

Using English as a medium of instruction for non-English-major students: Impacts and coping strategies

Phan Thi Ngoc Le

VNU University of Languages and International Studies,
Vietnam National University, Hanoi, Vietnam,
ORCID no: 0000-0002-2337-9135
E-mail: lehang6778@gmail.com

Abstract

In recent years, as English is considered to be the common language of government, business, and society in many countries, English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in higher education has become an important and inevitable educational trend. In this study, I shed light on the main effects of EMI on non-English-major students in Vietnam, and their coping strategies to adapt to EMI. Participants in this study included 120 students from five classes of non-English-major students in study skills classes in English at Vietnam National University (VNU) that I directly teach. To achieve the research purpose, I combined both quantitative and qualitative methods through a closed-ended questionnaire and semi-structured in-depth interviews. Research findings show that EMI can have both positive and negative effects on the learning experiences of students. At the same time, to deal with these impacts, some coping strategies seem more effective and widely used than other strategies. It is hoped that this research, which focused on the perspective of students engaged in EMI, will bring benefits to researchers and teachers in making appropriate adjustments in teaching when using English as a medium of instruction.

Key words: *EMI, impacts, coping strategies, non-English majors, Vietnamese students*

1. Introduction

In the context of integration into the global economy, internationalization of education is one of the important requirements of any country. The internationalization of education and the desire to compete globally have led to the growth of the use of English as the language of instruction in higher education around the world. Researchers in the fields of language learning and teaching support the idea that a second language is learned most effectively when used to convey content that is interesting and relevant to the learner (Smit, 2023; Dafouz & Gray, 2022). English is regarded as a tool for domestic modernization and development, a global language of commerce, tourism, and education, and the common language of government, business, and society in many nations with several indigenous languages (Dearden, 2015). Therefore, using English as the means of instruction (hereafter EMI) in higher education is an important educational trend. Researchers believe that the use of EMI by universities will expand rapidly and have both cultural and political significance in these countries whose first language is not English (Le, 2021). A rich and rapidly expanding

study literature reflects the growing popularity of EMI with some typical recent studies by Fujimoto-Adamson and Adamson (2018), Tsou and Baker (2021), Lasagabaster (2022), McKinley and Galloway (2022), Molino et al. (2022), Smit (2023).

With the aim of achieving top ranking in the world for Vietnamese universities by 2020, EMI has been viewed in Vietnam as an educational innovation that satisfies national and international standards (Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), 2013). In Vietnam, a variety of EMI programs have been introduced and put into practice at various educational levels. These programs have had positive outcomes, such as raising students' levels of professional and linguistic ability in English, increasing career prospects, promoting collaborations with foreign universities, and drawing in overseas students. Recent years have seen a significant increase in the amount of literature examining the effectiveness of EMI courses in the Vietnamese context such as Vo (2017), Le (2017), Tran et al. (2021), Nguyen (2021), Hoang et al. (2023). However, little is known about Vietnamese non-English-major students' perspectives towards the impact of EMI on their learning and what coping strategies students used in their EMI courses, which needs more investigation.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Review of Studies on the Impacts of EMI and Students' Coping Strategies in the World

Numerous studies from all over the world have shown how EMI affects students' academic success. The studies by Shohamy (2013) and Ali (2013) are the first to be mentioned in the last decade. Both authors agreed that when English is used in teaching, it not only helps students gain knowledge about specific fields, but also helps them improve their language skills. Worp (2017) examined how engineering students learned when given instruction in English, their level of English competence, and their expectations for future use of the language. The findings indicated that EMI students had better oral language abilities and English proficiency, and because they had frequent exposure to the language, felt more at ease using it in professional settings (Worp, 2017). In the study of Fujimoto-Adamson and Adamson (2018), the methodological issues associated with teaching sociolinguistics to Japanese undergraduate students through EMI were investigated. The findings revealed that lesson content is taught in both Japanese (the students' L1) and English (their L2) as a way of "translanguaging", which integrates "bilingual language practices" among students of diverse language proficiencies and linguistically scaffolds the content input (Fujimoto-Adamson & Adamson, 2018). In recent years, Al Hakim (2021) mentioned three advantages that students and instructors can gain from EMI: promoting academic proficiency, English proficiency level, and motivation in the learning process. Similarly, exploring the impact of EMI on students' language proficiency, Ulla et al. (2022) claimed that the implementation of EMI improved students' language proficiency and the university's internationalization. According to Del Mar Sánchez-Pérez (2023), while EMI has a favorable effect on student writing development in terms of vocabulary and lexical correctness, other aspects of writing, such syntax, grammar, organization, or fluency, did not seem to be impacted.

Besides positive views, some studies also mention the negative effects of EMI on students' academic performance. The insufficient linguistic proficiency of students enrolled in EMI courses has received a lot of attention in the literature. According to Kirkpatrick (2014), the majority of students in Asian contexts graduate from school with low English language ability. When expected to read, write, comprehend, engage in class, and give oral presentations, students with inadequate English proficiency are likely to be unable to use the language effectively (Evans & Morrison, 2011). Students' linguistic proficiency with an IELTS score of 6.5 – 7.0 is a requirement for understanding academic content (Barnard, 2015). According to van Wyk (2014), 65% of students at the University of Free State in South Africa had difficulties understanding the academic material due to their limited English competence. Additionally, studies have revealed that interactions between teachers and students in EMI classrooms are quite limited (Brock-Utne, 2010; Chang, 2010; Kagwesage, 2012). A similar observation has been made by Sert (2008) and Brock-Utne and Alidou (2011), in which a few participants mentioned that they sometimes understood the question but faced difficulties in expressing themselves in English. In studies by AlBakri (2013; 2017), the participants admitted that they struggled studying, primarily due to their limited language proficiency. It was also accepted that using Arabic as a medium of instruction (AMI) would result in students having a deeper understanding of the material and, most likely, performing better academically. Similarly, according to Al-Mashikhi et al. (2014), the adoption of English as the course language had negatively impacted their average score of students.

