# Content and Language Teaching: An Evolving Pedagogy for Vietnamese English-Medium Lecturers

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***Abstract:*** Content and language teaching has been widely applied in language education. The recent popularity of content and language-integrated learning (CLIL) and English-medium (EMI) courses has caused increasing research interest in exploring the relationships between language and content for an effective pedagogy. However, content and language-based teaching is elusive regarding contextual, disciplinary, and personal diversity, resulting in mixed classroom practices. Based on a questionnaire with 72 EMI lecturers, this paper explores the evolving nature of content and language teaching and how these EMI lecturers translated its teaching principles into practice. The findings revealed that most EMI lecturers perceived their dual role of supporting content and language development in EMI courses partly translated into classroom practices. Classroom activities primarily focused on lecturing, and language support strategies were integrated with content learning. The paper concludes with implications for teaching and further research.
***Keywords:*** EMI, content and language integrated learning, pedagogy, ESP.

Content and language-based teaching has been extensively studied in bilingual education contexts where immigrant children must simultaneously learn curriculum content and language (Baker & Wright, 2021). Recently, these contexts have become more diverse. They include Western countries, where immigrants learn the native language to integrate into the broader English-speaking community (Snow & Brinton, 2023), and non-Western countries, where local people adopt English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in general education (T. Nguyen & Llinares, 2023) and higher education courses (Dang et al., 2023). The emerging contexts have created new conditions for the content and language pedagogy to evolve.

In this expansion, a prominent controversy is the incompatibility of Western-based teaching principles with non-Western practices. For example, Kachru (1985) has concerns about theory, empirical validity, social responsibility, and ideology when applied linguistics transfers its research findings in the Inner Circle World to those in the Outer Circle. Later, Tsui and Tollefson (2007a) argue that the dominant Western pedagogies marginalize Asian teachers' pedagogical approaches, which are often perceived as out of context and labeled as "traditional and ineffective" (p. 9). Similarly, Mahboob and Tilakaratna (2012) point out that theories of language teaching and learning are primarily developed in the West with little influence from significant teaching and learning theories in non-Western contexts. This phenomenon causes various obstacles in developing the theories and their application in non-Western contexts. When these theories are uncritically transferred to other parts of the world, where the local practices (data) may or may not support them, policymakers tend to privilege Western theories regardless of the local practices, resulting in unexpected outcomes. Moreover, the problem

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arises when teachers misinterpret the principles of the methods and apply superficial classroom practices (Kaplan et al., 2011; Richards, 2005).

A similar issue has been increasingly documented in Vietnam higher education, where content and language pedagogy has been implemented in English-medium courses (Pham et al., 2023; Tran & Nguyen, 2018; Vu, 2017). It is argued that this teaching practice purposefully develops students' English proficiency and content knowledge. The number of Vietnamese lecturers who embrace English to deliver a content subject has rocketed in the past few years. However, researchers are more concerned about the didactic transformation of these lecturers (Min & Ngoc, 2020; Vu, 2020), resulting in ineffective classroom activities (Pham et al., 2023).

Therefore, it is necessary to critically examine how Vietnam EMI lecturers perceive the content and language pedagogy and their teaching practice transformation to organize classroom activities effectively. The research addresses two questions:

1. What do EMI lecturers perceive of content and language pedagogy?
2. How do they practice content and language pedagogy in the classroom?

This paper first reviews the concept of content and language-related teaching and how it has evolved in diverse language teaching approaches commonly found in Vietnamese contexts. They include bilingual education, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), language immersion, Content-based Instruction (CBI), Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), and English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI). The second part focuses on a questionnaire study with 72 EMI lecturers at a Vietnam university to elaborate on how they perceive and practice content and language-based pedagogy. The final part provides discussions and implications for further research and teaching practices.

## Literature Review

Language and content-based pedagogy has been adopted in multiple teaching approaches, namely bilingual education, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), language immersion, Content-based Instruction (CBI), Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), and English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) (Ball & Lindsay, 2012; Basturkmen, 2018; Snow & Brinton, 2023; Villabona & Cenoz, 2022). Each approach implemented in diverse contexts has added specific meanings (Macaro & Han, 2020). This section explores the reciprocal relationship between content and knowledge, how it has evolved in the literature, and how it might influence classroom practices. It will examine four aspects: teaching contexts, definitions, language and content relationships, and classroom activities.

### Teaching Contexts of Language and Content Pedagogy

The language use contexts are diverse and provide external factors that shape the language and content pedagogy at the classroom level. One way to classify the contexts is based on Kachru's (1985) Inner Circle, Outer Circle, and Expanding Circle categories with contextual variations regarding ontological status, learning strategies, interactional and pragmatic contexts, multicultural identities, the role of English for educational and social change, and communicative competence.

