# Challenges and Importance of Teaching English as a Medium of Instruction in Thailand International College

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## Abstract

This research investigated the views of lecturers regarding the challenges of teaching English as a medium of instruction (EMI) and its important impact on Thailand International College. A qualitative method was employed utilizing an interview protocol as a research instrument. In total, 12 lecturers from four programs of an international college were selected using a purposive sampling technique. Thematic analysis was applied to examine interview transcripts thus identifying common themes that came up repeatedly. The results revealed that there are four categories of challenges, namely, linguistic, cultural, structural, and identity-related (institutional) challenges and four important aspects of EMI implementation, namely, importance for language improvement, subject matter learning, career prospects, and internationalization strategy. Generally, lecturers found that their students can take notes, read academic texts, interact, and listen through EMI instruction. Taking all of this into consideration, this study provides suggestions for EMI to develop further in Thailand's higher education institutions as all the lecturers have voiced similar positive points on the importance of EMI implementation.

**Keywords:** challenges, content-based instruction, importance, medium of instruction

## Introduction

English has become a global language and teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) has increasingly become a universal demand. As reported by Macaro, Curle, Pun, An, and Dearden (2018), English as a medium of instruction (EMI) has become a growing global phenomenon, particularly in higher education. More and more higher education institutions are now keen to offer both undergraduate and postgraduate programs through the medium of English (Earls, 2016). The reasons for this are various and context-dependent. They include a perceived need to internalize the higher education institution (Knight, 2013) so that it is prestigious enough to attract foreign students due to falling enrollment numbers of local students through changing demographics, national cuts in higher education investment, the need of the public sector to compete with the private sector, and the status of

English as an international language (EIL), especially in the domain of research publications (Macaro et al., 2018).

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned, English has been formally adopted as an official language and the medium of communication among the participating countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN) to foster collaborative activities towards accomplishing quality education in the region (Luanganggoon, Phantharakphong, Sae-Joo, & Huntula, 2018). Therefore, using EMI in Thai higher education institutions is a key mechanism to equip graduates with professional skills and English language proficiency (Phantharakphong, Sudathip, & Tang, 2019). This enables the Thai higher education to produce more competent graduates who are competitive in the ASEAN Economic Community and wider international market (Bunwirat, 2017). However, the Thailand Nation website indicates that Thailand is ranked 55th from a list of 60 countries on their English proficiency skills (https://www.ajarn.com/ajarn-guests/why-is-english-so-poor-in-thailand). This shows that Thailand is so far down the ladder of English proficiency even though Thai educational policy has emphasized the importance of the English language by employing native speakers to teach English throughout Thailand (Luanganggoon, 2020). Moreover, teaching English as a foreign language or second language (L2) has become an important issue and is very challenging (Jufri, Yusri, & Mantasiah, 2019). The development of English as EMI is of great interest to language policy researchers in an era of globalization and internationalization. Despite the recognition of some implementation problems and constraints, EMI has been widely introduced into various non-native English-speaking countries including Thailand (Luanganggoon, 2020).

English has evolved from being foreign language or L2 to the language of academic disciplines in tertiary education (Wanphet & Tantawy, 2018). A major outcome of international colleges particularly in Thailand in terms of internationalization is the adaptation of English as the EMI for all the study programs. Furthemore, English-medium domination is deeply rooted in social, economic, and technological development as well as in international communication due to the results of globalization noticed in more English-medium programs in higher education institutions (Doiz, Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2013). This is further supported by Chapple (2015) who investigated the relationship between teaching quality of the EMI program and the learning barriers. Chapple found that understanding the lecturers' perspectives would contribute to the enhancement of the teaching practices and effectiveness of EMI. Using EMI in a university study program is a method to prepare an English-proficient labor force so as to help it compete in the global market as emphasized by Troudi (2009).

The teaching of English as a foreign language is always a challenging task. When it comes to the places where English serves a very limited purpose, it becomes more crucial and painstaking to teach and learn. The aim of EMI in this research is to develop students' English professional capability, increase their knowledge of different academic disciplines, and prepare them to take

part in the international community (Wanphet & Tantawy, 2018). In this context, English is considered an instrument rather than a subject. In other words, mastery of the English language is regarded as a by-product of attaining academic knowledge in content courses (Alfehaid, 2018). As a result, all the international colleges, as well as international programs of faculties in higher education institutions of Thailand, are using EMI as an internationalization strategy to implement their course curriculum. According to Taguchi (2014), EMI is used in many other countries as an internationalization strategy in higher education.

