texts for their students. Most existing studies have concentrated on broader issues such as teachers' beliefs, institutional language policies, or students' overall learning outcomes. Far fewer have looked closely at what happens in practice e.g. how lecturers modify, simplify, or reorganize complex disciplinary readings to make them more accessible. Even rarer are studies that capture teachers' reflections on this process, including the pedagogical choices and compromises they make when balancing clarity with academic accuracy. As a result, our understanding of the everyday, classroom-level decisions that influence students' access to disciplinary knowledge remains limited. The present study, therefore, seeks to contribute to this underexplored area by examining how EMI lecturers in a university in Vietnam use ChatGPT to support the adaptation of complex academic texts for their learners.

### **3. Methodology**

This study follows a qualitative case study design, which looks closely at a particular context to understand how things actually work in real life. According to Yin (2018), a case study allows researchers to explore a phenomenon in depth and within its natural setting rather than through abstract or controlled conditions. It is especially useful in education, where teaching and learning are influenced by many local factors (Duff, 2014). The main advantage of using a case study is that it helps reveal the real experiences, decisions, and challenges of people involved. However, this approach also has its limits as it can take a lot of time, and the findings may not apply to every situation since they come from one specific context. Still, it provides a detailed and grounded understanding that broader surveys might miss (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The case in this study was situated in a mid-ranked public university in Hanoi that offered a variety of undergraduate programs including International Relations. The institution was selected because it represented a growing group of Vietnamese universities where EMI had been adopted to enhance international competitiveness while teaching staff still navigated the linguistic and pedagogical challenges of English-taught programs. Five lecturers participated in the study (including the researcher). Two held doctoral degrees and three held master degrees, with academic backgrounds in economics, communication, education, politics, and English language teaching. Although all had overseas training experience ranging from one to three years and substantial teaching experience (five to twenty years), their EMI teaching experience ranged from only three to five years. None were disciplinary specialists in International Relations. This mix of expertise reflected the institution's recruitment policy, which prioritized lecturers with strong English proficiency (often those from English language teaching backgrounds or with overseas training) who were then assigned to teach disciplinary content, even when it was not their original area of specialization.

The focus course, *Theories of International Relations*, is a compulsory module for third-year International Relations students. It runs for 45 hours per semester and is delivered entirely in English. The main textbook used is *International Relations* (edited by Stephen McGlinchey, 2017), part of the E-International Relations Foundations series published in the UK.

The data were collected over one academic semester through three sources: (1) classroom observations, (2) teachers' reflective notes, and (3) textual comparison between the original textbook chapters and ChatGPT-adapted versions. The classroom observations focused on how the teachers used ChatGPT-generated materials during instruction and how the students responded to these materials. The teachers' notes captured their reflections on ChatGPT's usefulness, accuracy, the benefits and challenges encountered. The textual analysis compared linguistic simplification, conceptual consistency, and disciplinary accuracy between original and adapted texts. All the qualitative data were coded thematically using an inductive approach. In the first coding cycle, each dataset was analyzed separately according to its analytic focus. In the second cycle, codes across the three datasets were compared and synthesized into broader themes aligned with the two research questions. The participation was voluntary, with informed consent obtained from all lecturers. Institutional permission was granted by the university's academic board. To protect anonymity, participants' names and departments were not disclosed.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. How Teachers Employed ChatGPT to Adjust the Difficulty of EMI Course Materials

In adapting the content of the book *International Relations Theory* for third-year students, the lecturers faced an immediate challenge: the source text was written in dense academic English, filled with abstract ideas and specialized terms such as *realism*, *liberalism*, *constructivism*, *unitary actors*, *anarchy*... Students (with the majority in B1+ level and some at B1 level) often struggled to follow the long, clause-heavy sentences typical of the textbook. Class observations indicated that many of them could grasp individual words but found it difficult to connect arguments across paragraphs or to identify the main theoretical distinctions.

Across one semester of observation, all five lecturers used ChatGPT in different but overlapping ways to make the content more approachable. Classroom observations and teacher reflections revealed three main patterns of use: simplifying theoretical passages, generating tiered versions of the same text, adding scaffolds such as glossaries or designing questions.

