

# Chapter 2

## Road-Mapping English-Medium Instruction in Vietnamese Universities: The Divergence of Agency



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**Abstract** This chapter critically reviews the development of EMI in Vietnamese universities, with a particular focus on the agency available to and utilised by its various participants. The theoretical lens is through the six dimensions of the ROAD-MAPPING framework established by Dafouz and Smit (2016, 2020). ROles of English, Academic Disciplines, (language) Management, Agents, Practices and Processes, and INternationalisation and Glocalisation. Each dimension is explored in terms of the actors involved at national, institutional, and individual levels. The analysis sheds light on the perceptions, rationales, goals, and requirements of these various actors with regard to EMI, demonstrating a considerable divergence of agency. This divergence is attributed to several factors including (1) the top-down model of policymaking and management at the national and, to a lesser extent, institutional level, (2) the dominance of non-educational goals at the institutional level where institutions have to respond to a variety of factors undermining their academic operation, (3) the lack of policy guidance, EMI professional development, and practical support for lecturers, and (4) the quality, disciplinary focus, and ongoing curriculum support for students' English language development. The analysis demonstrates that these factors have particular effects at national, institutional, and individual levels within each of the dimensions of EMI. It is concluded that such divergence calls for a close investigation of what is happening at the level of individuals in actual classrooms in order to inform the development of EMI in an effective and sustainable way at the national and institutional levels.

**Keywords** English-medium instruction · EMI · Vietnam · Higher education · Educational policy · ROAD-MAPPING

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## 2.1 Introduction

While national policy is acknowledged as an important factor in the development of EMI in Vietnamese universities, it has frequently been noted that the actuality of EMI programs is very directly influenced by local factors within particular university settings (H.T. Nguyen, 2018; H.T. Nguyen et al., 2017). In reviewing EMI in Vietnamese universities, this chapter therefore attends not only to national agency but also to institutional and individual agency. Framing the review are the six dimensions of the ROAD-MAPPING framework developed by Dafouz and Smit (2016, 2020), which is specifically designed for the analysis of English-Medium Education in Multilingual University Settings (EMEMUS). Their work is based on an integration of theoretical perspectives from current developments in sociolinguistics, ecolinguistics, and language policy theory. Together these perspectives generate the six core dimensions of their framework: ROles of English, Academic Disciplines, (Language) Management, Agents, Practices And Processes, And Internationalisation And Glocalisation, giving the acronym ROAD-MAPPING.

All of these dimensions of EMI intersect and relate to each other, so that a focus on one will have connections to others (Dafouz & Smit, 2016, 2020). For example, management decisions about language use within university programs not only directly involve human agents and their practices and processes, but relate to the role of English on campus, to specific requirements of different academic disciplines, and to internationalisation and glocalisation in future employment options. Figure 2.1 illustrates the inter-relationship of these six dimensions and their dynamic nature.

It is possible to investigate each dimension in any particular setting through the ways EMI is talked about in that setting, whether it be by government, university

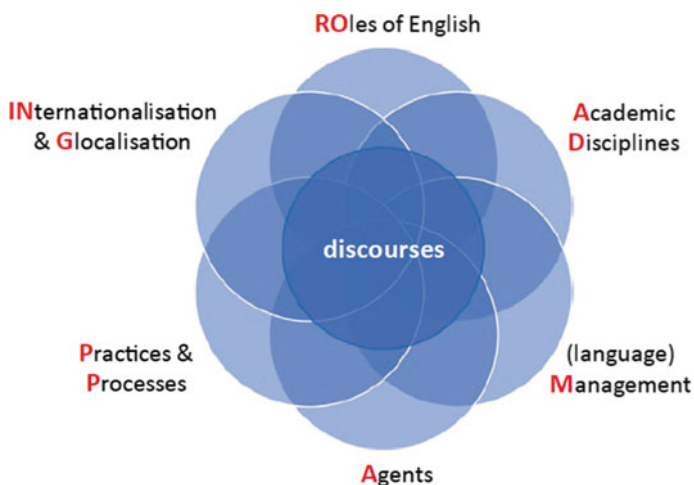


Fig. 2.1 The ROAD-MAPPING framework (Dafouz & Smit, 2016, p. 404)

leaders, industry stakeholders, the media, community members, teachers, students, or academic researchers. Discourses are therefore placed at the centre of the ROAD-MAPPING framework, indicating that they function as a point of access to information about each dimension and also as a channel for the intersection of those dimensions. Discourses related to EMI can be identified in written documents—such as policy, curriculum, assessment guidelines, and research papers—and in spoken form—such as teacher talk, student presentations, and research interviews. In other words, discourses provide a way to understand what is going on in each of the ROAD-MAPPING dimensions and what the connections and disjunctions are. Discourses also provide the data sources and analyses underpinning the accounts given in each chapter of this book.

This chapter draws specifically on the discourses of policy and of recent research into internationalisation and EMI in Vietnamese higher education. The aim is to identify the agency available to and utilised by participants in each dimension of EMI, as well as the divergence of agency and possible reasons for it, indicating potential pathways for moving forward with EMI in Vietnamese universities. At the same time, the chapter sets a broad context for the subsequent chapters, which draw on discourses of policy and practice situated within particular universities, disciplines, classrooms, and individual experiences.

## **2.2 The Development of EMI in Vietnamese Universities: A ROAD-MAPPING Analysis**

The following pages review the historical development of EMI in Vietnamese universities through each of the ROAD-MAPPING dimensions, employing three levels of analysis—national, institutional, and individual—to highlight the importance of different actors and their use of agency in each dimension. The discussion is based on the working definitions of the six ROAD-MAPPING dimensions provided in Dafouz and Smit (2020, p. 60) incorporating an added focus on agency within each dimension. A close understanding of the broad context of Vietnamese higher education is fundamental to the other dimensions, and the sequence consequently begins with the internationalisation and glocalisation dimension before following the sequence of the acronym.