Lecturers have experienced great difficulty in making students understand the knowledge of the teaching content if the English language is their L2 (William Dharma Raja & Selvi, 2011). This is because L2 learners require conscious effort to learn it and the exposure to the English language is limited. This is a different case of learning their first language (L1) or mother tongue whereby they learn it easily due to the favorable environment and by the great amount of exposure to their L1 (Phantharakphong et al., 2019).

Choomthong (2014) found that Thai students are less proficient in English compared to other ASEAN member countries. Therefore, Thailand's higher education institution, in particular, is considered as the main mechanism to equip students with not only sufficient professional skills but also higher English language proficiency (Bunwirat & Chuaphalakit, 2016). Currently, Thai people continue to rush to international programs which use EMI to sharpen their English competence. However, criticisms continue to arise as the teaching and learning of English in Thailand's basic education has not been able to provide students with an adequate level of proficiency to speak and perform satisfactorily in international tests (Dumrongkiat, 2016).

Subsequently, a major outcome of Thailand International College is to adopt English as the EMI for all the study programs. For instance, lecturers of all the international colleges in Thailand are either Thai or foreigners who can use English for instruction and some of them are native speakers of English. The impact of English as seen in the international college context is a rapidly growing tendency for English to be adopted as the EMI, even when most of the population speaks Thai as their local language. The rapid spread of EMI does not imply immediate success but is fraught with difficulties and challenges. Along with the implementation of educational policies of Thailand international college that call for EMI, there is a belief that language learning will take place during content delivery in a second language (Rogier, 2012).

Since this research addresses the use of EMI within the international programs at Thailand international college, the adoption of English as a language for teaching academic content was, in essence, prompted by instrumental motivations. After several years of EMI implementation, this timely research sought to consider the effectiveness of this instructional approach through the learning and teaching experiences of students and lecturers. It is hoped that this research will contribute to the knowledge of the effects of EMI in higher education on language proficiency, particularly in

contexts where EMI is initiated in Thailand where the native language is not English. It is anticipated that the research results will lead to awareness and improved practices among lecturers in EMI environments that will be beneficial to the students in terms of English language learning in contexts where EMI aims to improve language proficiency.

**Literature Review**

Past researchers examined several factors and provided an in-depth understanding of EMI outcomes. To carry out a systematic review, I (as the researcher) began with Spolsky's (2004) Language Policy Framework, challenges of EMI implementation, and past research review.

*Spolsky's Language Policy Framework*

I have drawn on the stimuli of Spolsky's theory to analyze its relevance to current English language policy in Thailand to reach a conclusion as to whether, and if so, how these forces have motivated Thailand's English language policy. Spolsky (2009, p. 1) proposes that language policies at the national level are determined by four common and co-existing forces, namely, (i) national (or ethnic) ideology or claims of identity; (ii) the role of English as a global language; (iii) a nation's sociolinguistic situation; and (iv) increasing interest in linguistic rights within the human and civil rights framework.

National ideology and identity refer to the infrastructure of beliefs and principles relevant to a collective mind that may be apparent in language policy. In the context of Thailand's non-colonial past and the scarcity of an intra-functional role of English in the country (Suntornsawet, 2019), where Thai language as an official language assumes predominance in national and cultural identity (Spolsky, 2004).

The role of English is defined as the "tidal wave of English that is moving into almost every sociolinguistic repertoire" throughout the global language ecology (Spolsky, 2004, p. 220). Owing to English as the language of global communication, it has come to index a cosmopolitan social and economic mobility. Ytsma's (2000, p. 228) reference to the Netherland's emphatic prioritization of English as L2 of a language polity can seeve as a good example. However, the wave can also create tensions between linguistic internationalization and local language interests (May, 2014), meaning the tidal wave may also be resisted by the method of interferences to protect the prominence or vigor of local languages. For instance, the debate in Germany discloses a smoldering worry about English and debates arise about the marginalization of German (Phillipson, 2003, p. 80).