Inner Circle refers to native English-speaking countries, e.g., the USA and the United Kingdom. In this context, English is dominant as it is L1 for most citizens and the mainstream language at home, school, and government. English learning, therefore, aims to promote cultural, academic, and political status for the learners. English learning can refer to L1 learning or bilingual education for immigrant students. Research in bilingual education in Inner Circle settings recognizes the contextual influence on classroom activities. For example, Baker and

Wright (2021) point out that weak bilingual education, which does not focus on developing learners' mother tongue, only aims to develop the mainstream language so that learners can integrate into mainstream education to study the content. The students, therefore, learn a language in withdrawal classes to prepare for subsequent mainstream content learning. In contrast, strong bilingual education promotes pluralism and the dual development of learners' mother tongue and mainstream language. It adopts immersion, maintenance/heritage language, and mainstream bilingual models to promote dual languages for learners.

Outer Circle countries such as Bangladesh, India, and Singapore have adopted English as their second language (ESL). Although English is not the first language of the citizens, they are vital for governance, work, and education. The government supports the spread of the English language and may see it as an instrument to address social, economic, and educational issues. The government's top-down language planning promotes multilingualism and English language status (Coyle & Meyer, 2021). However, the mismatch between policies and realities (Coleman, 2011) and controversies about national identity (Jahan & Hamid, 2019; Tsui & Tollefson, 2007b) need to be clarified for learners and teachers in selecting classroom priorities.

The Expanding Circle countries, including Indonesia, China, Korea, and Japan, adopt English as a foreign language while most of the population uses another language for daily and administrative purposes. Learners are exposed to English mainly at school, taught as a subject or a medium of instruction for limited subjects besides their national languages. The limited exposure to English and educational practices is attributed to ineffective and unsystematic classroom activities (Lo Bianco, 2010; Pham et al., 2023; Tran & Nguyen, 2018; Vu, 2017).

To summarise, language-use contexts significantly influence lecturers' pedagogy, which, in turn, influences the choices of classroom activities and education focus. There is no one-size-fits-all method of combining content and language. As it is well acknowledged that EMI practices are influenced by the social, political, and economic environment (Baker & Wright, 2021; Cummins, 2008b; Lo Bianco, 2008; Skutnabb-Kangas & McCarty, 2008), caution and validation research are needed when these findings are applied to new contexts, especially non-Western ones. The following section analyses how content and language are defined in previous studies.

## Definitions of Language and Content

Language and content are the two significant outcomes of language and content pedagogy. However, these two concepts might have varied references in the research traditions. Language is examined from different perspectives. Language may be closely related to literacy development for young children (Gibson et al., 2021). In bilingual education, Cummins (1981, 2008a) further divides language skills into two categories: basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). These skills serve different purposes and require varied efforts and methods to develop. Similarly, Coyle et al. (2010) differentiate three types of language in CLIL classes: language of learning, language as learning, and language for learning.

Notably, research in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which originated in the Inner Circle countries, provides more detailed descriptions of language that reflect linguistic evolution. Early ESP research describes language as special vocabulary, sentence structures, and discourse used in one discipline (Hyland, 2002; Paltridge, 2000). In later skill-based and sociolinguistic research, language is defined as skills that might involve generic language skills transferable among disciplines or professions (Anthony, 2011; Dovey, 2006; Spack, 1988), such as "summarising, paraphrasing, quoting" (Spack, 1988, p. 43) or language to perform functions such as "expressing cause and effect" (Hyland, 2002, p. 389). Recent ESP research recognizes learners' roles in multiple social contexts (Belcher & Lukkarila, 2011; Paltridge,

2013) and defines language based on context-specific communication events (Huhta et al., 2013).

A similar situation is documented in content definitions. Although content generally refers to knowledge in non-English subjects, its manifestation continues to evolve. For example, content-based instruction expands the concept of content, previously defined as academic subject matter, into "non-language issue of interest of importance to learners" (Greenese, 1994, as cited in Met, 1999a, n.p.) and "material that is cognitively engaging and demanding for the learner and is material that extends beyond the target language or target culture" (Met, 1999, p. 150). Meanwhile, ESP research focuses on disciplinary knowledge and skills in higher education or professional contexts. Recent studies distinguish content as subject knowledge from cognitive skills (Basturkmen, 2018; Belcher, 2009; Dafouz et al., 2018) and cultural understanding (Coyle & Meyer, 2021).

In brief, content and language as learning outcomes have multiple definitions depending on the research traditions and their research achievements. Examining their relationship is vital as language and content pedagogy involve both elements.

## Relationship between Language and Content

Language and content are interdependent in content and language-based teaching, and this relationship might have positive and negative pedagogical impacts. Several research approaches have reported positive impacts, including ESP, CBI, CLIL, and bilingual education. For example, ESP believes learners will learn better if exposed to relevant language and communication needs. Therefore, it emphasizes the importance of identifying learners' needs in a specific academic and professional setting when developing language courses (Hyland, 2002). This feature makes ESP "a radical, modern, more scientific departure from previous [language teaching] approaches" (Starfield, 2013, p. 1). Similarly, Mohan (1986), pioneering in content-based instruction (CBI), affirms the effectiveness of teaching languages through content. However, unlike ESP, CBI perceives the reciprocal relationship of language and content in which learning content leads to learning language, and a mastery of language enables the understanding of content (Stoller, 2004, 2008).

