Perceived Impact of EMI on Students' Language Proficiency in Vietnamese Tertiary EFL Contexts

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Abstract

English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) has been widely adopted at the tertiary level in non-English speaking countries and Vietnam is no exception. Vietnamese universities and the Vietnamese government have anticipated significant linguistic benefits for student outcomes through the implementation of EMI. Using a mixed-methods design of surveys, interviews, and focus groups with students and lecturers at six Vietnamese universities, this study investigates lecturer and student perceptions of the impacts of EMI on students' language proficiency in Vietnam. The study indicates that both students and lecturers were optimistic about students' language improvement. This study recommends some implications for students, lecturers, and further research regarding EMI in the Vietnamese EFL context. Among the recommendations to emerge from this study, assessment on students' language ability before they commence EMI courses and lecturers' adequate language competence for EMI programs should be considered.

Keywords: EMI, English language proficiency, EFL contexts, language skills, Vietnam

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam, hereafter Vietnam, is a country in Southeast Asia where Vietnamese, the national language, is the main medium of instruction in schools at all levels of education. Meanwhile, English is used as a foreign language in limited situations such as for international communication, business purposes, or international education. English language teaching in Vietnam has experienced various changes based on socio-political and economic developments in different historical stages. However, since Doi Moi (Renovation), English has consolidated its role as one of the most important foreign languages in globalization and internationalization in Vietnam.

First introduced in Vietnam in the 1990s, English as a medium of instruction (EMI) has become one of the country's current English language teaching (ELT) trends. Considered to be the first written policy document regarding the implementation of EMI, the Resolution on Higher Education Reform Agenda (HE) issued in 2005 officially documents English as a tool to teach and learn other subjects at the tertiary level. Since then, the implementation of EMI has been encouraged, but not compulsory, in Vietnamese tertiary EFL contexts as a response to globalization. The Vietnamese government expects EMI courses to assist with equipping Vietnamese graduate students with English language proficiency and academic expertise necessary for studying, working, and communicating efficiently in global contexts (Tran, Burke, & O'Toole, 2021). EMI has been implemented in some selected Vietnamese universities that meet the requirements set by the Ministry of Education and Training (e.g., with regards to teaching staff, resources, and facilities). Vietnamese students have the right to enroll in an EMI program if they satisfy specific criteria, such as passing the national university entrance examination and meeting the language requirements.

Literature Review

In recent years, the EMI approach has become a global phenomenon (Dearden, 2014; Goodman, 2014; Kirkpatrick, 2011a; Lei & Hu, 2014; McKay, 2014; Othman & Saat, 2009; Smala, 2009; Taguchi, 2014). Many researchers note that EMI has a significant role in the higher education systems of Asian and European countries as a part of universities' strategies for internationalization as many universities - and indeed governments – see EMI as integral to improving learners' English language competence (Byun et al., 2011; Chapple, 2015; Le, 2012; Wächter & Maiworm, 2014). However, the benefits of EMI to students' language competence are contested across cultures and nations. While some students believe that they can improve their language ability through EMI courses (Tatzl, 2011; Wächter & Maiworm, 2014; Yeh, 2014), others find that EMI does not have any influence on their English proficiency (Lei & Hu, 2014). A study conducted by Collins (2010) with 1011 students and 117 instructors in an English-medium university in Turkey reveals that students' self-perceived low language proficiency is the reason why "they feel disadvantaged during their college years (Collins, 2010, p.97). However, Collins (2010) also notes that EMI is a solution for non-English speaking countries like Turkey "to survive in the international market" (p.97). Lecturers and students in his study perceived the importance of the implementation of EMI as well as its linguistic benefits and employability to university students. Dearden (2014) defines EMI as "the use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English" (p.4). This approach aims to broaden learners' subject-area knowledge and promote their English proficiency and professional expertise in English. In this way, English seems to be a "tool for academic study, not as a subject itself" (Taguchi, 2014, p. 89). Similarly, many scholars point out some advantages of EMI, such as improving English, fully participating in international

communication (Cots, 2013; Seitzhanova, et al., 2015), encouraging international students to enroll, improving the university rankings, and promoting the learning of English (Cots, 2013).