The sociolinguistic situation alluded above to "the number, and kinds of languages, the number and kinds of speakers of each, the communicative value of each language both inside and outside the community being studied" (Spolsky, 2004: 219). This is not just involved with the factual sociolinguistic

setting, but also with subjective perceptions about the significance of specific languages. However, it is crucial in language policy research not to accept any sociolinguistic situation prima facie because sociolinguistic arrangements may not be "inevitable or logical, but rather the result of political processes and ideologies of state formation" (Ricento 2006: 15). This is not to suggest that one should disengage oneself from the common force of Spolsky's theory but rather focus on its interconnectedness with his three other forces, as well as the salience of examining language ideologies in language policy, given perceived and real sociolinguistic situations may be manifestations of socio-political arrangements and ideologies.

The final force of Spolsky's theory (2004: 220) claims that there is an escalating global interest in "linguistic pluralism and an acceptance of the need to recognize the rights of individuals and groups to continue to use their languages". Spolsky (2005) particularly elicits the international awareness of minority issues generated by the American civil rights movement and twentieth century international human rights instruments that establish and protect language minorities either explicitly or implicitly. Language is situated as an aspect of human rights, encouraging countries to offer language rights to their minorities in some manner, such as provisions for minority language-medium schooling (Spolsky 2004). This is certainly the case, for example, for speakers of Maori in New Zealand (May & Hill 2005) and French Canadians outside of Quebec (May 2014). Spolsky's final force, therefore, predicts countries as inevitably concerned in creating and executing liberal language rights for their minorities.

### Challenges of EMI Implementation

My literature review identifies four major EMI challenges facing lecturers, including students' language abilities and proficiency, appropriate methods, and inadequate resources (Garcia, 2020). In a similar vein, Bradford (2016) proposed four categories of challenges found in EMI, namely linguistic challenges, cultural challenges, structural challenges, and identity-related (institutional) challenges.

Linguistic challenges are those related to language issues confronted by both lecturers and students involved in EMI programs. These issues are often encountered by non-native students as they struggle to understand the accented English of native lecturers (Ammon & McConnell, 2002) and they have difficulties to understand lecture content delivered in English in general (Hellekjær, 2010). On the other hand, students face many challenges in EMI, where they are unable to comprehend published academic literature in the English language because of their inadequate English proficiency. This, as reprted by Wilkinson (2013) refers to Dutch students who have problems following EMI programs at Maastricht University because of their inadequate of English language proficiency. Overall, there is a general concern in the EMI literature, often attached to self-perception or touching on the basic

assumption, that students may fall short of possessing adequate English proficiency (Huang, 2015; Wächter, 2008). On the other hand, EMI lecturers are concerned about the linguistic challenge posed by the heterogeneity seen in the language proficiency among students. The main language-related challenge encountered by lecturers is their ability to deal with such diversity in addition to their mastery of the language itself.

Cultural challenge is defined as a mismatch between the characteristics and expectations of students outside the country and those from within (Bradford, 2016). The cultural challenges are highly influenced by the experience of EMI lecturers and teachers. For example, a lecturer from Britain might be accustomed to a teaching delivery style that is highly interactive while such a style is not considered the predominant dynamic in Thailand university classrooms where students prefer to be passive learners (King, 2013). According to Bradford (2016), some Japanese lecturers were feeling compelled to adjust their teaching style which in turn may affect the national ideology and the identity force of Spolsky's theory. This kind of cultural conflict is arguably less of a cultural challenge in which interactivity in local lecturers.

Another kind of cultural challenge is cultural anxiety around EMI and an associated perceived superiority of instruction in English to the detriment of local languages which seemed to occur particularly in countries that have experienced prior subjugation of domestic "minority" languages. For instance, the case of Flanders in Belgium, where Dutch was not recognized as an official language until 1930 and French dominated the scientific and cultural life for a century or more in that region (Splunder, 2010). While there may be little evidence that EMI, in fact, is as pernicious as some seem to fear (Coleman, 2006; Hu, 2009; Jenkins, 2013), the fear itself is indeed real and cannot be ignored.

Structural challenges in the EMI program were related to overall programmatic coherence and included issues related to an insufficient number of EMI courses and support staff cannot work with diverse populations (Bradford, 2016: 4). Several studies point to reluctance on the part of potential EMI lecturers due to lack of confidence related to an absence of training or a lack of financial incentive (Byun et al., 2011). Regarding the lack of confidence, there is an overlap with the linguistic challenge mentioned earlier, with a vicious circle of administrators and potential EMI lecturers assuming that very high proficiency levels are necessary to teach EMI courses, yet with little or no institutional assistance to attain such levels.