Bilingual research provides evidence for the interdependence between language and content. The Threshold Theory in bilingual research believes language competence will affect cognitive (content) development. If bilingual learners develop balanced competence in both languages, they can enjoy positive effects on cognition. In contrast, no negative or positive effects will be obtained if language competence is developed in one language. Bilingual learners will suffer adverse cognitive effects if competence is low in both languages. Another line of research that supports the interdependence between language and cognition has been associated with the distinction of two language skill categories: basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) (Cummins, 1979, 1981, 2008a). Although this distinction receives controversial responses, it confirms the two-way influence between language and cognition. High language proficiency can help learners interpret meanings in context-reduced communication, while low language proficiency might have adverse effects. This distinction explains immigrant learners' challenges when their CALP is inadequate for academic success (Cummins, 2000). The author argues that effective CALP development requires cognitive (thinking skills), academic (subject knowledge), and language. He concludes:

> We know our [bilingual] program is effective and developing CALP with confidence that our students are generating new knowledge, creating literature and art, and acting on social realities that affect their lives (Cummins, 2000, pp. 19–20).

A recent study with accounting students in China (Lin & Lei, 2021) provides more evidence to confirm the interdependence between language proficiency and content learning. The findings indicate that high academic ability and language support can compensate for low language proficiency, leading to similar content outcomes. Likewise, Dafouz et al. (2018) analyze disciplinary reasoning in a business administration course to identify appropriate language support for content learning. Unfortunately, these studies were limited to specific subjects, and applying them to other content areas requires caution.

In short, language and content are educationally interdependent. The development of one factor can influence the construction of the other. Lecturers, therefore, should consider this reciprocal relationship to organize effective classroom practices to achieve the desired outcomes.

## Classroom Focus

Multiple factors can shape classroom activities, including political policies, educational theories, and teacher training practices (Mahboob & Tilakaratna, 2012). In content and language pedagogy, the classroom focus can be divided into three categories: language-driven, content-driven, and dual focus. This section will review how classroom focus can affect classroom activities and procedures.

## Language-Driven Pedagogy

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is the first teaching method that prioritizes language over content. Politically, these methods originated from the Inner Circle countries to help immigrant learners learn English as a second language to integrate into the mainstream classroom. Language learning is perceived as separate or subordinated to content learning (Benesch, 1999, 2001). Educationally, language was believed to have little association with content. A good example is Dudley-Evans and St. John's explanation of carrier and real content (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). They propose that the former acts as a context to achieve the real goal of the class (language). In using a table of statistics to teach the language of comparison, the statistics constitute the carrier content, but the "real content" is the language used to make comparisons (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, p. 11).

Similarly, content-based instruction focuses on developing language for second language learners in the Inner Circle countries, where they are exposed to language-rich environments in multiple social contexts (home, school, and community) (Grabe & Stoller, 1997). Nevertheless, it seems to value the interdependence of language and content learning via well-documented teaching principles as follows:

i) Language is best incidentally acquired through extensive exposure via comprehensive input (Krashen, 1985) and meaningful output (Swain, 2001). Therefore, pedagogical content knowledge (van Driel & Berry, 2010) and meaningful interactions are necessary for CBI;

ii) Language and content should be acquired at the same time in contextual settings (Cummins, 2008a; Grabe & Stoller, 1997);

iii) Cooperative learning, which emphasizes students' ability to work together towards a shared goal, individual rewards, and accountability, will promote effective CBI (Slavin, 2010);

iv) Learning strategies, particularly reading strategies, should be integrated into specific classroom activities to develop independent learners (Grabe & Stoller, 1997);

v) Appropriately demanding activities compared to students' existing knowledge and expertise will enhance students' motivation and practical learning and;

vi) Students should have choices of content and learning activities relevant to their needs and interests.

These principles reflect a more significant role of content in providing meaningful contexts for language learning. While ESP and CBI do not require learners to develop content knowledge, they emphasize contextual learning, learners' interests, and needs in selecting classroom activities.

## Content-Driven Pedagogy

Bilingual education is sometimes classified as content-driven as it emphasizes content learning. For example, Baker and Wright (2021) point out that weak bilingual education in the United States,  which does not focus on developing learners' mother tongue, only aims to develop the mainstream language so that learners can integrate into mainstream education to study the content. The students, therefore, learn a language in withdrawal classes to prepare for subsequent mainstream content learning. Meanwhile, adult learners in EMI programs are also expected to develop their English proficiency as a bi-product of attending content classes (Pecorari & Malmström, 2018; Phan et al., 2024; Vu, 2020) because the EMI lecturers can not scaffold language development (Macaro & Han, 2020). They neither take language support as their responsibility nor know how to facilitate language development.

