Student Satisfaction and Experiences with EMI at an International University in Thailand

Adisorn Vinitwatanakhun[*][Theodore Maria School of Arts, Assumption University][1]
Tharinee Kamnoetsin [Theodore Maria School of Arts, Assumption University]
Nina Nipatsant [Theodore Maria School of Arts, Assumption University]
Pawinee Phattanawibul [Theodore Maria School of Arts, Assumption University]

Abstract

This research was conducted at an international institution known for its extensive use of English as the medium of instruction across various subjects. The study took place during the Intensive English Course. It was essential to evaluate the EMI approaches and identify issues for stakeholders, particularly the students involved. The study's objective is to find the relationship between EMI and students' satisfaction. The research aimed to understand how students respond to their satisfaction level with EMI experience related to the course, the university and teachers' attributes. To gather data, we used a questionnaire with a sample of 412 participants enrolled in a 90-hour intensive English language course designed to prepare them for the EMI context. At the end of the course, 18 students agreed to answer open-ended questions regarding their EMI experience. Both the satisfaction survey and the written response addressed three research questions. The results indicated that students' overall satisfaction with the EMI experience towards teachers' attributes was very high (mean = 4.38, SD = 0.84). Secondly, the overall satisfaction level regarding the EMI status of the university was very high (mean = 4.42, SD = 0.76). Lastly, participants are very satisfied with the intensive course (mean = 4.33, SD =0.79) and the activities throughout the course (mean = 4.22, SD = 0.88); however, their satisfaction was lower compared to their feelings about the instructors and the university. Essentially, effective EMI curriculums should foster an inclusive learning environment that can develop competent language users regardless of their linguistic background. Therefore, student engagement is the priority. Additionally, pedagogical recommendations and recommendations for future research were provided at the end of our study.

Keywords: EMI, Satisfaction, Experience, International University

1. Introduction

English is not only one of the main languages taught as a subject in many national school systems but is now increasingly the medium of instruction in universities worldwide (Dearden, 2014). In Thailand, for example, many students at international educational institutions may pursue their degree in English in majors such as business, nursing or engineering.

It is well known that English is used globally. However, significant changes can be seen in the last two decades as English became a medium of instruction and especially in higher education in the Asia-Pacific, it is becoming a 'new normal' (Walkinshaw, Fenton-Smith, & Humphreys, 2017). EMI (English medium instruction) refers to teaching subjects in English without specific language learning objectives, typically in a country where most people do not speak English (Madhavan Brochier, 2016), but to some people, the meaning of EMI is still vague. The term EMI is also used for marketing, internationalization and financial benefit (Dearden, 2014). English medium instruction (EMI) in higher education in the Asia Pacific is increasing because it is the language used for diplomacy, scholarship, trade, and commerce (Kirkpatrick, 2010).

EMI rises because of the geopolitical status of English as a lingua franca, the growth of higher education, and the policy actions of governments in the Asia-Pacific concerning internationalization (Kirkpatrick, 2010).

Adopting English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) is driven by diverse objectives. Institutions choose EMI to enhance English proficiency, provide a common language in multilingual settings, boost economic competitiveness, and cultivate graduates with global literacy skills. EMI also aids in attracting international students, improving university rankings and prestige, fostering competitiveness, and facilitating global communication. Additionally, it aims to develop students' intercultural communication skills, acknowledging the importance of cross-cultural competencies in the modern interconnected world. The multifaceted reasons for selecting EMI underscore its pivotal role in addressing linguistic, economic, and educational goals (Richards & Pun, 2021).

The satisfaction survey developed by Methavasaraphak (2022) was used in this study. The authors adapted the satisfaction survey and designed interview questions based on the study's objectives. The satisfaction survey and the interview questions were used to address three research questions.
1. What is the students' satisfaction level with the EMI experience regarding teachers?
2. What is the students' satisfaction level with the EMI experience regarding the EMI status of the university?
3. What is the students' satisfaction level with the EMI experience regarding the course?

