

# Chapter 13

## English as Medium of Instruction in Vietnamese Teacher Education: Students' Learning Experiences



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**Abstract** English as medium of instruction (EMI) in the provincial universities of Vietnam, where there is almost no opportunity to use English outside class, is currently under-researched. This chapter therefore reports on a practitioner-researcher investigation at a provincial teacher training college, investigating students' learning experiences and how they perceive the effects of EMI on the development of their content knowledge construction and English language performance in a Methodologies course for teaching English in primary schools. Participants were 20s-year students and data were generated from pre- and post-tests, learning diaries, videos of micro-teaching and semi-structured interviews, evidencing students' learning experiences as well as their perspectives on the role of EMI in those experiences. The teacher's pedagogical approach was grounded in Sociocultural Theory (SCT), which highlights the role of language in learning. This provided a valuable framework for supporting students to engage with English as a mediational tool for learning, both in terms of knowledge construction and achieved linguistic solutions. The data provide clear evidence of how students built up their learning through teacher and peer scaffolding within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which in turn suggests a number of pedagogical implications for valuable EMI practices.

**Keywords** English-medium instruction · EMI · Vietnam · Higher education · Teacher education · Learning strategies

### 13.1 Introduction

While EMI is used now in a range of disciplines in tertiary education, it has particular significance in the preparation of English teachers for primary and secondary schools in the provinces of Vietnam. This is due to the fact that future teachers, especially those qualifying as English language teachers, should be able to contribute effectively

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to the development of English proficiency nationwide. This chapter therefore reports a practitioner-researcher investigation in a provincial teacher training college where English was used as the medium of instruction for a single second-year course within a Vietnamese medium program. This course was in Methodologies for teaching English in primary schools, and was thus well-suited for an initial step into EMI. The study investigates students' learning experiences in regard to the effects of EMI on the development of their content knowledge construction and their English language performance. At the same time it details the lecturer's pedagogical efforts to respond to students' difficulties while both she and they engaged in their first trial of EMI. Her aim was to move her EMI practices forward and thus enhance students' whole learning experience.

Content knowledge in Methodologies courses relates to various fields of students' psychology, education and society, in which theories and practices of teaching English to students play a crucial role. Methodologies courses primarily focus on teaching activities, enabling pre-service teachers to adjust English education into local practices (Bui & Nguyen, 2016). Thus, the English-major course at this teachers' training college provides learners with theories and practices for teaching English in Vietnamese primary and junior high schools, including knowledge of curriculum, Methodologies and textbooks, and skills of designing, organising and evaluating teaching activities and solving unexpected classroom situations. Traditionally, due to the complex content knowledge and the inadequate level of students' English language proficiency, lecturers in provincial teacher training colleges delivered lessons in Vietnamese in order to provide these teachers-to-be with the optimal understanding of the required knowledge for better application in future. Consequently, little is known about how EMI is implemented in the micro-level context of such courses and what its effect is on students' experiences of content knowledge construction.

This study adopts Dearden's (2014, p. 4) definition of EMI as 'the use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English'. In other words, English serves as the vehicle for content learning and application, and language proficiency outcomes are implicit or incidental. It is nevertheless reasonable to expect that students' English language performance will improve in a Methodologies course focusing on English language teaching, and that students who have chosen to specialise as English language teachers would be motivated to use EMI as a pathway to improving their proficiency. This might be particularly so for the students in this teacher training college who come from Vietnam's rural areas, sometimes remote highland areas, where there is little use of English in daily life and limited access to English resources. There English teaching and learning is not considered important or appreciated, compared with the big cities. As a result, university entrants from these places cannot easily compete with university students from metropolitan areas in terms of English language proficiency. This means that EMI implementation where there are multiple students from such areas has particular challenges, and therefore research is needed to inform EMI curriculum and pedagogy so that benefits occur.