## Dual Content and Language Pedagogy

This category refers to any bilingual pedagogy with dual aims of language and content, such as content and language integrated learning (CLIL), EMI, and language immersion. These approaches all support multilingualism and the reciprocal relationship between language and content, though balanced outcomes are rarely achieved. For instance, CLIL (or EMILE in French) refers to "a dual-focused educational approach" (Coyle et al., 2010, p. 1) in Europe to use an additional language to deliver non-language content and to achieve 4Cs goals (content, cognition, culture, and communication). Another example is Canadian language immersion (Swain, 2000), which places learners in content classrooms to provide a meaningful communication context. However, it does not provide formal form instruction. Young learners are expected to pick up language from classroom activities organized by content teachers who can use the language fluently. Similarly, some EMI programs aimed to help learners enhance English proficiency (Min & Ngoc, 2020; Pecorari & Malmström, 2018; Phan et al., 2024; Vu, 2014), but their lecturers were confused to develop an appropriate pedagogy.

There are several reasons for this confusion. In the first place, content and language pedagogy is a broad construct that includes multiple factors. Lasagabaster and Sierra (2010) criticize the CLIL definition for failing to tell what CLIL "exactly" (p. 367) involves. Although the program aims to achieve language and content development, more efforts are needed to break down the dual goals into manageable and measurable goals (Vu & Burns, 2014). The second reason why content and language pedagogy seems confusing is the diversity of teaching contexts and the support teachers receive. Content and language pedagogy might include CLIL programs in European school contexts, EMI programs in European and Asian higher education courses, or varied language immersion models in Africa (Kyeyune, 2010), Canada (Baker & Wright, 2021), and the United States (Lindholm-Leary, 2007). The diverse contexts will differ in ideology, educational values, cultural norms, resources, and students' learning needs. The final reason is the research gap in informed content and language teaching practice (Macaro et al., 2017; Pham et al., 2023). Macaro (2017) observes an "ad hoc" (p. 65) research agenda and the quality of research in EMI.

To help EMI research grow and yield fruits, Macaro (2017) strongly advocates a serious pedagogical focus on higher education EMI and "systematic reforms of teacher preparation and resourcing" (p. 68). Similarly, Coyle and Meyer (2021) emphasize a balanced content and language pedagogy that promotes "disciplinary literacy", the ability to use specialized language and practices to navigate and participate in the discipline (p. 39).

## Summary

To summarise, this section has reviewed the historical development of content and language pedagogy in four aspects: context, learning outcomes, content and language relationships, and classroom focus. The content and language teaching practices are evolving to accommodate contextual factors, linguistic and educational research insights, and teachers' personalization of teaching principles. Language and content pedagogy is an umbrella term that can swing between two ends: language or content. If it is language-driven, it is similar to ESP and CBI approaches. If it is content-driven, the pedagogy prioritizes subject knowledge like the language immersion approach. If language and content pedagogy promotes dual goals, it resembles the content and language-integrated learning model (CLIL). Although EMI practitioners aim to develop language and content, an explicit EMI pedagogy has yet to be established. Vu (2020) suggests that EMI lecturers should be supported and held responsible for developing content and language for their learners. They can follow an elective approach that incorporates some principles that practitioners of content and language teaching generally agree on, including:

1) A good content and language integration lesson must address both language and content goals;
2) Language and content development are reciprocal. Language is essential for the learners to construct their understanding of the subject matter. Deep learning of the content is an excellent opportunity for language usage;
3) Language can be developed in two processes: accidental learning from students' exposure to English-medium classroom activities and form-focused learning of linguistic elements (such as vocabulary);
4) Interactions are essential for students' learning and;
5) Learners should have choices over the content and learning.

The following sections will describe a study with Vietnam EMI lecturers to illustrate how they adapt their classroom practices to achieve the desired educational outcomes.

## Methods

This section outlines a questionnaire study to explore EMI lecturers' practices in Vietnam. It describes the research context, participants, method, and data collection and analysis procedure.

## Research Context and Participants

The study was conducted at a public regional university in northern Vietnam in 2022. The university has a total enrolment of approximately 58,000 students and 2600 lecturers (in 2019) in eleven faculties and schools. It offers undergraduate and graduate courses in Science, Engineering Technology, and Social Science. In addition to language-major classes offered at the Faculty of Foreign Language, the university also launched EMI courses under advanced, elite, and joint programs to internationalize the curriculum and improve training quality with international partners.

This study adopted a convenience sampling method (Creswell, 2009). The participants were 72 EMI lecturers who were working on or would work on English-medium programs at the university. They were selected to attend a training course on EMI teaching methods organized by the university. Table 1 below summarises information about the participants.