## **2.3 Internationalisation and Glocalisation**

The initiation and development of EMI in Vietnam derived from the country's socio-economic and political integration into the world subsequent to its Doi Moi policy in 1986 and international integration in 1995. At the national level, two key drivers have promoted the growth of EMI in the higher education system. The first is the

country's open-door policy and international integration in which higher education is viewed as a 'key state imperative' to achieve social order and economic development, and to promote the state's capacities (Evans & Rorriss, 2010; London, 2010). A number of policy documents were issued during the 2000s which acknowledge the importance of EMI and establish it as an essential part of the country's internationalisation. For example, the *Proposal for Advanced Program Project in Some Vietnamese Universities in 2008–2020 Period* clearly states that:

The implementation of some undergraduate English-taught advanced programs aims to establish and develop several international and regional level fields of study, faculties, and universities, improve HE quality, and have a number of Vietnamese universities gain the world's top 200 universities by 2020 (The Government of Vietnam, 2008a, p. 15).

EMI in Vietnamese higher education can be viewed as a strategy to attract international academics and students, to promote teaching and research collaboration with international partners, and to promote universities' standing in international higher education rankings (The Government of Vietnam, 2008a). A need for the higher education sector to become both attractive and competitive therefore contributes to the implementation of EMI. In other words, neoliberal ideology also plays a role in EMI in Vietnam as in other countries or jurisdictions.

The second key driver of internationalisation relates to critical changes in higher education governance. The higher education sector underwent a significant structural change during 1987 and 1990 when several educational agencies were merged into the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), a single ministry responsible for the whole education system in Vietnam under the direct management of the government. Another structural change occurred in 1993 when two national and three regional multidisciplinary universities were established by merging a large number of small specialised institutions (Dao & Hayden, 2010; Hayden & Lam, 2010). Recognition of the role of the private sector in education led to the establishment of the very first non-state university in 1994, with the number of private universities rising to 95 in 2018 (Salmi & L.T. Pham, 2019, p. 104). A further structural development took place during 1995 and 2003 when a line-management mechanism was introduced for universities to report directly to their associated ministries (e.g. the Medical University reports to the Ministry of Health, the University of Industry reports to the Ministry of Industry and Trade). This was followed by the stratification of universities in 2004 and accordingly, top-tier institutions were strategically funded by government resources (Hayden et al., 2010).

Despite these structural shifts, the sector was still in crisis with respect to governance, quality, curriculum, and research (H.T. Nguyen, 2018). Against this backdrop, the government mandated a Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA) in 2005, in which internationalisation was central to the quality improvement of the sector. HERA considered internationalisation to include (a) the involvement of more international commitments and agreements; (b) improvements in the teaching and learning of foreign languages; and (c) the creation of favorable conditions for foreign investment in the higher education sector (Harman et al., 2010). These structural changes were also reflected and reinforced in the 2005 and 2019 Education Laws, and the 2012

Higher Education Law. All these legal documents, to various extents, have placed the need for EMI at a central position in internationalisation. However, none have highlighted the need for glocalisation in terms of the adaptation of western curriculum and materials to be inclusive of and responsive to local interests and values, and also to counter western-centric perspectives and potential cultural imperialism. This requires a critical stance towards colonial aspects of internationalisation (e.g. Beck, 2013), with implications for the establishment and conduct of EMI programs in Vietnamese universities.

Institutionally, EMI has been seen primarily as a response to three local pressures on universities: financial autonomy, nation-wide competition, and the domestic demand for higher education—a phenomenon that has been termed out-bound internationalisation (Hamid et al., 2013). Granting more autonomy to institutions, including financial autonomy, was one of the primary objectives of HERA in 2005. However, this and the structural changes, including the stratification of institutions, resulted in many universities struggling to be financially independent. A number of senior managers from different universities have clearly stated that the implementation of EMI in their institution was initially a remedy to financial pressures (H.T. Nguyen et al., 2016; M. Pham & Doan, 2020). EMI was seen as a good strategy to generate income by attracting more students, since EMI programs attract higher fees. In addition, universities now can offer both Vietnamese-medium instruction (VMI) and EMI in parallel within one program, which means the number of students enrolled in that program can be increased, resulting in more income.

The nation-wide pressure of competition for students has greatly increased with the entry of the private sector into higher education. Public and private institutions, including foreign universities, are now operating in the same market, and consequently both the programs on offer and the reputation and ranking of each university are important factors in attracting students. Although MOET is in control of the annual student intake for each institution, the more programs an institution can offer, the more students they can accept. Likewise, the more involvement the university has with international institutions, the higher the perceived reputation. On both counts university senior managers often regard EMI as a way to increase collaboration with international partners.

A third pressure for EMI has been the local population's insistent demand to be trained and qualified for rapidly changing employment. The flows of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and the increasing presence of foreign enterprises in Vietnam, as well as the country's expansion of international relations during the late 1990s and 2000s created an even greater demand for English, often referred to as 'English Fever' in Vietnam (V.C. Le, 2006, p. 172). Additionally, the country's socio-economic development has created a wealthier population in which many well-off families can afford to pay higher fees for their children's tertiary education. There are therefore opportunities for Vietnamese universities to tap into this potential market by providing quality undergraduate programs incorporating EMI.

In sum, the overall objective of institutions' efforts at internationalisation, including EMI, is to boost institutional ranking, to be recognised regionally and internationally, to attract students, and to increase employability for EMI graduates.

Institutions also consider EMI as a response to a market-driven trend in higher education—a phenomenon that has been metaphorically referred to as ‘neoliberalism’s war on higher education’ (Giroux, 2014). The commitment to internationalisation of tertiary education has led to expanded collaboration with external universities to offer joint programs and also twinning programs (both types of program use the curriculum of the external university, with joint programs being located in Vietnam and twinning programs mainly overseas). The number of joint and twinning programs dramatically increased between 2007 and 2018—from 133 to 282 offered in 82 HEIs (L. Hoang et al., 2018, p. 30). Nguyen (2018, p. 121) puts the number at 290, while Tran and Marginson (2019) subsequently put it at approximately 300, giving some idea of the speed of take up. Clearly EMI has been chosen as a multi-purpose strategy for HEIs to diversify their programs, a strategy which is mainly implemented by individual teachers and their students.

Given that EMI lecturers and students operate primarily in the classroom, they are influenced as much by local forces as by global ones, hence the importance of a glocalisation perspective in relation to internationalisation. Such a glocalisation perspective takes into consideration first the achievement of educational outcomes required in the domestic market and second the best use of lecturers’ knowledge and skills. While internationalisation in higher education has tended to foster western-centric curriculum (Beck, 2013), the more recent trend towards glocalisation—both from a marketing and an educational perspective—has been an attempt to redress the balance and integrate local and regional concerns. Glocalisation of curriculum not only values such concerns and associated knowledges, but can be directly relevant to industry needs and students’ employment prospects, as well as building on lecturers’ expertise in the local environment.