Evidence of educational benefits that EFL students in EMI courses gain is documented in various Asian contexts (e.g. Chen & Kraklow, 2015; Chu et al., 2018; Fujimoto-Adamson & Adamson, 2018; Huang, 2015; Kim & Yoon, 2018; Kym & Kym, 2014) and to lesser degree in Vietnamese higher education institutions (Dang et al., 2013; Le, 2012; Nguyen et al., 2017; Vu & Burns, 2014). Studies in Taiwanese educational contexts offering student perspectives indicate that students find EMI courses helpful and motivate their learning (Chen & Kraklow, 2015; Huang, 2015) and they are satisfied with content knowledge construction and English language learning through EMI despite experiencing some challenges. Similarly, studies on EMI in Vietnam find that EMI is conducive to both content and language learning and the students have good attitudes towards this new model (Dang et al., 2013; Le, 2012, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2017; Vu & Burns, 2014). Research specifically into students' learning experiences with EMI tells us a good deal about the benefits that Vietnamese learners in EMI programs gain (Dang et al., 2013; Le, 2012; Nguyen et al., 2017; Vu & Burns, 2014). Such studies demonstrate that students improve their English proficiency and demonstrate both content and language achievement by overcoming problems they may have initially encountered with EMI. They gain content knowledge through original English textbooks from leading publishers and they gain generic skills, namely teamwork, critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills, which would be highly sought after by international organisations (Le, 2018). While potential English teachers in the rural or remote areas of Vietnam may not be invested in the requirements of international organisations, they surely are invested in improving their language proficiency alongside constructing content knowledge.

However, previous studies in Vietnam and other countries also confirm the challenges and negative impacts of EMI on students (Çankaya, 2017; Do & Le, 2017; Hu & Lei, 2014; Le, 2012, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2017; Vu & Burns, 2014; Yıldız et al., 2017; Zumor, 2019). Multi-level EMI classes comprising students of diverse English language proficiency are common (Do & Le, 2017; Le, 2012; Nguyen et al., 2017), with some individuals having insufficient English proficiency to fully access the curriculum, thus placing pressure on teachers regarding the actual conduct of EMI classes and the role of Vietnamese language. In addition, EMI does not consistently lead to English language proficiency development; students even might feel frustrated and demotivated due to their difficulties in understanding the texts or inability to express themselves and participate in classroom discussion (Le, 2018). In response to such issues, translation and translanguaging have become recognised as essential for the better understanding of terminologies (Do & Le, 2017; Vu & Burns, 2014), especially for lower language proficiency students. Finally, EMI students also have to deal with learning challenges due to conflict with their traditional learning methods and other issues of curricula, learning environment, and teaching and learning facilities (Dang et al., 2013; Vu & Burns, 2014). While insufficient English skills are reported to be one of the biggest problems among Vietnamese undergraduate students generally (Le, 2012; Nguyen et al., 2017; Vu & Nguyen, 2004), this is even more so in the provincial colleges and universities where students from rural, highland and

remote areas study. Therefore, research into EMI in such settings is greatly needed, especially with the inclusion of student voice to present reflections on their learning experiences.

## 13.2 Research Methods

The study was conducted at a teachers' training college in a central province of Vietnam, and involved 20s-year students enrolled in an EMI course in 'Methodologies for teaching English in primary schools'. The teacher education program covers three years of theory and skills development, during which time general and specialist Methodologies courses are compulsory. The Methodologies course in this study covered 60 periods (50 min each), with 48 periods working in class with teachers and the rest self-studying at home. The lessons in class were organised in a double period lasting 100 min twice a week. The lecturer used mainly English, but intentionally chose Vietnamese when students had difficulty grasping content; students' use of English was encouraged in group work and classroom discussion, with Vietnamese also accepted. The theory of learning adopted by the EMI teacher in this Methodologies course was Sociocultural theory (SCT), developed initially by Vygotsky and his colleagues, because SCT highlights the role of language in the learning process as a powerful culturally constructed tool (Vygotsky, 1978). Simply put, in learning contexts, learners use language as the key mediational tool to support their cognitive development and to construct knowledge (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). SCT is thus highly suited both to support and assess Vietnamese student experiences when being required to use English as the mediational tool for learning new content and presenting their ideas. Working in students' zone of proximal development (ZPD) was a feature of the teacher's pedagogy, and the data provide various examples of the potential development which can be achieved with the guidance and support of more knowledgeable others, known as 'scaffolding' in SCT theory (Ohta, 2000; Wood et al., 1976).