**Table 1**

*Summary Information about Participants*

| | Categories | Number of respondents (total 72) | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Subject responsible | Content | 69 | 95.8 |
| | Language | 2 | 2.8 |
| | Both | 1 | 1.4 |
| Nationality | Vietnamese | 72 | 100 |
| | Non-Vietnamese | 0 | - |
| Languages the lecturers can speak | Two languages (English and Vietnamese) | 72 | 100 |
| | 3 Languages (English, Vietnamese, and others) | 7 | 9.7 |
| | 4 Languages (English, Vietnamese, and others) | 1 | 1.4 |
| English proficiency | English certificates | 57 | 79.2 |
| | Bachelor degree | 1 | 1.4 |
| | None of the above | 14 | 19.4 |
| Teaching experience | Less than five years | 11 | 15.3 |
| | 5-10 years | 23 | 31.9 |
| | more than ten years | 38 | 52.8 |
| EMI teaching experience | Less than five years | 44 | 61.1 |
| | 5-10 years | 11 | 15.3 |
| | more than ten years | 3 | 4.2 |
| | No experience | 14 | 19.4 |
| EMI training | EMI pedagogy | 14 | 19.5 |
| | English language only | 0 | - |
| | Both EMI pedagogy and English language | 8 | 11.1 |
| | No training | 50 | 69.4 |

As can be seen from the table, there were 72 respondents with 69 content lecturers (95.8%), two language lecturers (2.8%), and one lecturer teaching both content and language (1.4%). All respondents were Vietnamese and fluent in English and Vietnamese (72); some of them could speak three (7) or four (1) languages. Most of the participants obtained English proficiency certificates (IELTS, TOEFL, TOEIC) (57) or an English language degree (bachelor) (1). Fourteen lecturers (19.4%) had no evidence of language proficiency. Regarding teaching experience, the majority of the participants were experienced teachers with more than ten years (52.8%), five-to-ten years (31.9%), and less than five years of teaching (15.3%). However, their EMI teaching experience was relatively shorter: more than ten years experience (4.2%), five years experience (15.3 %), less than five years experience (61.1 %), and no experience (19.4%). Unfortunately, most respondents delivered EMI courses without training (69.4%). Of the remaining respondents who obtained some EMI teaching training, only 19.5% had either English or EMI pedagogy training, and a minor (11.1%) trained in both English language and EMI pedagogy.

**Research Method**

This qualitative study explored participants' teaching perceptions and practices (Maxwell, 2013). Data included an online questionnaire implemented before the training session and participants' Padlet written responses while training. The questionnaire written in English included 30 questions to explore the EMI lecturers' perceptions and classroom practices (nine about participant information and 21 about the teaching perceptions and

practices). Questions about perceptions were designed based on content and language teaching principles. Questions about classroom practices were based on three main classroom language functions (managing the classroom, understanding and communicating lesson content, and assessing students and giving them feedback) (Freeman et al., 2015) and EMI classroom activities (Vu, 2014). The questionnaire included different types (closed-ended, open-ended, multiple-choice, rating-scale), most of which provided options for the respondents to choose (one or several options accepted). They could also add options or write short answers (see Appendix).

**Data Collection and Analysis**

The questionnaire was first piloted with 14 respondents from a similar training course in June 2021 before being conducted online via Google Forms before the training session in November 2021. It was designed as an activity before the training session to assess needs and explore their perceptions and common classroom practices to save researchers' resources (Hanks, 2017). All 72 participants attending the session online from their places completed the questionnaire in 30 minutes. The results were downloaded and cleaned for format consistency to prepare for analysis. In this study, descriptive analysis (Paltridge & Phakiti, 2015) was employed with closed-ended questions, while qualitative data from open-ended questions and participants' written responses were analyzed using thematic coding to provide details to these themes (Creswell & Clark, 2011) and the relationships among them. However, little meaningful qualitative data were obtained from the open-ended questions. Results are presented to address the two research questions.

**Validity and Reliability**

This exploratory study examined the evolving nature of content and language teaching. Data collected from the questionnaire illustrated this elusive process among Vietnam EMI lecturers. The study adopted an audit trail technique (Vu, 2021) to enhance its reliability and validity, a detailed description of the data collection and analysis process. Although the researcher originally collected two data types (questionnaire and participants' written responses to training activities), little new information was found in the latter.

**Findings and Discussion**

The findings from the questionnaire data addressed the two questions about the EMI lecturers' perception and practices of content and language pedagogy.

**What Do EMI Lecturers Perceive of Content and Language Pedagogy?**

Data revealed lecturers' perceptions of content and language pedagogy. Regarding the educational outcomes of EMI classes, a significant proportion of lecturers believed they included both language and content development (81.9%). However, a small number of the respondents thought EMI classes focused on either subject content (12.5%) or English proficiency (5.6%) (see Table 2). Most respondents ( 80.6%) perceived their dual role (teaching both subject and English knowledge and skills) in developing language and content. Fewer lecturers thought their role was confined to teaching subject knowledge and skills only (13.9%) or teaching English knowledge and skills only (5.6%).