For lecturers, taking on EMI teaching is either a compulsory part of their job or a choice made for their professional advancement. However, the move to EMI programs by HEIs has left little space for academics to make their choices freely. Universities use various incentives such as higher payment and workload coefficient to motivate their academics to teach in English. Other incentives can be yearly bonuses and teaching awards for promotion. These motivation strategies have put some academics under pressure to take on teaching in EMI even when they do not feel ready. Other academics perceive EMI teaching as an opportunity to improve their English language, the quality of their course, their international research collaboration, and their ongoing employment prospects. Furthermore, compared to traditional teaching in Vietnamese, teaching in English can give lecturers more flexibility to select teaching materials from global sources, to practise a more democratic teaching and learning environment, and to construct more equitable, sympathetic teacher–student relationships (Hamid et al., 2013). This in itself is a move towards glocalisation. A further move, which requires dedicated time and resources, is the adaptation or tailoring of overseas academic curriculum and materials to be inclusive of and responsive to local and regional interests and values.

While Vietnamese students may struggle to engage with a curriculum and materials that are totally western-centric (L. Tran et al., 2018), they are unlikely to be aware of that aspect when enrolling in an EMI program. Students in Vietnam tend

to view EMI as an opportunity to improve their English language proficiency, to advance their chances of studies overseas, and to facilitate employment upon graduation (Phuong & Nguyen, 2019). Thus employment markets resulting from the country's socio-economic development and international integration have tended to influence students' decision to enrol in EMI programs.

At the individual level of students and teachers we can identify aspects of glocalisation rather more readily than at the national and institutional levels where internationalisation is a much stronger force. What needs to be questioned is the extent to which institutions could exercise agency in support of the kind of glocalisation that would benefit students in meeting their desired educational outcomes. We can also raise questions as to the roles of English in that pursuit.

## 2.4 Roles of English

The 'Roles of English' dimension in the ROAD-MAPPING framework refers to the position of English vis-à-vis other languages, whether foreign, national, regional, minority, or migrant languages, and to its various functions as a pedagogical and communication tool. At the national level, English has gradually gained a central position in Vietnam compared to other foreign languages such as French, Mandarin, Japanese, Russian, and Korean. Historically, the introduction of a foreign language into Vietnam often reflected the country's diplomatic relations with a particular country in the world. For instance, the introduction of Chinese, French, and Russian mirrored the country's diplomatic relations with China, France, and the Soviet Union respectively in the past. However, English has not followed a similar pathway of cultural politics of language and is an exception in Vietnam. Prior to Doi Moi in 1986, English was regarded as the language of the enemy (Wright, 2002). The return of English to Vietnam after 1986 was not a direct consequence of the country's diplomatic relationship with a particular country but primarily due to its regional and international integration, such as its membership in the Association of the South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN), the normalisation of the relationship with the United States, and the developing relationship with the European Union (EU). To integrate into the international community, Vietnam needed a language to communicate with the outside world, and the power of English as the language for international communication made it a logical choice (Sharifian, 2009). One example of such a central position for English is a decree approved by the Prime Minister in 1994 requiring government officials to study English in order to interact directly with foreigners (T.N. Pham, 2014).

The value attached to English can be illustrated by the fact that 98% of school students chose English as a compulsory subject in 2000 (Vang, 2003, p. 458), while at the tertiary level, as of 2006, 90% of students chose to study English among four foreign languages available (V.C. Le, 2006, p. 167). English is now used for communication between Vietnamese and foreigners, and sometimes also among Vietnamese in certain professions and even in daily life. The popularity of English

has led Doan, M. Pham et al., (2018) to argue that English has become an international language in Vietnam, indicating the central position of this language in comparison to other foreign languages. Nevertheless English is yet to become a lingua franca among students and teachers in Vietnamese universities as is happening in some other parts of the world (Dafouz & Smit, 2016), even though the number of international students in Vietnamese higher education institutions has increased dramatically from 1,100 in 2015 to 21,000 in 2020 (T.N. Le, 2020). Together, these developments reflect the role of English in Vietnam.

While English can have multiple functions in higher education settings (Dafouz & Smit, 2020), these functions are understood differently at different levels and among different stakeholders. At the national level, English is considered to serve as an ‘instrument for professional and academic purposes’ (Tri & Moskovsky, 2019, p. 1334). For instance, the *Proposal for the Advanced Program Project in Some Vietnamese Universities in 2008–2020 Period* documented clearly that the use of English in Advanced Programs aims to:

...equip undergraduate students with updated knowledge, life skills, professional skills, learner autonomy, research competence, and adaptability to the working environment upon graduation...to improve Vietnamese teaching staff’s specialist knowledge, pedagogy, and English proficiency to get engaged in lecture delivery and research collaboration at overseas HEIs (The Government of Vietnam, 2008b, p. 15).

Institutionally, English can also function as an outcome criterion of EMI programs (Dafouz & Smit, 2016); however this outcome has often been taken for granted by Vietnamese HEIs, rather than being recognised as requiring lecturers’ intervention or any resource investment. For example, some executives from a university in Hanoi asserted that ‘when students studied in one of [stet] EMI programs, they would “naturally” become fluent speakers of English without academics’ specific attention to language aspects’ (H.T. Nguyen, 2018, p. 131). Vu and Burns’ (2014) in-depth investigation of an EMI program offered by a national university in Hanoi reports that, while the English entry requirement for students was 5.5 in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and the exit level was to be 6.0, this increase was expected to occur without specific investment into helping students improve their English language. As elsewhere internationally (Rose & Galloway, 2019, p. 195), it was simply assumed that the English proficiency of students would be improved through their immersion into EMI courses, an assumption also identified at the national level in policy documents (Tri & Moskovsky, 2019). In such cases, English as an exit criterion is taken as a by-product, rather than a targeted outcome addressed through resource investment.

Among individuals engaged in EMI programs, English has key functions as a tool for learning and teaching and also for social interaction. These functions are briefly outlined in the section below on Practices and Processes, and are highlighted across the individual studies. At the same time, academics and students hold different perceptions of English development. On the one hand, academics expect a sufficient English proficiency from students before they enter into EMI programs. On the other hand, students see English development as one of the outcomes from their



EMI studies and expect to be supported by their teachers to develop their language proficiency, even though their expectation is often not clearly stated (Phuong & Nguyen, 2019). This difference can form a ‘contested terrain’ between academics and students and can vary across academic disciplines.