About 40% of participants consenting to participate in the study were from highland and remote areas while 35% were from rural areas and 25% from suburban districts of small provinces. Six participants were of ethnic minorities. All students had previously taken courses in grammar, listening skills and speaking skills. This Methodologies course was the first profession-related course in the program, and the first EMI course experienced by the students. Consequently the research seeks answers to two important EMI implementation questions:

- a. In what ways did students' content knowledge construction develop through EMI in this Methodologies course?
- b. In what ways did students' English language develop through EMI in this Methodologies course?

Both quantitative and qualitative data were sourced, achieving some triangulation of methods.

The quantitative data were generated from analysis of the students' pre- and post-test tasks in terms of error frequency, as reflected in the overall marks given for English language (grammar and lexis) and content. The tasks required students to design one-period lesson plans in English, based on textbooks (designed by MOET and Pearson) for teaching English in grades 3, 4 or 5 (Tieng Anh 3, 4 or 5). The assessment aim of the task was to better understand the students' lesson planning abilities and also their English language performance before and after they joined the EMI class.

Qualitative data comprised videos, learning diaries and interviews. Students' ten-minute micro-teaching sessions, with their partners as primary school pupils, were video-recorded on two separate occasions and transcribed to obtain data on their teaching skills and target language use across the course. Learning diaries were a pedagogical practice inherent in the course, written by students in both English and Vietnamese after each lesson to reflect and report on what they learned, what they were unable to discuss in English, what they found difficult to understand due to the lack of translation and what they did not understand. After every two lessons, the teacher collected and studied all participants' learning diaries, modifying subsequent EMI lessons in response. For example, revision of previous content and simplified versions of materials were provided after students reported that they could not understand the content knowledge fully; also the amount of English use in class was adjusted with more Vietnamese explanation and translation in the class sessions that focused on theory. While the intention of the learning diaries was primarily pedagogical, they also served as valuable research data, analysed thematically and grouped in relation to knowledge construction and English language development.

Additional qualitative data were generated through a ten-minute individual interview conducted in Vietnamese at the end of the course with each of the 20 students, and audio-recorded. The interview addressed ten questions focusing on: further understanding of students' self-reported learning; the challenges encountered; and their suggestions on curriculum, teachers' pedagogy, course organisation and EMI application. Once again the data were analysed thematically in direct relation to the student context and the two research questions.

### **13.3 Findings**

The teacher education students' EMI learning experiences in their 'Methodologies for teaching English in primary schools' course have two key dimensions: knowledge construction and English language development. The former relates to students' construction of course content made available to them through EMI, while the latter relates to how they build up their English language proficiency through engagement with EMI. A key feature of all students' EMI experience was the ZPD scaffolding they received from both teacher and peers, and the scaffolding they themselves supplied to others.

### ***13.3.1 Knowledge Construction Through EMI***

During EMI lessons, the teacher used English to give lectures, explain new terminologies, give examples and organise classroom activities. In addition to mediating Methodologies content, the classroom language of EMI not only provides linguistic input but helps students shape their ideas of how to use English in their future roles as English teachers, notably through short and simple classroom commands, appropriate language for lesson planning, and the language to explain and justify their teaching. In other words, one of the benefits of EMI in this particular course is that both the content presented and the language used are of future professional relevance. Participants have potential learning opportunities to immerse themselves in English language input, share some of their ideas in English as much as they can and learn from their teacher's and partner's use of English. The subject-related knowledge partly draws on students' cultural and historical prior experience of English teaching methodology during school, but mainly draws on set textbooks and lectures and on the group activities in the EMI classroom. As a result, students can learn from working together with their teacher and their partners in the EMI class and may co-construct more knowledge.

