



# Exploring Lecturers' Perceptions about Teaching Practices in EMI Classrooms

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## Abstract

*This research investigates the effectiveness of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) programs in higher education institutions in Vietnam. The research aims to assess the efficiency and the challenges and opportunities faced by lecturers in EMI courses, focusing on language proficiency, academic performance, and pedagogical strategies. Using a qualitative research method, the data were collected from university students and faculty members through surveys, interviews, and classroom observations. The findings indicated that while EMI programs enhanced students' English proficiency and global academic competitiveness, they also presented significant challenges, including comprehension difficulties and reduced subject matter retention. These challenges highlight the need for comprehensive language support mechanisms and faculty development programs. By situating these findings within the broader literature on EMI in non-native English-speaking contexts, this research contributes to the understanding of effective EMI implementation. The results provide actionable recommendations for policymakers, educators, and university administrators, emphasizing the need for targeted language support, curriculum adaptation, and teacher training.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The demand for learning English in Vietnam has remained consistently high, particularly in the context of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) classrooms. Since the introduction of the Doi Moi (Renovation) policy in December 1986, which marked Vietnam's transition to a more open economy, the need for English proficiency has grown significantly (Dang, 2026; Hoang, 2018). As English is the dominant global language in trade, business, and international relations, it has become a core focus in Vietnamese education. The ability to communicate effectively in English is widely perceived as a key factor in securing better career opportunities, not only in tourism and hospitality but also in various other professional fields. As a result, many parents, especially those in major urban areas like Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, are willing to allocate substantial financial resources to provide their children with English instruction from an early age (Nguyen, 2011). This investment

is often framed as an “early investment” to enhance their children’s future competitiveness in the global job market (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Duong & Le, 2024; Nguyen, 2022).

This research aims to assess the efficiency and the challenges and opportunities from lecturers’ perceptions on their English language teaching practices in EMI classrooms. To achieve this, the research focuses on two key objectives: (1) to determine the extent to which English lecturers are aware of their teaching practices, and (2) to explore how their awareness influences English language instruction in EMI settings. By addressing these objectives, the research seeks to provide insights into the connection between lecturers’ perceptions and their instructional approaches, contributing to a deeper understanding of effective English teaching methodologies in EMI classrooms.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the 1960s, the widespread use of English in over 100 countries has sparked debates regarding its ownership. Many scholars argue that English has undergone denationalization, meaning it no longer belongs solely to native speakers in terms of linguistic usage (Deroey & Johnson, 2025; Han, 2023; McKinley & Rose, 2022). The concept of World Englishes emerged in 1965 when Braj Kachru observed that Indian speakers had adapted English into a distinct variety, diverging from American and British English. However, Han (2023) noted that despite its introduction, the concept received limited attention from the English teaching community, as even by the 1991 TESOL Quarterly anniversary, English as a Lingua Franca remained an unfamiliar notion among educators. Nonetheless, increasing awareness of World Englishes has driven scholars to explore how to equip English users for effective global communication (Moore, 2015). Furthermore, sociolinguists acknowledge that local linguistic and cultural influences shape English in different L2 contexts, affecting pronunciation, syntax, vocabulary, and pragmatic conventions (McKinley & Rose, 2022). As a result, scholars and educators have proposed moving beyond the native-speaker model as the sole benchmark for English language instruction and global communication (McKay, 2002; Steger, 2020).

When shaping teaching materials and curricula to align with English language teaching in EMI classrooms, it is inevitable that the assessment system must also undergo modification. Current language testing frameworks have been criticized for their inadequacy in reflecting the role of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), as they often prioritize inner-circle English varieties, which are not necessarily the goal for many English learners worldwide (Davies et al., 2003; Macaro & Searle, 2025). A clear example of this issue can be seen in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which emphasizes the attainment of native-like competence in its assessment criteria. For instance, at the B2 level, learners are expected to “sustain relationships with native speakers without unintentionally amusing or irritating them or requiring them to behave other than they would with a native speaker” (Council of Europe, 2001, pp. 35, 76). Similarly, another criterion at B2 requires learners to “interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with natives” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 129). At the highest proficiency level, C2, the framework expects learners to “appreciate fully the sociolinguistic and sociocultural implications of language used by native speakers and react accordingly” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 122). These criteria reflect an outdated perspective on English learning, where native-speaker norms dominate.