As regards coping strategies, according to Stephenson and DeLongis (2020), the thoughts and behaviors employed to handle the demands of a stressful circumstance, both internal and external, are known as coping strategies. Similarly, coping strategies are also considered to be the techniques or skills people employ to control their stress and unpleasant feelings (Crego et al., 2016; Hamaideh, 2011). The issue of coping strategies of students in EMI classes was also discussed by many scholars in the world. Ali (2020) explored Omani students' coping strategies in an engineering program taught in English. The results revealed that their mother tongue (Arabic) was used as a compensatory strategy, along with translation, bilingual dictionaries, the internet, peer, group, and family support, choosing to take English lessons, using personal strategies, and other lecture comprehension-related coping mechanisms. In the study of Hung and Good (2021), students reported using a variety of approaches to their English textbooks, including taking notes in class, using Chinese translations of the books, and getting notes from more seasoned classmates. These approaches allowed students to access the material without running into issues related to their weak English skills. Similarly, Pomat et al. (2022) investigated the coping strategies of students in an EMI nursing program such as a bilingual support system, definitions of technical terms, translanguaging instruction. Sharing the same findings, in the study of Pun et al. (2023) the evidence of the language difficulties teachers and students in EMI scientific courses encounter was critically reviewed and synthesised, along with suggested coping strategies such as bilingual approaches to teaching and learning. Cross (2016) also argued that the teachers in his study see content and language integrated learning (CLIL) as the division of language and content. The author proposed reconsidering the notion of "integration" and emphasizing the value of using various languages in the classroom to improve students' conceptual development and content

knowledge (Cross, 2016). Similar results have been documented in CLIL, such as the usage of L1 for students to feel at ease in the classroom (Lasagabaster, 2013). Blackledge and Creese (2010) also conducted research in the context of multilingual student instruction in language classrooms and they thought that with flexible pedagogy, learners use their translanguaging as an unrestricted social resource. Moreover, Canagarajah (2011) contends that translanguaging is possible even with minimal pedagogical effort from teachers since it is a natural occurrence. This is due to the fact that a varied group of multilingual students in the classroom naturally engages in translanguaging. Besides, according to the findings of Moorhouse and Wan (2023), teachers and syllabus/curriculum designers can support students by suggesting various coping techniques for student self-help.

2.2. Review of Studies on the Impacts of EMI and Students' Coping Strategies in Vietnam

In Vietnam, the impact of EMI on students' language proficiency has received moderate attention from authors. In the study by Vo (2017), the participants identified three key benefits of EMI programs at a Vietnamese university, including the improvement of students' knowledge and skills, supportive learning and teaching environments, and improved employment prospects. This result concurs with benefits suggested by Coyle et al. (2010). Similarly, Le (2017) showed that the participants have favorable sentiments toward EMI and recognize its potential advantages for their future employment. According to the study of Tran et al. (2021), teachers and students shared a positive attitude on students' language development. According to the findings, students' reading, hearing, speaking, and technical terminology knowledge all improved the most, while their knowledge of grammar was thought to have improved the least (Tran et al., 2021). Nguyen (2021) also mentioned some positive effects of EMI program implementation such as improving the quality of higher education in Vietnam, revamping the stale curriculum, and fostering English language proficiency. According to Hoang et al. (2023), the first and biggest impact of EMI came from the students' improvement of their academic and technical lexis for their disciplines.

The issue of coping strategies of students in EMI classes has only been studied by few Vietnamese scholars. Do (2016) conducted a study on physics students' challenges and their coping strategies on an EMI program at Hanoi university of science, Vietnam National University. The study demonstrated that the students experienced major difficulties with their ability to understand lectures and with their use of English. They frequently studied in groups, engaged in a lot of reading, attended lectures, finished their homework, and memorized information. From the teachers' viewpoint, Nguyen (2021) showed that teachers used a variety of ways to overcome the challenges of instructing EMI lessons including strategies coping with the complexity of subject content, reducing teaching speed and fluidity, addressing students' poor engagement and interaction, and introducing students to strategies to deal with technical issues. Le and Nguyen (2023) also suggested that the students who sign up for EMI lessons need to be aware of their responsibilities as global citizens within the EMI program. To enhance their output abilities (speaking and writing), they should use technology and participate in extracurricular activities (Le & Nguyen, 2023).

2.3. Research foci and questions

As we can see from the review of the literature, the context of using EMI in university classes has many impacts on students' learning process and the coping strategies that students use to deal with that learning context are also very diverse. In recent years, the role of conducting EMI in university classrooms has received much attention from researchers in the world. However, in Vietnam, there is not much research into the coping strategies of learners, especially non-English-major students. Therefore, this study was conducted to explore those impacts and some coping strategies from the perspective of the recipient, i.e. the learner, because they are the center of the teaching-learning process, according to the modern learner-centered approach to education. These goals can be achieved through the following two research questions:

- 1. What impact has EMI had on non-English-major students in Vietnam?*
- 2. What strategies do non-English-major students have to adapt to EMI?*

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

In this work, I used a two-phase sequential mixed methods strategy to evaluate the data throughout two periods. I employed quantitative approaches in the first stage and qualitative methods in the second. The reason is that I support the view that “we can learn more about our research topic if we can combine the strengths of quantitative methods and qualitative methods, while compensating for the weaknesses of each” (Punch & Oancea, 2014, p.339). While qualitative data's merits lay in their sensitivity to meaning and context and in-depth research on smaller samples, quantitative data's value is that it allows us to track general patterns across a large and representative sample of the population. To select the research participants, the purposive sampling was adopted. I chose 5 classes of non-English-major students that I directly teach. These are classes of students participating in study skills classes in English at Vietnam National University (VNU). All participants were between 18-22 years old and were Vietnamese citizens. Before entering university, these students had the opportunity to expose to English, which is a mandatory subject in the general education program from grades 3 to 12 (MOET, 2013). English at the high school level equips students with lifelong learning skills to continuously learn and develop their future working capacity. Based on the results of the university entrance exam, this group of students had passed the English course at CEFR level A2, equivalent to level 2 according to the 6-level foreign language competency framework for Vietnam. They aimed to achieve the B1 output standard (equivalent to level 3).