The types of knowledge gained by the students are indicated in their learning diaries, where they noted the ideas for teaching in primary schools that they encountered during the preceding Methodology class, such as a lesson on 'Teaching vocabulary' or 'How to teach in primary: using games, songs and videos'. One type of knowledge concerned content for future teaching—the 'what' of teaching. S12 provided two such entries three weeks apart, indicating improvement in focus as a potential teacher: the first was 'What to teach in general: pronunciation, parts of speech, how to use antonyms, collocation, lexical fields, register and appropriateness', while the second narrowed down to reflect the reality of teaching vocabulary in primary contexts 'What to teach in primary: pronunciation, spelling, meaning and use'. Another important type of knowledge concerned pedagogical practices—the 'how' of teaching. S18, for example, wrote that 'in order to make good interaction a teacher should look into pupils' eyes while talking, raise the pictures to their eye level and make sure the pictures don't cover the teacher's face'. Writing lesson plans combined both types of knowledge, and students gradually became more proficient at this, although a third of the students mentioned feeling constrained by their English proficiency. S12, for example, said 'when writing lesson plans, I wanted to express a lot of ideas but I couldn't because I didn't know how to express my ideas in English'. That was clearly a frustration, and a disadvantage of EMI for such individuals. More broadly, S1 noted that he/she learned how to design lesson plans mixing more than one method and that when observing the micro-teaching of other students he/she learned how to use classroom English from them.

Data from videos of micro-teaching provides valuable evidence that EMI did not hinder students' construction of subject-related knowledge and that the English medium scaffolding from teachers and partners entailed improvement in their teaching procedures. Over the duration of the course, students' micro-teaching

sessions became more contextualised with a focus on the actual level of primary learners and suitable steps of new language presentation, while their experience of solving unexpected in-class situations became more practical. For example, in an initial micro-teaching session on asking and answering about the time, S19 implemented a procedure for teaching a new structure by modeling between teacher and one student, drills of two halves of the class, drills of two students and finally a role play between the teacher and whole class. The lack of pair work and the unnecessary repetition of the last step made the teaching less effective because the 'students' (i.e. the partners acting as primary school students) did not have time for their own practice and the teacher (S19) still controlled the learning till the end of the lesson. However, after being scaffolded by both teacher and partners through English medium comments on both achievements and weaknesses as well as suggestions for improvements, S19's second micro-teaching session on asking and answering about free time activities was improved with more viable steps, namely presentation of new words and structure with teacher-whole classwork, modeling between two more capable students in front of the class, pair work and then role play of the pairs as a way of consolidation at the end.

EMI students also learned how to cope with unexpected classroom situations from experiencing them in micro-teaching. In S8's first micro-teaching session, he/she just smiled and ignored students' wrong pronunciation, wrong answers and misunderstanding of teacher instructions in the accuracy tasks, whereas in the second session he/she knew to repeat or paraphrase instructions, corrected students with smiles and used finger correction. Similarly, in the second micro-teaching session S16 was able to produce clearer verbal instructions instead of using only gestures as in the first session, which caused a lot of incomprehensible situations and laughter. In other words, the use of EMI mediates students' knowledge construction during processes that are focused on learning methodology. Consequently, the EMI learning process per se becomes the artifact which can be exploited by the teacher as a tool of semiotic mediation to develop students' acquisition of new professional knowledge and skills.

Students' knowledge construction through EMI necessarily varies according to the individual, especially in the context of classes with numerous students of low or medium English proficiency, as in this case. For example, in the interviews students admitted that they found fully understanding materials in English difficult, as well as the lecture content. As S12 recalled, 'The lesson content is a lot so even when I had prepared by reading the materials before the lesson, I couldn't understand it fully'. However, the materials were nonetheless artifacts which mediated their learning to an important degree. S8, for example, specifically claimed the benefits of reading materials in terms of acquiring more vocabulary and terminologies, being conducive to classroom learning, and initiating exploration of new knowledge.