Tatzl (2011) conducted a questionnaire survey and individual interviews on English-medium masters' programs at an Austrian university of applied sciences and indicated that the student participants perceived the positive influence of EMI courses on their English language skills. Tatzl (2011) notes that this is "the greatest benefit of English-medium instruction" (p. 258). The lecturer participants in his study stated that students are encouraged to practice the language in EMI courses. They believe that their EMI students are more confident in speaking skills.

In Korea (Republic of Korea), scholars (Byun et al., 2011; Lee, 2014) show that EMI approaches have been implemented at the tertiary level and expected to improve students' English skills to prepare them to work in the global environment. The findings from surveys and focus groups conducted by Byun et al. (2011) and the Centre for Teaching and Learning at Korean University indicate that students feel satisfied with EMI courses at Korean University (KU) as these courses are believed to help improve students' English proficiency. As noted by Byun et al. (2011), the EMI policy at Korean University seems to be successful, or "at least the outcome of EMI policy has so far been in line with the broader policy goal of internationalizing KU" (p. 438). However, the students believe that their English abilities need to be improved to take EMI courses more effectively, even though the findings show that English competence does not significantly affect their understanding of the subject-area knowledge.

A study undertaken with 476 EMI students at six Taiwanese universities by Yeh (2014) stated that there are various reasons students take EMI courses. Their lecturers' expertise in the content-area knowledge and their demands for improving their English ability are the most frequently cited. As with the findings of Byun et al. (2011), the participants in Yeh (2014) believe that EMI courses have a positive influence on students' English language skills, especially their listening and reading skills.

However, in other contexts, the benefits of EMI for students are perceived differently. For example, Lei and Hu (2014) conducted a study to examine whether EMI had any impact on students' English proficiency and affect in English learning and use from an undergraduate EMI program at a Chinese university. Their findings indicate that EMI courses do not improve students' English proficiency nor have a positive impact on English learning and use. Even, the students in their study perceived that "the intensive English listening and speaking instruction that the EMI students received in freshman year appeared to be more effective in improving their English proficiency than the EMI itself" (Lei and Hu, 2014, p. 122).

Interestingly, as with other scholars (Byun et al., 2011; Yeh, 2014), the findings of Chapple (2015), who conducted a mixed-method study using questionnaires and interviews with Japanese EMI teachers and students in two private universities in Western Japan, reveal that EMI courses in Japan are mainly implemented to improve the English proficiency of university students. However, as 34% of the students in these classes "failed to complete them and either gave up or officially withdrew" (Chapple, 2015, p. 5), the linguistic gains through EMI courses were described by the researchers as "dubious" (p. 4). Specifically, the findings of Chapple (2015) show that 33% of Japanese students in their study rate "*Some*" for the linguistics benefits from EMI, 18% think they have "*Considerable*" improvement in language proficiency, while 24% confirm that there is no change in their English ability through EMI courses. The rest of

the students are unsure about the impact of EMI on their language ability. Significantly, some issues that influence the effects of this approach on teaching language skills are also presented in Chapple (2015), such as one-way and teacher-centered Japanese teaching style and lecturers' lack the ability to "teach EMI classes effectively" (Chapple, 2015, p. 4).

The perceived impact of EMI on students' linguistic competence from previous studies in different contexts helps identify the issues that need to be addressed in the present study, including whether students and lecturers perceive EMI to have an impact on Vietnamese students' language proficiency and its impact on particular language aspects (listening skills, reading skills, writing skills, speaking skills, knowledge of grammar and vocabulary). This study was conducted to gain insights into lecturers' and students' perceptions of the impact of EMI on students' language proficiency using surveys and interviews at six universities located in Northern Vietnam, Central Vietnam, and Southern Vietnam.

Research Methods

An explanatory sequential mixed methods design, including surveys (students and lecturers), interviews (lecturers), and focus groups (students), was adopted in this study. As suggested by scholars (Creswell, 2012; Mills & Gay, 2016; Pole, 2007), this design provides a better understanding of the research problems or issues than either research approach alone. Closed questions in questionnaires with five-point Likert items were adapted from Byun et al. (2011), Yeh (2014), and Tatzl (2011). Particular Likert items of this study are shown in Table 1. The items in the questionnaires seek an understanding of participants' perceptions of the linguistic benefits of EMI to students. Meanwhile, the semi-structured questions were used for in-depth interviews with lecturers and focus group interviews with students to refine, consolidate and explain the quantitative findings.

