



EMI Classroom Practices of International Program in Thailand University: A Perspective of EFL Thai's Students

Chidchanok Meenasantirak and Intisarn Chaiyasuk

Maharakham University, Thailand

Corresponding Author, E-mail: 62010155004@msu.ac.th, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-2325-637X>

E-mail: intisarn168@gmail.com, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-0460-1395>

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Abstract

Background and Aim: The adoption of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in Thailand, particularly in university-level international programs, was driven by various factors. Most notably, it was viewed as a strategic move to prepare students for an increasingly interconnected world where English reigns supreme in academia, business, and diplomacy. This research examines the attitudes, challenges, and practices of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in an international program at a Thai university from the perspectives of Thai EFL learners.

Materials and Methods: The study employs a mixed-methods approach, utilizing surveys, interviews, and classroom observations. A five-point rating scale questionnaire was distributed to 80 learners to investigate their perceptions of EMI. Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted with 8 participants to gather detailed information on their attitudes, perceived advantages, and challenges related to EMI.

Results: The findings reveal that Thai EFL learners have a positive attitude towards EMI, recognizing its benefits for English language proficiency and future employment opportunities. However, they face challenges in understanding instructors' English speaking, comprehending materials, and acquiring specialized vocabulary.

Conclusion: The study emphasizes the importance of language preparatory courses, provision of support materials, teacher training, and the development of intercultural competence. Furthermore, it suggests that future research should involve a larger sample size and encompass various educational environments to gain a comprehensive understanding of Thai EFL learners' perspectives on EMI in international programs at Thai universities.

Keywords: English medium instruction (EMI); Classroom practices; International program, Thai university; Thai EFL learners; Attitudes

Introduction

The adoption of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in Thailand, particularly in university-level international programs, was driven by various factors. Most notably, it was viewed as a strategic move to prepare students for an increasingly interconnected world where English reigns supreme in academia, business, and diplomacy (Soruç & Griffiths, 2017). Proficiency in English was widely seen as the key to accessing global opportunities, such as job prospects, studying abroad, and participating in international collaborations and conferences.

The rapid growth of EMI in higher education, even in countries like Thailand where English isn't the native language, was a direct response to the global demand for English proficiency (Macaro et al., 2018). The successful implementation of EMI courses and programs in higher education heavily depended on the perspectives of those involved in the process, especially the students. Students' attitudes played a pivotal role in determining the effectiveness of EMI (Mehisto & Asser, 2007). These perspectives significantly influenced their learning behaviors and academic achievements (Hengsadeekul, et al, 2010). Additionally, understanding students' viewpoints regarding EMI was beneficial for both students and educators in the teaching and learning process. Proficiency in the English language was a key indicator of success in EMI. Several scholars emphasized that a strong command of English was a fundamental requirement for the successful implementation of EMI (Dearden, 2015; Galloway et al., 2017). Similarly, Thompson et al. (2019) revealed that students associated EMI success with maintaining the quality of content learning, understanding lectures effectively, improving their English language skills, and enhancing their long-term career prospects. While EMI programs became increasingly popular among students, they also presented challenges, especially for those with lower levels of English proficiency (Lee et al., 2021). Various studies reported the difficulties students faced in understanding EMI courses and following lectures (Lee et al., 2021;





Tsou & Kao, 2017; Walkinshaw et al., 2017; Belhiah & Elhami, 2014). Furthermore, investigations into the effectiveness of EMI courses revealed differences in teaching behavior and practices between native English-speaking EMI teachers and local (non-native English-speaking) EMI teachers (Qiu & Fang, 2019). Challenges related to language, culture, structure, and identity were also identified in EMI instruction (Tang, 2020). Moreover, students' expectations regarding EMI lecturers emphasized the importance of subject matter expertise, effective teaching methods, and familiarity with students' local language and culture (Inbar-Lourie & Donitsa-Schmidt, 2019).

While EMI programs offered clear advantages, it was essential to explore the experiences and perspectives of Thai students enrolled in such programs, especially those classified as English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. EFL Thai students encountered distinct linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical challenges in EMI classrooms. Previous research has shown that EFL Thai students often struggle to comprehend English. Choomthong (2014) found that Thai students had subpar English proficiency, lagging behind their counterparts in other developing nations. This deficiency in English proficiency could be attributed to the limited exposure Thai students had to the language, making it challenging for them to attain mastery.

To address the research gap related to EMI implementation, particularly in the Thai context, this study delved into the classroom practices and experiences of Thai EFL learners within an international program at a Thai university. By examining the day-to-day realities of EMI classrooms, this research aimed to provide valuable insights that could shape and enhance future EMI policies and practices (Macaro et al., 2018). The findings of this study had the potential to improve the effectiveness of EMI delivery in Thai higher education and could have broader implications for similar contexts worldwide. In conclusion, the increasing adoption of EMI in non-English-speaking countries, including Thailand, required a comprehensive understanding of the classroom practices and experiences of Thai EFL learners within international programs. By addressing existing research gaps and providing valuable insights, this study aimed to contribute to the enhancement of EMI policies and practices in Thai higher education and beyond (Macaro et al., 2018).