The identity-related (institutional) challenge is related to how the EMI program is perceived from outside and the identity of the EMI program, the lecturers who are teaching the EMI program, and the students' enrollment (Bradford, 2016: 12). Institutional identity, in particular, the preoccupation around how it is perceived by the rest of the world, for example in world rankings seems to be a growing concern among higher education institutions that wish to internationalize as a key driver of EMI policy (Knight, 2015).

Mastery of the English language is viewed as a by-product of obtaining academic knowledge in content subjects. As a result, EMI is used in Thailand as an internationalization strategy in higher education (Tang, 2019). On this line of reasoning, content-based instruction (CBI) is used as the conceptual mainstay by referring to instructional approaches that make a dual, though not necessarily an equal commitment to language and content learning objectives. Hence, content-based approaches support the speaker's L2 as the medium for content learning, and content is the resource for L2 learning (Kasper, 2000). CBI supports synergistic, rather than sequential, mastery of both content and language. This occurs when students are exposed to meaningful content-related discourse conveyed in L2.

If CBI is well implemented, it enables English as Foreign Language (EFL) students to develop sophisticated literacy and English academic skills such as reading, listening and taking notes, academic writing, and oral communication (Weimer, 2002). In content courses, students are required to think critically to direct questions as well as discuss synthesize and evaluate information., In keeping with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory on L2 acquisition, communicative competence is acquired while learning about specific subjects or courses, because students use their L2 to interact with peers and the lecturer (Stryker & Leaver, 1997). Similarly, in a content-based classroom, teacher-student interactions enhance students' language proficiency because the new academic register is delivered in L2 (Gibbons, 2003). As a result, these research outcomes could have a greater contribution to have a systematic analysis made by exploring the problems and challenges faced by lecturers. Hence, I wish to focus on the importance of EMI in the teaching and learning of international programs and its management strategies.

*Past Research Review*

Wächter and Maiworm (2014) conducted an extensive survey of EMI programs throughout Europe. They found that EMI programs are aimed to attract students from other countries, prepare students for mobility and a globalized labor market, and raise the profile and ranking position of the university. Macaro et al. (2017) conducted an in-depth review of 83 studies in higher education that documents the growth of EMI in different geographical areas. Macaro et al. concluded that key stakeholders have serious concerns regarding the introduction and implementation of EMI despite sometimes recognizing its inevitability. They also concluded that the research evidence to date is insufficient to assert that EMI benefits language learning nor that it is detrimental to content learning.

Kirkpatrick (2017) found that there has been a striking increase in the number of higher education institutions in the Asian Pacific region that are moving to offer courses and programs through EMI, particularly in Malaysia and Myanmar. However, Kirkpatrick argued that the move to implement EMI has been undertaken without adequate planning and preparation for lecturers

and students. In addition, Kirkpatrick (2017) urged everyone concerned to consider the possible implications of this move to EMI for lecturers and students and proposed that higher education institutions need to embrace an inclusive language education policy in adopting EMI courses. Kirkpatrick contended that higher education institutions that have adopted EMI policies and programs need to take into account the use of English as a lingua franca and to ensure that the policies identify and encourage bi/multilingualism in the higher education institution.

Dearden (2014) obtained information from 55 countries regarding EMI as a growing global phenomenon to map the size, shape, and future trends of EMI worldwide. A total of 60 countries' British Council staff were involved as informed respondents. Dearden's (2014) result showed that the general trend is moving towards the rapid expansion of EMI provision. Besides, Dearden reported that there is official governmental backing for EMI but with some interesting exceptions. Public opinion appeared not to wholeheartedly support EMI underlying the attitudes can be described as "equivocal" or "controversial" rather than being "against" its introduction and/or continued use. This is because of the potentially socially divisible nature of EMI whereby EMI is limited accessible by lower socio-economic groups and/or a fear that the L1 or national identity will be underminedby by its prevalence.

Galloway (2017) investigated the effectiveness of using EMI in Japan and China's higher education institutions. Galloway stated that there is a mistaken view put forth both by Japan and China's governments who believe that EMI programs will improve higher education students' English proficiency, and therefore result in a workforce that there is more fluent in English. EMI is considered to provide a double benefit, namely knowledge of their course content and English language skills. Therefore, both governments and students think that this will make them more valuable in the global job market (Galloway, 2017). However, Galloway (2017) found that students understand more content when learning in their L1, compared to studying in English. Furthermore, lecturers believed EMI programs should only use English, but many also said that students' L1 could be used as a pedagogical tool with an EMI course. Lecturers seemed to regard EMI more as a method to teach the content, rather than as a tool for learning English.