#### 4.1.1. Simplifying theoretical passages

Teachers prompted ChatGPT to generate simplified versions of original textbook sections. For example, two teachers required the tool to “*Paraphrase this paragraph so that undergraduate students with B1+ English level can understand.*” Two prompted: “*Rewrite this paragraph for students with B1+ English level, keeping the key idea.*” while the other asked ChatGPT to “*make a B1+ paraphrased version that keeps the original meaning but uses simpler vocabulary and clearer sentence structure*”. The AI-generated versions typically rephrased long, complex sentences into shorter, clearer ones and replaced discipline-specific jargon with more common vocabulary. This allowed students with lesser English proficiency to engage more easily with the disciplinary content.

For example, the original passage in the textbook stated:

Conversely, realists tend to dismiss optimism as a form of misplaced idealism and instead they arrive at a more pessimistic view. This is due to their focus on the centrality of the state and its need for security and survival in an anarchical system where it can only truly rely on itself. As a result, realists reach an array of accounts that describe IR as a system where war and conflict is common and periods of peace are merely times when states are preparing for future conflict. (Chapter 4, p. 49)

In class, students struggled with the chain of reasoning connecting *optimism*, *idealism*, *pessimistic view*, and *anarchical system*. Several paused during group reading, whispering questions like, “What does *pessimistic view* mean here?” or “Why do they think peace means preparing for future conflict?” One teacher noted in her journal that students tended to interpret *anarchical system* in the everyday sense of “chaos”. This misunderstanding led some students to view realism as an ethical stance about human behavior rather than a structural theory about state relations. To address this confusion, the teacher used ChatGPT to generate a simplified version that preserved the argument but reduced the cognitive and linguistic load, which suits the B1+ level:

In contrast, realists do not share the optimistic ideas of idealists. They believe that such optimism is unrealistic. Realists think that each country’s main goal is to stay safe and survive. Because there is no world government to control or protect everyone, every state must depend on itself. For this reason, realists see international relations as a system where wars and conflicts happen often, and even peaceful times are just short breaks before new tensions or fights begin. (ChatGPT-generated version)

The adapted text replaced abstract academic phrasing like *misplaced idealism* and *anarchical system* with accessible explanations tied to concrete images of international life. When the teacher reintroduced this version in a later session, students were able to summarize the core idea of realism without confusing it with moral pessimism. One student commented that the new version “sounds more like what we see in the news”, suggesting improved conceptual transfer between theory and real-world understanding.

#### 4.1.2. Generating tiered versions of the same text

Teachers asked ChatGPT to produce two (or more) versions of the same text. For example, the following original sentences from the textbook were written in a highly academic style, with a dense use of abstract vocabulary such as *impunity*, *sovereignty*, *norms*, and *prosecution*. These words are typical of disciplinary writing in International Relations but can pose challenges for students who are not yet comfortable with this level of abstraction.

Version 1 (original): States were once the judge, jury and executioner of all matters related to the conduct of international affairs. Under the guise of state sovereignty, the state could act with

impunity as far as its citizens and lands were concerned. Those days are effectively over as the pressure of outside interests, amplified through international non-governmental organisations, have eroded state impunity. In no other area has there been such a major leap forward than in the development of norms involving international human rights. It also used to be the case that monarchs, presidents, prime ministers and other state leaders held immunity from any kind of criminal prosecution while they were in power. (Chapter 6, p. 76)

On average, sentences in the passage were quite long (around 27 words) and often contained multiple clauses or embedded ideas. The writer discusses complex and abstract ideas about how state power and international law have changed over time. The vocabulary is clearly academic, with phrases like “under the guise of”, “act with impunity”, and “criminal prosecution”, which are not commonly used in everyday English. The sentence structures are also quite advanced, including long, complex sentences and the use of inversion for emphasis (“*In no other area has there been such a major leap forward than in the development of norms involving international human rights*”). This version would be appropriate for advanced EMI learners at around the C1 level or higher, who already have strong reading and academic language skills.