Objectives

The present study aimed to gain insights into the experiences, attitudes, challenges, and benefits of Thai EFL students in EMI classrooms. It explored their engagement with the course material, interactions with peers and instructors, overall satisfaction, and learning outcomes. Additionally, it investigated the potential challenges related to language proficiency, comprehension, and academic performance. Specifically, the following two objectives were formulated to guide the study:

1. To assess the attitudes of students towards EMI in an international program at a Thai university, and
2. To investigate the teaching and learning practices and their effects on students' learning outcomes in EMI classrooms at a Thai university.

Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework of this study was grounded in several key theories and concepts related to second language acquisition and English Medium Instruction (EMI). Firstly, the framework drew on Krashen's theory of comprehensible input (1985), which emphasized the importance of consistent exposure to comprehensible input as a crucial factor in second language acquisition. This aligned with the idea that EMI programs could offer a rich learning environment for English learners by maximizing the use of the target language.

Secondly, the sociocultural approach to second language development (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006) underscored the role of social interactions in language learning, highlighting the significance of communicative interactions in EMI classrooms.

The conceptual framework of higher education in EMI courses (Macaro, 2018) provided insights into the dynamics and challenges of teaching and learning in EMI contexts in higher education.

Lastly, the theoretical perspective on language learning strategies (Chamot, 2001; Griffiths, 2018) acknowledged that learners employed various strategies to intentionally enhance their English





skills and language proficiency. These strategies were adaptable and linked to motivation and self-regulated learning.

In summary, this study's theoretical framework integrated these theories and concepts to provide a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and perspectives of Thai EFL learners in EMI classrooms within an international program at a Thai university.

Methodology

1. Participants and setting

The study involved 80 students from the English for International Communication major. Most participants were Thai native speakers who used their first language (L1) for social interactions. However, two international students in an international bachelor's program regularly used English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) for academic purposes, not relying on the Thai language.

For the qualitative part of the research, a purposive sampling method was used. Eight students were purposefully chosen from the initial group of 80 for in-depth semi-structured interviews. Selection was based on their unique experiences and perspectives related to EMI implementation and its impact on the program. This approach aimed to provide a diverse and insightful understanding of EMI classroom practices within the Thai university context.

2. Research instruments

The study employed three research instruments: an online questionnaire sent to participants due to the Covid-19 situation, focusing on EMI implementation and learners' English subject opinions, with sections covering attitudes, lesson comprehension, and language use; semi-structured online interviews in Thai and English to gain in-depth insights from seven participants, addressing attitudes, challenges, and language use in EMI classes; and real-time online observations in two EMI-using classrooms over a week, capturing teaching approaches, activities, and learner reactions through video recordings and a non-participant observation approach. Qualitative content analysis was applied to data from surveys, interviews, and observations using methods from Corbin and Strauss (2008) and Dörnyei (2007), aiming to comprehensively understand EMI classroom practices and Thai EFL learners' perspectives in an international program at a Thai university.

3. Data collection procedure

The data collection process involved assessing content validity through expert evaluation, utilizing the Item Objective Congruence index. An online questionnaire was distributed via email and social platforms in English and Thai and quantitatively analyzed using percentages. Structured interviews were content-analyzed, supplemented by probing questions to delve into participants' attitudes and challenges, with audio-recorded interviews transcribed for analysis. Classroom observation, with teacher permission, generated detailed notes capturing significant moments and EMI use. This comprehensive approach aimed to ensure valid and reliable data collection, contributing to a holistic understanding of EMI practices and perspectives.

4. Data analysis

In the data analysis stage, the collected data were subjected to both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Descriptive statistics were used for the questionnaire data, providing percentages, means, and standard deviations, while Likert scale scores were interpreted and categorized. For the semi-structured interviews, thematic analysis was employed, organizing codes into themes to understand Thai EFL learners' perspectives on EMI practices. Classroom observation data were qualitatively analyzed, documenting events and behaviors to identify patterns in teaching methods and student responses. Throughout the analysis, data from interviews, observations, and surveys were cross-referenced to provide a comprehensive understanding of EMI practices and perspectives in the international program at the Thai university.





Results

1.What are the students' attitudes towards EMI in the international program?

1.1 The analysis of questionnaire responses revealed that the majority of participants, including both first-year and second-year students, had positive attitudes towards English Medium Instruction (EMI) in the international program. A significant percentage in both groups strongly agreed that studying in English met their future job requirements (86% for first-year students and 89% for second-year students). Similarly, a large portion believed that using English for teaching and learning improved their study skills (84% for first-year and 86% for second-year), and the majority considered EMI as their preferred choice for future studies (81% for first-year and 83% for second-year). These findings indicate that most participants view EMI as valuable for academic learning and hold a positive attitude towards learning and using English in an academic context.