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

In the first phase, I designed a closed-ended survey questionnaire (See Appendix A). Quantitative data obtained from statistical analysis of the questionnaire were used as a starting point to reveal general trends among participants in programs that adopted EMI. It also provides some basic information about the study population and who is willing to participate

in the second phase of the study. Most importantly, it assisted us in preparing for the development of the in-depth interview questionnaire used in the second phase. In this study, the questionnaire was adapted from the questionnaire on the effects of EMI on students' learning experiences and quality of education in content courses by AlBakri (2017). There are two parts in the questionnaire that follow the two research questions. Part 1 includes 10 statements about the impacts of EMI on students' learning experiences and part 2 includes 10 sentences about coping strategies students used in EMI classes. I adopted a 5-point Likert scale for all 20 statements (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree). The participants found it easy to read out the entire list of scale descriptors while using a 5-point Likert scale, as 5-point Likert scales were thought to be less confusing and had the potential to boost response rates (Bouranta et al., 2009). In fact, 124 students were given the survey questionnaire. During the analysis phase, I had to exclude the questionnaires of four participants because they were incomplete or contained identical responses to virtually all items. Finally, I collected questionnaires from 120 participants.

In the second phase, semi-structured in-depth interviews with students were used in the next phase (See Appendix B). As defined by Kvale (1996), the interview “is a construction site for knowledge. An interview is literally an inter-view, an inter-change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest” (Kvale, 1996, p. 14). Semi-structured interviews are interviews based on a list of questions or topics to cover. However, the order and way of asking questions can depend on the context and characteristics of the interviewee. This is where the semi-structured interview method helps to achieve depth by giving the interviewer the chance to go into further detail about the interviewee's answers. Semi-structured interviews may be considered a “high-preparation, high-risk, high-gain, and high-analysis operation” (Wengraf, 2001, p. 5) due to the participatory aspect of the interview, which is both extremely flexible and somewhat unpredictable (Byrne, 2004; Roulston, 2010). In-depth interviews were used to thoroughly explore a specific topic, in order to collect as much information as possible about the topic that was researched through questionnaires in the early stages. From there, I could gain a comprehensive view and understanding of learners' perspectives, behaviors and emotions.

In order to guarantee the validity of the survey's results, the Spearman-Brown method was additionally used as a split-half approach to evaluate the reliability coefficient. It may be argued that the data collected is reliable because Spearman-Brown reliability (R_{sb}) = 0.79 for part 1 and 0.74 for part 2 is higher than the value of 0.7.

4. Research Results and Discussions

4.1. Research question 1: What impact has EMI had on non-English-major students in Vietnam?

4.1.1. Impact of EMI on performance in exams

The first group of impacts mentioned is the impact on student exams. The results of the survey are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Impact of EMI on performance in exams

Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. Failure to understand questions in English causes students to answer incorrectly in the exam.	4.14	0.68
2. Problems with English writing skills affect the results of students' essays.	4.11	0.66

Table 1 shows that both statements in this section received a high mean score ($M > 4$). Furthermore, the standard deviation for each factor was low ($SD < 0.7$), indicating that the data were evenly dispersed around the mean value. It means that all students agreed that they had difficulty understanding exam questions and English writing skills to express answers in essays. These opinions were confirmed in the interview when some participants mentioned problems they faced due to the use of new words in exam questions. S1's interview excerpt highlights this point:

There are many problems in exams. Sometimes teachers use new words in midterm or final exams; Vocabulary is not mentioned in class lectures or documents. This happens especially in multiple choice questions or long questions.... You often misunderstand a word and give the wrong answer. (S1)

Besides, another student pointed out that: "Sometimes I have to read the question multiple times and this often involves multiple choice questions" (S2) while one student said that he often writes a wrong answer due to misunderstanding the exam question: "This happened many times. I misunderstood the question and I wrote an answer to another question" (S3). In addition, students' English writing skills when having to express answers is also an issue students mentioned in the interview. Students asserted that they sometimes understood the question but had difficulty expressing their answer in English.

These difficulties of students were also partly reported in some previous studies by international scholars. Nearly all interview subjects admitted that they have trouble understanding exam questions (AlBakri, 2013). AlBakri (2017) stated that almost all participants faced problems in writing and most of the writing problems revolve around the terminology students need to utilize in English and how to apply it in a sentence. Similarly, participants in Evans and Morrison's (2011) study also experienced this issue. Sert (2008) and Brock-Utne and Alidou (2011) made a similar observation, in which a few participants said that they occasionally understood the question but had trouble in expressing themselves in English to answer some exam questions.

4.1.2. Impact of EMI on students' academic performance

Based on the data collected, in this section we will examine the impact and consequences of EMI on students' academic and research performance. Some of the results obtained are presented in Table 2 as follows.

Table 2. Impact of EMI on students' academic performance

Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation
3. Low English proficiency causes students to achieve low rankings in subjects taught in English.	4.03	0.75
4. GPA scores will be higher if all subjects are taught in Vietnamese.	3.63	0.67
5. Looking up disciplinary terms when studying subjects in English takes a lot of time for students.	3.85	0.75
6. Teaching disciplinary subjects in Vietnamese will help students understand faster and spend less time preparing before class.	4.37	0.61
7. Having to ask teachers and friends to explain some English lessons again is quite difficult and annoying.	3.76	0.94

Table 3 shows that students tend to want to study some specialized subjects in Vietnamese because Vietnamese-language instruction in academic topics will enable students to comprehend concepts more quickly and prepare for classes with less effort ($M= 4.37$). In addition, all students agreed that low English proficiency causes students to achieve low rankings in subjects taught in English ($M= 4.03$). The results in the survey are completely consistent with the opinions of the students participating in the interview. Specifically, all interview participants thought that studying a major in Vietnamese would be easier and clearer. This result is quite similar to Al-Mashikhi et al.'s (2014) study, in which 48.3% of participants felt that their average score had deteriorated because the courses use English as the medium of instruction.