Table 1
Five-Point Likert Items Used in the Study

Student Questionnaires		**Lecturer Questionnaires**	
Categories	Likert items	Categories	Likert items
Self-satisfaction with language proficiency in EMI courses	*1 = Not at all satisfied, 2= Not satisfied, 3 = Partially satisfied, 4 = Satisfied, 5 = Highly satisfied*	Students' language competence before commencing EMI courses	1 = *Not at all*, 2 = *Not much*, 3 = *Neutral*, 4 = *Somewhat*, 5 = *Very much*.
Self-assessment of four language skills	*1= Poor, 2= Below average, 3= Average, 4 = Above average, 5 = Excellent*	Students' language proficiency improvement through EMI courses	1 = *Strongly disagree*, 2 = *Disagree*, 3 = *Neutral*, 4 = *Agree*, 5 = *Strongly agree*.
Language proficiency improvement through EMI courses	1 = *Strongly disagree*, 2 = *Disagree*, 3 = *Neutral*, 4 = *Agree*, 5 = *Strongly agree*.		

Research Site and Participants

To understand the perceived impact of EMI on Vietnamese students' language proficiency, six Vietnamese universities in the southern, northern, and central parts of Vietnam were selected to participate in this study, two universities in each part. These selected universities featured and implemented EMI programs in their curriculum. The descriptions of content lecturers and EMI students involved in this research are presented in Figure 1 and the next section. The selected EMI students were enrolling in EMI courses when participating in this study and the lecturer participants had at least one year of experience in EMI programs. As suggested by Creswell (2012), the participants were selected randomly from the target universities to ensure that they had an equal opportunity of being selected and the samples could be representative of EMI students and lecturers.

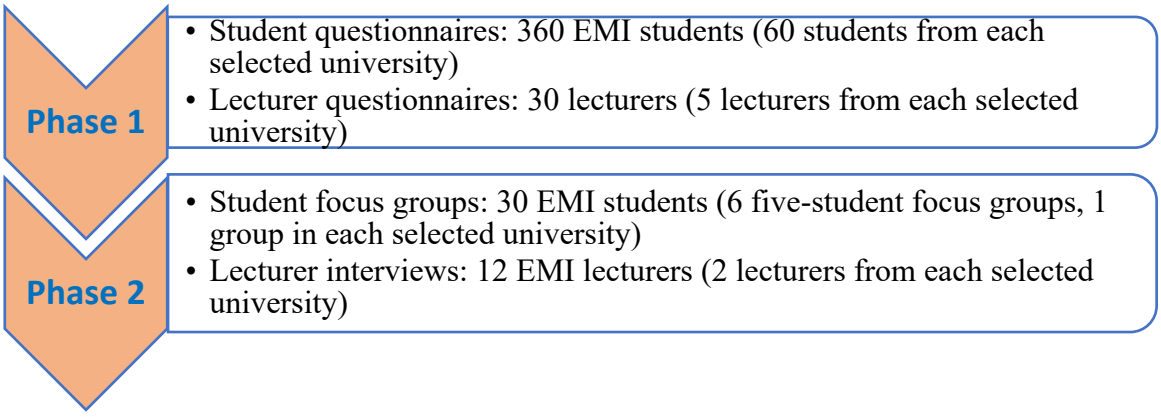
Data Collection Procedures

The present study included two phases. In the first phase, the quantitative data were collected through questionnaires for students and lecturers. Thirty content lecturers were invited, of which five lecturers were from each selected university. Meanwhile, 360 EMI students were randomly selected to respond to the questionnaires, of which 60 students were from each selected university. The questionnaires were each composed of a number of scales, consisting of groups of Likert items. This paper rests on data from the two *Impact* scales, consisting of 31 items on the student questionnaire and 32 items on the lecturer questionnaire.

In the second phase, focus groups with 30 students and interviews with 12 lecturers were used to collect the qualitative data, in which two lecturers and one five-student focus group were interviewed in each target university.