2. Literature Review

2.1. EMI in Asia-Pacific

Martinez (2016) provided a history of EMI usage in higher education in Asia that it began in Japan in 1913 at Sophia University in Tokyo, in China by British governor Frederic Lugard at the University of Hong Kong, and in the Philippines in 1905 at Central Philippine University. He further explained that it was used within the university, which could be top-down (from the university administration) or bottom-up (from the faculty or/student). In some studies, top-down is referred to as the macro level (of language policies), and bottom-up is the micro level (of EMI practitioners). Since then, it has been adopted in different universities and has become an integral part of a curriculum.

2.2. EMI in Thailand

However, EMI implementation involves a complexity of social, political, linguistic, institutional and other influences and expectations, and in the tertiary phase of education, the challenges are linguistic, cultural, structural and identity-related (institutional) (Martinez, 2016). These challenges are also found at Thailand's international universities. Tang (2020) researched the challenges of teaching English as a medium of instruction (EMI) and its essential impact on Thailand International College. The results revealed Matinez's four categories of challenges: linguistic, cultural, structural, and identity-related (institutional). Moreover, this study also found that the importance of language improvement, subject matter learning, career prospects, and internationalization strategy are the four crucial aspects of EMI implementation. With the result, lecturers found that their students can take notes, read academic texts, interact, and listen through EMI instruction; Tang suggested that as all the lecturers have voiced similar positive points on the importance of EMI implementation, EMI should further be developed in Thailand's higher education institutions.

2.3. Challenges for EMI

Insufficient language proficiency among learners has been observed to affect them in various ways, leading to challenges in comprehending lectures, difficulties in communicating subject-specific content, and a need for additional time to complete a course (Galloway, Kriukow, & Numajiri, 2017). Students must cultivate the skill to comprehend content presented in English and express their comprehension in the language. This ability is often lacking at the initial stages of an EMI program but tends to develop as students enhance their English proficiency and experience more comprehensive English instruction later on (Marsh, Hau, & Kong, 2000). It can be said that exposure is the key to success. The school conducted this research because it implemented a new textbook for the bridging course for the first time. Therefore, the EMI approaches need to be evaluated, and issues must be identified for stakeholders, especially the learners in the present study. Indeed, the school needs to ascertain

how students respond to EMI.

2.4. Roles of Intensive English Course

In higher education systems where English is the primary language, students may undergo English instruction until upper secondary levels. This is often followed by a full-time intensive English course emphasizing general language skills and English for Academic Purposes (Richards & Pun, 2021). In some countries, such as Turkey, students must complete an extended pre-university English course, known as a bridging course (Richards & Pun, 2021). In Japan, students are required to demonstrate their English proficiency by submitting the results of internationally recognized tests, i.e. TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) or IELTS (Internationally English Language Testing System) (Brown, 2014). Given that a strong command of English is essential for learners to engage in EMI effectively, diverse entry criteria may be set. Tests can be a screening tool to identify students requiring a bridging program and those ready to advance to EMI (Macaro, 2018). According to Richards and Pun (2021), in educational institutions where English is the Medium of Instruction, the language serves two roles: as a medium of instruction and as a subject. The latter is the focus of this study, with English as the learning target. In such subjects, a language instructor is typically a language expert tasked with ensuring the attainment of prescribed English knowledge, skills, and performance standards.

2.5. EMI and Teacher's Attributes

The success of EMI significantly depends on various attributes of teachers, which can influence students' learning experiences and overall satisfaction. Such attributes include language proficiency, pedagogical skills, cultural sensitivity, adaptability, and supportive attitude (Aguilar & Rodríguez, 2012; Evans & Morrison, 2011; Dearden, 2015; Macaro, Curle, Pun, An, & Dearden, 2018; Rose, Curle, Aizawa, & Thompson, 2019; Sert, 2005; Karakas, 2016; Graham, 2018). Teachers' proficiency in English is crucial for effective EMI. A higher proficiency level allows teachers to explain concepts clearly, use diverse vocabulary, and interact more naturally in English, positively affecting students' comprehension and learning outcomes (Aguilar & Rodríguez, 2012; Evans & Morrison, 2011). Effective EMI teachers employ specific pedagogical strategies to facilitate understanding. These include visual aids, simplified language, repetition, and checking for understanding. Teachers trained in EMI pedagogies can better address students' language-related challenges (Dearden, 2015; Macaro, Curle, Pun, An, & Dearden, 2018). Teachers who are culturally sensitive and aware of students' backgrounds can create an inclusive classroom environment. They are more likely to understand the difficulties students might face when learning in a non-native language and adjust their teaching strategies accordingly (Rose, Curle, Aizawa, & Thompson, 2019). EMI teachers need to be flexible and capable of switching between languages, if necessary, particularly when students struggle to grasp complex concepts. This code-switching can aid in bridging gaps in understanding (Sert, 2005; Karakas, 2016). A supportive and patient attitude from teachers encourages students to engage, ask questions, and practice using English without fear of judgment, thereby enhancing the learning experience (Graham, 2018).

