

Creating English-speaking Culture with EMI in EFL Classrooms

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Abstract

Due to the use of English worldwide as a lingua franca and to keep up with the global trend of teaching English as a Medium of Instructions (EMI), this has brought diverse responses and perspectives on how English should be perceived. For educational institutions, having English as a medium of instructions in the classes could be very challenging, moreover with the fact that English is not the native language of Indonesians. The language barrier for EFL learners might demotivate them to keep on learning and use English in daily interactions. Therefore, through qualitative research design, the study aims to investigate and analyze how the use of EMI in classes brings transformations towards EFL learners. Further, the study will also explore the EFL learners' potentials through variety of strategies in facing any challenges, including language barriers in English learning process. This study explores how EMI can be leveraged to foster a supportive English-speaking culture among preservice teachers in Indonesia. Drawing on qualitative data from classroom observations, questionnaires, and interviews, the research highlighted the transformative potential of EMI when paired with culturally responsive and emotionally resonant pedagogies. Findings suggested that confidence-building strategies, translanguaging practices, and reflective tasks are keys to nurturing learner agency and sustained English use. These findings contribute to the discourse on designing culturally responsive language curricula that prepare students for global communication while maintaining a connection to their cultural backgrounds.

Keywords: English Medium of Instruction (EMI), English-speaking culture, EFL learners

1. INTRODUCTION

The globalization era and technological advancement has been impacting the world in almost all aspects of life, including in education. Not only English had been used widely to find information that could be searched online, but it was also used for a means of communication almost by people all over the world. It holds a significant importance in

education and daily life interactions in many parts of the world ((Simões & Sangiamchit, 2023).

As learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesia, they rarely use English for daily interactions. Other than that, the EFL learners feel anxious and afraid to make mistakes, especially in using English as a means of communication both in classroom and in daily life. This resulted learners were reluctant to share their ideas and opinions using English. They also showed less confidence in the oral presentations and were frightened of making mistakes in practice (Studies, 2019). Indonesia as one of the non-English-speaking countries has many things to catch up compared to other countries in Asia such as Japan and China which have been leading in practicing EMI because they have many international students enrolled in their EMI programs (Galloway et al., 2020). Learning English has never been easy for learners to learn or acquire English due to the language barrier where English is not the learners' native language. They may still also need help participating in discussions, as they would be involved in listening and speaking skills which require adequate vocabulary and skills to make sentences in a proper sentence structure. These difficulties may cause hesitation in students to participate and lower their self-esteem (Köksal & Tercan, 2019). The high demand of being competent of English users both in academic field and daily communication has put English as a medium of instructions (EMI) (Curle et al., 2024). This has been the most suitable strategy employed to meet the 21st century skills challenge. Creating an English-speaking culture in EFL contexts required more than enforcing English use. It involved fostering environments where learners felt safe, affirmed, and motivated to express themselves in English. This study investigated how EMI could be designed to support such transformation, particularly among preservice teachers who would shape future classrooms. Therefore, the aim of the study were as follow: (1) to investigate and analyze how the learners' experience in EMI classes bring holistic transformation in their lives, (2) to explore the learners' potential through variety of strategies that will bring them to be reflective and responsive learners in facing any challenges.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

To face the challenges that learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesia, such as fear to make mistakes, lack of confidence, and minimal use of English practice, therefore, implementing English as a Medium of Instructions (EMI) could be a strategy that can help English proficiency to keep up with all the fast information flow online which were mostly in English. The EFL learners in higher education must have adequate vocabulary and skills in both written and oral presentations, therefore, EMI was considered as pathway for them to gain confidence to speak, enhance vocabulary and improve oral presentation skills. The EFL in Indonesia were also very much influenced by psychological problems along with environmental factors as primary barriers toward speaking fluency (Elisathusilawani, 2023). Moreover, motivation and confidence which play an important role in English learning process took a big part of teacher's priority to ensure that students should feel free and comfortable to express themselves and share their opinions in speaking activities (Pasaribu, 2022). This was in line with the initial inclusive education where learners would feel more relax in a less-threatening environment, so that each individual was valued deeply with their strengths and areas to improve.

The new finding was that EMI was widely promoted for improving English proficiency, however, only few studies deeply explored its role in shaping learners' self-identity and confidence as reflective responses. This is crucial for teacher preparation that will help them to be more ready mentally when they have their own class, especially the preservice teachers in non-English-speaking contexts. This was what made the current study different from other similar studies on the implementation of EMI in EFL contexts. Focusing on Indonesian EFL classrooms, implementing EMI did not only bring benefits, but also challenges. It revealed the gap between teacher's English competence and proficiency and learners' comprehension skills toward what the teachers explained to them. Therefore, recommendation is needed to bridge up the gap through teacher professional development and scaffolding guided-instructions, and culturally grounded materials to ensure EMI supported both students' academic and social-emotional growth (Anggraini, 2023).