Table1. Overall Attitudes towards EMI

Item	First-year student				Second-year student			
	mean	S.D.	%	Level	mean	S.D.	%	Level
1. I believe that using English in teaching and learning improves my study skills.	4.23	1.05	84.60	high	4.30	0.76	86.00	high
2. I feel that learning English gives me more freedom to express my thoughts and ideas.	3.65	1.08	73.00	high	3.93	0.86	78.60	high
3. Studying my courses in English enables me to fulfill my future job requirements.	4.30	0.97	86.00	high	4.45	0.64	89.00	high
4. I believe that learning English matches my academic background.	3.88	0.94	77.60	high	3.93	0.83	78.60	high
5. I feel comfortable when studying in English.	3.73	0.93	74.60	high	3.68	0.83	73.60	high
6. I feel confident when I study my courses in English.	3.53	0.91	70.60	high	3.68	0.86	73.60	high
7. I feel more positive when studying my subject content in English.	3.58	0.87	71.60	high	3.70	0.76	74.00	high
8. I don't find differences between studying my subjects in English or Thai.	2.80	1.07	56.00	moderate	2.95	1.28	59.00	moderate
9. Studying in English will be my first choice in any future study I might take.	4.05	0.99	81.00	high	4.15	0.86	83.00	high
Total	3.75	0.75	74.94	high	3.86	0.63	77.22	high

The analysis of the qualitative findings revealed that the interviewees held a highly positive attitude towards EMI, aligning with the quantitative results. Specifically, the interviewees (referred to as Gucci, Hermès, Dior, and Armani) expressed that using English as the medium of instruction not only helped them enhance their English language skills but also enabled them to acquire a greater depth of knowledge (refer to Table 2). By comparing the interview data with the survey responses, it was evident that almost all participants (91.6% of first-year students and 90% of second-year students) perceived studying in EMI as an opportunity to practice and improve their English language proficiency (as depicted in Table 2). Furthermore, certain interviewees (Gucci and Armani) reported positive outcomes resulting from their learning experiences in EMI classes. Table 3 provides excerpts from the interview data that highlight the participants' attitudes towards EMI classes.

However, it indicated that both groups of students lacked confidence when they encountered the use of English in the class.



Table 1 English can facilitate my improvement in English.

Item	statement	First-year student				Second-year student			
		mean	S.D.	%	Level	mean	S.D.	%	Level
24.	I believe that learning subjects in English can facilitate my improvement in English.	4.58	0.59	91.60	very high	4.50	0.75	90.00	very high

Table 2 Qualitative analysis of students' attitudes towards EMI

Participants	Statements
Gucci	I like how to use English as the instruction medium. I find that it is proper to use in general courses. Moreover, I have learned how to note and write in English and communicate with foreign friends. I expect that studying in the EMI program will improve my English skills precisely.
Chanel	Studying in the EMI program is easy for me. It is a real advantage for me because I can understand correctly, so I can learn quickly.
Hermès	The goal of studying in my major, EIC, is to do better in English and use English with teachers so I have more opportunities to use English, and I think I will improve my English automatically.
Dior	I think EMI is beneficial and improving my English skills and earning more knowledge.
Versace	EMI classes brought me intimate the English language, new vocabulary, and conversations in English with friends and teachers.
Armani	I received a positive result from studying in EMI classes; for example, I can understand the drug labels written in English because I have learned them from the class.

* This excerpt was translated from students' records.

The student believes that studying in the EMI program is beneficial for improving their English skills. They find it easy to understand the lectures and can learn quickly. They also appreciate the opportunity to use English with teachers and friends. The student has seen positive results from studying in EMI classes, such as being able to understand drug labels written in English.

1.2. Perceptions of Language Proficiency

The analysis of the qualitative interview data revealed that the participants experienced positive outcomes as a result of implementing EMI in their academic courses. The interview data highlighted four key points in which implementing EMI was beneficial for the participants: 1) improving their English language skills, 2) acquiring new knowledge, 3) experiencing the advantages of using English as the medium of instruction, and 4) gaining proficiency in both English language and subject matter.

Specifically, in terms of improving English skills, the participants reported that learning in EMI classes significantly contributed to their language development. They attributed their improvement in writing and speaking skills to their exposure to English materials and instruction. This finding is depicted in Table 4.





Table 3 Improving English Skills from the Interview

Participants	Statements
Gucci	I learned how to note and write in English and communicate with foreign friends in English.
Hermès	I think the advantage of using EMI in academic subjects is I can improve my English because I'm going to use it in class a lot in English, I will be well-acquainted with the language. So, I have more opportunities to use English. And I think I will improve my English automatically
Versace	Studying in the EMI program led me to learn the English language. I can apply English often with teachers and friends by speaking and developing myself in the classroom.