## 2.5 Academic Disciplines

The dimension of Academic Disciplines in the ROAD-MAPPING framework encompasses two-related notions—academic literacies and academic culture.

Academic literacies refer to the diverse range of academic products (whether spoken or written) typically developed in an educational setting and conforming to socially conventionalised situated practices. By disciplinary culture we mean more particularly the subject specific conventions, norms and values that define different disciplinary areas (Dafouz & Smit, 2020, p. 60).

Spoken and written ‘academic products’ vary across academic disciplines, since each discipline has its own English usage. Consequently English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is seen as an integral part of EMI programs (Arnó-Macià & Aguilar-Pérez, 2020; Schmidt-Unterberger, 2018), in addition to English for Academic Purposes (EAP). In regard to ‘disciplinary culture’, Neumann et al., (2002) point out that teaching and learning practices, curricular designs, and assessment methods in each academic discipline vary according to its epistemological characteristics. Consequently acculturation to the literacies and practices of each discipline is essential for academic success in an EMI program. However, Tri and Moskovsky (2019) reviewed a number of Vietnamese policy documents and found no acknowledgement of disciplinary differences in these documents. On the contrary, they found that such policy documents often presume benefits of EMI programs for learning in the academic disciplines (Tri & Moskovsky, 2019). The use of English as medium of instruction is presumed to enable students to access up-to-date knowledge, original learning materials, professional practices, and skills in their disciplines, while being able to avoid constraints of relying on Vietnamese translations of learning materials which may hinder their learning. Such presumed benefits have no doubt influenced both national and institutional decisions on the introduction of EMI programs across the disciplines. However, the needs of the country for socio-economic development have generated a clear distinction of priorities for EMI between different disciplines. Some disciplines, such as Information Technology, Business Administration, Banking and Finance, Accounting and Tourism, have been given priority precisely because they are believed to meet the current needs for socio-economic development.

At the institutional level, the key factors that underlie priorities given to certain academic disciplines are: government funding, resource availability, student demand, and presumed benefits of EMI courses for graduates’ employment prospects. As a general practice, each institution would consider their own resources together with the funding allocation from the government to develop and offer EMI courses or

programs according to their capability in particular disciplines. For example, Vu and Burns (2014) report that funding from the government was a key factor that motivated executives from a university in Hanoi to implement EMI programs in particular disciplines. On the other hand, in a study by Pham and Doan (2020) several university senior managers across the country acknowledged that they would encourage any academics who can teach in English to offer EMI courses. Nevertheless, institutions often prefer to offer EMI courses in disciplines that can attract more students.

There exists a strong belief that the quality of English learning would be improved if it is directly connected to content learning (To, 2010). This, and a specific endorsement of certain types of content, is reflected in a recommendation from a study investigating factors that influence English education at Vietnam National University in Hanoi. The author proposes that.

the most effective way [to improve the quality of English language learning] is to turn universities into a bilingual environment in which the mother tongue is the means of general communication and instructional medium of *social science subjects* and English is the instructional medium of *science and technology* (V.V. Hoang, 2008, p. 34: emphasis added).

Similarly, Tri and Moskovsky (2019) investigate several documents on pilot EMI programs and find a similar institutional presupposition that students' disciplinary knowledge and discipline-specific language proficiency are believed more likely to be improved through EMI in certain disciplines than in others.

The use of English as medium of instruction can also risk homogenising academic disciplines, resulting in an Anglo-centric monocultural model (Dafouz & Smit, 2016; Smit & Dafouz, 2012). This results from wholesale 'borrowing' from international partners, which has historically been widely practised in Vietnamese higher education in regard to curriculum, reference materials, and personnel training and quality evaluation (T.T.P. Vu & Marginson, 2014). Such 'curriculum borrowing or foreign curriculum transfer' (L.T. Tran & Marginson, 2018, p. 7), without adaptation to the Vietnamese context and without regional forms of glocalisation, inevitably introduced a monocultural model. This has not yet been fully addressed in that currently more and more EMI courses are developed by Vietnamese academics who graduated from overseas as 'westernised' experts in their academic disciplines. Together with their lack of expertise in curriculum design and EMI pedagogies, as well as their expectations of students' English language proficiency, their EMI courses still risk homogenising academic disciplines, which could then bring about counterproductive effects (N. Nguyen & Tran, 2018; T.T.P. Vu & Marginson, 2014). Vu and Marginson (2014) rightly point out that EMI programs need to be localised and Vietnam's identity, strategy needs, values, and goals must be respected and integrated. Together with the differing priorities given to certain academic disciplines, homogenisation of an academic discipline could raise a question as to whether the disciplinary knowledge and academic literacies that EMI students are taught would enable them to function effectively in their future local and intercultural professional contexts.

Individually, lecturers and students hold different perceptions about EMI in academic disciplines. Many content lecturers experience psychological barriers to taking any responsibility for teaching or commenting on language features (Horie,

2018), positioning themselves as ‘not language teachers’ (Airey, 2012). Their reluctance to comment on language aspects may also reflect a limited appreciation of the particular academic literacies and intercultural variations of their discipline. Unfortunately, there are very few language teachers with the relevant disciplinary knowledge to accomplish this role effectively, and consequently very few EMI courses provide students with such language support. Nevertheless, students expect to improve both their discipline knowledge and their language proficiency from EMI courses, thereby achieving comparative advantages in finding jobs. There is thus a contradiction between academics’ and students’ expectations with regard to what kind of knowledge academics will provide, and students will be equipped with, in EMI courses. Given the contingency of academic literacies and disciplinary knowledge, without a clear recognition of the different discourses between various disciplines and of the constructive alignment between academic literacies and discipline knowledge, students are less likely to be equipped with sufficient academic literacies and discipline knowledge. This is clearly a matter to be addressed through the national and institutional management of language across the disciplines.

## 2.6 Language Management

The language management dimension of EMI refers to language policy statements or declarations, whether written, spoken, or internet-based, that are intended to define and control the role and position of languages (Dafouz & Smit, 2020). In both the national and the institutional contexts of EMI in Vietnam, such language statements or declarations are remarkable for either their absence or their vagueness (Kirkpatrick, 2014; H.T. Nguyen et al., 2017) resulting in confusion for individual stakeholders, notably academics and students. National policy documents do not formalise the status of English in higher education, nor do they regulate language aspects in EMI programs.