Figure 1

Participants of the Study



To ensure the participants fully understood the questions, the questionnaires, focus groups, and interviews were conducted in Vietnamese. Then, in the stage of analysis and discussions, codes, nodes, and quotes were translated into English by the main researcher author, who is bilingual and familiar with the concepts of the study.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data from the student and lecturer questionnaires was entered into SPSS 25 for quantitative analysis. SPSS is a statistical software, including "a wide range of statistical procedures" to help researchers obtain results that are "suitable for use in a research report" (Cronk, 2019, p.iii). Descriptive analysis of each questionnaire yielded demographic data for both the student

and lecturer samples and reliability measures suggested that the scales were internally consistent (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.9$ for both student and lecturer scales).

The qualitative data were organized and coded using NVivo 22 which helps researchers manage data from messy records into organizing and implementing a qualitative project, get ideas rapidly, see the relationship among ideas and concepts and then "report from the data" (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013, p. 3). As the content analysis was the main focus and aim of the analytical process in this study, both the content and context of documents from lecturer interviews (Spencer, et al., 2003) were analyzed to identify key themes, categories, and concepts (e.g., frequency of their occurrence, cluster), with the link to other variables (e.g., gender, regional locations, teaching experience), including lecturers' perceptions of the impact of EMI on students' language proficiency. Meanwhile, the relationships between themes were also examined. In addition, the qualitative data from student focus groups were analyzed using content analysis as the qualitative approach with a combination of two content analysis techniques. Signs according to their meanings were classified through the semantic content analysis in which "the frequency with certain objects (or persons, institution, or concepts) are mentioned" and "characterized" (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2007, p. 119). At the same time, the classical content analysis (Onwuegbuzie, et al., 2009) was also used to "create small chunks of the data and then placing a code with each chunk," and then, these codes "are placed into similar groupings and counted" (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009, p. 6). A matrix adapted from Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009) was also applied for analyzing the data from student focus groups, shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Matrix for Focus Group Analysis

Categories	**Groups and Respondents**						Total
	Group 1	**Group 2**	**Group 3**	**Group 4**	**Group 5**	**Group 6**	
1	Members	Members	Members	Members	Members	Members	(n)
2	Members	Members	Members	Members	Members	Members	(n)
3	Members	Members	Members	Members	Members	Members	(n)

Research Question

The findings of the quantitative and qualitative data of this study addressed the following research question:

> What is the perceived impact of EMI approaches on students' English language proficiency?

Findings and Discussions

Students' Data

Students' self-satisfaction with language proficiency in EMI courses. Students in this study showed that they were satisfied most with their reading skills (Mean = 3.6 out of 5), followed by general vocabulary and listening skills. Meanwhile, they were moderately content with their writing skills, speaking skills, listening skills, knowledge of technical terms, and grammar, in which writing skills received the lowest mean ratings at 3.0. More detailed descriptive statistics of students' self-satisfaction with their language competence are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Students' Self-Satisfaction with Language Proficiency in EMI Courses

Students' Self-Satisfaction (*N* = 360) *(1 = Not at all satisfied, 2= not satisfied, 3 = Partially satisfied, 4 = satisfied, 5 = Highly satisfied)*		
Items	**Mean**	**SD.**
Reading skills	3.6	0.8
General vocabulary	3.5	0.8
Listening skills	3.4	0.9
Technical terminology	3.3	0.9
Grammar	3.3	0.8
Speaking skills	3.2	0.9
Writing skills	3.0	0.8

Students' self-assessment of their four language skills. Overall, students rated their "*Understanding discussions during the lesson"* (listening skills) and "*Understanding instructions and questions in reading tasks*" (reading skills) with the highest scored at 3.8 while "*Using appropriate academic style*" and "*Coherence and cohesion in writing*" of writing skills were self-assessed with the lowest mean score at 3.3 and 3.2, respectively. More detailed descriptive statistics of students' self-assessment on their subskills of language competence are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Students' Self-Assessment of their Four Language Skills

Assessment on listening skills (N=360) *(1= Poor, 2= Below average, 3= Average, 4 = Above average, 5 = Excellent)*		
Items	**Mean**	**SD.**
Understanding discussions during the lesson	3.8	0.8
Understanding the lecturer's oral instructions	3.7	0.9
Understanding conversations outside the classroom	3.7	0.9
Listening and taking notes during lectures in class	3.7	0.9
Listening and understanding the content of lectures in class	3.6	0.9
Assessment on speaking skills (N=360) *(1= Poor, 2= Below average, 3= Average, 4 = Above average, 5 = Excellent)*		
Discussing the subject-area knowledge in groups	3.5	0.8
Oral presentation skills	3.4	0.9
Expressing ideas about lectures	3.4	0.8

