

The state of English as Medium of Instruction (EMI) in Higher Education Institutions in Indonesia

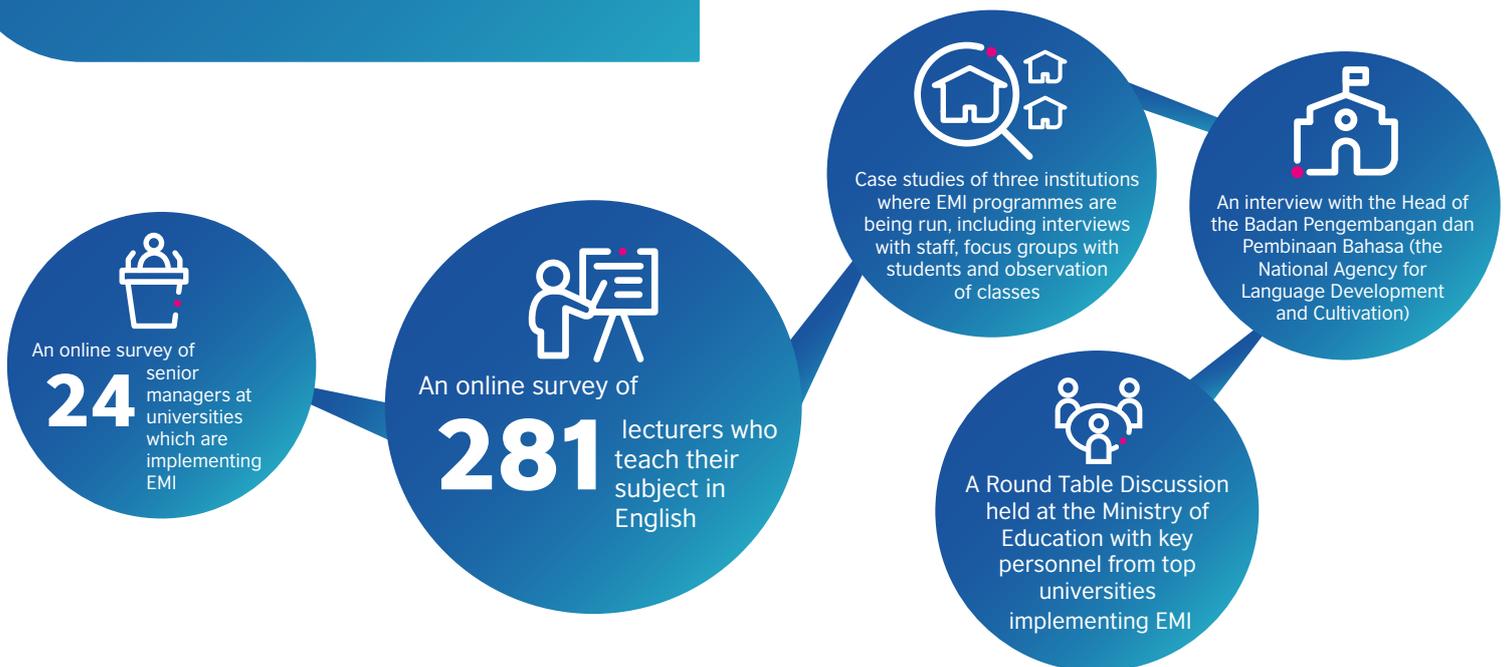
Summary

In the last decade, an increasing number of higher education institutions in Indonesia have begun using English as a medium of instruction in their academic programmes. This appears to have been a largely autonomous ‘bottom-up’ movement, part of an attempt to internationalize their curricula and strengthen their global competitiveness. While this initiative has been broadly supported by government, there is a concern to understand the extent of EMI, find out whether it is being implemented in effective ways and consider how it might be supported to optimize educational achievement. This report was commissioned by the British Council to address these issues.

The full report can be downloaded from this link:

bit.ly/EMI-IDNReport2021

A mixed-method research strategy was adopted involving:



The results confirmed that EMI is spreading fast in the more prestigious higher educational institutions (HEIs), driven partly by a conviction that it is important for maintaining that prestige, as well as a sincere belief in some quarters that it can improve students’ English proficiency without harming their learning of subject knowledge.