In Indonesia, English is still being learned as a subject that was not consistently taught and exposed enough to get the EFL familiarized. Therefore, the implementation of EMI in higher education could bring a positive impact not only related to the teachers' English proficiency and global readiness, but it requires scaffolding to support deep content learning (Zuaro, 2025). Moreover, English learning process should bring the learners to experience a holistic transformation from their perspectives in responding to challenges in English learning with the help of EMI strategy (Ahmedtelba, 2025). As concluded from reviewed literature, EMI helped the EFL learners to be more ready for the global discourses, but it needs regular monitoring. It was a robust strategy improving or enhancing learners' fluency skills through systematic processes both cognitively and in terms of feelings thus making it appropriate within modern communicative and experiential paradigms grounded on flexible approaches to learning. Its implementation is particularly beneficial within classroom environments where language anxiety is prevalent, as it has the potential to develop confident competent speakers of English, even in Indonesia.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

The current study used is multiple-case studies research design. The multiple case study design is a valuable research design in studying the links between the personal, social, behavioral, psychological, organizational, cultural, and environmental factors that guide organizational and leadership development (Abadir et al., 2020). Case study research is essential for the in- depth study of participants' perspectives on a phenomenon within its natural context.

In this study, the multiple-case approach enables a comparative exploration of how English Medium Instruction (EMI) is experienced across diverse classroom contexts, each shaped by distinct learner profiles, pedagogical strategies, and sociocultural dynamics. By treating each case as a bounded system, the research captures the nuanced interplay between language use, learner identity, and emotional engagement elements often overlooked in large-scale quantitative studies.

3.2. Research Participants

There are 20 preservice teachers who participated in the study. They were in semester 5 from the English language education study program. They had taken some courses where English was used as a medium of instructions.

3.3. Instruments

There were also class-observations that will detect the needs analysis of the learners when they learn English in a class where EMI is used. Based on the questionnaire results, the in-depth interview will be done to get more detail and richer findings from the research participants related to what they responded to the questionnaire.

3.4. Data Analysis Techniques

All the data will be finally analyzed using the related theories using coding system to see the similar patterns. All the process will help the researcher to identify the potentials from the research participants and continuously keep the classes implementing EMI will be a helpful strategy for learners of English as a foreign language who are the future teachers to meet the international standard.

Through this approach, the study aims to illuminate how EMI can serve as a transformative strategy in EFL classrooms, particularly when implemented with emotional scaffolding, affirming feedback, and learner-centered activities. The findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of how EMI fosters confidence, communicative competence, and pedagogical readiness among preservice teachers. By continuously supporting EMI integration in teacher education programs, institutions can better prepare learners to meet international standards while honoring their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Ultimately, this research advocates for EMI not as a one-size-fits-all model, but as a flexible, inclusive, and empowering approach to English language education in multilingual contexts.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Language Barrier as a Struggle to Improve English Skills

To build the English-speaking culture, teachers and learners need to collaborate, though there were a big challenge in implementing EMI where learners were from different places around Indonesia. The learners mentioned that they're struggling in following classes due to the language barrier. They also found out that the lack of understanding of the subject matter due to language barriers that might bring more difficulties in their teaching practices in the future. One of the strategies to integrate the learning materials and the learners' cultural background for an effective learning. Creating a classroom atmosphere that encourages students to explore and appreciate their own and others' cultures helps teachers establish a crucial sense of belonging and respect necessary for effective learning. (Rima et al., 2024). As English is not the native language in Indonesia particularly, so language barrier has become the biggest challenge in creating English-speaking culture.

Though the learners need to face challenges in EMI implementation, there were some students that they wanted to improve their English skills, moreover, they found that their instructors built a dialogue with the learners (Tien, 2021). Since the instructor had known the learners quite well and responded to any suggestions appropriately. The more

they know about their learners, the better he can give responses or build dialogue to discuss about their difficulties. (Alharbi, 2021).

They were encouraged to improve their self-confidence to speak English through a personal dialogue with the instructors. Due to the language barrier, there should be strategies that need to be done to help the EFL learners in learning or acquiring English, which is through personal dialogue (Iwuanyanwu, 2023). Most of EFL learners are reluctant to speak in English because they do not feel confident in sharing their opinions in English freely. Through personal talk with the learners whose English proficiency is quite low, it will boost up their confidence to speak in English. Most students perceived English proficiency improvement through EMI practice (Pramerta et al., 2023). However, their study also suggested a need for a review on full English application in the classrooms (Galloway & Ruegg, 2020). Therefore, there has been an urgency on how to use English as a medium of daily communication as well instructions in classroom to bring transformative learning process for students in Indonesian context.

Especially if the activities allowed them to listen and share their ideas with other students. Moreover, from the interviews, the students felt more confident when they were given tasks and needed to respond to some questions, then share what they have learned to other students. One of things that they loved to do was when they practiced the 4-skills of English simultaneously.

