

# Bridging Languages: How EMI Teachers Use Language-related Teaching Strategies in their Classrooms

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**Abstract.** The rapid expansion of English-medium Instruction (EMI) in higher education worldwide presents opportunities and challenges, particularly in non-English contexts. While EMI aims to enhance global competitiveness, academic quality, and intercultural awareness, its implementation often faces language-related barriers affecting both students and instructors. This study investigated the language-related teaching strategies international EMI teachers employed to facilitate content delivery and enhance student comprehension. Specifically, it explored the instructional and regulative discourse strategies utilized in EMI classrooms. A case study approach was employed, focusing on two international EMI teachers at a private university in Indonesia. Data were collected through classroom observations, stimulated recall, and semi-structured interviews. Findings reveal that teachers used various instructional strategies, including demonstrations, visual aids, synonyms, and code-switching, to bridge linguistic gaps and support content comprehension. Regulative strategies such as building rapport and checking comprehension were also frequently utilized to create an inclusive learning environment. Teachers perceived these strategies as effective in mitigating language-related barriers and fostering engagement among students with varying English proficiency levels. This study underscores the importance of language awareness in EMI pedagogy and offers insights into effective teaching strategies for non-language faculty delivering content in English.

**Keywords:** English-Medium Instruction, higher education, instructional discourse, language-related strategies, regulative discourse.

## Introduction

The adoption of English-medium instruction (EMI) in higher education institutions (HEIs) has rapidly expanded worldwide. It prioritizes using English as the primary classroom language to deliver non-language content material while students simultaneously obtain new skills and knowledge (Dafouz & Gray, 2022; Dearden, 2015; Macaro, 2018). In the context of EMI in Indonesia, it has been executed following the trend set by numerous European and other Asian countries. In European countries, there were over 800 EMI programs in 2002, and by 2008, the number had risen to some 2400, mainly in the Netherlands, Germany, and Scandinavia. In the same way in Asian countries, EMI implementation has been conducted in Malaysia, China, Vietnam, and Japan. Malaysia soon had over a hundred partnerships with universities from Anglophone countries, making it one of the first Asian countries to internationalise its higher education through EMI rigorously. In China around 2001, all universities controlled by the Ministry of Education in China "were instructed to use English as the main teaching language in the following subjects: information technology, biotechnology, new-material technology, finance, foreign trade, economics, and the law." In

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Vietnam, multiple EMI programs have been offered in public and private universities since 2008. In Japan, the Japanese Ministry of Education launched its 'Global 30' project to "develop degree programs in English to internationalize academic systems and campuses" in 2009. Then, by 2013, thirteen universities offered EMI programs at the graduate or undergraduate level (Hoang, 2018). In Indonesia, EMI has been employed in various ways over the last 20 years through the terms "bilingual classes" or 'international classes', for various reasons. Moreover, the Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education announced in 2015 the intention for a bilingual university curriculum using both *Bahasa Indonesia* and English, and many universities took the calling as motivation to establish or continue expanding their EMI offerings (Lamb et al., 2021; Simbolon, 2018).

The implementation of EMI is motivated by multiple underlying factors. First, EMI is aimed at internationalization. It plays a crucial role as universities strive to enhance global competitiveness and meet QS World University Ranking criteria, emphasizing internationalized faculty and student bodies (Chen, 2017). Second, EMI is believed to enhance academic quality by fostering critical thinking, academic abilities, and employability. Lastly, it serves to promote intercultural awareness, enhances educational performance, and encourages creative thinking, contributing to higher standardized test scores (Chapple, 2015).