Although there is a considerable amount of research on EMI, studies focusing on international universities in Thailand are limited, and there is a lack of written responses to support the findings. Therefore, this paper aims to fill this gap by conducting a student satisfaction survey. In addition to the quantitative data, participants will be asked to provide written responses to further support the findings.

3. Research Methods and Materials

3.1. Context of the study

As an international institution, the university conducting this study is known for extensively using English as the medium of instruction in most subjects, including science and mathematics. Offering subjects such as business, mathematics, and sciences in English aims to internationalize higher education. It may have been ahead of its time, but this drive for internationalization has pushed EMI to the forefront of many nations and universities alike. In a study of 55 countries, EMI Oxford, working with the British Council, found that "the general trend is towards a rapid expansion of EMI provision" (Dearden, 2014, p. 2).

The university offers an intensive 90-hour, two-month English language course to prepare students for their first semester.

This course is taught by both Thai and non-Thai instructors.

3.2. Participants

Four hundred and twelve students participated in the present study. All underwent the 90-hour intensive English language course designed to prepare them for the EMI context. Throughout the course, students' language skills were assessed through various activities, including group presentations, pair presentations, individual presentations, reading, writing, listening, and class discussions. In addition to the in-class assignments, students were required to take two tests. After administering the questionnaire towards the end of the course, 18 students consented to respond to open-ended questions regarding their EMI experience. These written responses allowed participants to freely express their perceptions of their overall learning experience and the EMI context at the university.

3.3. Instruments

The authors utilized existing items and designed new items based on the study's objectives. Participants were asked to rate their satisfaction regarding their EMI experience, considering the course, the teachers, and the university's EMI status. Five experts reviewed the items, and those with IOC results no less than 0.8 were included in the questionnaire. Furthermore, some items were rephrased based on the suggestions of the experts.

3.4. Data Interpretation

The data were comprehensively analyzed, and mean scores were computed to ascertain the level of students' satisfaction with their EMI experience. Although the five-point Likert scale was used as the research instrument, it should be noted that the data level of engagement range is 4. Thus, the mean scores should be interpreted as follows: 1.00-1.80 as 'strongly disagree'; 1.81-2.60 as 'disagree'; 2.61-3.40 as 'neither agree nor disagree'; 3.41-4.20 as 'agree'; and 4.21-5.00 as 'strongly agree.' As for the instrument's reliability, the questionnaire was piloted, and Cronbach's alpha was 0.98.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Result of the First Research Question

To answer the first research question, What is the students' satisfaction level with the EMI experience regarding teachers?, the overall satisfaction is very high (mean = 4.38, SD = 0.84). As seen in Table 1, participants are very satisfied that the instructors in this course encourage students to participate and share their thoughts, ideas and experiences (mean = 4.53, SD = 0.73). In addition, participants are also very satisfied that the instructors in this course teach students to be responsible (mean = 4.53, SD = 0.71), and that the instructors in this course are enthusiastic about teaching (mean = 4.50, SD = 0.75).