Teacher cognition has become a central area of research in language teacher education, particularly in EMI contexts. While various terms such as perception, conception, attitudes, and beliefs are often used, they are generally considered interchangeable with the broader concept of cognition (Malmström & Zhou, 2025; Richards & Pun, 2021). This field has gained significance due to extensive research demonstrating that teacher cognition plays a crucial role in shaping lecturers' perceptions and assessments of teaching and learning, which is reflected in their classroom behaviour (Borg, 2006; Truong et al., 2020; Wingate, 2025). Furthermore, teachers' beliefs and cognitive frameworks influence their instructional practices (Farrell, 2015), including the ways they implement teaching methodologies and interact with students. Additionally, cognition directly impacts teachers' willingness to adopt and integrate new teaching strategies, techniques, and pedagogical innovations in the classroom (Akıncıoğlu, 2024; Doran et al., 2025; Lasagabaster, 2022; Tillema, 2000).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research was conducted at a university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Established in 1999, this university has been officially recognized by the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam and has since developed into a prominent institution of higher learning. Currently, this university serves more than 30,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students across 20 faculties, offering 81 undergraduate programs, 14 master's degree programs, and four doctoral programs. The university provides education in 19 diverse fields, including health sciences, arts, humanities, social sciences, business and management, law, life sciences, computer science, engineering, production and processing, architecture, tourism, environmental studies, educational sciences, veterinary studies, natural sciences, and mathematics and statistics. This broad academic scope allows it to cater to a wide range of academic interests and professional aspirations.

As part of its commitment to internationalization, this university has incorporated EMI programs within the Institute of International Education (IIE). IIE serves as the leading unit in the university's efforts to globalize higher education, facilitating collaborations with reputable international universities from countries with well-established education systems. Through these partnerships, IIE provides students with access to internationally recognized curricula, enabling them to experience global education standards while studying in Vietnam. The EMI programs at IIE aim to enhance students' English proficiency, equipping them with the linguistic and academic skills necessary for participation in a competitive, globalized workforce. By offering a wide range of academic disciplines and prioritizing international collaborations, this university plays a vital role in the development of higher education in Vietnam. The integration of EMI programs further supports the university's mission to provide high-quality education that aligns with global academic standards. Through the IIE, this university fosters an inclusive learning environment where students can engage with diverse perspectives, preparing them for professional success in an increasingly interconnected world.

## **RESULTS**

### **EMI Lecturers' Perception of English Language Teaching Practices**

The perception of English teaching practices among EMI lecturers varied, with some expressing familiarity with the concept while others held differing viewpoints. Among the eight participating lecturers, six (75%) indicated awareness of the term *“English teaching practices”*. Within this group, four lecturers shared a similar perspective regarding the role of standardized English in EMI classrooms. As one lecturer explained, *“In my teaching, I tend to follow American English norms because they provide consistency and are widely recognized by students”*. Another lecturer expressed a comparable stance, stating, *“Standard English, especially British English, helps avoid confusion and ensures students are assessed fairly”*. Similarly, one participant emphasized the institutional expectation: *“Our department encourages us to rely on standardized English in lectures, so students can be aligned with international exams”*. In contrast, not all lecturers equated effective EMI teaching with standardized English. One teacher reflected, *“I don’t think standardized English is always necessary; sometimes clarity and relevance to the subject matter are more important than following one variety”*. This diversity of viewpoints illustrates that while many lecturers favour standardized English for its perceived neutrality and alignment with global norms, others consider pedagogical flexibility and disciplinary needs to be equally, if not more, significant.

This approach involves incorporating diverse varieties of English into lesson planning, selecting inclusive teaching materials, and designing classroom activities that reflect the multilingual reality of English use in both academic and professional contexts (Lohan & Dafouz, 2024; McKay, 2002). By doing so, lecturers can foster a more inclusive and realistic learning environment that better prepares students for global communication. Furthermore, this perspective aligns with recent discussions on World Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), which advocate for a shift away from traditional native-speaker norms toward a more flexible, context-driven understanding of English proficiency (Jenkins, 2015; Han, 2023; Seidlhofer, 2011). Ultimately, the diverse perspectives on English teaching practices among EMI lecturers highlight the ongoing debate regarding language norms in higher education. While some educators still adhere to native-speaker standards, there is a growing recognition of the need to adapt teaching strategies to the realities of global English use. Addressing this issue requires continuous professional development and curriculum design that reflects the evolving role of English in EMI contexts (Costa & Mastellotto, 2022; Curle et al., 2024).