The remaining statements in the table all have mean scores ranging between 3.5-4, which means that besides some neutral opinions, the majority of students concur with them. Some students attributed their poor academic results to the implementation of EMI in universities and all subjects should be taught in Vietnamese for higher GPA ratings ($M= 3.63$). One student said:

Studying in an English environment has a negative impact on my learning. I need to spend more time with English rather than focusing on my major courses. English was wasting our precious time. Because of English, I need to spend a lot of time practicing my presentations instead of focusing on main subjects. (S4)

In addition, students also think that studying in Vietnamese will take less time because students have to spend a lot of time looking for disciplinary phrases when learning subjects in English ($M=3.85$). One student shared:

I need to spend a lot of time researching and finding the meaning of new words and looking for the technical meaning of those words. Also I need to have plenty of

time to prepare and write my assignments to meet deadlines. All of these can be considered challenges that have a great impact on my academic performance (S5).

In the interview, I learned why this was the case. S6 explained, for instance, that, “There will be a difference in the time needed to study. It takes us more time to study in English because we need to translate documents. In Vietnamese, we know the words so we can learn them easily” (S6).

These results were consistent with the study of AlBakri (2017), in which the author acknowledged that teaching in Arabic would provide students a better understanding of the subject and would likely improve their academic performance. Ali (2020) investigated the difficulties Omani students had in an English-taught engineering program. The outcomes showed that students preferred speaking Arabic, which was their mother tongue. The study by Do (2016) also shows that the students had major problems with their comprehension of lectures and their use of English.

Despite the above-mentioned drawbacks, all participants still believe that learning in an English-speaking environment is beneficial to them and advances their language skills. In Table 3 below, some survey findings are presented.

Table 3. Some positive effects of EMI

Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation
8. Despite a low ranking, EMI still plays an important role in my studies.	4.33	0.81
9. Learning subjects in English has gradually improved and become more familiar to students.	4.19	0.55
10. EMI improves students' English proficiency, especially listening and speaking skills.	4.45	0.61

From Table 3, although the introduction of EMI had a significant impact on exams and student scores, they still cannot deny the quite positive effects that EMI brought about learning in general. All students agreed that although English makes them rank lower than studying subjects in Vietnamese, using English as a medium of instruction also plays an important role in learning (M= 4.33). According to Shohamy (2013) and Ali (2013), using English in the classroom helps students not only learn about particular disciplines but also develop their language skills. In Vietnam, Le (2017) also stated that the participants feel positively about EMI and are aware of its possible benefits for their future work.

In the interview, students confirmed that they have achieved certain improvements and gradually become familiar with the English-speaking environment. This statement was made clearer in the interview when S6 shared, “I also had difficulty reading, writing and speaking but things started to improve dramatically. Because all the subjects in school are in English and this has helped me improve my English” (S7). The gradual improvements of students

were also mentioned in the study of Worp (2017), in which EMI students were more proficient in both oral language and English, and as they were exposed to it more frequently, they were more comfortable speaking it in formal contexts.

Statement 10 received the highest mean score ($M= 4.45$), indicating that speaking and listening are the two skills that have improved the most in the EMI lesson. The improvement in language skills was reported by Al Hakim (2021) who claimed that EMI can help students foster academic proficiency, English language fluency, and learning motivation. Similarly, the results of Tran et al. (2021) showed that speaking and listening skills are some aspects improved the most in EMI classes (Tran et al., 2021). Del Mar Sánchez-Pérez (2023) also emphasized some positive impact of EMI on the development of English skills, but the author argued that EMI has a positive impact on students' writing development, especially vocabulary and lexical correctness. According to Hoang et al. (2023), the initial and strongest effects of EMI were the students' increased proficiency in their fields' specialized academic vocabulary and technical terms. It can be seen that in some other studies listening and speaking skills are not the aspects gaining the most improvement, but the authors asserted the progress in disciplinary vocabulary.

These opinions contradict the arguments given by the majority of students participating in this study as presented above, and serve as illustrations of the complex personal perspectives that arise from each student's unique circumstances. EMI can both positively and negatively affect a student's learning experience. It can also be a positive factor in improving their English proficiency while, at the same time, it can be a source of hindrance regarding the acquisition of knowledge and skills related to the student's major.

4.2. Research question 2: What strategies do non-English-major students have to adapt to EMI?

Non-English-major students used a number of coping strategies to handle language-related challenges and difficulties when incorporating EMI into the curriculum. Some strategies appear to be more effective and more widely used than others. I summarized the average mean values to evaluate the popularity of the strategies when used by students in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Students' coping strategies to adapt to EMI

Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation
11. Put questions for teachers about difficult issues in English at class.	4.33	0.54
12. Ask friends to re-explain difficult lessons.	3.83	0.61
13. Translate documents into Vietnamese using dictionary or Google Translate to fully understand their content.	4.40	0.60
14. Try to guess the meaning of new words based on the context of the article, without translating them into Vietnamese.	3.40	0.74

15. Read many related documents in English to expand knowledge and vocabulary.	3.33	0.71
16. Ask friends or anyone with expertise to review English essays before submitting them to the teacher.	3.88	0.74
17. Use Vietnamese to express opinions more clearly in class discussions.	4.50	0.53
18. Make a list of difficult terms in English and study it every day.	2.83	0.60
19. Ask the teacher to speak slowly and repeat a certain topic during class.	4.32	0.52
20. Write English essays and ask friends or teachers to review and correct them.	2.68	0.68

In this section, the coping strategies of non-English-major students are divided into the following groups: using mother tongue as an alternative strategy; using dictionaries and translation tools; using strategies related to acquiring lectures; using social support from peers, groups, and family members; using personal strategies.