EMI is being introduced at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, across almost all subject areas in Sciences and Humanities, in programmes with international students and also in courses exclusively for Indonesian students. Teaching staff are generally enthusiastic about EMI and we heard about, and witnessed directly, some successful enactments of the strategy. When it works well, it clearly offers a number of benefits for individuals and institutions.

However, we also uncovered evidence of poor practice where educational standards were likely to be severely compromised; such practice is usually the result of students having inadequate English and/or lecturers not knowing how to adapt their teaching for EMI. It appears that EMI is being implemented in many HEIs without any explicit policy statement, any provision of training for staff or students, any systematic checks on quality, and even in some instances without the full knowledge of management.

Defining EMI

EMI is defined as ‘the use of the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English’ (Macaro, 2018). This definition is relevant to the context of Indonesian higher education, where current trends indicate a move from Bahasa Indonesia medium instruction towards an expansion of EMI provision at universities that are striving for internationalisation. An alternative definition aligns EMI more with content and language integrated learning (CLIL): “English-medium education refers to curricula using English as a medium of instruction for basic and advanced courses to improve students’ academic English proficiency” (Taguchi, 2014). EMI programmes come in many forms, that can be placed on a continuum, such as that depicted in Figure 1 (adapted from Thompson & McKinley, 2018).

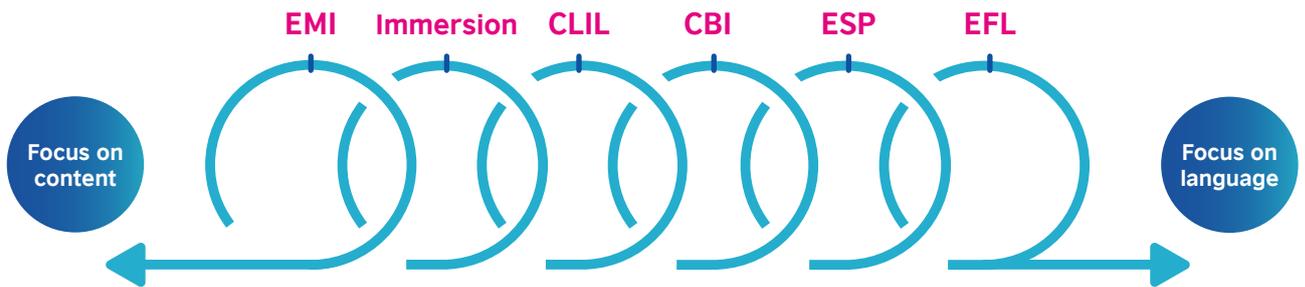


Figure 1– Continuum of EMI in practice (adapted from: Thompson & McKinley, 2018)

In Figure 1, EMI as a policy would be placed at the far left (with ‘content’), while EMI in practice, depending on the programme, might be located anywhere along the centre to left part of this continuum. Taguchi’s definition, located somewhere around the middle of this continuum, might more accurately capture the actual practice of implementing EMI in many institutions of higher education where there is a dual focus on students’ acquisition of both content and language knowledge (CLIL), or even a predominant focus on language development through the teaching of content (CBI).

EMI in the East Asia region

The growth of English-medium instruction (EMI) worldwide has famously been described as an “unstoppable train” (Macaro, 2015) sweeping enthusiastic policy-makers and educators off their feet as they charge towards a truly internationalized future.

Dearden’s (2015) well-cited survey of 60 countries worldwide found that, despite concerns about educational benefits and social inclusivity, there was “a general trend towards rapid expansion of EMI” and an expectation that it would continue to grow.