**Table 2**

*Summary of EMI Lecturers' Perceptions of Content and Language Pedagogy*

| Questions | Categories | Number of respondents (total 72) | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| What do you think is the role of EMI lecturers? | Teach subject knowledge and skills only | 10 | 13.9 |
| | Teach English knowledge and skills only | 4 | 5.6 |
| | Teach both subject and English knowledge and skills | 58 | 80.6 |
| What are the learning outcomes of an EMI class? | Subject content only | 9 | 12.5 |
| | English proficiency only | 4 | 5.6 |
| | Both subject content and English proficiency | 59 | 81.9 |
| What does subject content involve? (tick all that apply) | Subject knowledge and skills | 58 | 80.6 |
| | Thinking skills | 57 | 79.2 |
| | Cultural understanding | 32 | 44.4 |
| When teaching subjects through English as a medium of instruction, which linguistic aspects do you often focus on? (tick all that apply) | Subject-specific vocabulary and technical terms | 48 | 66.7 |
| | Grammar | 14 | 19.4 |
| | Pronunciation | 24 | 33.3 |
| | Receptive English skills (listening, reading skills) | 44 | 61.1 |
| | Productive English skills (speaking, writing skills) | 41 | 56.9 |

Most respondents adopted an expanded content definition, including subject knowledge and skills (80.6% each) and thinking skills (79.2%). However, cultural understanding received the slightest awareness (44.4%) (see Table 2).

The most popular aspect of language development support was reported in technical terms and subject-specific vocabulary (66.7%), followed by language skills needed to understand content (60.1%) and express meanings (56.9%). Some lecturers described their language support for grammar and pronunciation at much lower frequencies, 33.3% and 19.4%, respectively.

The findings indicate a continuum in the lecturers' perceptions of content and language pedagogy. While most participants perceived EMI dual goals, expanded content definitions, and varied language support, some lecturers were more aligned with either language or content extreme.

**How Do EMI Lecturers Practice Content and Language Pedagogy in the Classrooms?**

This section describes the participants' pedagogical practices and examines the lecturers' activities in EMI classrooms to achieve the desired outcomes. As shown in Table 3, EMI lecturers tended to use English the most often for less interactive activities such as lecturing (83.3%), planning a lesson (75%), questioning and answering (72.2%), and designing tests (58.3%). Fewer lecturers used English to initiate students' work, such as giving instruction (68.1%) and managing group work (45.8%). The activity that was the least often performed in English was providing feedback (40.3%).

**Table 3**

*Activities EMI Lecturers Used English for*

| With EMI teaching, what activities do you use English for? | Number of respondents (total 72) | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Planning a lesson | 54 | 75.0 |
| Lecturing | 60 | 83.3 |
| Giving instruction | 49 | 68.1 |
| Questioning and answering | 52 | 72.2 |
| Managing group work | 33 | 45.8 |
| Providing feedback | 29 | 40.3 |
| Designing tests | 42 | 58.3 |

Findings from the questionnaire also indicated the educational activities EMI lecturers implemented to develop content knowledge and skills (see Table 4). While educational activities were organized inside and outside the classrooms, the former group was more popular than the latter one. Regarding in-class activities, the most frequently used activity was lecturing (81.9%), followed by group work (80.6%). The most frequent outside classroom activities were for assessment purposes, such as after-class quizzes (80.6%) and projects (75%). The least frequent tasks involved reading and preparations before the class ( mostly under 15%).

**Table 4**

*Lecturers' Choice of EMI Activities to Develop Content*

| | Number of respondents (total 72) | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Before-class reading topic-related materials | 10 | 13.9 |
| Before-class reading topic-related materials and preparing questions | 9 | 12.5 |
| Before-class reading topic-related materials and answering provided questions | 8 | 11.1 |
| Before-class reading the topic-related materials and preparing presentations | 39 | 54.2 |
| In-class lecture | 59 | 81.9 |
| In-class group work | 58 | 80.6 |
| In-class whole group discussion | 52 | 72.2 |
| In-class case study | 50 | 69.4 |
| After-class quizzes | 58 | 80.6 |
| After-class projects | 54 | 75.0 |
| After-class reflection journals | 21 | 29.2 |

Questionnaire data revealed the participants' willingness to realize the language goals. Table 5 reported a variety of support activities. Most of the support was embedded in content-driven activities. The most popular ones included presenting vocabulary in context (79.2%), encouraging questioning and answering (51.4%), and assigning reading activities (45.8%). The least popular tasks were form-focused, such as correcting grammar errors (15.3%) and explaining grammar rules (16.7%), except for providing a glossary of terms (33.3%). Fewer lecturers reported using after-class activities. The fewest lecturers assigned before-class activities to students (less than 15%).