Despite having 54 distinct peoples living across the entire country, Vietnam can be considered as a linguistically homogenous country, since the Kinh or Viet people who speak Vietnamese as their mother tongue account for 90% of the population (Ho & Wong, 2004). Vietnamese has been the language of instruction in the country’s school system since its independence in 1945. Since then, the language policy has remained stable and contributed to national identity building and socio-political stability, with Article 7.1 of the 2005 Education Law stipulating that ‘Vietnamese is the official language to be used in schools and other education institutions’ (MOET, 2005). The 2005 Education Law also assigns to the government decisions on the use of foreign languages as medium of instruction, without specifying English. The 2012 Higher Education Law includes the significant decision to allow the use of foreign languages as medium of instruction in the higher education sector (Vietnam National Assembly, 2012). More importantly, the 2012 Higher Educational Law stipulates that HEIs can themselves decide their use of foreign languages as medium of instruction in accordance with the decisions from the Prime Minister (Vietnam National Assembly,

2012: Article 10). In legal policy documents, the term ‘official language’ has always been reserved for Vietnamese language and ‘teaching and learning activities using foreign languages’ have referred to the use of foreign languages in general. Article 11.1 in the most recent Education Law in 2019 reaffirms that ‘Vietnamese is the official language used in all educational institutions’ and ‘the government will decide the use of foreign languages in teaching and learning’ (MOET, 2020). Thus the use of ‘foreign languages’ as a general term in these legal documents avoids formalising the status of English in the education system.

Specifically in regard to EMI programs, the national management of language falls under the responsibility of MOET. While various EMI language policies have been drafted, issued, and overseen by MOET, they are often criticised as being ‘too general to lead to informed practices’ (H.T. Nguyen et al., 2017, p. 42). English is not clearly and officially regulated as the language of instruction even for EMI programs. Instead, such policy documents typically provide general guidelines for the language eligibility for staff and students in EMI programs.

The *Proposal for the Advanced Program Project in Some Vietnamese Universities in 2008–2020 Period* sets out the entry requirements for lecturers to teach EMI courses. Academics eligible for EMI teaching must (a) complete a postgraduate qualification (e.g. master or doctoral degree) in their discipline area, (b) be proficient in English (equivalent to C1 Level in the Common European Framework of Reference for Language—CEFR) or have achieved a degree program overseas, and (c) have taught the course in Vietnamese-medium instruction for at least three years (The Government of Vietnam, 2008b). In principle, the English requirements from HEIs for their academics should be consistent with the requirements set out in the national policy documents. However, each institution tends to adapt these policies flexibly in order to meet their individual needs. It has been well reported in Vietnamese EMI literature that achieving a postgraduate degree from *overseas* is often assumed by university executives to be a qualification to teach EMI courses regardless of the language of the overseas country. While a likely reason for this is the shortage of academics with sufficient English proficiency, impacts on the quality of teaching must be expected. It is not uncommon that students complain about their lecturers’ English proficiency (see also Chapters 12 and 14 in this volume).

Regarding the English language proficiency required for students to enrol in EMI programs, there is a lack of consistency at the national level. Students in Advanced Programs are simply assumed to have sufficient English proficiency, while those who enrol in Joint Programs have to demonstrate English proficiency equivalent to Level B2 of the CEFR (The Government of Vietnam, 2008b, 2012), which indicates readiness to engage in a variety of academic and professional environments in English, ‘although with a limited range of nuance and precision’ (CEFR, 2001). However students wishing to enrol in High Quality Programs are subject only to individual decisions by their HEIs (MOET, 2014). Thus the national policy function regarding English as student gatekeeper lacks both clarity and consistency, inviting a similar approach at the institutional level.

English proficiency entry requirements for students do indeed vary widely across HEIs. To enrol a sufficient number of students to address their financial needs, some

universities have set overly low English proficiency requirements. For instance, one university accepted a score of 500 out of 950 in TOEIC for entry into its program even though this score is considered insufficient for academic study (Cots, 2018). Furthermore, HEIs often accept non-official English proficiency tests as indicators of students' readiness to enrol in EMI programs. There has been evidence that several universities have either modified a version of an international English test such as the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) or accepted it as an indicator of students' English proficiency (H.T. Nguyen, 2018; H.T. Nguyen et al., 2016). Furthermore, not only individual institutions, but even departments or programs sometimes have their own language proficiency benchmarks whether for entry requirement or exit criterion. Thus English proficiency as a management benchmark covers a wide spectrum, and may not serve its intended gatekeeper function.

Institutions' language policies also vary across a spectrum—in this case from total absence to partial, vague, and semi-official regulation. Some institutions state in their EMI brochures, websites, and introductory sessions that English is the language of instruction. However, M. Pham and Doan (2020) report that academics were often not consulted or informed in writing of their institution's language policy, coming to know it only through meetings and individual verbal communication, such as 'use as much English as possible'. Similarly, one university president did not provide any written form of EMI policy but advised academics that they did not have to teach 100% in English, the priority being that students could understand the lectures (H.T. Nguyen, 2018). Even though national policy documents consider academics, students, graduates, parents, and employers as important EMI stakeholders (MOET, 2014; The Government of Vietnam, 2008a), in the current Vietnamese context, they can exercise little influence on institutional EMI policies. This lack of power reflects the top-down model of policymaking that is typically practised in Vietnamese HEIs (M. Pham & Doan, 2020; L. Tran & Nguyen, 2018; N. Vu & Burns, 2014). It is in contrast to higher education settings internationally, where language policies are often planned, implemented, and assessed by a variety of stakeholders at all levels (Dafouz & Smit, 2016). If such an approach were adopted in Vietnam, given the different rationales, needs, and goals of EMI stakeholders, policy design would have the potential to be more multifaceted and dynamic than it currently is. Meanwhile, the lack of explicit regulations, statements, or policy references to English makes its status invisible and a challenge for individual stakeholders to enact.