In most Asian countries, many of the same interconnected factors are reported to be driving the trend towards EMI:



the ever-increasing dominance of English in academic publishing, which means contemporary learning resources for students are in English, and opportunities for staff career development often require competence in the language



a desire to internationalize HEI, both for its own sake to facilitate regional/global collaborations and to push institutions upwards in domestic and global leagues tables – the number of international students being an indicator of HEI internationalization (QS Intelligence Unit, 2019)



to provide for increased numbers of fee-paying international students



a concern with the English language standards of university graduates as they enter an increasingly competitive global labour market.

Figure 2 – Driven factors for the trend toward EMI

The state of English as Medium of Instruction (EMI) in Higher Education Institutions in Indonesia report includes details on current EMI trends in China, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines.

What is the current ambition for EMI in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and how is this supported through national policy, local policies and implementation strategies?

The evidence suggests that EMI is becoming increasingly common in Indonesia. We estimate that there is, or soon will be, an EMI programme at virtually all the top HEIs in the country. At the elite institutions, EMI is operating in several different subject areas and hundreds of students are involved; at other institutions it may be restricted to one or two courses on a single study programme.

This rapid growth appears to be happening organically, and does not appear to be coordinated, planned or even monitored. While ministerial pronouncements may have given encouragement to HEIs to introduce EMI, there is no official policy and the legal position of EMI is questionable. Few HEIs have an official policy on MOI, as far as we could tell; this reflects the fact that EMI is a very recent development.



Responses to the lecturers' survey show that almost every conceivable subject area in the HE curriculum is being taught in English somewhere

There seems to be little consistency in regulations concerning entry to EMI programmes, either as staff or student.

- Only 7 HEIs reported on English proficiency requirements for students, and only 2 of these mentioned specific scores (IELTS 6.5, IELTS 6.0).
- Managers were even more vague about qualifications of lecturers to teach EMI – 7 mentioned that lecturers had to have studied abroad themselves, and 6 said they had to demonstrate some proficiency in English.
- Only at the 'English-only' HEI in Jakarta was there any check on teachers' pedagogic skills – all applicants there had to do peer teaching in English as part of the selection process.

In Indonesia we found that management in some HEIs did not know which of their programmes were running EMI courses. The decision to introduce EMI may rest with Deans or even lower down the hierarchy, and implementation depends on the enthusiasm of particular academics. Not surprisingly at the micro-level of courses and classes we found a great diversity of practices, for instance differences in entry qualifications (if any), teaching methods and forms of assessment.

Who and/or what are the driving forces behind the implementation of EMI in Higher Education institutions (HEIs) in Indonesia?

This rapid proliferation of EMI programmes is being driven by similar factors across the region. There is some evidence of bottom-up demand, from students and their parents.

All surveyed managers view EMI as enhancing the employability of their students "prepare students for the global labour market", and improving their HEI's international status. All but one believes EMI will improve the general level of English among students. Interestingly they also align almost exactly with the views of lecturers.

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80% of lecturers sampled said they believed their HEI should offer more EMI in the future.”

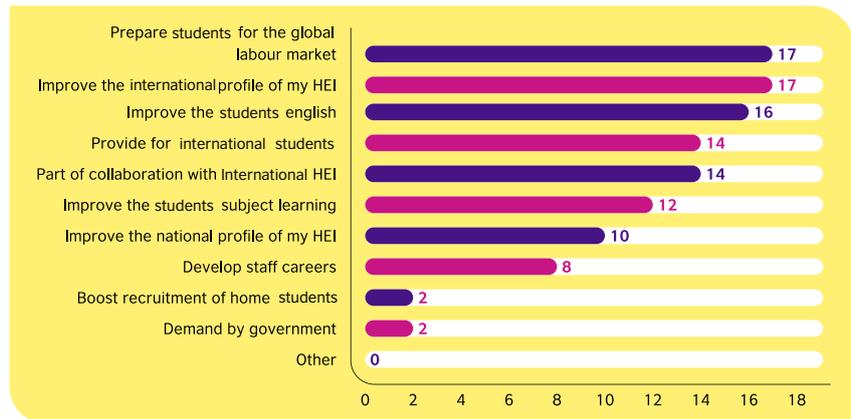


Figure 3 – HEI managers’ reasons for expanding EMI (n = 24)