**Table 5**

*Lecturers' Activities to Achieve the Desired Linguistic Aspects*

| Categories | Number of respondents (total 72) | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Presenting terms in context | 57 | 79.2 |
| Breaking words down | 21 | 29.2 |
| Providing a glossary of terms | 24 | 33.3 |
| Explaining the grammar rules | 12 | 16.7 |
| Giving correction to grammar errors | 11 | 15.3 |
| Explaining pronunciation rules | 13 | 18.1 |
| Giving correction to pronunciation errors | 13 | 18.1 |
| Focusing on lecturing to improve students' listening skills | 24 | 33.3 |
| Assigning many reading activities | 33 | 45.8 |
| Encouraging questioning and answering | 37 | 51.4 |
| Assigning group discussions | 13 | 18.1 |
| Assigning writing activities ( summary, journal, reflection) | 13 | 18.1 |

The respondents reported some challenges in conducting EMI lessons. The most noticeable challenge was students' low English proficiency, facing 76.4% of respondents, followed by little pedagogical training (50%) and their own English proficiency (40.3%). The least reported problem was course information; about 12.5% of the participants had no access to this information (see Table 6).

**Table 6**

*Challenges Facing EMI Lecturers in an EMI Class*

| What challenges do you have when teaching an EMI class? | Number of respondents (total 72) | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| I am not confident with my English proficiency. | 29 | 40.3 |
| My students are not good at English. | 55 | 76.4 |
| I am not provided with a detailed syllabus and instructions about the course. | 9 | 12.5 |
| I have little or no support in pedagogy training for EMI classes. | 36 | 50 |

The lecturers reported adopting varied techniques to adjust to the EMI environment. The most popular technique was using Vietnamese to explain difficult concepts and tasks (70.8%), followed by paraphrasing and using examples (63.9%). Simplifying language use (51,4%), slowing down (48.6%), and providing a written form of instruction (41.7%) were less frequently used. Fewer lecturers chose to reduce the content (30.6%) (see Table 7).

**Table 7**

*Lecturers' Adjustments in EMI Lessons*

| Categories | Number of respondents (total 72) | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Reducing content | 22 | 30.6 |
| Slowing down instruction speed | 35 | 48.6 |
| Simplifying language use | 37 | 51.4 |
| Repeating, paraphrasing, using examples | 46 | 63.9 |
| Providing a written form of instruction | 30 | 41.7 |
| Using Vietnamese to explain difficult concepts | 51 | 70.8 |

In short, the findings illustrated the EMI pedagogy, which endorsed multiple activities to develop language and content. While most EMI lecturers practiced less interactive activities (lecturing and quizzes), some adopted more complex and interactive educational activities (group work and project work). Most respondents reported purposefully supporting students' language needs using content-embedded activities (reading, lecturing, writing, and discussion). Direct instruction in grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary was adopted far less frequently. Some perceived teaching challenges were low English proficiency (facing lecturers and students) and inadequate pedagogical professional development opportunities.

## Discussion

At the perception level, the findings revealed a mixed perception of the content and language pedagogy. On the one hand, most EMI lecturers were aware of the aims, principles, and their roles in endorsing content and language pedagogy. They believed that EMI classrooms should result in content and language development for the students. The content was not only confined to subject knowledge and skills; it also comprised cognitive skills. Their belief is aligned with the critical teaching principles of content and language-integrated learning (Coyle et al., 2010). However, a minority of the participants failed to recognize the dual goal of EMI courses and tended to support either language or content-driven goals. This finding resonates with findings from previous studies in other contexts, where the political or administrative policies imposed different expectations for educational practices to improve education quality (Airey et al., 2017) or to gain cutting-edge scientific knowledge (Kim et al., 2017) or to gain better employability (Phan et al., 2024). However, as the respondents were from the same institution, this lack of shared meaning about the EMI program outcomes and teaching principles was alarming. It might result in a mismatch between the stated and observed outcomes (Louber & Troudi, 2019; H. T. Nguyen et al., 2017; Pham et al., 2023). The institution should develop a clear agenda for EMI adoption and communicate its corresponding educational outcomes well to involved lecturers to eliminate confusing meanings to EMI adopters.

At the classroom level, the study reported details about the lecturers' practices. Although many participating lecturers recognized the dual goal of content and language pedagogy, the participants seemed to prioritize content over language. Language support activities were primarily embedded in reading, listening, collaborating in group work, or answering questions. This finding drew attention to the type of English proficiency students developed and the method of language instruction.