The challenges of supporting quality EMI delivery in international colleges going by Dearden's (2014) research report are: (i) there is a shortage of linguistically qualified lecturers; (ii) there are no stated expectations of English language proficiency; (iii) there appear to be few organizational or pedagogical guidelines which might lead to ineffective EMI teaching and learning; and (iv) there is no EMI content in initial lecturer education preparation training programs as well as continuing professional development (in-service) courses.

Despite good planning, curriculum, textbooks, qualified lecturers, and effective administration, the teaching-learning process sometimes seems to be futile when the actual skill development is not up to the mark. At this juncture

we need to note that although our students spend a long time in language classes, they do not achieve a desirable level in various language skills and are not able to express themselves in simple English sentences. Due to the deficiencies that exist in their learning given that English is the language of EMI for core courses, the desired result cannot be achieved (Tang, 2019). Thus, it can be concluded that English in an EMI has a decorative aspect and it has no academic consequences if further investigation does not address solutions to the problems.

**Research Questions**

Based on the literature review presented so far, I would like to analyze CBI by referring to instructional approaches that make a dual commitment to language, and content learning objectives. On this line of reasoning, the general objective of this research is to empirically investigate the assumption that language proficiency increases when content delivery takes place in English. It seeks to discover the challenges faced by the lecturers while they are using CBI to teach their EMI courses. This research then proposes the following research questions:

1. What are the challenges faced by lecturers in terms of language and content while they are teaching EMI courses, namely students' language proficiency and subject matter learning?
2. Why is EMI implementation important?

**Method of study**

The target population of the current research is lecturers from four different departments within the International College at a university in Khon Kaen province, Thailand. This college was selected because it implements the policy of EMI in all its study programs. The purposeful sampling technique was employed in this qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2002). This involves identifying and selecting individuals that are especially knowledgeable or experienced with this phenomenon of interest (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In addition to knowledge and experience, Bernard (2002) noted the importance of availability and willingness to participate, and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner. In keeping with this, I contacted this college asking for permission to conduct the research and look for volunteers.

Focus group interview was used to collect high-quality data in a social context (Patton, 2002) which primarily helped me understand the specific challenges and the importance of EMI implementation from the viewpoint of the participants of research (Khan & Manderson, 1992). After considering the above circumstances, four cycles of focus group interviews were conducted

with 12 lecturers from four undergraduate programs in the international college, namely, Business Administration, International Affairs, Tourism Management, and Communication Arts. Three lecturers who came from each undergraduate program participated in the respective cycle of the semi-structured focus group interview. The 12 participants consisted of six foreign lecturers (English is their L1), two foreign lecturers (the Chinese language is their L1), and four local lecturers (the Thai language is their L1). Participants identified as R1 to R6 are the native speakers, R7 and R8 are from China, and R9 to R12 are local Thais. Table 1 shows the background of the participants.

Table 1
*Background of the participants*

| No. of Participant | Country of origin | EMI program | Teaching experience |
|---|---|---|---|
| R1 | Canada | Business Administration | 8 years |
| R2 | French | Business Administration | 5 years |
| R3 | United States | Tourism Management | 8 years |
| R4 | United States | International Affairs | 5 years |
| R5 | United Kingdom | Communication Arts | 7 years |
| R6 | The Netherlands | International Affairs | 4 years |
| R7 | China | Tourism Management | 4 years |
| R8 | China | Tourism Management | 4 years |
| R9 | Thailand | Business Administration | 4 years |
| R10 | Thailand | Communication Arts | 4 years |
| R11 | Thailand | International Affair | 3 years |
| R12 | Thailand | Communication Arts | 7 years |

The research was approved by the university's Research Ethics Board. Participants were invited to indicate their willingness to participate in focus group interviews (Dawson, Dimitrov, Meadows, & Olsen, 2013). The duration of the focus group interview was one and a half hours. The interview guide included a series of probes and clarification questions to maintain consistency in questioning across participants. The focus group interviews were conducted using the English language. The interview questions were: (1) Within the EMI course, what are the perspectives from the lecturers on the effectiveness/outcomes of the EMI policy; (2) If any, what are their suggestions to increase the effectiveness of the EMI policy in the EMI course.