Table 1
Students' Satisfaction towards Teacher's Attributes

No.	Item	Mean	S.D.	Meaning
1	The instructor in this course explains the subject matter in English clearly.	4.41	0.80	strongly agree
2	The instructor in this course uses different teaching methods to explain concepts and topics.	4.33	0.84	strongly agree
3	The instructor in this course encourages students to participate and share their thoughts, ideas and experiences.	4.53	0.73	strongly agree
4	The instructor in this course encourages students to think critically.	4.37	0.84	strongly agree
5	The instructor in this course understands the students' differences and learning style differences.	4.23	0.94	strongly agree
6	The instructor in this course regularly provides students feedback on their work and performance.	4.36	0.83	strongly agree
7	The instructor in this course shows students their mistakes and how to correct them.	4.32	0.87	strongly agree
8	The instructor in this course is fair in giving marks.	4.29	0.93	strongly agree
9	The instructor in this course gives useful comments/ feedback that help me know how to improve my performance.	4.38	0.81	strongly agree
10	The instructor in this course is enthusiastic about teaching.	4.50	0.75	strongly agree
11	The instructor in this course treats students fairly.	4.39	0.88	strongly agree
12	The instructor in this course is a good role model.	4.35	0.87	strongly agree
13	The instructor in this course teaches students to be responsible.	4.53	0.71	strongly agree
14	The instructor in this course encourages students to seek extra help on problems related to the course and other problems outside the class as appropriate.	4.33	0.88	strongly agree
15	The instructor in this course is open to students' comments and suggestions.	4.39	0.86	strongly agree
	Overall	**4.38**	**0.84**	

The result showed that having a caring and understanding instructor also plays an important role. The highest scores reflect the importance of instructor enthusiasm, highlighting the relationship between instructors and students. Instructors' enthusiasm and care significantly influence student perceptions and satisfaction. In other words, this underscores how students perceive their instructors. When instructors are engaged and attentive, students may feel more valued, which can foster a better learning environment.

The written responses showed what participants felt about their EMI experiences at the university; most of their feedback centered around their EMI experience with the instructors.
It cannot be denied that language instructors play a vital role in facilitating and enhancing learners' experience. Some participants stressed this in their written responses.

S4: I appreciate how all the teachers encourage us to feel confident when speaking English, and during our class presentations. I used to dislike doing things in front of many people, but their kind feedback and helpful advice have made me feel more confident in myself.
S16: If I need help, my teachers are always there to help. I used to practice writing without a full understanding. Then, the teachers came and explained the details to me. I believe that without this, my writing would be worse.

4.2. Result of the Second Research Question

To answer the second research question, What is the students' satisfaction level with the EMI experience regarding the EMI status of the university? the overall satisfaction is very high (mean = 4.42, SD = 0.76). As shown in Table 2, participants are very satisfied that there are students from different countries with multicultural backgrounds (mean = 4.56, SD = 0.67).

Table 2
Students' Satisfaction towards EMI Experience at the University

No.	Item	Mean	S.D.	Meaning
16	In general, I am satisfied with the ELL class.	4.33	0.79	strongly agree
17	In general, I am satisfied with the activities throughout the course.	4.22	0.88	strongly agree
18	Overall, I am satisfied with my decision to study at an international university.	4.46	0.74	strongly agree
19	I am satisfied that there are students from different countries with multicultural background.	4.56	0.67	strongly agree
20	I am satisfied that there are teachers from different countries with multicultural background.	4.53	0.74	strongly agree
	Overall	**4.42**	**0.76**	

* There are 412 evaluators.
Note: 5 = strongly agree, 4= agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree.

The observations highlight important factors in English Medium Instruction (EMI) at the university level. In this context, what students prefer most appears to be related to their satisfaction with the variety of classmates, friends, and diverse instructors from different countries, indicating a desire for a rich, multicultural experience thus demonstrating that it is truly an international university.

4.3. Result of the Third Research Question

To answer research question no. 3, What is the students' satisfaction level with the EMI experience regarding the course?, as shown in Table 2, participants are very satisfied with the intensive course (mean = 4.33, SD =0.79), and the activities throughout the course (mean = 4.22, SD = 0.88).

The least preferred aspects are course activities, learning and teaching styles, and grading. Regarding course activities, the results indicate that students seem to be less satisfied with these activities. This suggests that class activities should be improved to meet students' needs. It is essential to determine how these activities can be enhanced—whether they are too numerous, difficult, easy, unsuitable, unrelated to students' interests, or ineffective in helping them improve their English.