Regarding the type of English proficiency, when the lecturers aimed at content development, their language was closely attached to the disciplinary reasoning, including both language-related and disciplinary-related episodes (Dafouz et al., 2018). While the former focuses on the linguistic items that need meaning clarification, the latter are more complex to "elaborate individual knowledge elements to build up a more complete and shared knowledge structure" (Dafouz et al., 2018, p. 545) of content knowledge. The lecturers, therefore, should acquire appropriate pedagogical content knowledge to effectively facilitate students' learning (Dafouz et al., 2018; Hu & Li, 2017). The findings showed that the reported language support strategies (translation, paraphrasing, vocabulary learning) (see Table 5) in this study were more driven to provide solutions to language-related episodes, which is more beneficial to solving comprehension problems related to the lecturers' perceived challenge of students' low English proficiency and frequent lecturing in the classroom. Other language support for interactive disciplinary-related episodes (e.g., for discussions and group work) was less frequently reported. This practice might be partly explained by the EMI lecturers' and students' perceived English-using challenges and learning habits of being "spoon-fed with knowledge" (Vu & Dinh, 2024, p. 22). As lecturers' pedagogy is informed by "who is being taught, and who is

teaching, and their relationship to each other, and their relationship to structure and power" (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2010, as cited in Vu & Dinh, 2024, p. 31), it remained inconclusive from this questionnaire research to blame this practice for the lecturers' inappropriate teaching strategies to promote interactions and more effective content learning (Dang et al., 2023; Hu & Li, 2017; Siegel, 2022; Yuan et al., 2022).

Regarding language instruction methods, the study documented both integrated form-focused and isolated form-focused instruction practices. Most respondents reported purposefully supporting students' language needs by integrating language instruction in "disciplinary literacy" (Airey, 2016, p. 79) (reading, lecturing, writing, and discussion). Direct instruction in grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary was adopted far less frequently. These practices are recommended to support content and language development as EMI students learn to expand their linguistic repertoire meaningfully and accurately (Basturkmen, 2018).

## Conclusion

This paper has explored the evolving concept of content and language-related pedagogies with 72 EMI lecturers in a Vietnam public university. It first reviewed related contexts, including bilingual education, ESP, CBI, language immersion, and CLIL. Each context has influenced the pedagogy and hence created local meanings to meet the needs of the stakeholders. At the classroom level, essential content and language pedagogy concepts, including definitions, their reciprocal relationships, and classroom focus, have been reviewed. Practioners' competencies and perceptions might change how content and language are integrated into the lessons in several ways. First, they might prioritize content over language, as in bilingual education models, if they believe in content-only educational goals or need to be more competent to implement language support activities effectively. Alternatively, if the lecturers prioritize language over content, they might embark on ESP and CBI approaches to focus on language to prepare for subsequent content learning. Finally, they might take diverse classroom strategies to develop content and language if they perceive the dual goals of EMI courses.

The subsequent report of the questionnaire study illustrates all three scenarios from the participants in a Vietnam public university. Their perception and practice variations appeal for further institutional actions to communicate the dual goals and responsibilities to the EMI lecturers involved. This clarity will help them to choose design and classroom strategies to achieve the declared outcomes. Overall, content and language integrating learning is more than just a one-size-fits-all pedagogy. It will operate harmoniously with contextual factors prescribed by cultural, socio-economic, educational, and personal agendas and resources. Understanding contextual factors and the principles of integrating content and language learning might help teachers effectively practice a fit-for-the-purpose pedagogy and maximize student learning through continuous exploration and adjustment of teaching practices in their classrooms.

The implication can be summarised in three areas: alignment, personalization, and collaboration. First, EMI programs should identify their educational outcomes by considering local political and social policies to ensure the alignment of policies and practices (Pham et al., 2023) and eliminate adverse effects on classroom focus. Once the institution has identified its education outcomes, specific guidelines, and institution-based professional development (Sahan et al., 2021) on EMI pedagogy are needed to support the lecturers' classroom practices, as content and language pedagogy is elusive in accommodating diverse learning needs (ESP, CBI, or CLIL approaches). Second, personalization is required for lecturers' effective pedagogy. The provided teaching guidelines can ensure alignment among policies, educational goals, and teaching principles but can not prescribe classroom activities. The importance of personalization is related to much-needed flexibility to "take into account disciplinary

differences" (Airey et al., 2017, p. 561) and students' language needs (Kamaşak et al., 2021; H. T. Nguyen et al., 2017). Finally, collaboration is encouraged between language and content lecturers (Basturkmen, 2018; Jiang et al., 2019; Ma et al., 2024) as EMI lecturers, usually content experts, take more teaching roles toward language development. Content lecturers are recommended to take TESOL certificates as part of their professional development (Hu & Li, 2017; H. T. Nguyen et al., 2017).

The implications require some caution due to some limitations of this study. First, data were mainly collected via lecturers' questionnaires and lacked in-depth information about the lecturers' teaching practices. Further classroom data will be needed to justify the efficiency of language support activities in achieving the intended learning objectives. Second, the participants in this study came from diverse disciplines (see Table 1), and the reported classroom strategies might not be relevant to a specific discipline. These inconclusive areas are research gaps for Vietnamese EMI lecturers' future content and language pedagogy studies.

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