Specifically, the interview questions were about EMI aimed at investigating: (1) the lecturers' experience in EMI at the university level; (2) their beliefs about students' English improved when learning through EMI; (3) the indications of whether students' academic course learning was affected when learning through EMI; and (4) lecturers' views of the importance of using EMI in teaching and learning of higher education institutions.

The interview questions were checked for their validdty and reliability by conducting a pilot study. To ensure maximum validity, I carried out a one-

to-one correspondence between interview questions asked and its underlying competency with four heads of the programs. Interviews were also conducted with one lecturer from each program who were not involved in the actual research. The results of the pilot study showed that the interview questions map to the specific competency and can be said that the interview data for that candidate is reliable and valid or consistent with the competencies deemed essential for the EMI implementation.

The interviews were audio-recorded and partially transcribed, and then coded using a thematic analysis approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994). During coding, key themes related to my research questions were identified, such as concrete examples of students' language proficiency and subject matter learning and also views of why EMI is important in teaching and learning of higher education institutions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After the first round of coding, similar themes were grouped into larger categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The exact utterances representing each frequently occurring theme were then fully transcribed based on the audio recordings. An inductive approach was used by allowing the data to determine the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To ensure participant anonymity, participants' utterances are identified only by symbol R.

## Results

This section reports the recurring themes that emerged from the four focus group interviews. The initial result is the challenges faced by the lecturers while they are teaching EMI courses. This is followed by why EMI implementation is important.

### *The Challenges Faced by Lecturers*

The results revealed that four categories of challenges, namely, linguistic, cultural, structural, and identity-related (institutional) challenges were identified.

### *Linguistic Challenges*

All the participants acknowledged that students are not at ease in writing content-based English reports but most of them do not have any difficulty taking notes in English. R7 claimed that students could not produce good content-based English reports because they were having a linguistic problem to understand the basic concepts. The following excerpt from R7 explicitly pointed out the linguistic challenges:

I found that my students could not understand the basic concepts thus they are not able to produce a good assignment and project report. Some of them just cut and paste from the website without carrying out the project. (R7)

In the same manner, when I asked about the impact of reading English vocabulary, R3, R5, R7, and R9 stated that their students learned a lot of new technical vocabulary during their teaching. However, R3 highlighted one of the most common linguistic challenges relating to students' apprehensions surrounding inadequacy of English proficiency, by students and even some Thai lecturers alike as revealed by the excerpt below:

I found that some students and even some Thai lecturers do not have a good command of English because of their environment failed to give them an opportunity to use the English language frequently. That is very challenging to me as I have to teach them technical vocabularies which they are not commonly used in their daily lives. (R3)

*Cultural Challenges*

Results indicated that most of the participants agreed that their students do not have difficulty reading English textbooks and materials except participants from the Communication Arts program. R5, R10, and R12 who are from the Communication Arts program found that most of their students read English research papers by using Thai-English dictionaries to translate difficult linguistic or technical expressions. They can only understand the content to be approached in their L1, not English. The following excerpt from R5, R10, and R12 supported the results of students' reading skills based on EMI.

My students prefer reading in their L1 because it saves time, it is easier for them to understand, is more accessible without using dictionaries, is interesting, and is more enjoyable. (R5)
I think my students felt using L1 to understand the content is much more useful and easier. Even though I am a Thai lecturer and good in English reading skills, but I still prefer to read in the Thai language than the English language. Our students are not exceptional. (R10)
The majority of my students have specific language preferences while they are reading. They like to read their L1 reading materials. This is reflected when I asked them to do the literature review. Most of their references were derived from their L1 materials. (R12).

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned, results revealed that foreign lecturers have a different view compared to local Thai lecturers in terms of students' abilities in doing their assignments in English. Most of the students could not match foreign lecturers' expectations but they were able to match local Thai lecturers' expectations. The following excerpts from R1 and R9 explicitly pointed out the results of cultural challenges faced by students' academic writing.

> Most of the students encountered difficulty in doing their assignment and writing content-based English reports. They used 'Google translate' to translate from their first language (Thai or Chinese) to the English language, depends on whether they are Thai students or Chinese students. (R1)
> My students are having cultural anxiety to learn EMI course because the Thai language has been dominated their lives since they were born. (R9)

*Structural Challenges*

Most of the participants appeared to face challenges about students' productive skills in academic writing based on EMI. R11 tried to use the Thai language to overcome students' academic writing problems. Nevertheless, R12 explained that the quality of the English language of his students use in the assignment or project report is not his concern while he is correcting their written work even though he is aware of EMI policy objectives. The following excerpts from two Thai lecturers R11 and R12 explicitly pointed out how they looked into the problems of students' productive skills of academic writing based on EMI.

