

## ENGLISH AS A MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION (EMI) IN INDONESIA: THE KNOWN AND THE UNKNOWN

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### Abstract

Despite its growing popularity in Indonesia, particularly in academic programs of higher education institutions, EMI is a relatively new research area that leaves plenty of room for investigation. This review article examines the findings of various current EMI research in Indonesia and identifies areas of EMI that need to be prioritized for further research. Embarking on the global perspective of EMI development globally, this article positions Indonesia as a country that shares some similarities with other countries yet still has its own unique contexts and developments of EMI. Mapping what is known and what is unknown yet about EMI in Indonesia is of the utmost importance because it provides key information to shareholders, including but not limited to researchers, policymakers, and educators that need to make informed decisions on designing and implementing effective EMI programs. By focusing on the core issues of EMI research in Indonesia, this article aims to shed some light on the complex process behind the EMI implementation and offer insights that might help further research of EMI for the Indonesian context in the future.

**Keywords:** English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI); higher education; Indonesia; review article

### INTRODUCTION

Widely acknowledged as an international language, English has a significant influence as it is believed that one can have better opportunities and access to education and employment as well as improve their competitiveness in the global market by mastering the language (Khasbani, 2019). English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) has shown rapid growth, as indicated by the drastic rise of EMI programs in European Higher Education (HE) from 725 in 2001 to 8,089 in 2014 (Wächter & Maiworm, 2014) and the rising number of journal articles on EMI published in the Asia Pacific region (Dang, et al, 2020). English-medium instruction (EMI) is an emergent phenomenon that has become an established area of study in recent years, proven by committed groups of researchers, books, and even a journal specifically focusing on EMI. (Yuan, Zhang & Li, 2022; Macaro, 2022; Pecorari & Malmström. (2022).

EMI can be defined in several ways, but one of the most commonly used definitions is “the use of the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English” (Macaro, 2018). Macaro (2018) acknowledged that EMI is “an elusive phrase” because it is frequently used synonymously with other teaching approaches and educational systems and can be used as a catch-all term for various other teaching approaches and systems.

One term that is often compared with EMI is Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) as both of them involve the use of a foreign language as a tool in the learning of a non-language subject. Dearden (2014) provided clear distinctions between EMI and CLIL into three points: 1) CLIL is “contextually situated (with its origins in the European ideal of plurilingual competence for EU citizens)”, while EMI does not have any specific contextual origin; 2) CLIL does not refer to a particular second, additional or foreign language (L2), but EMI clearly states that English is the language used; 3) CLIL has a dual objective of improving both content and language, whereas “EMI does not (necessarily) have that objective”.

To better understand EMI and its place in the global world, it is important to review its development. In Europe, EMI’s growth was propelled by the Bologna Declaration signed in 1999 (European Ministers of Education, 1999) that aimed to promote mobility both within and outside of Europe as well as to enhance and sustain high-quality education. The Bologna Declaration attempted to encourage multilingualism in Europe rather than promoting an expansion of English education specifically. Still, since English is the most common second language in Europe, this led to a rise in English education (Richards & Pun, 2022).

Similarly, in Asia Pacific, a strategy to increase faculty members and student mobility throughout Asia was unveiled during the 2012 Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) conference. EMI plays a key role as

universities are most likely to be driven by the potential financial gain: fees paid by local and international students willing to have EMI in tertiary education (Kirkpatrick, 2014). Furthermore, in Southeast Asia in 2007, leaders of the Association of South East Asian (ASEAN) countries committed that an ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) shall be established by 2015. It would transform ASEAN into “a region with free movement of goods, services, investment, skilled labor, and freer flow of capital” (ASEAN Economic Community Factbook, 2011). Signed in 2009, the ASEAN Charter article 34 states that “the working language of ASEAN shall be English.” As a result, English undoubtedly is key in the ASEAN context, and EMI has a special appeal among parents, schools, universities, and policymakers aiming to have a competitive edge for the current and future generations.