* This excerpt was translated from students' records.

1.3. Perceiving new knowledge

In addition to improving their English language skills, the participants also highlighted the acquisition of new knowledge as a benefit of learning in EMI courses. They expressed that studying in English allowed them to access and comprehend subject-specific content and introduced them to advanced vocabulary through the materials used. As a result, they reported learning new information and gaining a deeper level of knowledge. Table 5 provides further insights into this aspect.

Table 4 New knowledge from interview data

Participants	Statements
Dior	I learned many new words from general courses. For example, for Consumption of Pharmaceutical and Health Products, there were complex words that we had to research to better understand.
Tiffany	I received new vocabulary from the academic courses.
Prada	Learning through EMI in general courses. I can gain new vocab and new knowledge from it.
Versace	EMI courses provide me with a new vocabulary and encouraging conversation with a friend in English which is new for me.
Armani	I earned new knowledge from studying in EMI courses, especially the subject of the Consumption of Pharmaceutical and Health Products.

* This excerpt was translated from students' records.

2. Challenges and Impacts

The questionnaire used in the study consisted of 9 items (see Table 6) that were negatively phrased and aimed to identify the difficulties experienced by Thai university students when their teachers used EMI in the classroom. Overall, the participants faced challenges in various aspects. Specifically, items 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15 revealed that more than 50% of first-year students encountered greater difficulties compared to second-year students. Among these, items 10, 11, and 12 highlighted that over 70% of first-year students found listening and comprehending lectures, as well as reading and comprehending textbooks, to be the most challenging tasks. Additionally, items 13, 14, and





15 indicated that approximately 50% of participants faced moderate difficulty in accessing materials and comprehending a large amount of content within limited time, struggling to engage in passive teaching methods, and encountering difficulties in understanding lectures due to poor pronunciation and fast-paced speech by the lecturers.

However, items 16, 17, and 18 showed a noticeable difference between first-year and second-year students. Over 60% of second-year students reported facing more challenges compared to first-year students. Item 17 received the highest mean score ($M=3.55$), indicating that second-year students encountered difficulty in understanding vocabulary. This was followed by item 16, which related to speaking skills ($M=3.48$), and item 18, which involved writing and critical thinking ($M=3.13$), as depicted in Figure 2. These results suggest that the challenges faced by first-year students differ from those of second-year students, with only three items overlapping in difficulty between the two groups.

Table 5 The challenges of EMI classroom

Item	First-year student				Second-year student			
	mean	S.D.	%	Level	mean	S.D.	%	Level
10. I cannot listen and comprehend lectures. *	3.53	1.09	70.60%	high	2.23	0.86	44.60%	low
11. I cannot read and comprehend textbooks and related materials. *	3.63	1.17	72.60%	high	2.25	0.84	45.00%	low
12. I have difficulties accessing related materials. *	3.73	1.13	74.60%	high	2.18	0.84	43.60%	low
13. I cannot digest a great amount of content knowledge in a limited time. *	2.90	1.11	58.00%	moderate	2.63	1.10	52.60%	moderate
14. I cannot enjoy the lessons because of passive teaching methods. *	3.15	1.27	63.00%	moderate	2.90	1.15	58.00%	moderate
15. I cannot understand lectures because of the lecturers' poor pronunciation and fast speed. *	3.45	1.20	69.00%	moderate	2.73	1.15	54.60%	moderate
16. I cannot speak full sentences with average speed and accurate grammar. *	2.45	1.13	49.00%	low	3.48	1.06	69.60%	moderate
17. I cannot understand vocabulary in textbooks and lectures. *	2.48	0.88	49.60%	low	3.55	0.85	71.00%	high
18. I cannot write a logical paragraph/ essay with various	2.48	1.01	49.60%	low	3.13	0.91	62.60%	moderate





Item	First-year student				Second-year student			
	mean	S.D.	%	Level	mean	S.D.	%	Level
uses of vocabulary and critical thinking. *								
Total	3.09	0.81	61.72	moderate	2.78	0.56	55.67	moderate

However, the analysis of the interview data revealed that the main challenges of learning EMI classes were two majors. There are comprehension and vocabulary issues. In particular, the second-year students faced more challenges because they might have less experience in using English.

2.1 Comprehension issue

In the interviews, the participants expressed difficulties in comprehending the content when the teacher used EMI and all English materials (see Table 7). They reported instances where they struggled to understand the meaning of words or the content presented in the materials. This sentiment was also reflected in the survey results, which indicated that first-year students ($M=3.63$) faced greater challenges in comprehending textbooks or materials compared to second-year students ($M=3.63$) (see Table 8). Therefore, the use of English as the sole medium of instruction in EMI classes posed a challenge in comprehending the subject's content.