In the second version generated by ChatGPT below, the text was simplified to make it more accessible for learners while keeping the main ideas intact:

Version 2: In the past, governments had full control over how they managed international issues. Using the idea of national independence, they could act without being punished for what they did inside their own countries. Today, outside groups and international organisations have made it harder for governments to act freely without limits. The biggest progress can be seen in new international rules about human rights. In earlier times, kings, presidents and other national leaders were safe from any kind of legal punishment while they were in power.

Several low-frequency or abstract words such as *impunity*, *prosecution*, and *norms* were replaced with more familiar terms like *freedom from punishment*, *trial*, and *rules*. Sentence length was reduced from an average of 27 words to about 18–20, often by splitting long, multi-clause structures into shorter, clearer ones. The researcher used Readability Formulas (<https://readabilityformulas.com/free-readability-formula-tests.php>), which is commonly used to assess lexical density and to evaluate overall readability of a text. It offers several well-established readability formulas, one of which is the Flesch–Kincaid Grade Level. Based on the results, version 1 is rated as extremely difficult, with a score of 14.62, suggesting that it is more appropriate for readers at postgraduate or college-graduate level, typically aged 23 and above. Version 2 shows a lower score of 12.50, but is still classified as very difficult, corresponding to an entry-level college standard and an age range of approximately 18 to 20.

The third version was rewritten for lower-intermediate learners (B1 level), with a stronger focus on accessibility and comprehension, as follows:

Version 3: A long time ago, countries could do whatever they wanted in world affairs. They had complete power and no one could stop them. They said this was their right as independent nations. But today, international groups have more power to stop governments when they break human rights. In the past, leaders like kings or presidents could not be punished for their crimes, but now that is changing.

Most technical or abstract vocabulary was replaced with high-frequency, concrete words. For example, *international affairs* became *world issues*, and *leaders held immunity* was rephrased as *leaders could not be punished while in power*. Sentences were further shortened to an average of 12–14 words, and complex connectors were replaced by simpler ones like *but*, *because*, or *so*. The syntactic structure was flattened, relying mostly on simple or compound

sentences rather than embedded clauses. These adjustments significantly lowered the lexical density and reduced the cognitive load for readers. According to Flesch–Kincaid Grade Level, version 3 receives a score of 5.84, which indicates that the text is fairly easy to read and corresponds to a sixth-grade level, making it suitable for readers aged approximately 11 to 12. However, while the simplified version improved accessibility, it also lost some of the academic tone and nuance present in the original. This highlights a central tension in EMI text adaptation: simplifying language to support comprehension often comes at the cost of disciplinary precision.

During classroom observation, the teachers distributed different versions based on students' self-assessed comfort with English. Interestingly, all observed that groups choosing simpler versions (2 or 3) were more talkative during discussions. In her reflection, one teacher wrote: "Having three different versions gave me the flexibility to tailor the lesson to students' varying proficiency levels without making anyone feel uncomfortable. It also encouraged more advanced learners to pay attention to subtle differences in how academic ideas are expressed".

#### 4.1.3. Adding scaffolds

Teachers observed that students often lost focus when reading multi-paragraph sections heavy with jargon, so they asked ChatGPT with producing lists of key terms and definitions for each chapter, using prompts such as "Generate 15 key terms from this section and give simple definitions in English with example sentences". This enabled the teachers to embed scaffolding directly into the reading materials without having to prepare it entirely by themselves.

For instance, in Chapter 5 on *International Law*, the lecturers asked ChatGPT to create a glossary of 15 key terms, each accompanied by a short explanation and an example, like this:

*Customary law*

*Meaning:* Rules that come from long-time practices and traditions between countries, not from written documents.

*Example:* If most countries act the same way for many years, this can become part of customary international law.

One lecturer explained: "Before using ChatGPT, I had to spend hours writing glossaries manually. Now I can ask for a list of 15 important terms from a chapter and their short definitions in English. Then I edit them for accuracy. It saves enormous time."