To address this, gathering student feedback on specific aspects of class activities, teaching and learning styles, and the grading system would be beneficial. The improvement based on student input could enhance their learning experience and overall satisfaction in an EMI context.

The written responses showed what participants felt about their EMI experiences at the university; most of their feedback centered around their EMI experience towards the course. Ten students stated that they were satisfied that they had the opportunity to interact with classmates from different countries with multicultural backgrounds. Indeed, the backgrounds of the students in this international setting is what the participating students expected from this university.

S2: The course helps me practice my speaking skills because there are foreign students in our class. This greatly improves my English skills.
S4: The foreign students (non-Thai) in class and the basic lessons really boost my confidence.

Interestingly, eight students' responses revealed that they were satisfied with the activities throughout the course of the present study despite the fact that this item's score ranked lowest as can be seen in Table 1. It could be said that the number of tasks (how many -need to check again) could be overwhelming for certain students. Some participating students claimed that they could feel that they believed that their English was better after having taken the course.

S3: I like the fact that the university allows students to practice presenting in front of the class, writing paragraphs, and listening. It helps us build the courage to express ourselves confidently.
S5: What I like the most about this course is the timing. The three-hour class doesn't force me to rush my studies. There's enough time for activities in class with my classmates. I particularly enjoy discussing topics with my group members. This helps me improve both my speaking and listening skills and enables me to use English in my daily life.

S18: This course helps me learn many things, including writing, reading, and presentation skills. Moreover, it allows me students to adapt themselves to new friends and a new society.

Prior to the textbook selection, the authors were aware of the differences in linguistic capital of each individual, thereby hoping that the selected teaching material would not be too intimidating. As the authors read the written response, it was quite a relief to discover that the learners felt empowered during the two months.

S4: I think the course is good for students, even those who aren't really skilled in English because my teachers start from the beginning and cover all basic lessons.
S5: I believe this course is really helpful for new students who aren't good at English or haven't studied in an English program before.
S7: I feel that this course is beneficial for someone who isn't proficient in English. The teachers cover everything we need to know.

The written response showed what participants felt about their EMI experiences at the university; most of their feedback centered around their EMI experience towards teaching and learning and the EMI experience at the university.

4.4 Pedagogical Implications

Effective EMI curriculums should foster an inclusive learning environment that can develop competent language users regardless of their linguistic background. Therefore, student engagement is the priority. To do so, EMI instructors must establish the communicative context necessary for meaningful English interactions in classrooms of diverse first languages. Grouping students with different linguistic backgrounds who do not share an L1 will foster more active student engagement. Such pedagogical approaches emphasize student interaction, where students must negotiate meaning and express ideas through authentic English communication. For students, the shared responsibility for classroom learning while developing the communicative competence necessary for intercultural understanding requires them to support each other's language development through dialogue and problem-solving. Additionally, the use of textbooks and teaching resources that reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of EMI classrooms should incorporate resources that include content from native and non-native English speakers with various accents and pronunciations to enrich the learning experience further and promote a broader understanding of English language usage in a more inclusive international setting.

5. Conclusions

This study investigates students' satisfaction with English Medium Instruction (EMI) at an international institution in Thailand, focusing on their experiences related to the course, the university, and teachers' attributes. A questionnaire was administered to 412 students enrolled in a 90-hour intensive English language course, and 18 students answered open-ended questions to provide additional insights.

Results showed that students expressed high satisfaction with their instructors (mean = 4.38, SD = 0.84). They particularly valued instructors who encouraged participation, shared experiences, demonstrated enthusiasm for teaching, and fostered a caring and understanding environment. Such attributes were crucial to students' positive perceptions of the EMI experience.

Students also rated their satisfaction with the university's EMI status highly (mean = 4.42, SD = 0.76), with a strong appreciation for the diverse multicultural environment. The presence of classmates and instructors from various countries contributed to a positive, international learning experience, aligning with the university's identity as a global institution.

Although students were generally satisfied with the intensive course (mean = 4.33, SD = 0.79) and course activities (mean = 4.22, SD = 0.88), these aspects received slightly lower ratings than their perceptions of instructors and the university. This suggests a need for further clarification and potential improvements in-class activities. Collecting more detailed student feedback on teaching methods and course design could help enhance the learning experience and satisfaction in the EMI context.