Assessment on reading skills (N=360) *(1= Poor, 2= Below average, 3= Average, 4 = Above average, 5 = Excellent)*		
Understanding instructions and questions in reading tasks	3.8	0.8
Reading and understanding the content of the lectures in class	3.7	0.8
Scanning and skimming skills to identify main ideas and specific information	3.6	0.8
Answering reading comprehension questions	3.6	0.8
Summarizing lectures	3.5	0.8
Assessment on writing skills (N=360) *(1= Poor, 2= Below average, 3= Average, 4 = Above average, 5 = Excellent)*		
Completing course assignments in papers	3.4	0.8
Summarizing subject-area knowledge	3.4	0.8
Using appropriate academic style	3.3	0.8
Coherence and cohesion in writing	3.2	0.9

Some students in focus groups revealed that they had "*sufficient language ability to understand the lesson*" (DG2 - Focus Group 4, 25 February 2017) or "*average*" (DG4, DG5 - Focus Group 4, 25 February 2017) as they attended general English classes or ESP/AEP classes before they commenced EMI classes. Generally, student participants believed that they gained linguistic benefits through EMI courses. More details of the students' comments are presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Students' perceptions of their English proficiency improvement through EMI courses

	Groups and Respondents						Total
	AG	**BG**	**CG**	**DG**	**EG**	**FG**	
Reading skills	AG1, AG2	BG3	CG1, CG4	DG1, DG2, DG2, DG4, DG5	EG3		11
Listening skills	AG2	BG1, BG2, BG4	DG1, DG2, DG3, DG4, DG5	EG1, EG4			11
Speaking skills	AG5	BG1, BG4, BG5		DG1, DG2, DG3, DG4, DG5	EG1		10
Writing skills		BG2, BG3, BG4, BG5	CG1		EG3, EG4		7
Technical terms	AG1, AG2				EG1	FG2	4

As with the quantitative data, students believed that their reading and listening skills were improved most:

> In the past, I read, but I did not understand it much, I meant I had to read very slowly. However, now I can read, scan, and understand faster (CG1- Focus Group 3, 24 February 2017).

> In the first year, I could read very slowly because there were a lot of complicated technical terms that I did not know. Later, after one year [in EMI courses], the speed of

> my reading skill is improved, and my listening skill is better. I can understand the lesson completely in class (AG2- Focus Group 1, 16 March 2017).

Students' writing skills and vocabulary (technical terms) were believed to be improved through EMI courses:

> I have to read extra books in English; thus, I can learn a lot of new words, technical terms in English. In addition, the subjects require students to write reports or do assignments in English. I think my writing skill is much enhanced, better than listening and speaking skills' (EG4- Focus Group 5, 24 February 2017)

> Personally, I think it [language ability] has been improved a lot, but in terms of technical terms of Business rather than communication skills or something like that (EG1 - Focus Group 5, 24 February 2017).

Unlike Tatzl's (2011) findings of students' confidence in speaking skills, the quantitative and qualitative findings of this study indicate that students feel more satisfied with their receptive skills (reading and listening skills) than their productive skills (speaking and writing skills). According to Davies (1976), knowledge of a foreign language is divided into three main stages. Receptive skills at the first and second stages enable students to "understand texts of various degrees of complexity in the foreign language" and "understand the spoken language" (Davies, 1976, p. 441). Meanwhile, at a higher level of stage three, students with productive skills are able to communicate actively in the foreign tongue to speak it and write it. The data of this study show that students have negative views of their productive skills, which is in line with the findings of lecturers' opinions of English abilities that students need to improve before commencing EMI courses (see details below).

Students' perceptions of the impact of EMI on their language proficiency are also reflected in their self-assessment on each sub-language skills, in which the overall mean scores of listening skills (Mean = 3.7 out of 5) and reading skills (Mean = 3.6 out of 5) are higher than writing skills (Mean = 3.4 out of 5) and speaking skills (Mean = 3.4 out of 5). Accordingly, students' self-assessment of receptive skills tends to be closer to "*Above average*" while productive skills are perceived at "*Average*" level. For example, they can comprehensively listen and understand the content and take notes during lectures (listening skills). Meanwhile, students believe that they can understand the content-area knowledge and scan and skim skills to identify main points or specific information (reading skills).