Despite its academic excellence, EMI implementation has also encountered mounting pedagogical impediments. The most common challenge, particularly in settings where English is not the first language, is the students' and faculty's limited or low English proficiency. Liu & Yuan (2024) observed that EMI teachers often lack proper language backgrounds and relevant linguistic training to teach language. In Moroccan HEIs, this deficiency is reported to impact learners and instructors. For students, this deficiency can undermine motivation and self-confidence. At the same time, for instructors, it similarly may cause insecurity and, more to that, hinder their ability to deliver course content or communicate in English effectively (Elkhayma, 2022). In Korean HEIs, the challenge in implementing EMI is recruiting teachers who can conduct classes entirely in English and those with relevant language skills to teach EMI classes (Byun et al., 2011). Similarly, in Omani HEIs, there is a need to enhance both EMI students' and teachers' capabilities and skills to effectively cope with EMI higher education in Oman (Alhassan, 2021). The EMI implementation in Indonesia is not without encounters. Oktaviani et al. (2021) found that teachers struggle to understand and teach subject content like Math and Science in English. Likewise, Puspitadari & Ishak (2023) revealed teachers' unreadiness in conducting discussions in English in their EMI classes. In other words, the research findings highlight teachers' limited (English) language proficiency and unreadiness that can affect their insecurity and competence in teaching EMI.

Although language learning and development are not the primary goals of EMI, it is essential to incorporate strategies to mitigate language-related barriers because language, as a semiotic tool for facilitating content learning, plays a central role in meaning making and knowledge construction (Liu & Yuan, 2024). Therefore, teachers and students must learn language-related strategies to support content delivery. With growing awareness of the significant role of students' linguistic proficiency in content comprehension, EMI researchers have started to study the purposes and proportions of language use (Macaro et al., 2020) and different language strategies employed by EMI teachers (Zhang et al., 2021).

The teachers' language-related strategies here can be in various registers (i.e., academic and daily languages) and technical expressions of a particular field of study, for instance, teachers' use of English to provide definitions, paraphrases, synonyms, examples, and explanations. Such the language for school disciplines has been theorized as a "curriculum genre" that includes two distinctive specialized register features: *regulative and instructional* (Chen, 2017). Regulative discourse refers to the language used to manage the social environment of the classroom in order to achieve a specific teaching and learning goal. In contrast, instructional discourse refers to the content and knowledge students should learn.

As teachers' English language becomes one of the main problems in EMI implementation, they must be exposed to and facilitated with models of applying various language-related teaching strategies to reduce their language-related anxiety and improve their language-related teaching strategies. This study investigates international EMI teachers' language-related instructional strategies when delivering English content subjects in English-medium instruction (EMI) classrooms. The following research questions guide this objective:

1. How do EMI teachers implement language-related teaching strategies in their classrooms?
2. How do EMI teachers perceive the potential of these language-related teaching strategies in EMI instruction?

This empirical study is essential for assisting non-English department teachers in effectively using English to deliver subject content within EMI classroom discourse. Furthermore, it provides valuable insights into best practices for implementing language-related teaching strategies to facilitate students' comprehension of the subject content in EMI classes and for more vigorous English preparation.

## Method

The present study employed a case study approach, examining a small sample of EMI teachers to explore their use of language-related strategies in EMI classes and their perspectives on this phenomenon, as what had been done by Chen (2017) and Liu and Yuan (2024). Conducted at a private university in Salatiga, Indonesia, data were collected from two EMI classes: *Digital Image Processing* (Faculty of Electrical Engineering) and *Methods and Curriculum for Teaching Mathematics to Elementary School Students* (Faculty of Teacher Education and Training).

The participants were two EMI teachers. The first is a Korean teaching *Digital Image Processing* and speaking Korean, English, and limited Bahasa Indonesia. He has lived in the research setting for six years. The second one is an American teaching *Methods and Curriculum for Teaching Mathematics*. She speaks English and *Bahasa Indonesia* and has lived there for fourteen years. Both teachers taught their English classes to Indonesian students, and all of them gave informed consent for inclusion before participating in the study.