Overall, the study emphasizes the importance of instructor qualities in a multicultural environment and suggests improvements to course content and activities to enhance the EMI experience in higher education.

Recommendation for Future Research

To constantly enhance the EMI experiences for first-year students, researchers may conduct research after some changes are made to see whether the satisfaction level will be higher. That is, if the sections are managed so that more students from different backgrounds are in the same sections, they will have to use English as a medium of instruction. Alternatively, researchers may interview students about revised teaching materials to see whether the selection of teaching materials can truly enhance their learning experience.

References

Aguilar, M., & Rodríguez, R. (2012). Lecturer and student perceptions on CLIL at a Spanish university. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 15*(2), 183-197.

Brown, H. (2014). Contextual factors driving the growth of undergraduate English-Medium Instruction programs at universities in Japan. *The Asian Journal of Applied Linguistics, 1*(1), 50-63.

Dearden, J. (2014). English as a medium of instruction – A growing global phenomenon: Retrieved from https://www.britishcouncil.es/sites/default/files/british_council_english_as_a_medium_of_instruction.pdf

Evans, S., & Morrison, B. (2011). Meeting the challenges of English-Medium higher education: The first-year experience in Hong Kong. *English for Specific Purposes, 30*(3), 198-208.

Galloway, N., Kriukow, J., & Numajiri, T. (2017*). Internationalisation, higher education and the growing demand for English: An investigation into the English medium of instruction (EMI) movement in China and Japan*. Edinburgh: British Council.

Graham, S. (2018). L2 motivational self system, international posture, and the future self-guides of Japanese university students. *System, 77*, 71-81.

Karakas, A. (2016). The feasibility of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) in Turkey: A phenomenological study. *Linguistics and Education, 37*, 1-10.

Kirkpatrick, A. (2010). *English as a lingua franca in ASEAN: A multilingual model (Vol.1)*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Komolmas, P. M. (1993). *English as the medium of instruction at ABAC*. Bangkok: Assumption University Press

Macaro, E. (2018). *English Medium Instruction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Macaro, E., Curle, S., Pun, J., An, J., & Dearden, J. (2018). A systematic review of English Medium Instruction in higher education. *Language Teaching, 51*(1), 36-76.

Madhavan Brochier, D. (2016). Ten truths (and a lie) about EMI. IATEFL webinar. Retrieved from https://divyamadhavan.wordpress.com/2016/10/12/10-truths-a-lie-about-emi/

Marsh, H. W., Hau, K. T., & Kong, C. K. (2000). Late immersion and language of instruction in Hong Kong high schools: Achievement growth in language and nonlanguage subjects. *Harvard Educational Review, 70*(3), 302-346.

Martinez, R. (2016). English as Medium of Instruction (EMI) in Brazilian higher education: Challenges and opportunities. In K. Finardi (Ed.), *English in Brazil: Views policies and programs* (pp.191-228). Brazil: Eduel.

Methavasaraphak, P. (2022). *Teaching competency and effectiveness of Assumption University*. Bangkok: Assumption University Press.

Richards, J. R. & Pun, J. (2021). A typology of English-Medium Instruction. *RELC Journal, 54*(1), 1-25. doi.org/10.1177/0033688220968584

Rose, H., Curle, S., Aizawa, I., & Thompson, G. (2019). What drives success in English medium taught courses? The interplay between language proficiency, academic skills, and motivation. *Studies in Higher Education, 45*(11), 2234-2248.

Sert, O. (2005). The functions of code-switching in ELT classrooms. *The Internet TESL Journal, 11*(8), 1-6.

Tang, K.N. (2020). Challenges and importance of teaching English as a medium of instruction in Thailand International College. *Journal of English as an International Language, 15*, 97–118.

Walkinshaw, I., Fenton-Smith, B., & Humphreys. P. (2017). EMI issues and challenges in Asia-Pacific higher education: An introduction. In B. Fenton-Smith, P. Humphreys, & I. Walkinshaw (Eds*.), English Medium Instruction in higher education in Asia-Pacific: From policy to pedagogy* (pp. 1-18). New York, NY: Springer International Publishing