The gains in knowledge construction among these EMI students mainly originated from the tasks set and the language encountered, which was slightly more difficult than what they could readily work with alone, but which they could manage with the assistance of more competent others, such as the teacher, classroom partners and use of a dictionary. Assistance of more competent partners and the teacher was provided in the form of group work, classroom discussion and teacher use of

English in lecturing, explaining and elaborating, as well as her appropriate use of L1 to promote understanding of the lesson content and how English expresses that content. The time consumed in using a dictionary and understanding the meaning of various terminologies was an issue for some students, with S19 admitting that he/she skipped the words or ignored them and that this negatively affected his/her understanding of the texts. More broadly, S8 reported that: ‘some students couldn’t understand the content of entire lessons and there were many new words which meant students were unable to acquire the content knowledge’. However, a contrasting view was put forward by S16, who asserted the advantages of EMI and its mediation of students’ thinking because students could ‘make use of chances to think in English, which helps prolong their memory and raise the sense of initiative in learning’ (S12).

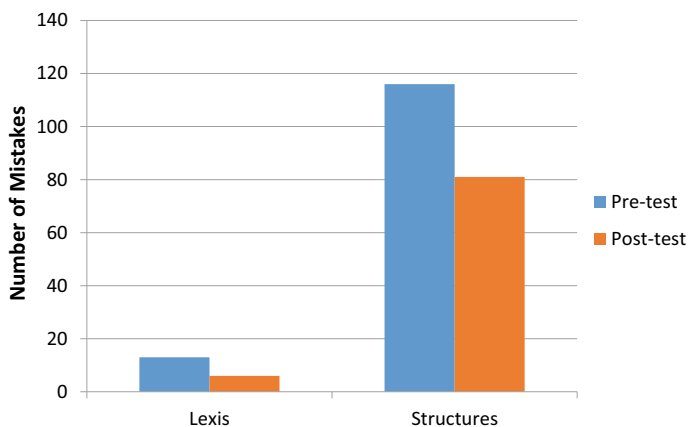
From an SCT perspective, the learning and the tasks that sometimes fall outside the present ZPD of the students, or their level of immediate potential development, can be acceptable for the ultimate purposes of long-term development. In fact, most students were able to complete the EMI course successfully, although the knowledge benefits they gained varied. On the whole, students confirmed in the end-of-course interviews that they now understood the textbooks better and were able to write appropriate lesson objectives to go with them (S1); they had accumulated more experience of teaching English (S18) and of working in the classroom environment in the role of a teacher (S10); they could choose suitable teaching methods (S11) and design better procedures for teaching English to primary learners (S1). The teacher updating herself on students’ learning through the learning diaries and her consequent frequent modification of EMI lessons was felt to directly contribute to students’ achievements in the course, not only in regard to knowledge construction, but also in regard to English language development.

### ***13.3.2 Language Development Through EMI***

During the end-of-course interview, students were asked to rank their current understanding of the English that the teacher used during the lessons and compare it with their level of understanding at the beginning of the course. There were five levels, from level 1 (do not understand) to 5 (totally understand). 14 out of 20 students acknowledged improvement in their understanding by one level while 6 of them remained at the same level—two of these (S2 and S14) reported that they could understand only at level 2 while the others were more confident from the start (S1, S9 and S20 remained at level 3, and S4 remained at level 4). Among those whose understanding of teacher language improved, five students increased from level 3 to level 4 while the others improved from level 2 to level 3. To be more specific, quantitative and qualitative data together from pre- and post-tests, learning diaries and interviews show that students gained linguistic benefits from the EMI process in terms of pronunciation, vocabulary and structures.