Although EMI has been proliferating in many countries, as proven by Dearden (2014), who investigated EMI as a global phenomenon in 55 countries around the world, including Indonesia, it also has problems and unresolved issues that need to be examined further. Additionally, more research needs to be done on expanding EMI programs throughout Asia and the difficulties encountered by those responsible for their implementation (Barnard & Halim, 2018). Due to this reason, this review article focused on EMI in Indonesia, particularly the Higher Education (HE) sector, while it also acknowledged its presence in other education sectors. This article aimed to provide a broad overview covering the history of EMI in Indonesia, EMI in Indonesian HE, EMI implementations, and future directions based on currently existing literature. By examining what is already known and what is still unknown, this article is expected to help inform researchers, teachers, and policymakers interested in EMI with the latest updates on EMI development in Indonesia.

## METHODS

A narrative literature review was chosen as the type of review because this review covered a wide range of issues within a given topic, summarized the literature on a particular topic, and provided a broad overview of a topic. Each work selected in the literature review has been critically analyzed regarding its appropriateness (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2016). The key and important elements of the most recent research on EMI in Indonesian HE are reviewed in this traditional review.

This research was conducted by reviewing book chapters, reports, and articles on EMI development and practices worldwide, mainly in Indonesia. The critical literature review paid particular attention to EMI literature published from 2001 until 2022 in order to document, analyze, and synthesize literature on EMI in Indonesia. The reason behind the chosen timeline was that the first literature covering EMI in Indonesia was written at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (2001). Written by Ibrahim (2001), the article was comprehensively written and Sinta 2-indexed; therefore, it served as the starting point of the timeline, which ended in 2022, the year the article was written.

To ensure the quality of the journal articles used as references in this review, the author only included journals indexed in The SCImago Journal & Country Rank, a freely accessible portal that includes journals and country scientific indicators derived from information in the Scopus database (SCImago, n.d), and Science and Technology Index (SINTA), a web-based research information system that provides quick, easy, and comprehensive access to measure the performance of Indonesian researchers, institutions, and journals. SINTA ranks range from 1 to 6, with 1 as the highest and 6 as the lowest. The minimum SINTA rank of journals contributing to this review is 3 since ranks 3 and above indicate rigorous editing and selection process, which are perceived as the guarantees for the high quality of the articles.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### The History of EMI in Indonesia

The first EMI program in Indonesia was offered by Bandung Institute of Technology, founded in 1920. The lecture was delivered in Dutch and English at ITB School of Pharmacy, and its early graduates were known to have superior English skills (Hamied and Lengkanawati, 2018). Although it was not very common then, EMI started gaining popularity in the 1990s, mostly among business schools that offered MBA programs (Ibrahim, 2001), which was most likely due to the monetary crises that made it financially difficult for people to study abroad (Lamb et al., 2021).

Approximately two decades later, the Indonesian government decided to prioritize EMI by introducing a new education program called *Sekolah Berstandar Internasional* (International Standard School), commonly known as SBI, in Indonesian primary and secondary education (Khabani, 2019). Aiming to be prepared for globalization, the Indonesian government realized the importance of educating Indonesian citizens in English, the key to communicating in international settings (Lamb, et.al, 2021). However, as stated by Khabani (2019), the highly ambitious program only lasted until 2013 since the government failed to consider the issues of students' English

competency, teachers' qualifications, and language ideology, which eventually led to strong reactions and heavy criticism from the public. Despite the abolishment of SBI from public schools, EMI remains in the school system in Indonesia, mainly in private schools, due to demands from parents who want the perceived benefits of EMI for their children.

The Indonesian government, as policymakers, was drawn to EMI again a couple of years later due to the approaching AEC. In 2015 the Minister of Research and Technology and Higher Education announced their plan for universities to use a bilingual curriculum designed by the ministry to prepare Indonesian future generations to compete in the AEC in the near future (The Jakarta Post, 2015). In response, established universities actively prepared and offered international programs delivered in English for international students and even local students from affluent families who could afford the costly tuition fees. Zein et al. (2020) also pointed out that overseas universities' Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) offered also led to the increasing demand for EMI in HE. Prestigious Indonesian universities also started creating and offering their own MOOCs in the spirit of Emancipated Learning (*Kampus Merdeka Belajar*), the latest policy from Minister of Education and Culture Nadiem Makarim, encouraging university students to learn new knowledge outside the study program taken (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020).

From this brief description of EMI history in Indonesia, it can be perceived that Indonesia is still in its early stage of EMI. EMI in Indonesia has been influenced predominantly by changes in politics and economics, locally, regionally, and globally. To some extent, the development of EMI in Indonesia is similar to its development in other countries as it is also under the assumption and belief that EMI is superior to studying in the mother tongue due to the dominance of English in globalization. Since English remains a widely used language in international settings, EMI will most likely remain prevalent in Indonesia, especially in tertiary education.