In Chapter 3, "*One World, Many Actors*", the author explains the different levels of analysis in International Relations as four main levels: the individual, group, state, and system levels. However, these explanations are rather theoretical and abstract, which makes it difficult for students to fully grasp the concepts. To make the content more engaging and concrete, the lecturers asked ChatGPT to generate practical examples illustrating each level. They then used these examples as short classroom activities where students were asked to decide which level of analysis each situation belonged to.

Teachers also used ChatGPT to design short comprehension quizzes and discussion prompts tailored to each adapted section. During one observed session, after reading the simplified explanation of realism, students were asked to answer AI-generated questions such as "What is the main reason realists think countries cannot fully trust each other?" The teacher later noted that students' responses revealed genuine understanding of the theory's assumptions rather than rote memorization of definitions. Teachers observed a rise in voluntary participation and fewer requests for translation help. In the meantime, students reported that these questions "made reading less scary" and "helped us know what to look for."

#### 4.2. Benefits and Challenges of Using ChatGPT for EMI Text Adaptation

Teachers' reflective journals all reveal that ChatGPT saved considerable preparation time compared to traditional text adaptation with rewriting or paraphrasing, which was so labor-intensive. Lecturers said they previously needed "a week to simplify a single chapter". With ChatGPT, they could produce a first draft within minutes and then spend their time reviewing or correcting the AI output. One lecturer commented: "It doesn't make decisions for me, but it gives me something to start from. After that, I can adjust the wording and make sure the ideas are theoretically accurate". This efficiency meant teachers could adapt more materials per semester and respond faster to student needs.

The tool was also highly appreciated as it improved linguistic accessibility and made students more engaged in the lessons. Observation among students reported they felt more relaxed and confident when reading the AI-adapted versions first, then moving to the authentic text. They felt less overwhelmed by unfamiliar vocabulary, which freed them to focus on conceptual understanding. For example, when studying *constructivism*, the adapted version explained "*socially constructed reality*" as "*our ideas and beliefs shape how countries act*", which students found easier to discuss in English.

Two teachers reported that ChatGPT fostered reflective teaching. In reviewing AI-generated outputs, teachers began to notice which parts of the text posed the greatest cognitive load for students. They discovered that even simplified language could mislead if the disciplinary logic was not preserved. For example, when working with a passage on constructivism, which discusses how international norms and ideas shape state behavior, ChatGPT's paraphrased output used phrases like "*countries follow rules because they think it's right*", which removed the deeper point that constructivism focuses on *shared beliefs and social interactions* rather than moral correctness. This prompted the teacher to adjust the language manually, explaining to students that "doing what is right" in constructivism means acting according to *socially accepted norms*, not individual morality. Through these experiences, the teachers became more aware of how far they could simplify language without changing the original meaning of the theories. ChatGPT served as a kind of mirror, showing them when a simplification went too far and started to distort ideas. By reviewing its outputs, the teachers learned to decide which academic terms and concepts had to stay exact, and which parts could be safely rewritten in easier language. As one teacher summarized, "Using ChatGPT didn't just save time. It made me think more deeply about how theory and language connect".

However, the study also pointed out important *challenges*. The most common concern was conceptual distortion. When simplifying complex international relation theories, ChatGPT sometimes dropped key distinctions. For instance, when asked to simplify the difference between *offensive* and *defensive realism*, the AI version merged the two into "*both believe states act to protect themselves*", missing the embedded meaning of *power maximization* vs. *security maintenance*. Teachers realized they could not rely on the tool uncritically; AI outputs had to be reviewed and aligned with authentic disciplinary sources.

Another challenge related to prompting skills and disciplinary confidence. Because all lecturers were trained in related fields (English education, economics, communication, or political science), they were confident in English but not always deeply grounded in International Relations theory. As one lecturer admitted, "I know how to write prompts, but sometimes I'm not sure if the simplified version is still accurate when looking from the perspective of International Relations.". Moreover, three teachers mentioned the pedagogical dilemma of over-simplification. While students appreciated easier texts, some began to rely

solely on ChatGPT-generated summaries instead of engaging with the original textbook. Teachers feared that overuse might erode students' exposure to academic discourse, thereby undermining the long-term goal of building EMI competence. One teacher reflected: "It's a double-edged sword. It helps them understand, but it can make them lazy readers."