Linguistic analysis of a pre-test and post-test involving the design of a lesson plan indicates that students reduced their mistakes involving wrong words, wrong forms





**Fig. 13.1** Frequency of English language mistakes in class

of words and inconsistent and non-parallel structures, subject-verb agreement and incorrect tenses (Fig. 13.1).

Most of the students demonstrated more accurate use of English in all their lesson plan writing in the latter part of the course, as well as in their micro-teaching in class, where they had no time to reflect before speaking as they did when writing.

Students reported learning many new words across the course, and a range of specific terminology for teaching English. S12 mentioned that he/she could practice the vocabulary by writing it into the lesson plans. Similarly, S2 recalled, 'I could apply those words to write lesson plans'. S4 said that.

When the teacher used English in the lessons, I got familiar with the sound and pronunciation of the words. There were many words that I could learn to use as classroom commands in micro teaching and my teaching afterwards. In general, EMI could help me improve my English vocabulary.

The lists of new words and terminologies in students' learning diaries show that students noted down vocabulary according to their language proficiency; in other words each person noted what was new to them. S8, after a lesson on 'Teaching vocabulary', wrote a series of related terms: 'collocation, connotation, lexical sets, productive language, receptive language, synonym and antonym, and finger correction' as well as some new general vocabulary items 'revise, individually, acceptable, random'. S1 mentioned the key terms related to teaching listening skills, namely 'listening with a purpose, listening for gist, listening for specific details, activate background knowledge, connected speech, fillers and predict'. Similarly, S2 wrote the classroom language expressions that he/she learned: 'Are you ready?', 'Open your book at page 75', 'I want you all to join in...' and 'We'll learn how to...'—all of which were then used in micro-teaching. As S12 indicated: 'Learning diaries are very good for learning in this EMI class. Students use them to review the previous lessons, the words, sentences they learned but might forget later'.

Students also reported being required to use all four communicative language skills, although with different frequency. Reading was the least used in class, being limited to working with various textbooks of English teaching, although more technical materials were assigned for reading prior to class. All students found these materials challenging, complaining that they contained too many unfamiliar words, with S12 suggesting the teacher should adapt materials with easy-to-understand language. Some students considered that their reading skill did not greatly improve because they had to translate a lot of learning materials the teacher gave out (S2; S15). However S4 reported improving in skimming technique, and also learning to pick out main ideas and general points in the materials. Students used writing mainly for designing objectives and activities in lesson plans, and writing comments on their partners' micro-teaching. Listening skill was mainly required when the teacher presented content and when peers were micro-teaching. Students mentioned gaining particular benefits when their teacher lectured using simple English language and a slow pace, as they could become familiar with terminologies and absorb pronunciation of new words, which they could then use in similar contexts later. S15 said, 'I improved my listening skill, had more vocabulary to apply into writing lesson plans and could improve my speaking skills'. Speaking, in fact, was reported as the most used English language skill, which is unusual in most EMI tertiary classrooms. However, its high positioning in this course links to two factors (a) the group work focusing on methods for teaching English language, and (b) the course requirement for micro-teaching. Most students commented that they learned to communicate better from working with their partners in group work or answering the teacher's questions, while the micro-teaching directly benefitted their classroom language use.

Videos of successive micro-teaching sessions clearly document such improvements in students' speaking. Over time, the students could produce clearer classroom language, provide more detail and clarity in their instructions to students, and verbally organise the classroom activities more accurately and fluently. Communication apprehension (Horwitz et al., 1986) and attitudes of shyness, embarrassment and lack of confidence in front of the class were gradually overcome through repeated experiences and the encouragement of their partners and their teacher, as with Yashima et al. (2018) results. Microteaching video data confirms that, in general, their pronunciation improved over time. Vietnamese language interference, which entails not pronouncing middle consonants or final consonants when speaking English, was discussed in the course, and became an object of feedback in micro-teaching. Thus, with the assistance of partners and teachers in the form of constructive comments and suggestions precisely in a students' ZPD, they could recognise the issue and reduce their regional accent. After being scaffolded by his/her partner's corrections, S7 reported paying more attention to pronouncing the final sounds of words like 'ask', 'word', 'look' and 'groups' as well correctly sounding 'the' before a vowel. Similarly, S4 reported learning to link sounds to connect two words as in 'what are', 'is it?'