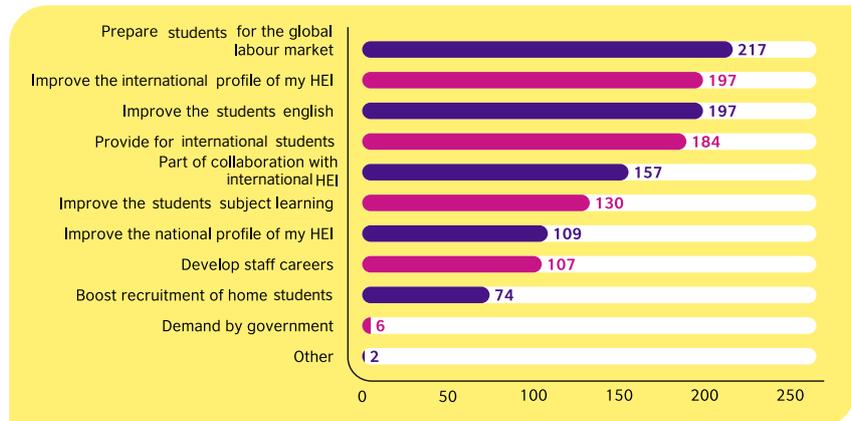


Figure 4 – Lecturers’ reasons for why their HEI should expand EMI (n = 275)

The strongest drivers of EMI relate to the very understandable ambition of institutions to boost their national and international profile, specifically by improving their position in league tables. EMI is implicated in this in at least three ways: it facilitates student and staff exchange, can (hypothetically) enhance standards of English among staff, and it could thereby help to boost publication rates and citation numbers. As one Vice-Rector wrote, “English is needed so we can take an active part in international academic debate”.

The perception that EMI improves the employability of Indonesian graduates is of course closely linked to the third reason, that EMI improves their English. “English is needed so that our graduates can get jobs at global or top national companies. This is part of our university’s strategic objective, to maximize our graduates’ employability” Manager at one private metropolitan university.

What are the strategies, approaches and forms of EMI currently being implemented in HE institutions in Indonesia?

Apart from one private metropolitan HEI, where the curriculum is exclusively in English, Bahasa Indonesia is the default MOI and EMI is a minority practice. **We have identified at least five distinct types of EMI provision:**

- 1. EMI on international (dual degree) programmes:** Collaborative 'International undergraduate programmes' (IUPs) where Indonesian students study abroad in Year 3 and 4 and get a dual degree;
- 2. EMI on international (single degree) programmes:** IUPs where students study mainly in Indonesia and get only a single degree, though perhaps pay a higher fee;
- 3. EMI on regular programmes:** Regular undergraduate programmes where students are required to take a certain number of credits on EMI courses, and may be joined by international exchange students;
- 4. EMI for international exchange students:** Undergraduate courses intended specifically for international exchange students but which some home students can join;
- 5. Postgraduate EMI programmes:** Postgraduate programmes exclusively or mainly in English.

EMI is being implemented at all levels of the HE system – nearly 90% of respondents to the lecturer survey were mainly teaching EMI at UG levels, while some were also teaching at Master's and research degree levels; 10 lecturers reported teaching EMI on non-degree courses.

There is some overlap between these forms of EMI (e.g. students might start off doing A but then switch to B) and there may be other types which did not emerge in our data.

As for what actually happens in classrooms, it is clear that EMI is not a uniform 'method' but a cover term for a very diverse range of practices. For example, the amount of English used in class differs, with some lecturers claiming to use the language almost exclusively, while others admit that their classes are bilingual, involving a lot of switching between English and Bahasa Indonesia both for social reasons and to clarify subject matter.

In terms of teaching methodology, we also observed great variety, reflecting existing differences in style among individual lecturers as well as the differing needs of each student group. Most lecturers say they have to change their instructional methods when doing EMI, in order to compensate for some students' lower competence in English.

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What is working well and what is not working well? What are the key challenges and opportunities?