Students' perceptions of their language proficiency improvement in EMI courses. The quantitative findings indicate that students rated their language competence improvement with a range of mean scores from 3.3 to 4.0. More detailed descriptive statistics are shown in Table 6.

Table 6
Students' Perceptions of their Language Proficiency Improvement in EMI Courses

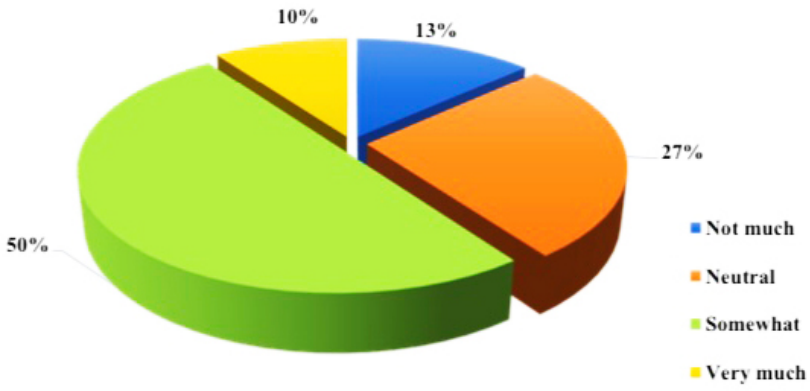
Students' language proficiency improvement (N=360) *(1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Disagree)*		
EMI courses help enhance my…	**Mean**	**SD.**
knowledge of technical terminology	4.0	0.7
listening skills	3.7	0.8
reading skills	3.7	0.7
speaking skills	3.7	0.8
general vocabulary	3.7	0.8
writing skills	3.6	0.8
knowledge of grammar	3.3	0.9

Overall, students perceived that EMI had a positive impact on their language proficiency. The data show that students' knowledge of technical terminology was most improved, followed by reading skills, listening skills, and speaking skills, while their knowledge of grammar is believed to be improved least. As presented by Tran et al. (2021), who conducted a study to explore challenges facing EMI students in Vietnamese EFL contexts, students had to read textbooks and extra materials and prepare new words before class, which may explain why their reading skills and knowledge of vocabulary were perceived to be improved most. As explained in focus groups, students' language proficiency improvement is linked to learning and teaching strategies and their own English level before commencing EMI courses, lecturers' language proficiency, and students' learning attitudes.

Lecturers' Data

Lecturers' assessment on students' language competence before EMI courses. Figure 2 shows that half of the lecturer respondents rated students' English proficiency before they commenced EMI courses at "*Somewhat*", 27% rated at "*Neutral*", 13% at "*Not much*", while only 10% believed that their students' language competence "*Very much*" meets the language requirements for EMI courses.

Figure 2
Lecturers' Assessment on Students' English Ability Before EMI Courses



The findings are consolidated in students' responses when they rated most of the items (5 out of 7) of their satisfaction of language proficiency below 3.5 (*see Table 2*). Tran (2020) noted that there is a lack of consistency in language requirements for EMI programs among

universities in Vietnam, which may lead to the fact that EMI lecturers have various opinions of the levels of students' required English proficiency.

Students' language proficiency improvement in EMI courses. Table 7 demonstrates the statistics of lecturers' ideas about students' language ability improvement in EMI courses. As with students, most of the lecturers see linguistic benefits of EMI courses to students' English level. Significantly, the highest score was at students' technical terminology knowledge (*Mean* = 4.6), followed by reading skills and general vocabulary (*Mean* = 4.5*)*. The least strong agreement was rated at "*Knowledge of grammar*" (*Mean* = 3.8).

Table 7
Lecturers' Perceptions of Students' Language Ability Improvement Through EMI Courses

Students' language proficiency improvement (N=30) *(1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree*		
	Mean	**SD.**
Knowledge of technical terminology	4.6	0.6
General vocabulary	4.5	0.6
Reading skill	4.5	0.6
Writing skill	4.3	0.6
Listening skill	4.2	0.7
Speaking skill	4.0	0.8
Knowledge of grammar	3.8	0.9

As with the quantitative findings, some lecturer respondents in the interviews stated that the students' vocabulary and reading skills were most improved, as stated:

> The students' knowledge is better after EMI courses. At least, their vocabulary and reading skills are improved (1E – Lecturer, interview, 10 March 2017).