> The majority of my students seemed to be ok to take notes, do their assignment, and make the project report. However, for those who could not do it, I would explain in the Thai language to help them to understand before they started doing their assignment or project report. (R11)
> I do not look at their English, I look at the technical terms and information. The quality of language is not my area of interest when I am correcting their written work. (R12)

All the foreign participants (R1 to R6) agreed that using English as the sole language of communication is their classroom practice. Moreover, the Chinese (R7, R8) and Thai (R9 to R12) participants claimed that there is no problem for students in asking and answering questions in English during class time and foreign participants (R1 to R6) stated that most of the students like to use their L1 to express themselves. While foreign participants feel comfortable using English when giving oral responses, and Thai participants prefer to use their L1 if possible.

> I find my students feel more confident to speak in their L1 because they find difficulty in finding the right English words. (R5)

> There might be some confusion if technical terms are translated into another language. (R11)

> My students can explain what they need more using L1 because they have limited English vocabulary. (R10)

*Identity-related (institutional) Challenges*

All the participants admitted that English interactional and listening skills are well implemented in the EMI classroom. The majority of the participants agreed that students can deliver oral presentations in English, and they always have peer interactions in their group work as required. Moreover, results revealed that foreign lecturers examine their own identities and place within their EMI implementation and how students struggle with issues of identity stemming from, for example, a lack of interaction between international and domestic students. Indeed, these issues have been reported by R1, R5, R9, and R12 as shown by the excerpts below:

> I notice that my students' English grammar is not good, and they are afraid that they might use a wrong English word or mispronounce another. (R9)
> All the books and materials are in English. It is more professional as all technical terms are in English and need to be discussed in English. (R5)
> L1 is more advantageous as a channel of communication with my students. (R12)
> My students told me that it is easier for them to discuss complicated materials in L1 and they told me that they cannot understand what I say. (R1)

**The Importance of EMI Implementation**

All 12 participants agreed that EMI is important based on several reasons. In light of this, I categorized the results into four themes, namely importance for language improvement, the importance for subject matter learning, the importance for career prospects, and importance as an internationalization strategy.

*Importance for Language Improvement*

According to R1 to R6, it is a desire or intention of international college or any higher education institution to improve English language learning skills and knowledge of a target culture. R6 mentioned that there is a great improvement in his students' academic English skills because he assigns students more written assignments to do. However, R5 indicated that students' English language skills are not well developed because students are not practicing the skills daily as illustrated by the excerpts below:

> I found that EMI courses can develop our students' foreign communication skills, especially those students from China who are weak in English language communication skills. They really cannot gain knowledge of content if they do not develop their language learning skills. (R1)
> I found that students' English language skills can be improved by giving them more assignments to do. They do improve as expected. The more they practice the better they will be. (R6)
> An overall improvement must come from their daily practices. But our Thai students, particularly, are not using the English language other than listening to our teaching in the English language only. So, how can they improve? (R5)
> Currently, we are in a multicultural society which makes EMI classroom as a natural environment for producing students who are proficient in more than one language. (R4)

*Importance for Subject Matter Learning*

The results revealed that the importance of EMI to convey subject matter learning. R2 stated that students can maximize the subject integration opportunities as many of the reference books are written in English. However, R8 believed that most of her students are not at ease when she has a discussion with them about the subject matter. Sometimes students refrain themselves from asking questions related to the subject matter because they lack English-speaking skills as expressed below:

> I noticed that students could maximize the subject integration opportunities if they are taught using EMI. (R2)
> I found that my students do not want to ask questions during my discussion because they can compose their subject matter learning problems. They lack speaking ability. (R8)

*Importance for Career Prospects*

The interview results showed that EMI implementation is important for career

prospects. For example, R3 and R8 pointed out that EMI implementation will open up possibilities for students to work and study abroad as well as spreading the country's own culture throughout the world as shown by the excepts below:

> This enables our students to study or work in a foreign language environment or international companies or oversea. (R3)
> Not only international colleges in Thailand but also technical and vocational colleges with EMI to feed the workforce with English and professional skills. (R8)