“What I like the most was when the lecturer gave us an interactive video when we needed to listen to a story, but there were also questions related to the story comprehension and vocabulary that made us think to find the correct answers.” (student 1)

“It helped me to learn English when the media was interesting. I also started to feel confident when I needed to share what I learned from the story to my friends.” (student 2)

“By listening and speaking in English about the story we have watched, we gained more confidence to share our ideas with more people.” (student 3)

4.2. Implementation of EMI to Shape Learners' Self-Identity and Confidence

English Medium Instruction (EMI) refers to the use of English to teach a non-language subject in a context where English is not the official language (Li & Pei, 2024). Moreover, there had been a tension between English instruction and students' limited proficiency, leading to anxiety and reduced comprehension (Katrina Herda et al., 2025). In many contexts, particularly in East Asia, it is closely related to government goals of improving the English proficiency of its citizens (Galloway et al., 2020). Therefore, teachers need to be creative encouraging their students to use English in their daily contexts. Teachers can also use students' interests and daily routines to create the learning support for students to feel confident when they share about their daily activities. During the learning process in the class, students were also asked to practice speaking in pairs about what they like to do in their spare time. The students looked so excited when they shared with their friends, they didn't seem afraid of making mistakes in their grammar. They also sometimes used Bahasa Indonesia whenever they didn't know exactly how they express their ideas in English. (Huang, 2025).

The use of EMI in classroom has no specific language learning objective, making it different from content-based approaches to teaching languages, such as CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) and CBI (Content-Based Instruction). The use of the English language of instructions also promoted a holistic pedagogy that valued

multilingual repertoires and sociocultural identity in EMI classrooms (Prabjandee & Nilpirom, 2022).

Through the EMI implementations, it will also bring transformation in the learners' motivation to learn, confidence and engagement with the learning process (Huang, 2025). Knowing that the learners of English as a foreign language were from different places around Indonesia, so when the teachers were flexible using English and sometimes used Indonesian as the home language of the learners, this brought a higher sense of engagement among them. This also acknowledged their identities that also affected their confidence toward themselves (Song et al., 2023).

From the questionnaire, the students mentioned that English can be integrated with other subjects, and they could enjoy using English as long as the teacher also used good strategy in teaching English. The teacher used English with more flexibility through the suitable speed while talking and how the teacher appreciated and valued each individual.

"I like the way the teacher encouraged us to practice English with our friends. He made sure that it's ok to make grammar mistakes, just don't be afraid to speak u

"The teacher speaks English not too fast, so that we can follow what she's saying and understand her English sentences."

"I enjoyed the role play, though my grammar is not good, but the teacher appreciated my effort and my friends' efforts."

Based on the interview, the students also thought that the power of encouraging words was really applied in the class and during the interactions between teacher and students and among the students. The teacher didn't give threatening environment, instead, he let the students share their ideas naturally. He allowed students to use bahasa Indonesia, but at the same time, he tried to give feedback to correct the students' speech. The use of the students' home language is emerging (Riadil, 2020).

One effective strategy is to integrate students' interests and daily routines into classroom activities, creating a familiar and emotionally safe space for language use. When learners are invited to talk about their hobbies, routines, or personal experiences, they tend to engage more confidently and meaningfully. Teachers can scaffold this process by modeling key vocabulary, providing sentence starters, and affirming students' efforts regardless of grammatical accuracy. Teachers designed activities that valued students' rich and unique cultural backgrounds and

During the learning process in the class, students were asked to practice speaking in pairs about what they like to do in their spare time. The students looked visibly excited when they shared with their friends; they didn't seem afraid of making mistakes in their grammar. This sense of enjoyment and emotional safety is crucial in building a sustainable English-speaking culture. It was also observed that students occasionally used Bahasa Indonesia when they struggled to find the right English words an example of translanguaging that allowed them to maintain fluency and express complex ideas without disengagement. The use of flexible language use can motivate learners to take ownership of their learning and express themselves more authentically (Zhou et al., 2024).

5. CONCLUSIONS

To create a supportive learning environment, it requires collaboration between teacher and students, especially in learning new languages. Students and teachers need to have the same goal to English language learning. Teacher plays an important role since

he is the one who will show a good and positive perspective about English. Teachers also need to be creative in designing learning activities where students can enjoy. When the students are interested in learning about certain subjects using English, especially if the teacher can always remind and encourage the students to keep on practicing not only in the class, but also outside the class. This way, English as a medium of English could bring a significant impact to students' lives. The further implications to maintain the use of English would be in the activities where students are paired up with other students as English-Speaking Buddy to practice their English skills through informal conversations inside and outside the class. Students can be also involved in Interest-based Projects where students choose topics they love (e.g., anime, food, sports) and explore them in English through mini-research or presentations. These activities will help students to build confidence to speak in English naturally that will help them to be more fluent speakers of English and be community members wherever they are.

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