Table 6 Textbook or materials issue

Participants	Statements
Dior	Some subjects were taught in Thai, but the task or examination was in English 100 percent. It caused me difficulties.
Tiffany	When I did not understand the content. I asked my friend to help to give me Thai content. So, when I study, I have two versions of materials in English and Thai.
Prada	The material in the academic course was complex. Although I tried to understand in English version I had to research or translate them into Thai.

*This excerpt was translated from students' records.

The students cannot comprehend the material and translating the textbook might help them to connect the content.

Table 7 Textbook or materials issued from the survey

Item	statement	First-year student				Second-year student			
		mean	S.D.	%	Level	mean	S.D.	%	Level
11.	I cannot read and comprehend textbooks and related materials. *	3.63	1.17	72.60%	high	2.25	0.84	45.00%	low

Entrance requirements for English programs may not always accurately assess students' true language proficiency. Some students may meet minimum requirements but still have varying levels of proficiency.

2.2 Vocabulary issue

Another of the challenges identified in the interview data was related to vocabulary. The analysis of the interview data revealed that some participants had difficulty understanding the vocabulary used in the materials. Vocabulary was a significant challenge for them, indicating limited vocabulary knowledge (see Table 9). Similarly, the survey results indicated that second-year students





($M=3.55$) faced greater difficulties with vocabulary compared to first-year students ($M=2.48$) (see Table 10). Therefore, the major challenge reported by participants was related to lesson vocabulary.

Table 8 Vocabulary issue

Participants	Statements
Dior	Vocabulary is my problem.
Tiffany	I found many new vocabularies and I had to use translation while I was studying.
Prada	I faced new words that I had never seen before. It was also not my mother tongue. So, it is really hard to understand.
Versace	Vocabulary is too difficult and too specific even though I reviewed the lesson by myself.
Armani	I found a difficult word when I was in the class.

*This excerpt was translated from students' records.

The researchers did not explicitly mention whether students prioritize looking up the meanings of difficult or unfamiliar vocabulary or tend to pass over it in the provided text. Further investigation or specific data related to this aspect of student behavior would be needed to conclude their vocabulary learning strategies.

Table 9 Vocabulary issue from the survey

Item	statement	First-year student				Second-year student			
		mean	S.D.	%	Level	mean	S.D.	%	Level
17.	I cannot understand vocabulary in textbooks and lectures. *	2.48	0.88	49.60%	low	3.55	0.85	71.00%	high

2.3 The language used in the EMI class

The EMI program at the Thai university offered courses that were taught in English, but it is worth noting that the Thai language may have been utilized to some extent in the general courses as well. The interview data revealed two distinct groups of participants in terms of their preference for the language of instruction: those who preferred fully English-taught courses and those who preferred a combination of English and Thai instruction.

Upon analyzing the interview data, participants such as Gucci, Chanel, Hermès, and Versace expressed a preference for teachers and materials in English. They believed that learning in EMI classes with English as the primary language of instruction offered the best opportunity to reap the benefits of the program. It was also an attractive choice for them (see in table 11). On the other hand, participants such as Dior, Tiffany, Prada, and Armani reported that the inclusion of Thai-taught instruction in EMI classes was beneficial for them due to their limited English proficiency and enhanced understanding of them (see Table 12).

However, the questionnaire results showed that using both English and the participant's mother tongue (Thai language) in the classroom, as reported by first-year and second-year students, received higher mean scores ($M=3.95$, $M=3.80$) compared to using English only ($M=3.75$, $M=3.75$). This indicates that EMI classes should consider incorporating both English and the mother tongue as the instructional medium.



**Table 10** Using English as the medium of instruction only

Participants	Statements
Gucci	I think it is proper to use EMI in general courses. I like the challenge of learning in EMI courses because I am excited to learn them.
Chanel	I wanted to be English 100 % in EMI courses. EIC is a fully English program that we have. It is not supposed to be taught half Thai and English including in materials.
Hermès	I prefer English as the medium of instruction in academic courses. I could receive more benefits from that such as improving more English skills. It is the reason why I chose this program.
Versace	I am studying international program. I prefer learning full English-taught in EMI courses.

Table 11 Combination with Thai-taught interview data

Participants	Statements
Dior	I prefer half English and Thai as the medium of instruction because the explanation of content in the Thai language can provide a comprehensive understanding and clearer image.
Tiffany	I prefer half English and Thai as the medium of instruction. I come here to study English but sometimes I don't understand all in English so teaching in Thai helps me.
Prada	Applying the Thai language in the EMI course is good for me because my English is limited.
Armani	I prefer studying in an EMI course with Thai and English as the medium of instruction. Perhaps, there are some words or content that I cannot understand. The lecture will explain to me more in the Thai language.

This excerpt was translated from students' records.

The students' varying levels of English proficiency contributed to their use of Thai as a supportive language. It is essential to acknowledge that not all students are equally proficient in English. Using Thai alongside English can be a coping mechanism for those who are less confident in their English skills.