Wherever the status of English is not formalised at the institutional level, this is inevitably reflected at the individual level within EMI programs and courses. At the classroom level, English is a pedagogical matter and the aim of teachers and students is to achieve the content goals of the curriculum, so immediately there are decisions to be made regarding how much Vietnamese language may be used and under what circumstances. In terms of language management policy, neither academics nor students have a voice, but instead they are responsible for implementing the policy, if any. They are left to self-interpret the institutional language management policies. Unfortunately, the absolute absence or vagueness of institutional language management policies has led not only to confusion and frustration

among academics but also to lack of consistency in teaching and learning, which consequently affects the quality of EMI programs. Consequently, the management dimension of EMI needs to address the EAP and ESP needs of both students and teachers. More broadly, it needs to operate both at the institutional level through large-scale policy (Kirkpatrick, 2014) and organisational measures, such as student entry requirements and teacher qualifications for EMI, and through decisions made at faculty level and within programs and individual courses, such as curriculum planning and choice of materials. Without policy guidance, the agents involved in EMI are forced to make their own decisions, whether or not they have the expertise to do so.

## 2.7 Agents

In the ROAD-MAPPING framework, the *Agents* dimension ‘encompasses the different social players (whether conceptualised as individuals or as collectives, concretely or abstractly) that are engaged in EMEMUS (Dafouz & Smit, 2020, p. 54). Nationally, the Vietnamese government, acting through the Minister of Education and Training (MOET), is the key collective driving EMI development. MOET is responsible for elaborating the government’s education policies by providing policy guidelines, circulars, regulations, and funding schemes to promote EMI. Together with other ministries, MOET is in charge of budget allocation, assessment, and inspection of the outcomes of EMI, especially in Joint, Advanced and High Quality programs under government sponsorship (The Government of Vietnam, 2008a). Despite more than two decades of EMI development in Vietnam, no formal professional association for EMI has been established in Vietnam; MOET remains the key actor at the national level.

At the institutional level, HEIs can be categorised according to the number of EMI offerings they make available and the degree of agency they can exercise in making decisions about program development and offerings. Both features depend largely on economic and locational factors and whether the university is public, private, or international. However, the importing of international programs contributes to usurping the role of institutional policies and agency, acting as their own force of agency. In regard to EMI offerings, MOET’s ‘strategic mission scheme’ (stratification of universities and priority in resource allocation) supported the introduction of full EMI programs, mainly for domestic students, at some Vietnam National University colleges in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, and several private universities. These universities consequently have had a head start. Other universities then began to offer either full EMI programs or several EMI courses within a predominantly VMI program, also attracting some international students. Nowadays, more and more universities offer EMI programs and courses, either in collaboration with international partners or independently, and with varying quality. Nevertheless, some universities especially in provincial areas still do not offer any EMI courses.

Each HEI tends to have a steering committee in charge of EMI, often headed by the President or Vice President of the institution, which was usually the case

for those universities selected by the MOET to implement EMI programs under the 'strategic mission scheme'. These committees follow the national guidelines to develop and design curriculum, select and collaborate with international partners, recruit or select staff members and students, and provide support for academics teaching in EMI programs (MOET, 2014; The Government of Vietnam, 2008a). In principle, each committee has to report their EMI implementation processes and outcomes to their higher equivalent committee at the national (ministerial) level. In reality, the institutional committee can exercise strong autonomy with regard to many aspects of EMI such as curriculum design and development, selection of international partners and materials, and recruitment of academics and students. HEIs also have the power to develop and implement overall language policies. This autonomy results from a lack of clear national guidance for language policy management and proper involvement of different agents at all levels, as evident in the policy review study conducted by Tri and Moskovsky (2019). In addition, HEIs can prioritise different goals in EMI programs and thus design their policies towards achieving these goals. An example can be found in a study by M. Pham and Doan (2020) which highlights that institutional managerial stakeholders may be more interested in commercial than educational goals in EMI. HEIs therefore are powerful agents in these regards.

Despite being powerful agents, institutions are still hardly ready for effectively exercising their agency educationally. Management readiness is a factor of how well and how rapidly institutions can respond to the changes required by the pedagogical innovation, namely the need for appropriate policy and explicit guidelines for implementation (M. Pham & Doan, 2020; Tri & Moskovsky, 2019), as well as recognition of the readiness issues among students and staff, and plans for addressing those issues. Given the speed with which EMI programs were introduced into higher education, there was little time initially for management to develop a true understanding of what is involved in learning and teaching through a foreign language. Without such understanding, explicit identification of needs and appropriate responses to those needs is not possible. In sum, management readiness includes the provision of clear institutional guidelines for implementing EMI, suitable initial preparation and ongoing support for students, professional development in EMI pedagogies for faculty staff, and material resources to support EMI within the disciplines.

At the individual level, a variety of actors may exercise some degree of influence on EMI development: lecturers, whether content or language specialists and whether domestic or international; providers of EMI professional development; students, whether local or international; parents; alumni and local employer bodies. Administrative or professional staff are also involved in EMI development but they are typically under direct guidance or instruction from senior managers and are best seen as part of the institutional collective. In contrast, academic staff and students have clear individual agency.

EMI academics can be classified as either content teachers or language teachers. Content lecturers carry the responsibility for EMI course design and delivery, while language teachers carry responsibility for credit-bearing English courses undertaken within an EMI program, as well as preliminary English coursework. Until now the tendency has been for the two to work independently, but there are strong reasons to

work collaboratively (Airey, 2020; Lasagabaster & Doiz, 2018). In the early days of EMI in Vietnamese universities, EMI courses were mainly developed in collaboration with foreign partners and therefore international lecturers were closely involved in EMI course development. In some cases, international academics were also expected to provide professional training for their Vietnamese peers in delivering content courses in English. This continues to some degree at present; however, international academics are now often on short-term contracts and thus lack voice in the wider institutional community. In addition to Vietnamese and international academics, there may be some teaching assistants who are expected to help both teachers and students in their respective tasks. Language teachers are mainly responsible for designing and delivering preparatory or intensive English language courses for EMI students who need to improve their general and academic English proficiency. In some universities, they also provide English related to specific disciplines in parallel with students' content courses, a highly recommended approach (Q. Tran & Phuong, 2019). At this level, both content and language educators have considerable agency over the courses they teach in terms of curriculum design, materials, delivery, and assessment. This means that, given the prevalent lack of institutional guidance, the quality of EMI programs is to a very great extent determined by the decisions of such educators and what subsequently takes place in classrooms.