### **EMI Lecturers’ Perception in Teaching both Languages and Contents**

Although teachers generally exhibited a solid understanding of English teaching practices, there are still notable limitations in their integration of diverse English varieties within their classrooms. This can primarily be attributed to the dominance of one specific variety of English, which tends to overshadow other varieties in instructional settings. According to a questionnaire conducted among lecturers, 75% of the respondents agreed that a particular variety of English is the most commonly used in English teaching in Vietnam. Interview findings further corroborated this trend. As one lecturer commented, *“In my teaching, I mostly rely on American English because that is what the students expect and what the textbooks provide”*. Another participant also emphasized the institutional preference: *“Our university encourages us to use British English in assessments and materials, so it becomes difficult to expose students to other English varieties”*. Similarly, a third teacher noted, *“Even though I know English is diverse, I rarely introduce other accents or expressions, since students may find them confusing”*. These extracts illustrate how the dominance of a single English variety not only shapes teachers’ classroom practices but also limits students’ exposure to the rich diversity of English worldwide.

This indicates a growing awareness of the role content plays in shaping teaching strategies, yet the preference for a dominant English variety remains strong. Such findings point to the challenge of diversifying English teaching to incorporate a wider range of English varieties, as the tendency to prioritize one dominant variety can limit students' exposure to the full spectrum of English usage in global contexts. While the awareness of different English varieties is present, the practical implementation of these varieties in the classroom is still constrained by traditional norms and the greater influence of one predominant form of English. This highlights the need for further efforts to encourage the inclusion of various English varieties in teaching, allowing students to better navigate the diverse linguistic landscapes they may encounter in their academic and professional lives (Akıncıoğlu, 2024; Lasgabaster, 2022).

This highlights the central role that materials play in shaping classroom instruction. Despite the growing awareness of the importance of embracing various English varieties, the materials used in EMI classrooms still predominantly reflect one specific variety of English, often aligning with native-speaker norms. McKay (2002) argues that this focus on a single variety can restrict students' exposure to the full range of linguistic and cultural dimensions that English encompasses, particularly as used by non-native speakers globally. The reliance on such materials may inadvertently reinforce the dominance of native-speaker norms while neglecting the diverse ways English is used in international contexts. As a result, students may receive an incomplete understanding of English, one that emphasizes native-speaker standards at the expense of recognizing the validity and importance of non-native varieties of English. This limitation underscores the need for teaching materials that reflect the broad spectrum of English usage across the world, allowing students to engage with the language as it is spoken and written by speakers from various linguistic backgrounds (McKay, 2002; Steger, 2020). Such an approach would better prepare students for the multilingual and multicultural environments they are likely to encounter in their academic and professional lives.

The preference for standardized English teaching materials can be attributed to several factors, including institutional expectations, assessment criteria, and the widespread availability of resources that predominantly feature Inner Circle English varieties (Jenkins, 2015; Kachru, 1985). These factors exert significant influence on teaching practices, leading to the continued use of materials that prioritize native-speaker norms, despite a growing recognition of the existence of multiple English varieties. This trend reinforces the centrality of the native-speaker model in language teaching, even though English now functions as a global means of communication predominantly among non-native speakers. The dominance of one specific variety in instructional resources reflects a persistent bias toward Inner Circle English, limiting students' exposure to the diverse linguistic and cultural forms of English that are increasingly relevant in global communication. As a result, while lecturers may acknowledge the validity of different English varieties, their teaching practices remain shaped by the availability and institutional support for materials that align with native-speaker standards. This reinforces the need for more inclusive teaching resources that represent the full range of English usage, preparing students for real-world communication across diverse contexts (Jenkins, 2015; Heyns, 2024).

**Table 1.** *Summary of Lecturers' Criteria to Assess Speaking Ability*

Category	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6	L7	L8	Total (people)
Pronunciation	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	-	6
Accuracy	x	x	x	x	-	-	-	-	4
Confident	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	8
Fluency	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	-	6
Contents	x	x	x	x	-	-	-	-	4

Table 1 provides an insightful breakdown of how eight lecturers (L1 to L8) in EMI classrooms assess students' speaking abilities based on five key criteria: Pronunciation, Accuracy, Confidence, Fluency, and Contents.

**Table 2.** *Summary of Lecturers' Criteria to Assess Listening Ability*

Category	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6	L7	L8	Total (people)
1. Be able to listen to keywords or key phrases	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	8
2. Be able to understand the speakers	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	-	6
3. Student's reaction after listening to something	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	-	6

Table 2 summarizes the criteria used by eight lecturers (L1 to L8) in EMI classrooms to assess students' listening ability. Three key criteria are evaluated: (1) the ability to listen to keywords or key phrases, making it the most universally considered factor in evaluating listening ability; (2) the ability to understand the speakers: six lecturers (L1 to L6) assess this criterion, while L7 and L8 do not; and (3) the student's reaction after listening to something: similar to understanding the speakers, this criterion is assessed by six lecturers (L1 to L6) but not by L7 and L8.