4.2.1. Using mother tongue as an alternative strategy in the classroom

Students frequently use Vietnamese, their mother tongue, as an alternative strategy to overcome communication difficulties when they ask and answer questions in classes taught in English. This is the most commonly used strategy by survey participants (M= 4.50 for statement 17). Through direct interviews, this strategy was also mentioned many times by students. For example, one student thought Vietnamese is very useful for learning:

To some extent, Vietnamese has helped me a lot in class. If you don't understand anything, you can ask someone to explain it in Vietnamese. Some teachers can simplify things in Vietnamese and we find that more helpful. My friends also often use Vietnamese to do their homework and then translate it into English. (S7)

It can be seen that S7 realized that Vietnamese teachers often use Vietnamese to make learning easier to understand and explain things that students cannot understand in English. In such cases, translanguaging can promote a deeper understanding of the issues (Baker, 2006). Translanguaging interactions are a phenomenon mentioned by students when carrying out activities related to their major. One of the interviewees stated:

The mother tongue plays an active role in helping me understand difficult concepts in lessons. We used Vietnamese together to discuss problems and how to solve them. We also used Vietnamese to give examples from real life to explain things and relate them to our daily lives. (S8)

The above data collection shows the importance of mother tongue in EMI classes for non-English major students. This result is consistent with many studies in the world. Fujimoto-Adamson and Adamson (2018) allowed students to use both English (the students' L2) and

Japanese (their L1) to deepen students' understandings during the lessons. Besides, the findings of Ali (2020) also showed that their native language (Arabic) was used as a coping method, coupled with translation, bilingual dictionaries, and other strategies. Similar to this, Pomat et al. (2022) regarded the bilingual support system as the main coping strategy of students in an EMI nursing program. Similar results were found in the study by Pun et al. (2023), which showed that both teachers and students used translanguaging in the classroom.

4.2.2. Using translation methods, dictionaries and the Internet

In addition to using Vietnamese as a useful coping strategy, Google Translate and dictionary were used by students to translate English texts in assignments and projects into Vietnamese. This is the second strategic group in table 4 with $M= 4.40$ for statement 13.

The interview excerpt again emphasizes the role of the mother tongue (Vietnamese) as one of the most prominent coping strategies used by students to handle the challenges and difficulties of EMI. S8 shared that:

Using mother tongue is a great help to us in translating and explaining difficult terms and concepts. I used a dictionary to translate specialized words into Vietnamese. Our teacher is Vietnamese and I can understand 97% of the lectures. (S8)

The interview with S9 showed me that bilingual dictionaries are also a big help for students: "For specialized terms, I sought help from consulting bilingual dictionaries and used technology to learn their meanings and pronunciations. They have been very helpful to me" (S9).

As can be seen, bilingual dictionaries appear to have been regularly utilized as a teaching tool to assist students in understanding specialized vocabulary and concepts. Students in the Hung and Good (2021) study also stated that they read the books in Chinese translation in order to comprehend the lessons. Le and Nguyen (2023) also suggested that using technology is a good coping strategy for students to adapt to EMI.

4.2.3. Using coping strategies related to acquiring lectures

Strategies to overcome difficulties when listening to lectures in class received agreement from all students participating in the survey. The two statements 11 and 19 in Table 4 both have Means of 4.33 and 4.32, respectively. I clarified these strategies in the interview and found that these strategies include measures to keep up with the instructor's lecture pace, take notes, participate in classroom discussions, ask questions, seek clarification, and perform activities at class. One student shared that:

There are a few strategies that we have used to deal with such challenges. Regarding the speed of teaching, sometimes we have to ask the teacher to slow down and repeat a certain topic. Sometimes we talk to each other in Vietnamese and explain topics to our friends in Vietnamese. Additionally, we also asked lecturers to simplify their language and give examples from real life to clarify their points. (S10)

All of these strategies were shown quite clearly in the results obtained from the survey and they were confirmed by another student:

Sometimes I have difficulty taking notes while the lecturers are speaking because of the type of language they use and the speed of their lectures. We often work in groups on practical exercises and help each other. Teachers often give examples from real life to help us understand better. (S11)

Vietnamese non-English-major students' coping strategies related to acquiring lectures were quite similar with those reported in the study of Hung and Good (2021). These authors claimed that various strategies were used by students to cope with lectures including taking notes in class, and getting notes from more seasoned classmates. A slightly different point in the study of Hung and Good (2021) is that students tended not to ask teachers to use the strategies of slowing down and clarifying lectures. However, a range of techniques to deal with the difficulties of teaching EMI lessons employed by teachers were demonstrated in the study of Nguyen (2021), including strategies dealing with the complexity of the subject material and those dealing with the slower teaching pace and fluidity.

4.2.4. Using social support from peers, family, and teachers

Table 4 shows that the strategy group with the average mean scores is related to using support from friends, family, and teachers. Those are statements 12 and 16 in the table with Means of 3.83 and 3.88 respectively. This was clarified by one of the interviewees as follows:

Sometimes I seek help from teachers and friends. Furthermore, family members who are highly qualified can help in this regard. I talk to my friends in Vietnamese and they explain everything in Vietnamese. This is really helpful for me. Going to a teacher during office hours and asking them to clarify some questions is another possible option. (S12)

The support from friends and teachers mentioned above is considered an effective coping strategy for students. However, from the data obtained, it can be seen that there are some students who expressed a neutral viewpoint towards these strategies. One student explained in the interview, "It might be tough and unpleasant to have to ask teachers and friends to clarify certain English lessons again. I'm afraid this will waste their time and I'm quite hesitant to do so" (S15).