Data collection methods included observation, stimulated recall, and semi-structured interviews done by the researchers. The observations were conducted twice for each class through video recordings. During the observation, the video was put at the back of the class so as not to affect class interactions. The observation sheets captured the occurrences and examples of teachers' language-related strategies in instructional (e.g., explaining concepts using synonyms and visuals) and regulative (e.g., assigning homework) discourses. Therefore, the observation sheet notes the kinds and examples of language-related teaching strategies that occurred in a particular sequence of teaching time. The teaching context was also captured to record in what context a particular language-related teaching strategy was used. The Stimulated recall followed recorded observations, allowing teachers to reflect on their linguistic choices and share their perspectives on the effectiveness (Nunan, 2001). The semi-structured interview was done after the stimulated recall to further explore participants' views on the challenges in teaching EMI classes, in performing instructions and class management (for example, in defining terms and concepts in English), and how particular language-related teaching strategies can be used to overcome or minimize the challenges.

Data analysis used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012) to identify patterns/themes of language-related teaching strategies and teachers' perspectives of the strategies' potential to facilitate learning in EMI classes. The data analysis unit is teachers' language use in instructional and regulative discourses. The data from the observation were calculated into frequencies to know the number of times teachers' language-related teaching strategies were employed in EMI classes. The data from stimulated recall and interviews were analyzed on the basis of themes that emerged in the data sources to see teachers' perspectives on the potential of particular language-related teaching strategies used in EMI classes.

Research trustworthiness was ensured through credibility and validity measures. As defined by Stahl and King (2020b), credibility was achieved through triangulation, combining observational data with teacher reflections. Observations quantified language-related strategies, while recall and interviews provided contextual explanations. The validity of data analysis and research findings were based on theoretical frameworks on specialized register features in EMI discourse (Chen, 2017; Liu & Yuan, 2024).

## Findings and Discussion

This section explains the research findings, answering two research questions: How do the EMI teachers use language-related teaching strategies in their EMI classes? How do the EMI teachers view the language-related strategies as effective in teaching EMI classes?

**How do the EMI teachers use language-related teaching strategies in them? EMI classes?**

The data on teachers' use of language-related teaching strategies were obtained from two classes: *Digital Image Processing* (Faculty of Electrical Engineering) and *Methods and Curriculum for Teaching Mathematics to Elementary School Students* (Faculty of Teacher Education and Training). Table 1 presents a comparative analysis of teachers' language-related teaching strategies in instructional discourse across both courses, while Table 2 compares their strategies in regulative discourse.

**Table 1. Teacher's language-related strategies for instructional discourse**

Instructional language-related strategies in digital processing class	Frequency	Instructional-related strategies in methods and curriculum class	Frequency
Explain lesson aim	5.3%	Explain lesson aim	5.5%
Define terms, symbols, codes, etc.		Define terms, symbols, codes, etc.	
– with demonstration	12.5%	– with demonstration, quotes/concrete examples	1.8 %
– with a concrete example	9%	– synonyms	12.9 %
– with body movement	7.1%	Describe dan discuss facts, concepts, etc.	
– with visual (drawing)	9%	– with demonstration, concrete example, synonyms	3.7%
Describe & discuss facts, concepts, etc.		– with visual (drawing)	5.5%
– With demonstration	9%	Code switching	12.8%
– With a concrete example	9%		
– With visual (drawing)	7.1%		
Total	68.1%		58.7%

The research findings on teachers' language-related strategies for instructional discourse indicate that the electrical engineering teacher predominantly utilized demonstrations (12.5%), body movement (7.1%), visuals (9%), and multiple examples (9%) to define terms, symbols, and codes, as well as to describe and explain facts, concepts, operational scientific information, and abstract ideas. In contrast, the EMI teacher in the education training program frequently employed synonyms (12.9%) to aid students' comprehension of terminology, incorporated visual explanations, and engaged in code-switching (12.8%) to facilitate understanding.

These findings corroborate the previous research conducted by Chen (2017) in a Taiwan HEI context, which showed that visuals were used in civil engineering classes to overcome students' language barriers. More prominently, this finding also confirmed the study conducted by Richards and Pun (2021), who observed that in science, students are expected to use language to describe, explain, and analyze scientific phenomena. The teacher facilitated comprehension by explaining abstract concepts in science with a range of multimodal representations such as tables, graphs, and diagrams (i.e., visuals).