## 5. Discussion

The findings align with other studies confirming that ChatGPT functioned as a flexible mediating tool that helps teachers negotiate the balance between disciplinary rigor and linguistic accessibility - a well-documented tension in EMI classrooms (Macaro et al., 2018; Airey, 2012; Galloway & Rose, 2021). The transformation from unpacked long, clause-heavy sentences and abstract concepts into clear, B1+ level English allowed students to grasp not only the literal meaning but also the underlying logic of realist thought. Observations of student discussions confirmed that linguistic simplification enhanced conceptual understanding: learners could summarize ideas in their own words and link them to familiar global events. This finding echoes Galloway and Ruegg's (2020) observation that adequate linguistic support enables EMI students to engage more deeply with disciplinary knowledge. However, although simplifying the text made it easier for students to understand, it also risked removing important nuances. For example, the difference between *structural anarchy* in theory and *social chaos* in everyday language. This highlights the teacher's essential role in checking and adjusting AI-generated materials to keep the disciplinary meaning accurate.

The creation of tiered versions of the same text further demonstrated ChatGPT's usefulness for differentiated instruction. By producing three levels of linguistic complexity, teachers could meet diverse learner needs without stigmatizing less proficient students. The observed increase in participation among groups reading the simpler versions suggests that readability directly influences classroom confidence and interaction. At the same time, advanced students benefitted from comparing versions, noticing subtle shifts in vocabulary and tone, an activity that fostered metalinguistic awareness. This layered approach reflects principles of adaptive pedagogy and scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978; Gibbons, 2015), showing that AI can effectively support inclusive teaching design when used with pedagogical intention.

Beyond simplification, ChatGPT's ability to generate glossaries, examples, and comprehension tasks offered practical time-saving benefits for lecturers. For instance, producing 15 key terms with definitions and examples for the *International Law* chapter allowed teachers to embed lexical scaffolding directly into course materials. This affirms the need to embed lexical scaffolding into course materials in EMI settings as EMI students needed to know thousands of word families to reach adequate lexical coverage, and that mere exposure to lectures was not enough without additional vocabulary support (Reynolds et al., 2023). Similarly, generating situational examples for *four levels of analysis* helped transform abstract theory into interactive learning activities, prompting students to apply concepts actively rather than passively memorizing definitions. These uses suggest that ChatGPT can function as a semi-automated assistant for pedagogical design, particularly in resource-constrained contexts where teachers have heavy workloads.

Despite the efficiency of AI-generated materials, teachers' continuous monitoring is needed to ensure the accuracy of disciplinary vocabulary. ChatGPT occasionally distorted theoretical meanings or produced oversimplified glosses that blurred key distinctions, echoing recent concerns that AI-generated academic texts often lack the precision and rhetorical appropriateness expected in formal academic contexts (Amirjalili et al., 2024).

## 6. Conclusion

This study shows that tools like ChatGPT can be genuinely useful in EMI classrooms but they are helpers, not replacements. The findings revealed that teachers strategically used ChatGPT to adapt dense academic texts by simplifying the text, designing tiered reading materials, and adding scaffoldings. However, they also found that AI outputs often required careful review to maintain theoretical precision, showing that pedagogical expertise remained essential in ensuring both linguistic clarity and disciplinary accuracy.

This study is a small case study and solely qualitative examining practices of five teachers in one university over one semester. That depth gives rich detail about practice, but it cannot tell us how widespread these patterns are across disciplines, institutions, or student profiles. The data also rely on teacher journals, classroom notes and text comparisons rather than large-scale measures of student learning, so claims about long-term gains in disciplinary literacy should be cautious. For future work, mixed methods or longitudinal designs would be valuable, e.g. tracking cohorts of students across semesters to see whether AI-adapted materials change their ability to read authentic academic texts. Comparative studies (different countries, disciplines, or levels of English) would help identify where ChatGPT is most useful. Finally, research into ethical guidelines and teacher training for responsible AI use would help institutions adopt these tools more confidently.

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