The data also show that lecturers had more positive attitudes towards students' improvements in language proficiency through EMI courses while students seemed to be more modest about their improvements. As noted by Tran et al. (2021), students were most challenged by vocabulary difficulty. However, the findings of this study reveal that students' knowledge of technical terms was believed to be improved most through EMI by both lecturers and students. As mentioned above, teaching and learning strategies that are intended to help overcome vocabulary difficulty may help students improve this aspect of language competence.

Students' improvements of four language skills in EMI courses. Overall, lecturers agreed that students made progress in terms of language learning through EMI courses, in which using writing skills to complete course assignments and reading skills to reading and understand the content of the lectures in class were perceived to be most improved (Mean = 4.4). Meanwhile, understanding conversations outside the classroom (listening skills) was the least score at 3.8.

Table 8
Descriptive Statistics of Lecturers' Perceptions of Students' Listening Skills

Students' improvement in listening skills (N=30) *(1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Disagree)*		
EMI courses help students improve their abilities in	**Mean**	**SD.**
Listening and understanding the content of lectures in class	4.2	0.8
Understanding lecturer's oral instructions	4.2	0.7
Understanding discussions during the lesson	4.2	0.7
Listening and taking notes during the lectures in class	4.1	0.5
Understanding conversations outside the classroom	3.8	0.8
Students' improvement in speaking skills (N=30) *(1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Disagree)*		
Oral presentation skills	4.2	0.8
Discussing the subject-area knowledge in groups	4.2	0.8
Expressing ideas about lectures	4.1	0.8
Students' improvement in reading skills (N=30) *(1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Disagree)*		
Reading and understanding the content of the lectures in class	4.4	0.5
Understanding instructions and questions in reading tasks	4.3	0.5
Scanning and skimming skills to identify main ideas and specific information	4.3	0.6
Answering reading comprehension questions	4.2	0.7
Summarizing lectures	4.0	0.7
Students' improvement in writing skills (N=30) *(1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Disagree)*		
Completing course assignments	4.4	0.7
Using appropriate academic style	4.1	0.6
Summarizing content-area knowledge	4.1	0.7
Coherence and cohesion in writing	4.0	0.7

The qualitative data findings show that although four language skills are thought to be necessary for the students in EMI courses, lecturers believe that reading skills and listening skills are the most important. They think that students need to read many documents/textbooks in English and understand lectures (listening skills) in class as "*In my major, students need to read lots of books*" (2A – Lecturer, interview, 14 March 2017). However, speaking skills are perceived to be the least important. Although EMI courses were believed to help students improve their language proficiency, how much progress was actually made was explained differently, as admitted: "*not the same to all students*" (2E – Lecturer, interview, 13 March 2017). Some lecturers added that students' language ability improvement depended on lecturers' and students' efforts with no clear explanations of specific efforts or how they worked to enhance students' language proficiency.

> With 6-years' experience in teaching in English, I find that whether students can improve English or not depends on the effort of both teachers and learners. The majority of students' language ability is improved. However, to what extent of the improvement depends on the level of effort of the learner. In a class, about 20% of students make significant progress and their English ability has been improved from the first year to their graduation, but 30% of them are at a low level (2D – Lecturer, interview, 22 February 2017).

As with students' data, the lecturers' data show that students' English level before they commence EMI courses and lecturers' language proficiency influence students' improvement in English competence.

> Students' language ability will be improved a lot if lecturers pronounce correctly; if they do not, there is no improvement (1C – Lecturer, interview, 16 March 2017).

More specifically, lecturers explained that students' language proficiency was improved because they used English as an everyday habit in class and during lesson preparations and having lectures in EMI classes.

> Of course, their language proficiency has been improved. What you work with every day, think of it every day, concern about it every day, it [English] will become yours. …. Supposing the students are lazy, they do not want to study English at home. However, at school, they study in an environment where English is used completely; their language proficiency must be different [improved]. For example, they may not understand a word for the first time, but when they hear that word repeatedly for the second time, the third time, they will get it. Having experienced with 5 or 6 EMI courses in the Advanced Programs, I have found that students' language level is much improved (1D – Lecturer, interview, 16 March 2017).