Importantly, classroom language, such as instructions and compliments, was significantly improved, with higher frequency and more complete use in the second

recorded session of micro-teaching. For example, S1 in his/her first micro-teaching session had a very limited approach to setting up an asking-and-answering drill:

‘Ok, now group A (gesturing a circle and pointing to one side). Ask! (slapping the table twice)’ and then ‘Ok, now group B (gesturing a circle and pointing to the other side). Answer! (slapping the table twice)’.

The second micro-teaching showed that S1 could produce better instructions as:

‘Now, we have two groups, Group A (pointing to one side) and Group B (pointing to the other side). Group A asks and Group B answers. Ok, Group A asks (points at Group A)’ and then ‘Now change. Group B asks and Group A answers.’

Similarly, S3 could use better structures in the second micro-teaching session, namely ‘Who can come to the board?’ and ‘Repeat after me’ instead of ‘Who can?’ and ‘Repeat again’ as in the first session, while S6 could use more informative instructions like ‘Work in pairs. Ask and answer with your partners in one minute about school things’. Students also learned to use a variety of compliments such as ‘Good job!’, ‘Well done!’, ‘Great!’, ‘Excellent!’ and ‘Yes!’ instead of just repeating ‘Good!’.

The micro-teaching partnerships provided plentiful opportunities for students to scaffold each other’s learning, drawn from observing and evaluating the teaching activities, and students commented on the benefits both of receiving and providing such scaffolding at their particular ZPD moment of readiness. In this way, the EMI course pedagogy simultaneously mediated the students’ English language development and their knowledge construction.

## 13.4 Discussion

EMI in this Methodologies course has been shown to have some major advantages in terms of both content knowledge construction and language learning benefits, which is in line with previous studies such as Dang et al. (2013), Le (2012), Nguyen et al. (2017) and Vu and Burns (2014). Students’ accounts of their learning experiences show them using English to specify lesson objectives, design suitable classroom activities, plan rational procedures of English teaching for primary learners, organise designed activities flexibly and respond to unexpected situations. This subject-related knowledge was mediated both through EMI and the deliberate scaffolding of partners and teachers within the students’ ZPD of content and English proficiency.

Prior knowledge and learning habits played an important role in students’ final academic results. Not all students achieved similar satisfactory profession-related knowledge, as was found in the study by Yip et al. (2003) in which EMI students did not fully comprehend terms and concepts. A key factor was students’ inadequate English proficiency, causing difficulty with terminology, as in Le (2018) and Kırkgöz (2005), and with understanding lectures, expressing their ideas and applying their knowledge to designing logical lesson plans. Students called for additional sources of input such as Vietnamese textbooks, simplified versions of English reading materials

and teacher translation to help them understand the content in depth. Additionally, students' prior experience of traditional teacher-led teaching in school impeded their capacity to design lesson plans in accordance with communicative language teaching principles, as required by the MOET. Finally, the workload of reading English materials and writing learning diaries was contrary to some students' learning habits and strategies, which kept them from gaining optimal learning benefits.

Linguistic benefits that students saw as deriving from EMI were consistent with findings by Dang et al. (2013), Le (2012), Nguyen et al. (2017) and Vu and Burns (2014). Students believed their improved English performance, especially their classroom language and skills, was directly mediated through the use of EMI, with specific skills improving in accordance with the focus of the coursework (Li et al., 2001). Skills of writing, listening and especially speaking were more developed due to the requirements of writing lesson plans, engaging with lectures, and performing micro-teaching. On the other hand, reading skill was hampered by reliance on dictionary use and translation.