### **EMI in Indonesian Tertiary Education**

Indonesia might have ambitions for its citizens to be able to communicate in English that, excel in education, and be skilled labor for the global market. However, language policies and curricula keep changing, leading to the latest condition in which English as a school subject is only compulsory starting from secondary education or junior high school (Grade 7). As Dewi (2018) acutely stated, one might believe that having had more than five years of exposure to English, students are prepared for EMI in tertiary education. In reality, this is only sometimes the case as exposure to English, and the quality of English teaching in Indonesia widely vary. Nevertheless, the supposedly adequate five years of prior English learning indicates that EMI is the most promising if implemented in HE institutions (HEIs) and thus worth investigating further. Furthermore, most scholarly articles and reports on EMI in Indonesia focused on tertiary education. Hence, it was deemed reasonable to direct the focus of this review toward EMI in HEIs in Indonesia.

According to Lamb et al. (2021), who wrote a very comprehensive mixed-method report on the state of EMI in Indonesian tertiary education, there are several interconnected reasons behind the implementation of EMI in HEIs in Indonesia. First, there is a strong desire to increase the institutional profiles and rankings of HEIs. Second, academic reputation and internationalization are vital for this goal. Third, it is expected that EMI can help push lecturers to publish their academic papers in English language journals, promote academic staff exchange, and attract international students.

By noting how all of these require massive resources, it can be concluded that HEIs in Indonesia that are able to implement EMI must be large and prestigious HEIs which can meet the financial and human resources needed. One will be tempted to accept the notion that EMI does increase the Matthew effect (the rich get richer and the poor get poorer) mentioned by Macaro (2022) because the first-tier and well-established HEIs in Indonesia will most likely become more globally competitive (if EMI is implemented properly and successfully). In contrast, the second tier, let alone the lower tier, will need help to keep up with the competition as EMI is not even a feasible option for them.

In addition to the drivers of EMI in Indonesian tertiary education, Lamb et al. (2021) classified five types of EMI programs in HEIs in Indonesia. The first type is international undergraduate programs (IUPs). Students study in Indonesia for the first two years before studying abroad for the following two years to receive a dual degree. The next one is the regular undergraduate program in which students are obliged to take several credits on EMI courses with the possible company of international exchange students. The third type is also IUPs, but the students only study in Indonesia and get a single degree. The fourth type is the undergraduate courses designed for international exchange students. Yet, local students can join, and the last is postgraduate programs delivered in English either exclusively or mostly.

The classification above differs from the elaborate typology of EMI (see Richards & Pun, 2022) and the four basic models of EMI (see Macaro, 2022), but this version can be valuable in prospective EMI research in Indonesia. Since the classification was based on research conducted in Indonesian tertiary education contexts, HEIs in Indonesia can probably easily resonate with this relatively straightforward classification. Having data

showing the distribution of EMI in HEIs in Indonesia can also provide insights and lead to further investigations to find out the reasons and outcomes.

### **Implementation: Ideal, Realities, and Complexity**

When imagining an ideal implementation of EMI, one might think of a learning context where the students have a sufficiently high level of English proficiency, the lecturers are highly proficient in English and well-prepared with content pedagogy and language teaching pedagogy, and the class interaction is interactive. Collaboration between content lecturers and language specialists/instructors can also be constructive as they can work together to plan and anticipate problems together as a team. Moreover, in this ideal scenario, all stakeholders, particularly university policymakers, lecturers, and students, have the same perceptions of EMI and its ideal implementation. Nevertheless, the reality suggested by several studies shows that it is often not the case imagined.

To be fair, the results of the studies were quite varied. In a case study, Hamied and Lengkanawati (2018) discovered that the EMI course's learning process was lively due to the lecturer's interactive learning approach. However, there was a problem with the lecturer's English accuracy, which indicated that the lecturer's level of proficiency was not as high as expected. Ibrahim (2001) also raised his concern regarding the general lack of English among university students and lecturers, as the low proficiency in language could hinder the teaching and learning in the EMI course. Furthermore, in her research, Simbolon (2018) reported that the main reason why the implementation of EMI was not very smooth was the different perceptions between the lecturers and the university leaders, even though both had the same belief in the importance of English for their graduates.