Nevertheless, such decisions and practices are dependent on the EMI preparedness of the educators and their readiness to enact their agency. Readiness in the teaching faculty is a concern both internationally and in Vietnamese higher education (Le, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2017; Vu & Burns, 2014; Fenton-Smith et al., 2017). In the first instance, English language competence is often a challenge for local teaching staff, especially the English required for classroom activity such as leading students to an understanding of new concepts (Barnard, 2014). This raises the concern that EMI affects the depth of teaching possible. For example, lecturers across disciplines in two Spanish universities have indicated that limited English proficiency conditions the degree of detail in their explanations, and reduces their capacity to paraphrase and to spontaneously improvise, thus affecting rapport with their students (Doiz et al., 2019, pp. 158–159). Lecturers' lack of EMI pedagogies is also an issue (M. Pham & Doan, 2020; Vu & Burns, 2014), as lecturers need to know 'how to modify their input, assure comprehension via student-initiated interactional modifications and create an atmosphere where students operating in an L2 are not afraid to speak' (Dearden, 2014, p. 23). However, across the world suitable professional development has taken time to emerge (Lauridsen, 2017; Macaro et al., 2018).

Students are also important agents regarding what takes place in classrooms, as their approach to learning through English and the level of English they bring to that task have direct influence on teachers' agency. Currently students enrolled in EMI programs are mainly Vietnamese and account for only a small number of the student population in most institutions. Nevertheless these students can influence the practice of EMI through their course feedback and evaluation, as well as through their day to day levels of engagement in class, which committed teachers tend to respond to. Parents can also influence EMI programs through providing feedback on their children's learning experience, while domestic EMI graduates who have completed



their EMI studies and are currently employed can use their work experience to feed in to EMI curriculum development, as can their employers.

As Tollefson (2008) emphasises, planning for any educational innovation needs to consider and productively respond to a range of contextual factors, including the readiness of management, teaching faculty and students. This is precisely where the challenges for EMI have been noted both internationally (e.g. Airey et al., 2017) and in Vietnamese universities (Nguyen, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2017; Vu & Burns, 2014; Tri & Moskovsky, 2019; Fenton-Smith et al., 2017). Overall, the key agents in the implementation and practice of EMI are those people who actually engage in it – the content lecturers and to a lesser degree the language lecturers and the students. These individuals not only influence the enactment of EMI courses, but have the potential to also usefully influence future institutional EMI policies. For this, they need to be given a seat at the table to ensure a voice in policy decisions for the actuality of practices and processes at the classroom level.

## 2.8 Practices and Processes

In regard to in Vietnamese higher education, the ‘Practices and processes’ dimension in the ROAD-MAPPING framework refers to the administrative, research and educational activities (Dafouz & Smit, 2020, p. 60) that construct and are constructed by local realities, include participants’ ways of thinking and doing EMI. As we have seen, the realities of EMI in Vietnamese higher education are heavily shaped by the exercise, or lack of exercise, of both national and institutional agency, which therefore has a strong influence on what can happen in classrooms, regardless of the strength of teacher and student agency.

At the national level, the Vietnamese education system has long been influenced by external factors, with foreign language policy and higher education changing according to the country’s socio-economic and political shifts. The initiation of EMI in Vietnam occurred subsequent to the country’s ‘open-door’ foreign policy, especially in the late 1990s and early 2000s, but the influence of the Soviet model of management was still dominant in Vietnam’s education system (Hayden & Thiep, 2007; Welch, 2010). The model reflects the state’s centralised control over the performance of all HEIs, which is implemented through a number of ministries: MOET, Ministry of Planning and Investment, Ministry of Science and Technology, and Ministry of Home Affairs. Some ministries assume responsibility across the system while others are responsible for different universities and colleges. Broadly speaking, all HEIs are under the management of MOET but some specialised-discipline universities are under the authority of other ministries. For example, Hanoi University of Industry is under the management of the Ministry of Industry and Trade while the Banking Academy belongs to the Vietnam State Bank. The control of the state is also manifested in the compulsory inclusion of courses in political ideology as part of EMI programs.

The centralised management underpinned by the Soviet model has exercised considerable agency in the development of HEIs and their program offerings, including EMI. One common practice from such a model of management is the issuing of top-down policies lacking a basis in empirical evidence from the lived realities of teaching and learning. EMI policies are no exception. For example, some policy documents often presuppose that EMI promotes learner critical thinking (The Government of Vietnam, 2008a; Tri & Moskovsky, 2019). However, such policy intentions may not necessarily be smoothly translated into institutional practices, particularly when these concern professional development of staff and learning support for students.

Although HEIs are responsible for implementing policy documents from the government, their institutional autonomy generates different ways of thinking and doing with respect to their own context and priorities. As previously pointed out, universities do not see EMI simply as a means of adding educational value. More importantly, for many universities, EMI is a multi-purpose strategy for income generation, student enrolment and international ranking. In order to realise these intentions, HEIs utilise the current availability of resources to develop and offer EMI programs, sometimes prematurely. Various strategies have been employed to support implementation, such as providing incentives for academics to develop and teach EMI courses, collaborating with high-ranking international partners, and providing some EMI courses in programs that are mainly VMI (H.T. Nguyen, 2018; Nhung, 2019; M. Pham & Doan, 2020). Such ways of thinking and doing EMI have had several consequences. One is that academics have been confused about how they are expected to carry out various aspects of their job, notably curriculum design and delivery of EMI courses, how to conduct lectures and tutorials in English, and the differences between VMI and EMI teaching practices. Another consequence is the lack of effective collaboration between content and language teachers. Content academics have to work with students who have diverse and limited English proficiency but often do not have the training or inclination to integrate language development. Third, students accepted into EMI programs with limited English language proficiency hinder the progress of teaching and learning activities and lead to student complaints and frustration. Fourth, there exists a lack of language support for students to develop their English language skills for learning through EMI. Last, and very significantly, there is a dearth of professional development opportunities for teachers to build up necessary EMI practices. Together, these undesired outcomes of the lack of clear policy guidance, regulation, and support manifest in challenges for successful learning and teaching activities in the classroom.

At the individual level, EMI lecturers and students have encountered complicated realities constructed not only by national and institutional agency but also by the local context of learning and teaching. For example, one factor that influences both academics' and students' 'ways of doing' is Confucianism, arising from the historical relationship between Vietnam and China (Huong & Albright, 2019). This ideological model assigns teachers a central role in teaching and learning, which can result in students' passive acceptance of their teachers' knowledge and thus a lack of critical thinking.