**Table 2. Teacher's language-related strategies for regulative discourse**

Regulative language-related strategies in digital processing class	Regulative language-related strategies in Methods and curriculum class
Introduce book source	Give students classwork
Make announcements	9.2%
Greetings	Asking critical or probing questions
Review previous lessons	7.4%
Start today's class	3.7%
Assign homework	3.7%

Checking comprehension	5.3%	Building rapport	14.8%
Building rapport	3.5%		
Total	31.9%		44.3%

Regarding regulative discourse, the electrical engineering teacher mainly used English to give assignments (7.1 %) and check comprehension (5.3%). In contrast, the EMI teacher in the education training program frequently used English to build rapport/comfortable circumstances in class (14.8%). The last finding is perfectly aligned with theories on EMI and emotions, arguing that EMI implementation can cause negative emotions such as anxiety, uneasiness, tension, or frustration. One of the positive psychological aspects that may play an important role in decreasing such negative emotions is classroom rapport. It concerns the existence of a conducive learning atmosphere, which fosters instruction and creates enjoyment, trust, respect, and closeness (Li, 2024). In this study, Participant two emphasized the importance of creating a positive and supportive learning environment by expressing appreciation for the students and allowing them to speak both in English and Bahasa Indonesia. She believed that building rapport with students helps reduce their anxiety about learning in English and even with native English speaker teachers (Source: interview).

### **EMI teachers' views on the effectiveness of the language-related strategies used in their EMI classes**

The teachers' views on the efficacy of the language-related teaching strategies used in their EMI classes were uncovered from the interview and stimulated recall data. *First*, they perceived the use of demonstrations, concrete examples, visuals, and case studies as effective for making the content (i.e., terms, concepts, definitions, facts) more comprehensible for their students with various English proficiency. For instance,

#### **Extract 1:**

"Space, change to D, H, S, I. It's not the RGB anymore. And input will be F5. The output will be J5." (Source: participant 1, observation 1)  
 "The bottom level is knowledge. The second level is understanding, and the third level is application." (Source: participant 1, observation 1)

In the first example, the teacher demonstrated how to use formulas to balance the color in the application. In the second case, the teacher used a visual triangle to explain the cognitive domain of Bloom's Taxonomy. Such language-related strategies helped the teacher resonate the content in English across languages and ability levels. He firmly believed that "Learning should involve not just reading textbooks but also processing real-world applications." He added, "Students need concrete examples to supplement book concepts." Therefore, lessons must move beyond theory to give practical demonstrations and case studies for students to connect with the material. In this vein, we found that the participant's decisions were well-thought-out as well as strategic as visuals have been applied successfully to help students in the Chinese context succeed in the EMI context (Moorhouse & Wan, 2023), and significantly helped them with L2 comprehension in new terms and concepts (Siegel, 2020).

Second, they perceived using English synonyms as helpful for making the content (e.g., terms, concepts, definitions, facts) more intelligible for their students with different English proficiency. For example,

#### **Extract 2:**

"So, what is the other name we can call this? This one part? one part of three so we can call it uhmm... verse." (Source: participant 2, observation 2)  
 "Self-knowledge is thinking about thinking or we can say metacognition." (Source: Participant 2, observation 1)

The teacher in this extract tried to define "verse" in fractions using its synonym<sup>3/4</sup> "part". The teacher also mentioned the word "self-knowledge" as the synonym of "metacognition." The use of word synonyms was driven by the language barriers that the students had in the classroom. i.e., with the problematic vocabulary used in the textbook. The teachers then tried to look for simpler words in English to make them understand the concept more easily. (Source: interview with participants 1 and 2). Using English synonyms was identified as a practical language teaching strategy in EMI classes (Liu & Yuan, 2024). Also, providing a simpler vocabulary was considered effective because it helped the student's comprehension through the simpler language used. More prominently, as stated in TAEC EMI Handbook (2019) using a synonym (class/lesson) or a general word (thing/issue/matter) will give

students a further opportunity to get the meaning. Hence, it helps improve students' comprehension of the disciplinary terms and concepts discussed.