3. Teaching and Learning Practices

This section provides insights into the extent to which EMI is utilized in the classroom by both students and teachers through observation. The observation process aims to address the second research question as well. During data collection, the researcher observed the language use and activities of the teachers, the responses of the students, and the overall classroom environment. The observational findings can be categorized into two main areas: 1) the teacher's Performance, and 2) the student's responses.

3.1 Teacher's Performance

The observations revealed that the teacher played a predominantly teacher-centered role in the EMI classes. The teaching approach relied heavily on the teacher's use of natural English to introduce the subject and deliver the content to the students. However, at the beginning of the class or during small talk, the teacher occasionally switched to using the Thai language. For example, the teacher





would use Thai to provide explanations, interact with students, or discuss administrative matters. Some examples of such instances include:

1. "อาจารย์ไม่อยู่อาทิตย์ที่แล้วเพราะไปฉีดวัคซีนมา เฉพาะนักเรียนที่ได้รับมอบหมายให้ศึกษางาน PowerPoint ของประเทศ... อะไรคะ..." (I couldn't come to class last week because I had to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Only those assigned to study PowerPoint presentations in each country need to complete the assignment.)
2. "ใบงานครั้งที่ 1 และครั้งที่ 2 อนุญาตให้ออกาสปรับแก้ได้อยู่ค่ะเพราะว่าบางคนลืมกดปุ่มส่งใน Google Classroom" (The 1st and the 2nd worksheets allow for the opportunity to make corrections because some people forgot to press the submit button in Google Classroom).
3. "เป็นลักษณะของคนลาวเลขนะค่ะ sincerity แปลว่าอะไรคะ เน้าใจ... แปลว่า จริงใจนะค่ะ" (It's a characteristic of Lao people. What does "sincerity" mean? Are you sure? It means being sincere.)
4. "จัดปะอยู่ในอินเดียตะวันออกและบังกลาเทศนะค่ะ เพราะฉะนั้นชื่อนี้ละค่ะ จัดปะ" (Champak is located in the East of India and Bangladesh, so that's why it's called "Champak".)

It is worth noting that in some instances, the teacher would conduct the class entirely in the Thai language for certain general subjects, instead of using English as the medium of instruction. As a result, some students would request that the teacher use a combination of English and Thai as the medium of instruction during class, considering the presence of international students.

However, when students have limited language skills, teachers need to take a more central role to ensure that students can understand and engage with the content. This can include providing explanations, offering translations, or simplifying language to facilitate comprehension.

In conclusion, the observed classrooms showcased the teacher's performance in EMI classrooms or learning environments. While the teachers acknowledged the importance of using English as the medium of instruction, there were instances where they switched to using the Thai language. This switch occurred mainly during informal interactions or administrative matters, rather than during actual instruction. Thus, applying in both languages allowed students to access content in a language they were more comfortable with. This can improve their understanding of complex subject matter, ensuring that language barriers do not impede their learning.

3.2 The Student's Responses

The students in the observed classes demonstrated active engagement and attentiveness. At the beginning of the class, the lecturer requested all students to turn on their cameras when participating in the class. Throughout the session, the students listened attentively, focusing on the lecturer and PowerPoint presentations. The lecturer encouraged student participation by asking questions, motivating them to share their ideas, and checking their understanding using English.

However, some instances suggested some students may have struggled to comprehend the concepts explained by the lecturers in English. Some students hesitated to respond during discussions or requested assistance from their peers to answer questions. As a result, the students occasionally switched to using the Thai language (their mother tongue) for certain conversations or interactions, such as roll calls or answering questions.

The survey results further supported the students' preference for using both languages. They believed that incorporating both English and Thai would help them acquire more knowledge and achieve a better understanding of the subject matter.

Discussion

1. Attitudes towards EMI in the Classroom

The present study investigated the attitudes of participants towards EMI in the international program at the tertiary level in Thailand. Through quantitative data analysis, it was revealed that the participants exhibited positive attitudes towards EMI. These findings are consistent with previous research that also reported positive attitudes among students toward EMI (Kym & Kym, 2014; Muthanna & Miao, 2015; Tai & Tang, 2020;). The positive attitudes expressed by the participants in this study highlight the perceived benefits of EMI in their language learning journey. These benefits include fulfilling future job requirements, improved study skills, and considering EMI as a favorable choice for future study. The findings suggest that the participants recognize the value of using and learning English as the medium of instruction in their academic pursuits.





1.1 The importance of EMI for students' future

EMI programs offer students valuable opportunities to acquire subject-matter knowledge and enhance their English competence. The present study found that the students recognized the significance of EMI as a crucial strategy in tertiary education. Survey results indicated that enrolling in the EMI program would increase their chances of success in future careers, academic growth, and pursuits. The positive attitudes toward EMI were driven by the students' perceived improvement in English proficiency and knowledge. Previous research supports the notion that EMI can enhance students' English skills, boost their self-confidence in speaking English, and facilitate comprehension of texts and articles written in the language.