In studies around the world, although it does not appear so frequently, the strategy of accessing help from family and friends is also reported in the study of Ali (2020) along with many other strategies like using their mother tongue, translation, bilingual dictionaries, the internet, and so on. This shows that this support network is also an effective way for students to learn in EMI programs.

4.2.5. Using personal coping strategies

One interesting thing is that the group of strategies related to personal coping strategies in student learning occupies a relatively low position in the survey. This strategy group includes statements 14, 15 ($M < 3.5$) and 18, 20 ($M < 3$). However, when interviewing students, all groups of students emphasized the importance of personal strategies in helping them cope

with problems and difficulties related to EMI, although they also admitted that being self-aware and maintaining these personal strategies requires a great deal of perseverance and determination on the part of the learner. One student pointed out:

One of the most effective coping strategies I use is to rely on personal effort. I usually write a list of words and repeat them often until I get into them. (S16)

This sharing showed us that some students had developed their own personal coping strategies. This is a natural and necessary direction for students to become autonomous learners. In this case, the strategies students often use are glossaries and the method of repeatedly learning words, concepts, and terms.

In fact, some students who are applying these strategies gradually take control of their own learning. Another student used personal coping strategies to handle language-related difficulties and suggested that he combined two of the strategies above, rewriting and creating a glossary:

As for writing skills, I practice it by rewriting and receiving opinions and feedback from teachers but the spelling problem still exists. For difficult terms and vocabulary, I created my own glossary and it's very helpful. (S17).

Students' autonomy strategies in finding personal strategies to adapt to EMI were also mentioned in a number of studies in the world and Vietnam. Moorhouse and Wan (2023) found that teachers and programs can benefit students by recommending a variety of coping mechanisms for student self-help. Similarly, according to Do (2016), to overcome difficulties in comprehending English lectures, students formed the habit of reading a lot of materials, completing their homework, and memorizing content language. These findings showed that students used a variety of personal strategies to deal with EMI challenges once English became their primary language of instruction, even though these strategies were less common than others like speaking in one's mother tongue or asking for help from friends and family. These techniques were employed by students to overcome obstacles and achieve their academic goals.

5. Conclusion

This study was conducted with 120 students from 5 classes of non-English-major students that I directly teach. These are classes of students participating in study skills classes in English at Vietnam National University (VNU). I collected data in two ways: first, using quantitative research methods through questionnaires, which I presented with tables and charts; second, using qualitative research methods through semi-structured interviews with 20 students who responded to the survey in phase 1.

First, regarding the negative influence of using English as the language of instruction, EMI was seen to have had an impact on performance in exams, specifically causing problems for students in understanding exam questions, or expressing answers in English. Besides, EMI had an impact on students' academic performance as students believed that some poor academic results were due to the implementation of EMI in universities, from which some

students thought that studying a major in Vietnamese would be easier and clearer. In terms of positive effects, despite the fact that learning in English placed students lower than learning in Vietnamese, adopting English as a language of teaching was crucial for learning. The two skills that have developed the most in the EMI lesson out of the four were speaking and listening.

Second, the Vietnamese non-English-major students participating in this study used a number of coping strategies to handle language-related challenges and difficulties when incorporating EMI into the curriculum. I divided the coping strategies of students into the following groups: (1) Using the mother tongue as an alternative bilingual strategy in the classroom; (2) Using translation methods, dictionaries and the Internet; (3) Using coping strategies related to acquiring lectures such as asking teachers to slow down and repeat a certain topic, or simplify their language; (4) Using social support from friends and family; (5) Using personal coping strategies such as glossaries, re-learning of words, concepts and terms, etc.

Regarding future research directions, I think that if the study were to expand the participant group to include graduate students, employers or key industry experts, it could contribute more to data analysis and issues related to academic and professional environments, thereby providing deeper insights into students' learning experiences and their perceptions of EMI.

References

- AlBakri, S. (2013). Problematizing English medium instruction in Oman. *International Journal of Bilingual & Multilingual Teachers of English*, 207(1172), 1-15. <http://dx.doi.org/10.12785/IJBMTE/010203>
- AlBakri, S. (2017). *Effects of English medium instruction on students' learning experiences and quality of education in content courses in a public college in Oman*. Ph.D thesis, University of Exeter. <http://hdl.handle.net/10871/27743>
- Ali, N. L. (2013). A changing paradigm in language planning: English-medium instruction policy at the tertiary level in Malaysia. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 14(1), 73-92. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2013.775543>
- Al Hakim, M. (2021). Revealing the Potential Impacts of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) in Indonesian Higher Education Context. *IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature*, 9(2), 461-472. <https://doi.org/10.24256/ideas.v9i2.2343>
- Ali, H. I. H. (2020). Omani students' coping strategies in an English medium engineering programme. *Arab World English Journal*, 11(2), 361-382. <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol11no2.25>
- Al-Mashikhi, E., Al-Mahrooqi, R. & Denman, C. J. (2014). Investigating college of science student attitudes towards using English as a medium of instruction. *The 2014 WEI International Academic Conference Proceedings* New Orleans, USA. Retrieved February, 2015, from: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283122177>
- Baker, S. (2006). English language learners and reading first: Some preliminary evidence of effectiveness. *Paper presented at the CORE Literacy Leadership Summit*. San Francisco,

CA.