Third, they perceived code-switching effective for making the content (i.e., terms, concepts, definitions, facts) more graspable for students with different English proficiency.

Extract 3:

"Satuan itu namanya apa? Part. So, the total is six parts". (Source: Participant 2, observation 2)

"This is the kata kunci. It is not that they do not have the understanding yet. It is that they can. They learn to develop real understanding because they question. Does that make sense? Because the person who does not wonder has the emptiness inside". (Source: Participant 2, observation 1)

The class learned about the mathematics part, and the teacher tried to explain the "part". The code-switching happened from saying "satuan itu namanya apa" to translating "satuan" in English. i.e., "part." Moreover, the language barriers and complex textbook vocabulary also encouraged her to use code-switching, i.e., to aid comprehension. With an adaptive and welcoming process, the language barrier can be overcome through strategic code-switching, repetition, and tapping easier vocabulary and examples. As stated by Setoningsih (2022), code-switching can increase the productivity of teaching and learning processes. The productivity, as emphasized by Moorhouse and Wan (2023) and Pun and Thomas (2020), the translanguaging from English to Chinese as the students' L1 in EMI classes helped consolidate students' knowledge so the students got facilitated in comprehending the content knowledge.

All the demonstration, visuals, concrete examples, synonyms, and code-switching are all language-related teaching strategies used to minimize language difficulties (Tajik et al., 2022), overcome students' insufficient proficiency in comprehending the subject content (Kang et al., 2023) and technical concepts (Li, 2024).

Fourth, demonstration, visuals, and concrete examples are also perceived to be decisive for engagement with students with different levels of motivation.

Extract 4:

"This is the picture from RGB Image, and this is from scale color image. I don't know which one is better. depend on the user." (Source: Participant 2, observation 2)

Participant 1, in the interview, stated that using demonstrations and concrete examples, like in extract four, effectively facilitates more profound understanding and engagement. Again, this decision is wise considering that students lack motivation also challenges EMI teachers when teaching EMI classes (Tajik et al., 2022).

Fifth, regarding language-related strategies in the regulative discourse, Participant 2 found that building rapport with students effectively reduced students' anxiety. She believed that "Building rapport can use code-switching to reduce student fear of the native-appearing teacher" (Source: participant 2, interview). The core approach involves establishing trust and comfort in Bahasa, then steadily transitioning to English while integrating Bahasa as needed. Building rapport can use code-switching, which becomes the important key here. In this case, the teacher seemed to understand the effect side of students who were not comfortable using English on meeting "the native-appearing teacher." As revealed by Setoningsih (2022), their Indonesian participants in EMI classes felt reluctant and more comfortable when the teachers did not deliver the lecture full in English. Therefore, the teacher's decision to switch codes from English to Bahasa Indonesia did correspond to such a psychological barrier in joining EMI classes. Unfortunately, the condition contradicted the participant's two situations when he could not switch from *Bahasa Indonesia* to English because the faculty regulated L2 only in the classroom A similar case found by Kang et al. (2023) where L2 only became the EMI policy.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the pivotal role of language-related teaching strategies in facilitating content comprehension within EMI classrooms. The findings suggest that EMI teachers employ various instructional and regulative discourse strategies—including demonstrations, visuals, synonyms, and code-switching—to bridge linguistic gaps and enhance student engagement. These strategies aid in knowledge transmission and address challenges related to students' varying levels of English proficiency, motivation, and confidence. As the study's implication, the effectiveness of these approaches underscores the necessity of integrating language-supportive strategies within EMI pedagogy to optimize learning outcomes. Moving forward, institutions should consider providing targeted training for EMI instructors to strengthen their linguistic scaffolding techniques and ensure more

effective content delivery. Although these are valuable insights, there are some limitations in the narrow sample size and the reliance on only teachers' perspectives. Further research must include students' viewpoints on the effectiveness of teachers' language-related teaching strategies in EMI classes.

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