As mentioned above, the students are modest about their progress in their language competence through EMI courses. As noted by many scholars (Chapple, 2015; Tran et al., 2021), content lecturers seem not to see their roles in students' language learning and use through EMI courses as their main responsibilities in EMI courses are believed to deliver content-area knowledge in English. Content lecturers believe that students' understanding of the content is the most important. As a result, they tend to deny their responsibilities for teaching English in EMI courses. Furthermore, Tran (2020) stated that Vietnamese lecturers did not perceive the effectiveness of collaboration between language lecturers and content lecturers in EMI courses in terms of linguistic support for students. The lecturers' lack of language proficiency and EMI training was also found in her study, which influences the way lecturers deliver the lecture in English, learners' engagement in the classroom, and the role of language and content teaching in EMI courses. Accordingly, students blame lecturers' language proficiency, especially lecturers' accents and pronunciation, for the quality of EMI lectures and lecturers' focus on delivering the content but avoid communicating with students in English during EMI lectures (Tran et al., 2021). These factors may explain the findings of students' perceived satisfaction with their improvements in language competence in this study.

Limitations

The strength of this study is the mixed-methods design with the incorporation of lecturer and student voices to address the perceived impact of EMI on students' language proficiency in

multiple perspectives. However, this study is based on the participants' reported perceptions and beliefs, and these may not adequately reflect practices happening in real EMI classrooms such as which language skills are practiced and how much the first language is used. In addition, the participants may not respond honestly when they give some comments on sensitive items such as students' responses to self-assessment on their own language ability because they are concerned about losing face. Furthermore, two of the target universities nominated the participants for the study; therefore, the respondents may avoid being disloyal to their employers or lecturers. Finally, the target research sites of this study are focal universities in big cities of three parts of Vietnam; consequently, the results may not be generalized to other Vietnamese universities in other parts of Vietnam.

Recommendations

EMI courses at the tertiary level are expected to bring students linguistic and non-linguistic goals (Tran, 2020). However, in an under-resourced context like Vietnam, the implementation of EMI needs to be well prepared and deployed to help students gain linguistic benefits. The findings of the present study suggest some implications for implementers (students, lecturers, and universities) and further research in Vietnamese tertiary EFL contexts.

First, EMI students need to well perceive the importance of their English level before commencing EMI courses. Students' English competence needs to be assessed through standardized benchmarks such as IELTS, TOEFL, "which are tailored to academic skills" (Nguyen et al., 2017, p. 43). In addition, English language teaching should prepare students for language competence from secondary and tertiary levels. Even when students meet the language requirements for EMI programs, English for specific purposes and English for Academic Purposes courses should be considered to equip them with skills of using language academically before they attend EMI courses.

Second, as discussed above, lecturers' lack of language proficiency may affect students' language learning. Therefore, lecturers should be aware of the roles of professional development, especially in preparing language competence for delivering the content-area knowledge in English, particularly their communicative skills (e.g., accent, pronunciation, accuracy, and fluency of expression in EMI lectures, and in dealing with questions) and the use of English in the academic environment. For example, they should attain language certificates such as IELTS, TOEFL or take part in international conferences and training courses for EMI lecturers. They also should consider consultancy or collaboration with language lecturers.

The findings of this study were mainly based on lecturers' and students' opinions. More research should be undertaken to understand better the actual impact of EMI on students' language learning. For example, classroom observations may provide evidence of how four language skills are practiced and how much English is used in EMI courses. Pretests and posttests are also a good way to assess students' language improvement.

Conclusions

The Vietnamese government encourages the implementation of EMI programs in tertiary EFL contexts in the expectation that they will improve students' language ability "as part of the national internationalization agenda" (Tran, Burke, & O'Toole, 2021, p.49). In this study, students' and lecturers' positive attitudes toward the impact of EMI on students' language proficiency, especially on students' receptive skills (Listening and Reading), suggest alignment between the government's intentions and student and lecturer perceptions. The current study's

findings provide one baseline for research on other EMI programs within Vietnam and in non-English speaking countries or for other additional languages as a medium of instruction programs.

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