*Importance as an Internationalization Strategy*

Finally, all the Thai participants (R9 to R12) stated that it is the political reasons for nation-building and aligning a country with English-speaking neighbors. The following excerpts from participants can help explain the importance of EMI implementation as an internationalization strategy:

> As the main aim of the international college is resolutely proceeding with internationalization and making educational environments at higher education institutions that can compete with the best in the world, I am no doubt that EMI implementation is important. (R9)
> Most of our students decided to join an international college with the desire to study abroad. Only EMI can provide opportunities to develop our students with the needed capabilities. Besides EMI implementation can cultivate our students' identity as Thais and spreading Thai culture to the world when they study abroad. (R10)
> One of our major strengths in international college is introducing EMI so that it can attract foreign students to our faculty. (R11)
> You can see that the Thai government decision is aimed at competing with the globalized world in the field of knowledge. This can be helped by implementing EMI in higher education institutions. (R12)
> I think we should establish more international programs in teaching universities such as the Rajabhat Universities where all courses should be conducted in EMI. (R10)

**Discussion and Conclusion**

The results revealed an overview of the challenges and importance of teaching EMI courses that have been encountered in its implementation. The discussion turned to the current state of EMI in Thailand, specifically, reconsidering the global challenges presented earlier in light of local realities. Even though the results identified four challenges, namely linguistic, cultural, structural, and identity-related (institutional) challenges, there are some discrepancies of views in terms of linguistic challenges by comparing foreign and local Thai

participants. Most of the foreign participants concluded that their students' academic writing skills such as writing assignments and project reports were the most challenging skill that students failed to possess through EMI but local Thai lecturers seemed to have lower expectations in terms of students' academic writing abilities. This implies that the English competence of students is a reality that needs to improve, as emphasized by Macaro et al. (2018). This is supported by the results indicated that language improvement is one of the importance of EMI implementation.

All the participants agreed that students possess only the lowest level of academic writing, that is, taking notes in English. In addition to this, results revealed that code-switching was used by Thai lecturers to help students understand difficult aspects of the lesson as well as overcoming the cultural challenges. This result is in keeping with Galloway (2017) who found that students understand more content when learning in their L1, compared to studying in English. The use of code-switching can help students with lower performance to be able to follow the lessons better than using English only (Memory, Nkengbeza, & Liswaniso, 2018). Memory et al. (2018) stated that code-switching can reduce students' stress because when they can switch to L1, they do not have to worry about how to say it in English. While, such a position implies that as foreign lecturers are unable to translate into their L1, this tends to leave students with less understanding of subject-matter learning.

Notwithstanding the points voiced earlier, most of the participants felt positive regarding students' reading academic texts in English. They also concluded that using English-to-English dictionaries can improve students' reading vocabulary, and thereby is one of their coping strategies within EMI instruction. Yeh (2014) points to a similar result concerning the lecturers' perceptions of EMI on students' reading ability. The result is also supported by Chang's (2010) result. Chang found that lecturers' assigning English language reading tasks to their students can be an indicator to measure students' reading skills. Furthermore, the majority of the participants emphasized that their students preferred reading in their L1 if they are given a choice. Consequently, Bradford (2016) claimed that lecturers have to overcome structural challenges in providing evidence of equipping graduates with English language skills that they need for their study and future employment, and improved English language skills might be predictable with an increased exposure to EMI lectures. Ultimately, EMI implementation helps students' career prospects.

The current trend in Thailand is to attract more international students and increase the university ranking by integrating more EMI courses to globalize their institutions. As the results showed identity-related (institutional) challenges have to be taken into account to assist in internationalization strategy, it is hoped that the results of this research could shed more light on the current EMI courses and let more policymakers and lecturers know that encouraging Spolsky's (2004) Language Policy Framework is good for students in Thailand along with an appropriate

mechanism for professional training professional EMI lecturers also is necessary (Luanganggoon, 2020).

In light of all that I have said so far, I would like to consider what the likely trends and implications are for EMI in the future by investigating the importance of EMI implementation. Since all participants have similar and positive points on the importance of EMI implementation, future research should study the experiences of native speakers of English who cannot communicate at any operational level with their students (who have a different L1) or bilingual speaker who may not have near-native proficiency in English but knows the L1 of his/her students will perform better in conducting EMI courses as emphasized by Kirkpatrick (2017). The same argument may then arise in the EMI field with "imported" English native speaker lecturers and lecturers being highly valued and bumping out their locally produced counterparts.

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