- Barnard, R. (2015). Current issues in English language education in Asia: A personal perspective. Keynote speech in the *Proceedings of the KAPEE conference*, Seoul, 17 January 2015, 5-14.
- Blackledge, A., & Creese, A. (2010). Translanguaging in the bilingual classroom: A pedagogy for learning and teaching? *The Modern Language Journal*, 94, 103-105. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2009.00986x>
- Bouranta, N., Chitiris, L., & Paravantis, J. (2009). The relationship between internal and external service quality. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 21(3), 275-293. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09596110910948297>
- Brock-Utne, B. (2010). Policy on the language of instruction issue in Africa- a spotlight on South Africa and Tanzania. In Desai Z., Qorro, M. A. S. (Eds.), *Educational challenges in multilingual societies: LOITASA phase two research* (74-101). African Minds.
- Brock-Utne, B. & Alidou, H. (2011). Active students-learning through a language they master. In Ouane, A. & Glanz, C. (Eds.), *Optimizing Learning and Education in Africa; the Language Factor* (187-215). Paris: ADEA. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002126/212602e.pdf>
- Byrne, B. (2004). Qualitative interviewing. In C. Seale (Ed.), *Researching society and culture* (pp. 179-192). London: Sage.
- Canagarajah, S. (2011). Translanguaging in the classroom: Emerging issues for research and pedagogy. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 2(2011), 1-28. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110239331.1>
- Chang, Y. Y. (2010). English-medium instruction for subject courses in tertiary Education: Reactions from Taiwanese undergraduate students. *Taiwan International ESP Journal*, 2(1), 53-82. <https://doi.org/10.6706/TIESPJ.2010.2.1.3>
- Coyle, D., Hood, P., & Marsh, D. (2010). *CLIL: Content and language integrated learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009024549>
- Crego, A., Carrillo-Díaz, M., Armfield, J. M., & Romero, M. (2016). Stress and academic performance in dental students: the role of coping strategies and examination-related self-efficacy. *Journal of Dental Education*, 80(2), 165–172. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.0022-0337.2016.80.2.tb06072.x>
- Cross, R. (2016). Language and content ‘integration’: the affordances of additional languages as a tool within a single curriculum space. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 48(3), 388-408. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2015.1125528>
- Dafouz, E., & Gray, J. (2022). Rethinking the Roles of ELT in English-Medium Education in Multilingual University Settings: An Introduction. *ELT Journal*, 7(2), 163-171. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccab096>
- Dearden, J. (2015). *English as a medium of instruction: A growing global phenomenon*. London: British Council. Retrieved August 2016 from <https://www.britishcouncil.org/education/ihe/knowledge-centre/english-language-higher-education/report-english-medium-instruction>
- Del Mar Sánchez-Pérez, M. (2023). The impact of EMI on student English writing proficiency in a Spanish undergraduate engineering context. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 13(2), 373–397. <https://doi.org/10.14746/ssl.38279>

- Do, T. T. T. (2016). *A study on Physics students' challenges and their coping strategies on English as a medium of Instruction (EMI) program at Hanoi University of science, Vietnam National University*. Master's thesis, Vietnam National University, Hanoi.
- Evans, S., & Morrison, B. (2011). The student experience of English-medium higher Education in Hong Kong. *Language and Education*, 25(2), 147-162. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2011.553287>
- Fujimoto-Adamson, N., Adamson, J. (2018). From EFL to EMI: Hybrid Practices in English as a Medium of Instruction in Japanese Tertiary Contexts. In: Kirkgöz, Y., Dikilitaş, K. (eds) *Key Issues in English for Specific Purposes in Higher Education. English Language Education*, vol 11. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-70214-8_12
- Hamaideh, S. H. (2011). Occupational stress, social support, and quality of life among Jordanian mental health nurses. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 33(1), 15-23. <https://doi.org/10.3109/01612840.2011.605211>
- Hoang, N. T., Bui, T. N., Le, D. H., & Pham, V. D. (2023). Students' Challenges on Learning EMI Courses at a Technical University in Vietnam: An Investigation from Students' Voices. *Proceedings of the AsiaCALL International Conference*, 1, 131-151. <https://doi.org/10.54855/paic.2319>
- Hung, Y.-J., & Good, R. L. (2021). Survey of English Use and Coping Strategies in Discipline-Specific University Courses in Taiwan. *International Journal of TESOL Studies*, 3(1), 43-57. <http://dx.doi.org/10.46451/ijts.2021.01.04>
- Kagwesage, A. M. (2012). *English for Academic Purposes practices in Rwandan higher education: National University of Rwanda as a case study*. Lambert Academic Publishing.
- Kirkpatrick, A. (2014). *English as a medium of instruction in east and south-east Asian Universities*. In N. Murray & A. Scarino (Eds.), *Dynamic ecologies* (pp. 15-23). New York, Springer.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews*. Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Lasagabaster, D. (2013). The use of the L1 in CLIL classes: The teachers' perspective. *Latin American Journal of Content and Language Integrated Learning*, 6(2), 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.5294/3148>
- Lasagabaster, D. (2022). *English-Medium Instruction in Higher Education*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108903493>
- Le, T. T. H. (2021). EMI Programs in higher education in Vietnam and in the world: applications and recommendations. *Journal of Vietnamese science and education*, 37(1), 60-64. http://vjes.vnies.edu.vn/sites/default/files/baiso11_so37_01_2021.pdf
- Le, T. T. H., & Nguyen, T. B. (2023). English-medium instruction in Vietnam: Benefits and drawbacks from students' perspectives. *Vietnam Journal of Educational Sciences*, 19(2), 30-39. http://vjes.edu.vn/sites/default/files/vjes_-_vol_19_-_issue_02_-_no_03-30-39.pdf
- Le, T. T. N. (2017). Insights into the implementation of English medium instruction at Vietnamese Universities: Exploring the learning experiences of business students. *Journal of Science and Technology, the University of Danang*, 12(121), 53-57. <https://jst-ud.vn/jst-ud/article/view/146>
- McKinley, J., & Galloway, N. (2022). *English-Medium Instruction Practices in Higher Education. International Perspectives*. Bloomsbury Academic.

- Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). (2013). *Education in Vietnam in the Early Years of the 21st Century*. Vietnam Education Publishing House.
- Molino, A., Dimova, S., Kling, J., & Larsen, S. (2022). *The Evolution of EMI Research in European Higher Education*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003150923>
- Moorhouse, B. L., & Wan, Y. (2023). Students' Experiences of English-Medium Instruction at the Postgraduate Level: Challenges and Sustainable Support for Success. *Sustainability*, 15(4), 32-43. MDPI AG. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/su15043243>
- Nguyen, T. T. H. (2021). EMI courses at National Economics University during Covid era: lecturers' challenges and coping strategies. *VietTESOL International Convention Proceedings: Rethinking English Language Education in the Covid Era*, 5(1), 136-147. Retrieved from <https://proceedings.viettesol.org.vn/index.php/vic/article/view/28>
- Pomat, N., Jannok, A., Buripakdi, A., & Wilang, J. D. (2022). Partial EMI nursing program: Insights from students and teachers in Thailand. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 12(7), 1386-1396. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1207.19>
- Pun, J. K. H., Fu, X., & Cheung, K. K. C. (2023). Language challenges and coping strategies in English Medium Instruction (EMI) science classrooms: a critical review of literature. *Studies in Science Education*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03057267.2023.2188704>
- Punch, K. F. & Oancea, A. (2014). *Introduction to research methods in education*. London: Sage.
- Roulston, K. (2010). Considering quality in qualitative interviewing. *Qualitative Research*, 10(2), 199-228. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794109356739>
- Sert, N. (2008). The language of instruction dilemma in the Turkish context. *System*, 36(2), 156-171. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2007.11.006>
- Shohamy, E. (2013). *Critical perspective on the use of English as a medium of instruction at universities*. Multilingual Matters, Bristol: UK.
- Smit, U. (2023). English-medium instruction (EMI). *ELT Journal*, ccad018, 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccad018>
- Stephenson, E., & DeLongis, A. (2020). Coping strategies. *The Wiley encyclopedia of health psychology*, 55-60. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119057840.ch50>
- Tran, T. H. T., Burke, R., & O' Toole, J. M. (2021). Perceived Impact of EMI on Students' Language Proficiency in Vietnamese Tertiary EFL Contexts. *IAFOR Journal of Education: Language Learning in Education*, 9(3), 7-24. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1303125.pdf>
- Tsou, W., & Baker, W. (2021). *English-Medium Instruction Translanguaging Practices in Asia*. Singapore: Springer Singapore.
- Ulla, M. B., Junifer, L. B., & Pongsathorn, D. N. A. (2022). English language curriculum reform strategies: The impact of EMI on students' language proficiency. *Ampersand*, 9, 1-8, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amper.2022.100101>
- van Wyk, A. (2014). English-medium education in a multilingual setting: A case in South Africa. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 52(2), 205-220. <https://doi.org/10.1515/iral-2014-0009>
- Vo, P. Q. (2017). Students' experiences with English medium instruction (EMI) tertiary programs in Vietnamese context: Implications to curriculum developers. *Proceedings of*

International Conference 2017, 1-11.
http://www.vnseameo.org/InternationalConference2017/materials/15_VoPhuongQuyen_Fullpaper.pdf

Wengraf, T. (2002). *Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage.

Worp, K. V. D. (2017). English medium instruction: away towards linguistically better prepared professionals in the Basque Autonomous Community? *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 14(1), 53-68. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2017.1258994>

Appendix A – Questionnaire

Circle the number that best describes your choice.

Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree
 1 2 3 4 5

Impact of EMI on students' learning performance	
1. Failure to understand questions in English causes students to answer incorrectly in the exam.	1 2 3 4 5
2. Problems with English writing skills affect the results of students' essays.	1 2 3 4 5
3. Low English proficiency causes students to achieve low rankings in subjects taught in English.	1 2 3 4 5
4. GPA scores will be higher if all subjects are taught in Vietnamese.	1 2 3 4 5
5. Looking up disciplinary terms when studying subjects in English takes a lot of time for students.	1 2 3 4 5
6. Teaching disciplinary subjects in Vietnamese will help students understand faster and spend less time preparing before class.	1 2 3 4 5
7. Having to ask teachers and friends to explain some English lessons again is quite difficult and annoying.	1 2 3 4 5
8. Despite a low ranking, EMI still plays an important role in my studies.	1 2 3 4 5
9. Learning subjects in English has gradually improved and become more familiar to students.	1 2 3 4 5
10. EMI improves students' English proficiency, especially listening and speaking skills.	1 2 3 4 5
Non-English-major students' strategies to adapt to EMI	
11. Put questions for teachers about difficult issues in English at class.	1 2 3 4 5
12. Ask friends to re-explain difficult lessons.	1 2 3 4 5
13. Translate documents into Vietnamese using dictionary or Google Translate to fully understand their content.	1 2 3 4 5

14. Try to guess the meaning of new words based on the context of the article, without translating them into Vietnamese.	1	2	3	4
	5			
15. Read many related documents in English to expand knowledge and vocabulary.	1	2	3	4
	5			
16. Ask friends or anyone with expertise to review English essays before submitting them to the teacher.	1	2	3	4
	5			
17. Use Vietnamese to express opinions more clearly in class discussions.	1	2	3	4
	5			
18. Make a list of difficult terms in English and study it every day.	1	2	3	4
	5			
19. Ask the teacher to speak slowly and repeat a certain topic during class.	1	2	3	4
	5			
20. Write English essays and ask friends or teachers to review and correct them.	1	2	3	4
	5			

Appendix B – Interviews

1. What difficulties did you experience when English was introduced as the medium of instruction?
2. What language challenges did you face?
3. Which skills in learning English are the most challenging for you, and why?
4. Besides language difficulties, did you encounter any other problems?
5. Can you tell me some of your specific experiences with these challenges?
6. How did you cope with those linguistic and non-linguistic challenges?
7. Did your mother tongue help you overcome these challenges? Please explain clearly why.
8. Can you name some language difficulties when you have to write in class and do essay assignments at home? Why did you encounter these difficulties?
9. Please mention some language difficulties when you have to participate in class discussions and interact with teachers in English? Why did you encounter these difficulties?
10. Please list some ways you use to overcome those difficulties you mentioned above.