Unlike previous accounts of the negative impacts of EMI classes with multiple levels of proficiency (Do & Le, 2017), this study indicates that setting up opportunities for scaffolding between more capable students and less capable ones can result in improved English language use (e.g. pronunciation and classroom language). Students benefited when being linguistically assisted within their ZPD and in direct response to their micro-teaching. Additionally, the benefits of L1 use when teaching students with inadequate English language proficiency were evident, in line with Shohamy (2012), Mohamed (2013) and Vu and Burns (2014). The teacher's translation when students could not understand the lessons, as well as students' use of Vietnamese in discussing together, helped mediate knowledge construction.

### **13.5 Conclusion and Implications for Moving Forward with EMI**

This study has provided a student view of the benefits and challenges of EMI in a Methodologies course for teaching English in primary schools in a rural Vietnamese province. The perspectives from sociocultural theory (SCT) that were embedded in the teacher's classroom pedagogy also facilitated analysis of students' experiences of English as a mediational tool for knowledge construction and language development, including scaffolding within their ZPD.

The 20 students involved successfully gained the required content knowledge, namely writing lesson plans, designing suitable teaching activities, organising those designed activities and giving comments on their partners' teaching. To varying degrees, students also improved their linguistic performance related to their future profession. For example, improved speaking skills included better classroom commands and informative instructions, while improved writing skills led to

more detailed lesson plans. Thus, the students experienced benefits of both knowledge construction and language development through this new way of teaching and learning their content subject. At the same time, the students also encountered challenges due to insufficient English proficiency, especially in reading professional materials in English and in group discussions.

The students' experiences of EMI, both beneficial and challenging, have several core pedagogical implications for moving forward with EMI in Vietnamese universities, in essence confirming the view of Vu and Burns (2014) that, in order to achieve the objectives of EMI lessons, teachers need to spend considerable time and effort to prepare and adjust lesson plans and design English materials. Consistently, the results also suggest that EMI teachers should focus on preparing suitable English reading materials to guarantee content access, as with Vu's (2017) English textbooks, and on simplifying their English when giving lectures, to support students' language development as well as content access. Teachers need to make frequent modifications of EMI lessons, taking into account students' actual level of English and their immediate learning needs, and design supportive learning activities within students' ZPD. They should also encourage English use as a mediational tool among students, and pair students of different language abilities to maximise learning opportunities. They themselves should use English just slightly above students' proficiency and at appropriate speed, and accept 'imperfect' English from students giving suitable corrections later.

The fact that lesson content in this study was delivered in both English and Vietnamese contributed importantly to students' learning achievements. The use of translation and L1 in some stages of EMI lessons scaffolds the content learning and mediates knowledge construction. This suggests the value of 'a bilingual curriculum' (Belhiah & Elhami, 2015) or a 'hybrid' model (Fujimoto-Adamson & Adamson, 2018) in which the students' L1 is used for discussions, background reading and within some content tasks. Pedagogically, L1 use should be accepted as a mediational tool for deep knowledge learning and the amount of L1 use should be less in practical lessons than in theoretical ones.

This study has also shown the use of learning diaries to be valuable in two important ways: in helping EMI students reflect on their learning and develop learning strategies and initiative for grasping theory and practicing skills, and as a useful tool to keep EMI teachers updated with their students' content acquisition and linguistic problems and thus to facilitate appropriate adaptation as the course proceeds. The use of learning diaries after EMI lessons is therefore highly recommended as a means of addressing potential problems and bridging the gap between teachers' expectations and students' actual levels of English proficiency and ease of content access.

In sum, it is evident from the students' learning experiences reported in this chapter that learner-centred pedagogies grounded in sociocultural learning theory have the potential to facilitate both knowledge construction and English language development within an EMI course, and that a flexible use of Vietnamese language is essential for the achievement of both when students start with limited English proficiency. The pedagogies used in this class all offer ways of moving forward with EMI to achieve the intended educational goals.

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