Overall, we found a high level of enthusiasm for EMI and a widespread belief that it is a positive educational development. A large majority of both managers and lecturers expressed the view that EMI was good for students' English, and for their subject learning, and a common view is that it will ultimately enhance the profile of the institution.

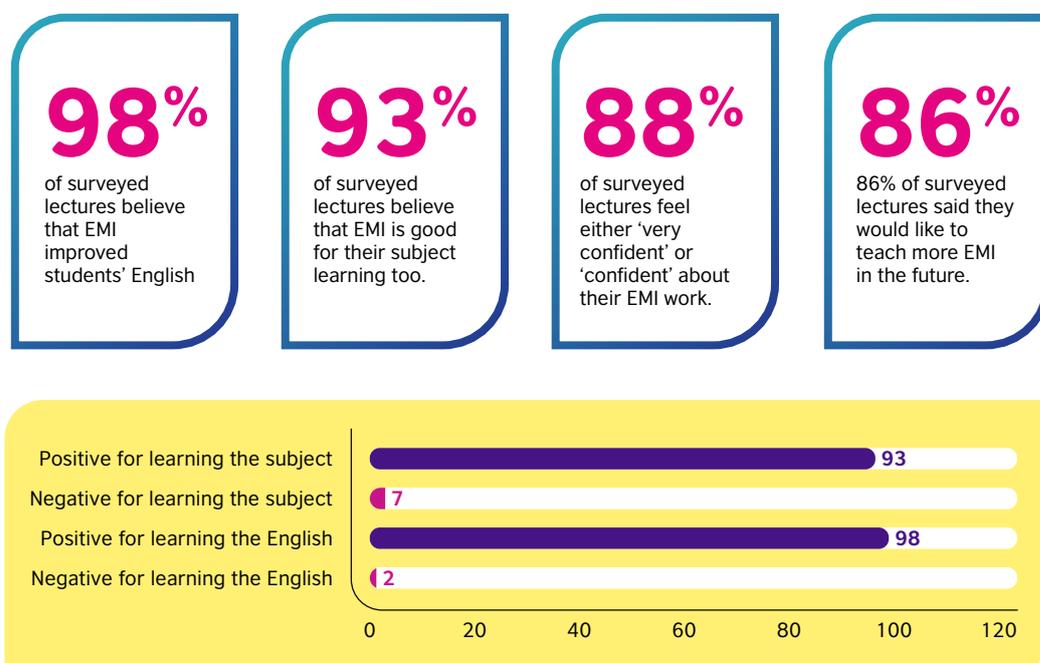


Figure 5 – Lecturers' views on the effect of EMI on student learning (%) (n=235)

“As we know that English is an international language, so it gives me some advantages to communicate with other people from other countries; so we can change our culture, change our behaviour, or something like how they do business in their country, how do they do their day, like work. English makes me easier to get more knowledge and communicate.” *Student from a central Javanese state university*

Examining EMI more closely, in case study HEIs, allowed us to add nuance to this picture; our respondents still exuded positivity about EMI, but only when the conditions were right, and that overwhelmingly meant when the students' level of English proficiency was sufficiently high.

Even lecturers who had benefited from good quality specialist training complained that EMI became a struggle when the class had too many students who could not follow the lecture. Some admitted that their lectures had to be 'simplified' in English, others that sessions had to move more slowly and therefore could not cover the whole curriculum.

“Managers admitted that their judgements were based mainly on opinion, not on any empirical data.” As far as we are aware, no formal evaluations have been carried out into actual student learning outcomes. This is not surprising as Macaro (2018) points out that this is a global lack – this is where research is perhaps most urgently needed, but where it is most difficult to produce trustworthy results. What is more, assessment practices on EMI courses seem to be even less uniform and less systematic than teaching practices.

We are not confident that EMI lecturers know whether their students are learning more or less than when studying in their mother tongue.

Managers and lecturers views on main challenges in EMI and what support is needed?

Both managers and lecturers were asked about the main challenges they faced in implementing EMI. A high degree of unanimity was apparent in their responses.