Consistent with previous studies (Huang, 2015; Rahmadani, 2016), the current study revealed that EMI motivated students to enroll in the program to strengthen their English proficiency and gain professional knowledge. Furthermore, the study demonstrated that participation in the EMI program significantly improved students' English skills. The qualitative findings highlighted the most useful skills gained through the EMI approach, specifically speaking and writing. Students benefited from exposure to understandable materials and engaging in various language tasks, leading to improvements in language proficiency. Interview responses underscored the progress made in speaking and writing skills.

However, these findings contrast with Ament and Prez-Vidal's (2015) study, which found less noticeable improvement in productive abilities such as writing and grammar. Similarly, Knoch et al. (2015) reported that accuracy, grammatical and lexical complexity, and overall writing scores were not significantly impacted by EMI.

Furthermore, meaningful language exposure and task involvement have been shown to facilitate language acquisition (Cosgun and Hasirci, 2017). The findings suggest that EMI courses may also contribute to the development of lexical fluency. Tran (2021) found that students' reading, listening, speaking, and technical terminology knowledge showed the most improvement, while their grammar knowledge had the least improvement. Students engaged in pre-class preparation, including learning new words and reading textbooks and materials. These results align with previous studies that reported significant improvements in reading abilities and vocabulary knowledge (Tran, 2021).

Another reason students enroll in the EMI program is to invest in their English skills to improve their career opportunities (Xie and Curle, 2020). English proficiency is increasingly valued as a resource in the global economy, providing students with a competitive edge in the international job market (Crowther & De Costa, 2016). Similar findings have been reported in Europe (Wächter & Maiworm, 2015) and Asia (Galloway et al., 2017). Participants in this study reported that the EMI program fulfilled their English language needs for future job requirements. Previous research has also highlighted the positive impact of EMI on students' English proficiency and future career prospects (Phuong & Nguyen, 2019; Tamtam et al., 2012).

Moreover, interviews revealed that students perceived EMI as the appropriate approach for academic subjects. This aligns with previous research that highlights EMI as a means to encourage student mobility and internationalization in higher education, with a focus on language improvement (Coşgun & Hasirci, 2017). Students expressed their preference for EMI in future studies. The EMI program is popular and appealing to international students, and language learning is a motivating factor (Galloway et al., 2017; Galloway & Ruegg, 2020). Therefore, the study findings support the notion that students perceive significant benefits from participating in the EMI program.

To summarize, this study revealed that undergraduate students in Thailand have positive attitudes toward EMI. They appreciate the opportunity to study academic courses through EMI and recognize its importance in higher education. Students believe that participating in the EMI program enhances their language abilities and future career prospects. The next section will discuss the challenges associated with EMI.

2. The challenges in English as a medium instruction classroom

The discussion in this section focuses on the challenges encountered in English as a medium of instruction (EMI) classrooms. The qualitative data analysis revealed that two groups of participants experienced these challenges differently, but the common difficulties among both groups were





accessing related materials and comprehending lectures and content. The findings suggest that students face difficulties in understanding EMI lectures due to their limited language proficiency and unfamiliarity with field-specific terminology. These findings align with previous studies that have identified language proficiency and lack of subject-specific vocabulary as significant barriers to learning in EMI classrooms. It is worth noting that the research highlights comprehension issues related to both the instructors' English proficiency and the materials used in the EMI classes.

2.1 Difficulties in Comprehending the Instructors' English-Speaking

This study identified challenges related to the EMI program, where students found the English instructions challenging despite the EMI teachers performing well in their classes. The difficulties primarily revolved around understanding the instructors' English speaking and vocabulary. The data from classroom observations revealed that occasional grammatical, phonological, or idiomatic issues arose during lessons. After class, some students approached the teacher and requested that they refrain from teaching exclusively in English due to their limited fluency in the language, which resulted in difficulties for the students in the classroom. During the interviews, participants Tiffany and Prada reported difficulty in understanding the lecturer.

Regarding lecture comprehension, approximately half of the students who responded to the questionnaire indicated struggles with new vocabulary and terminology. The interviewees expressed similar sentiments. Limited vocabulary knowledge and poor listening skills may hinder students from fully grasping the explanations and directions provided by the lecturers, resulting in gaps in their subject knowledge. These findings align with previous research conducted by Phuong & Nguyen (2019).

2.2 Difficulties in understanding the materials

The findings from the interview session revealed that participants struggled to comprehend the content and meaning of words in the associated materials. These results align with previous research demonstrating that students' low levels of English proficiency hindered the implementation of the EMI program (Soruç and Griffiths, 2017). The following excerpts highlight this challenge. The challenges related to the English language were significant concerns for students. Some students interviewed mentioned complex translation issues when translating their study materials. This example emphasizes that when the first language is linguistically distinct from the second language, the cognitive load increases, and individuals cannot rely solely on their first-language ability to develop proficiency in the second language (Goodwin, 2013; Roussel et al., 2017).