## DISCUSSION

In this research, it was reported that lecturers did not have control over the selection of teaching materials, as these decisions were made at the institutional level. This aligns with the findings of Walsh (2010), who also found that teachers lacked autonomy in choosing instructional content, with students primarily being exposed to native English varieties through pre-recorded tapes. Similarly, interview participants in this study stated that when working in schools, universities, or English centres, they had no authority over the selection of textbooks used in their classrooms. Instead, these decisions were made by the board of management, leaving teachers with no choice but to follow the prescribed curriculum. This lack of control over teaching materials not only restricts instructors' ability to tailor lessons to students' needs but also reinforces the dominance of native-speaker norms in EMI classrooms. Given this institutional constraint, a significant limitation of the study is its

inability to explore the perspectives and awareness of the board of management regarding English teaching practices.

A key limitation of this research is its inability to examine the perspectives and decision-making processes of the board of management regarding English teaching materials. Without insight into their awareness and perceptions of English language teaching in EMI contexts, it remains unclear why specific textbooks and instructional resources are chosen. Understanding the rationale behind these decisions could provide a clearer picture of whether institutional policies align with modern pedagogical approaches that acknowledge English as a global language. Future research should investigate the attitudes of educational policymakers and administrators toward English teaching practices in EMI settings to determine whether their material selection process considers linguistic diversity. This would help bridge the gap between institutional policies and lecturers' pedagogical autonomy, ensuring a more inclusive and effective approach to English language instruction in EMI classrooms.

## CONCLUSION

The findings revealed that although lecturers demonstrated some awareness of English teaching practices in EMI settings, they lacked a clear conceptual understanding of the term, which limited their ability to effectively apply EMI principles. Their teaching remained shaped by traditional models, with strong expectations for students to use native English varieties in high-stakes assessments, reflecting the dominance of native-speaker norms (Hamp-Lyons & Davies, 2008; Nguyen, 2022; Walsh, 2010). English also played a broader role in shaping lecturers' teaching skills, subject delivery, and perceptions of their professional identity, a process that may be influenced by teachers' classroom interactions with learners (Tran et al., 2024). A critical concern was the absence of non-native English varieties in teaching materials, which restricted students' exposure to linguistic and cultural diversity. Moreover, lecturers reported little authority over textbook selection, as materials were mandated at the institutional level (Walsh, 2010).

This study has limitations, including a small sample size, focus on limited EMI programs, and reliance on lecturers' self-reports. Future research should incorporate perspectives from students, administrators, and policy-makers to capture a more comprehensive view of EMI implementation (Macaro & Searle, 2025). In addition, experimental studies could test approaches such as metaphor-based learning (Honma & Takeshita, 2014) to promote inclusive understandings of English. Broader qualitative studies across regions and disciplines are also needed to inform policy reforms toward more diverse and equitable EMI practices.

## IMPLICATIONS

The study highlights important implications for EMI practice and policy in Vietnam. While lecturers were generally aware of English teaching practices, their lack of a clear conceptual understanding limited their ability to effectively integrate EMI principles. The persistence of native-speaker norms, particularly in high-stakes testing, reinforces monolithic ideologies of English and restricts students' exposure to global linguistic diversity. Moreover, the reliance on institutionally mandated textbooks perpetuates the dominance of specific English varieties, leaving little space for non-native English representations. To address these issues, universities should (1) grant lecturers greater autonomy in

adapting or supplementing teaching materials, (2) incorporate diverse English varieties and cultural elements into EMI curricula, and (3) provide targeted professional development programs that enhance lecturers' pedagogical competence in inclusive EMI practices. Such reforms would better prepare students for authentic global communication and promote a more equitable English learning environment.

Further research should address these limitations in several ways. First, future studies should broaden their scope to include the perspectives of students, institutional managers, and policy-makers to capture a more comprehensive picture of EMI implementation (Macaro & Searle, 2025; Walsh, 2010). Second, following Honna and Takeshita's (2014) insights, experimental research could test innovative approaches such as metaphor-based learning to foster an appreciation of English as a multicultural and international language. Third, expanding research across different educational levels, disciplines, and regions in Vietnam would help reveal context-specific challenges and raise broader awareness of inclusive EMI practices. Such investigations could make a valuable contribution to promoting more adaptable, equitable, and globally oriented EMI programs.

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