Implementing EMI in Indonesian tertiary curricula requires complex consideration, indeed. As Dewi (2017) argued, the EMI perceptions in Indonesian tertiary education were particularly complex due to linguistic issues and bigger issues: national identity and sentiment toward using English, a western language, as a medium of instruction. This strong feeling provoked by EMI was also acknowledged by Lamb, et al. (2021) that believed it was partly due to its influence on issues of national identity and autonomy. Talaue and Kim (2020) would even refer to English in Indonesian education as "a love-hate relationship," an observation that is hard to deny after reading some research (Kohler, 2019; Zein, et al., 2020) that showed how Indonesian policymakers erratically changed the position of English in the national curriculum despite the perceived benefits of English for global competition. Kohler (2019) explained that this was due to "tensions between nationalism and internationalization, between tradition and modernity, and between unity and diversity." Therefore, as long as this has not been resolved, this complexity will probably remain for many years.

The last issue related to the complexity of EMI in Indonesian tertiary education addressed in this article is translanguaging. From the term EMI itself, using English as a medium of instruction seems to be the obvious choice when pondering which language to use in the classroom. However, using English exclusively in Indonesian EMI classrooms has been proven to create learning difficulties for students as well as teaching problems for lecturers due to their low level of proficiency (Lamb, et al, 2021). The study showed that lecturers often switched to their first language, intentionally and unintentionally, when teaching EMI programs. Students could benefit from it, provided they all shared the same first language with the lecturers. In some EMI settings, however, this was not applicable as students had different first languages. The idea of translanguaging in EMI classroom, in which teachers and students could tap into their linguistic repertoires and switch from one language to another, was warmly welcomed by Yuan et al. (2021) who conducted research on students' perspectives on ideal EMI in Chinese HE. This could encourage researchers interested in investigating when, where, and how to adopt translanguaging in EMI classrooms in Indonesian HEIs. Yuan et al (2022) suggested that EMI teachers need to do "careful planning and critical reflections on and in practice to maximize its pedagogical power for student learning," and this will most likely be relevant in Indonesian contexts as well it will be easier said than done.

These findings showed that to implement EMI in HEIs in Indonesia, thorough needs analysis, a compulsory well-designed professional EMI preparation program for lecturers, matching the EMI perceptions among all stakeholders, and making informed decisions regarding translanguaging are essential. Dang, et al (2021) suggested the importance of instilling teacher agency for lecturers' professional learning so that they would be motivated to keep improving themselves as EMI lecturers instead of relying on a short course provided by their institutions or overlooking their role not only as a content expert but also language teacher. Although EMI does not specifically have dual aims like CLIL, undoubtedly, language plays a very important role in students' success in EMI programs. Macaro (2022) also emphasized that learning strategies in language and EMI classroom settings differed despite some similarities. All of these areas remain untouched by researchers of EMI in Indonesia in addition to numerous other questions related to EMI (see Macaro (2022)'s list of questions) that need to be answered to gain a better understanding of EMI. Therefore, there are still plenty of unknown things about EMI in Indonesia.

## CONCLUSION

Having provided a brief and broad overview of EMI development in Indonesia, especially in tertiary education, the article aimed to generate an understanding of what is known and still unknown based on the dearth of available EMI literature specific to Indonesian contexts. A brief history of EMI development, its state in HEIs, and the conflicting idealism and reality of EMI implementations are things that are known and elucidated in this article.

Nevertheless, many issues regarding EMI in Indonesia still need further research. This article attempted to state some priorities that still need to be discovered. Still, it would not imply that they would be the only unknown areas of EMI research in Indonesia. Researching more about EMI is vital in order to gain a better understanding, help make informed decisions, and evaluate EMI programs in Indonesia. For instance, preparing lecturers for the program and balancing the language needs with the content needs remain challenging, especially since there is a wide range of EMI practices in Indonesia with its own complexity. As a result, it is important for researchers to keep investigating and trying to find the answers that are greatly needed to be answered soon. That will pose challenges, but as Yuan et al. (2022) quoted their respondent's unique metaphor, "EMI is like a durian. While it seems intimidating, you will fall in love with it once you have a taste." EMI in Indonesia is complicated, but researching and implementing it will be worthwhile because EMI will most likely be, or even more, relevant in the future due to the lasting power and popularity of English worldwide.

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