EMI students have themselves reported particular 'ways of thinking' about their programs and academics. First, students expect their teachers to be fluent in English and able to convey their disciplinary content effectively (Duong & Chua, 2016; V. Hoang, 2008; Phuong & T. Nguyen, 2019). When expectations are not met, students, both domestic and international, have expressed disappointment or frustration about their teachers' English proficiency, sometimes referring to feelings of powerlessness and frustration (H.T. Nguyen, 2018). Second, some students expect a proficient level of English competence from their peers in EMI programs, whereas proficiency in EMI programs can cover a wide spectrum, due to low entry requirements. Local students with limited English proficiency are reluctant to use English in class, so resorting to Vietnamese is their best choice, even though it renders the learning environment exclusive to international students. The diverse level of English proficiency among both academics and students is a reality that students generally encounter and must learn to manage through various 'ways of doing' in class.

Many content lecturers struggle to teach classes with diverse English proficiencies, especially since they expected students enrolled in EMI programs to be proficient in English (Hamid et al., 2013; H.T. Nguyen et al., 2016; H.T. Nguyen et al., 2017). One academic reported that 50% out of the 60 students in her EMI course were actually incompetent in English and should have enrolled in a VMI program (H.T. Nguyen et al., 2016, p. 676). Vietnamese content academics often regard students' English language incompetence as a matter either for students themselves or for language teachers, and it is not uncommon for them to repeatedly affirm that they are not language teachers (M. Pham & Doan, 2020; N. Vu & Burns, 2014). Second, discipline academics understand that teaching a course using English as the language of instruction should be different from teaching a VMI course. Nevertheless, they are unclear about the differences, as institutions have not provided adequate professional development in terms of EMI curriculum design and delivery, pedagogies and assessment. Finally, EMI lecturers also struggle with their own English proficiency. Not all academics teaching EMI programs, including those who have achieved their degrees overseas, are confident about their own English in terms of conducting EMI courses (M. Pham & Doan, 2020). Both lecturers and students have reported a lack of English proficiency from academics to affect their capacity to scaffold learning and to be creative and flexible in teaching (H.T. Nguyen, 2018; H.T. Nguyen et al., 2016). All of this reveals institutional under-preparedness in terms of personnel and resources to implement EMI programs and a 'specific reality' in which academics are caught between their own beliefs about EMI and their responsibilities to support students to achieve their learning goals.

To address these challenges, and in the absence of institutional commitment to their EMI professional development, EMI lecturers have employed a variety of strategies for curriculum design, materials selection, assessment, and language use in class activities. For some academics, designing an EMI course has simply meant translating their existing courses from Vietnamese into English without significant changes in content, assessment, and teaching sequence (M. Pham & Doan, 2020). Others have

made changes to the best of their ability within the limited time and resources available to them. Many academics are reluctant to comment on student language problems and therefore often provide no feedback or just general comments on this area. With regard to the use of English and Vietnamese in class, academics have practised a variety of strategies. Some employ code-switching between Vietnamese and English when explaining discipline-specific terms while others give each part of their lecture in English and then translate it into Vietnamese to make sure that students can comprehend the content (H.T. Nguyen, 2018; N. Vu & Burns, 2014). Another strategy to make a course EMI-like is to select materials in English for the course reference list, but choose primarily ones that have been translated into Vietnamese (M. Pham & Doan, 2020), or to provide supplementary materials in Vietnamese. Such discursive practices employed by academics aim to ensure student access to course content, but can be perceived differently by students themselves. At the same time, the effectiveness of these strategies on student learning is questionable.

In short, as individual agents, these two most important stakeholders—teachers and students—have developed particular ways of thinking and doing EMI teaching and learning, largely in response to specific national and institutional contextual realities. We see this throughout the studies reported in this volume. Each individual exercises their own agency in designing or selecting practices and processes to achieve their goals.

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

The ROAD-MAPPING framework applied here to the historical development of EMI in Vietnam has confirmed the contextually bound and dynamically interconnected nature of all six dimensions in the framework, as well as their importance to understanding agency in EMI and its implications for moving forward. In this Vietnamese setting of EMI, most notable is the divergence of agency across national, institutional, and individual levels within every dimension. Government actors at the national level have exercised powerful agency in the policy aspect, while institutional actors have tended to manifest agency through semi-official regulations rather than coherent policies. Meanwhile individual lecturers and students have had their agency restricted to the classroom level, unable to contribute to policy development. Those actors at national and institutional levels appear to prioritise non-educational goals over educational goals, thereby potentially compromising educational outcomes. On the other hand, at the individual level, lecturers and students try to do what they believe best for achieving course and program goals but are often held back by national and institutional constraints.

Some factors responsible for the misalignment of agency between different levels of actor are (1) the top-down model of policymaking and management at the national and, to a lesser extent, institutional level, (2) the dominance of non-educational goals

at the institutional level where institutions have to respond to a variety of factors undermining their academic operation, (3) the lack of policy guidance, EMI professional development and practical support for lecturers, and (4) the quality, disciplinary focus, and ongoing curriculum support for students' English language development. These factors not only indicate a discursive and premature development of EMI in Vietnam, but also call for a closer investigation of what is actually happening at the classroom level if EMI is to achieve its ultimate goal—to equip learners with content knowledge while also developing English language proficiency.

The analysis of EMI development in Vietnamese higher education in this chapter has clearly indicated an asymmetry of agency among the various stakeholders at all levels in every single dimension of the ROAD-MAPPING framework, and with consequent effects. Importantly, government and universities are, to a very great extent, more powerful than teachers and students in policy decision-making and in directing the development of EMI. Nevertheless, these powerful stakeholders have often prioritised non-education objectives over educational ones, whereas the ultimate objective of EMI in classrooms is educational in nature—to equip students with discipline knowledge and English language competence for their future profession. To achieve this ultimate educational goal depends on the teaching and learning practices that occur on the ground. As a result, for EMI in Vietnam to move forward in a sustainably educational way, an inclusive approach is required, one which can not only address the imbalance of agency but also provide space for all stakeholders to exercise their agency and negotiate their goals and strategic actions. The ROAD-MAPPING framework offers a means of identifying and creating such spaces in every dimension of the EMI project and therefore can itself be considered a tool for moving EMI forward.

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