By far the biggest challenge was the relatively low level of English competence among students – no less than 179 lecturers (out of 281) complained about this, as did 9 out of 12 managers. Indonesian EMI lecturers are not alone: Macaro (2018) reports that “virtually all [research] studies have reported concerns about students’ lack of proficiency creating new barriers to content learning” (p. 92).

The next two challenges, given roughly equal emphasis, were the low level of English competence among teaching staff, and the lack of interest in EMI among home students.

It is no surprise then that both parties, when asked what support the government could give to HEIs to help them implement EMI, put more English training for students at the top of their wish-list.

Lecturers’ expressed wishes are presented in Figure 6, and it can be seen that – despite their self-confidence in the job they are doing; they know they themselves need assistance with English, and with EMI teaching methodology. Technological support was also seen as potentially useful, notably improving online learning platforms which could in turn enable students to access valuable English language audio-visual materials and subscription service study apps.

Alongside language training for students and staff, there were many requests for the government to facilitate the exchange of staff and students – both outward and inward. There was a perception that more incentives could be offered for foreign staff to teach in Indonesian universities, and more awards offered for local staff and students to study or work abroad for periods of time. In addition, it was felt that unnecessary bureaucracy was restricting opportunities for international collaborations, such as setting up dual degree programmes. While almost half of the lecturers called for training in EMI teaching methodology, only two of the managers mentioned this – but it is noteworthy that both work at HEIs which have implemented highly successful EMI staff training courses.

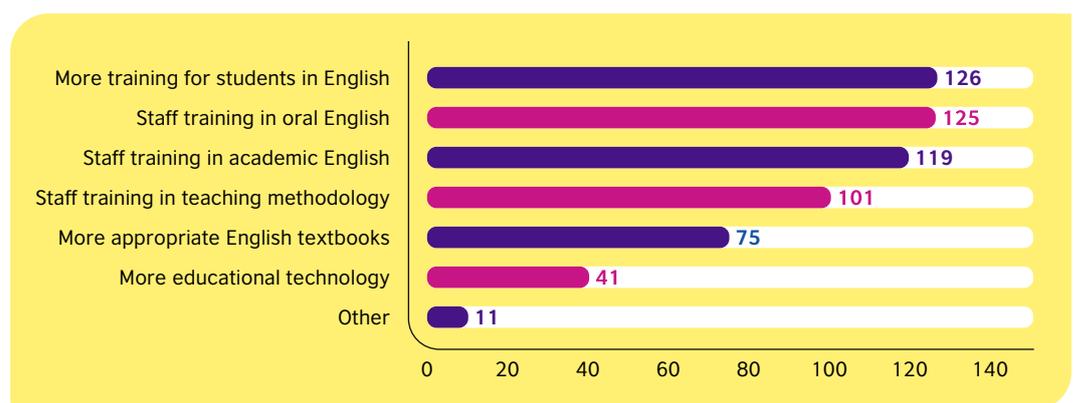


Figure 6 – Lecturers’ views on support needed for EMI (n = 235)

Recommendations



The Ministry of Education gives consideration to the creation of a quasi-official body with responsibility for monitoring and advising on the implementation of EMI programmes in HEIs.



HEIs should be encouraged to publish their policy on medium of instruction, providing a clear rationale for use of English, stating the learning goals explicitly and giving information about how those goals are assessed.



Students entering EMI programmes should have a minimum level of proficiency in English, as certified by a reputable English language test. The Ministry should support the development of an English language test for Indonesian high schools and HEIs which can be aligned with international standards such as the Common European Framework of Reference.



HEIs which want to implement EMI need to re-think their English teaching strategy. We recommend close collaboration between the university language centres and faculties, with discipline-specific instruction offered to students who are engaged in EMI courses.



HEIs must recognize that EMI also requires investment in staff training, specifically in teaching methodology and in appropriate educational technology.



There is a danger that EMI could exacerbate socio-economic differences in Indonesian society; HEIs should counter this by not allowing special entry to EMI programmes on the basis of English skills alone, and by making English skills training widely available for undergraduates.