When asked about the difficulties they encountered in reading textbooks or course materials written in English, the majority of students identified reading English textbooks as the most significant challenge. This finding is consistent with the results of studies conducted by Phuong & Nguyen (2019). Vocabulary was reported as the most frequently mentioned difficulty. Therefore, it is not surprising that students often rely on dictionaries or other supporting tools to first understand the meanings of words and then translate them into their native language to grasp the content (Phuong & Nguyen, 2019). Specifically, students face difficulties in comprehending lectures where technical vocabulary is predominantly used. This finding aligns with the research by Ekoç (2018), Hellekjær (2017), and Yıldız, Soruç, and Griffiths (2017).

The current results indicate that when EMI is implemented in a university setting, it cannot be assumed that students' language skills are sufficient to understand the instructional sessions (Querol-Julián & Crawford Camiciottoli, 2019). Therefore, significant issues include a lack of integrated language support and a low level of language competency among students (Rubio-Alcalá et al., 2019). Overall, Thai university students face various challenges related to EMI, including a lack of competency in the classroom. Inadequate English proficiency has an impact on both the teaching and learning processes, contributing to the ineffectiveness of EMI programs.

3. Code-Switching

This section discusses the findings on teachers' and learners' teaching and learning practices, encountered challenges, and their experiences of language use in EMI classes.

The qualitative findings revealed that both teachers and learners used code-switching and translanguaging in EMI classes. Learners requested teachers to occasionally adapt the use of the first language (L1) during lessons. Additionally, the quantitative results demonstrated the necessity of





combining L1 and English for improved content acquisition due to learners' low English proficiency, disparities in students' English knowledge, and other factors (Baltabayev, 2020). Participants stated that their insufficient English proficiency hindered their comprehension of the content knowledge. These findings are consistent with previous research that found a negative effect of language skills deficiency on content learning performance in EMI programs (Zenkova & Khamitova, 2018; Huang, 2015; Hengsadeeikul et al., 2010).

These findings indicate that the majority of students' inadequate language competence explains the use of code-switching and translanguaging. These findings align with the results reported by Kim et al. (2017) in their study, highlighting the necessity of using L1 in EMI classrooms due to students' inadequate English proficiency.

Furthermore, the use of L1 facilitates content acquisition, as students have a better understanding of lecture materials when code-switching is adapted. This finding is consistent with a previous study where code-switching to L1 enabled lecturers to ensure that students with weak proficiency understood course content better (Chuang, 2015; Rowland and Murray, 2019).

Thus, the findings suggest that EMI courses present content acquisition challenges due to students' limited English ability. Therefore, if teachers do not apply code-switching, translanguaging, or slower speech pace during EMI lessons, it may result in inadequate acquisition of knowledge, difficulties in academic success, and subsequent insufficiency in subject knowledge (Baltabayev, 2020).

Conclusion

The present study revealed that university learners exhibited a positive attitude towards English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI). Participants expressed enjoyment in learning academic subjects through EMI programs and recognized its importance for higher education in terms of enhancing their employment prospects. Students in higher education believed that EMI could enhance their English language proficiency, enabling them to compete in the global job market and facilitating their academic growth (Macaro, 2016). Moreover, EMI was seen as a means to improve student mobility and academic comprehension.

Regarding the challenges associated with EMI, participants identified the main barrier to be the comprehension of EMI lecturers and materials. The findings suggest that learners should work on improving their language skills to better prepare themselves for EMI courses. Institutions can further support EMI instructors and students by providing systematic and comprehensive pre-and in-service training on linguistic and pedagogical aspects, with a specific focus on students learning in a second language (L2), as advocated by Ozer (2020) and Morell Moll et al. (2020). Additionally, institutions should consider offering basic English instruction to help students transition into EMI courses, thereby reducing barriers along the EMI pathway.

In conclusion, the participants demonstrated a positive attitude towards EMI, perceiving it as an opportunity for a promising future in their careers and further education. The program motivated them to improve their English proficiency through academic subjects.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

The study delved into attitudes, challenges, and EMI practices in Thai universities among higher education learners but encountered several limitations. Data collection occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, potentially influencing responses and limiting questionnaire accessibility, leading to a smaller-than-expected participant pool. Moreover, the study primarily featured learners from a single university, necessitating a more diverse representation across institutions and subjects in Thailand for a comprehensive view. The absence of longitudinal analysis missed insights into the long-term effects of EMI programs on language proficiency, academic achievement, and career prospects. Additionally, the research did not thoroughly explore support mechanisms and pedagogical approaches' effectiveness in EMI contexts, including technology and teacher training. Overcoming these limitations in future studies can contribute to a more thorough understanding and improvement of EMI practices in higher education.





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