

ENGLISH-MEDIUM INSTRUCTION AND MULTILINGUAL REALITIES: INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' VOICES FROM EMI CLASSROOMS IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

English-medium instruction is expanding in Indonesian universities to support internationalization and global partnerships, yet classroom communication often remains multilingual. This study examined how lecturers' language practices and peer language choices shape international students' participation and inclusion in EMI programs at a university in East Java. Using a qualitative descriptive design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine international students, and the data were analyzed thematically. The findings suggest that EMI operates as a negotiated multilingual practice rather than a stable English-only environment. Lecturer communicative competence shapes international students' access to disciplinary learning, while peer language practices regulate participation and inclusion by establishing informal multilingual norms that often override institutional EMI policies. As a result, opportunities for participation become unequal, with inclusion frequently depending on students' own efforts to negotiate language barriers. These findings highlight the need for EMI implementation that promotes linguistic equity through clearer lecturer communication and structured institutional support for multilingual participation.

Keywords: code-switching; English-medium instruction; international students; language policy; multilingual classrooms

ABSTRAK

Pengajaran dengan bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa pengantar (English-Medium Instruction/EMI) semakin berkembang di berbagai universitas di Indonesia untuk mendukung internasionalisasi dan kemitraan global, namun komunikasi di kelas masih berlangsung dalam lingkungan multibahasa. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana praktik bahasa dosen dan pilihan bahasa teman sebaya memengaruhi partisipasi dan inklusi mahasiswa internasional dalam program EMI di sebuah universitas di Jawa Timur. Dengan menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif, wawancara semi-terstruktur dilakukan terhadap sembilan mahasiswa internasional, kemudian data dianalisis secara tematik. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa dalam praktiknya EMI merupakan praktik multibahasa yang terus dinegosiasikan, bukan lingkungan yang secara konsisten hanya menggunakan bahasa Inggris. Kompetensi komunikatif dosen memengaruhi akses mahasiswa internasional terhadap pembelajaran akademik, sedangkan praktik bahasa teman sebaya membentuk norma multibahasa informal yang dalam praktiknya sering kali lebih dominan daripada kebijakan EMI institusional. Akibatnya, kesempatan untuk berpartisipasi menjadi tidak merata, dan inklusi sering kali bergantung pada upaya mahasiswa sendiri dalam menavigasi hambatan bahasa. Temuan ini menyoroti pentingnya pelaksanaan EMI yang mendorong kesetaraan linguistik melalui peningkatan kompetensi komunikatif dosen serta dukungan institusional yang terstruktur bagi partisipasi multibahasa yang inklusif.

Kata Kunci: alih kode; bahasa pengantar bahasa Inggris; mahasiswa internasional; kebijakan bahasa; kelas multibahasa

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, the global landscape of higher education has witnessed a significant shift in non-Anglophone countries, transitioning from English being taught as a foreign language (EFL) to its adoption as the medium of instruction (EMI) for academic disciplines such as science, mathematics, and medicine. This shift reflects broader trends in internationalization, where English is positioned as a tool for enhancing global academic mobility, fostering multilingual competencies, and improving institutional rankings (Dearden, 2021; Muttaqin & Chuang, 2022). EMI is often framed as a dual-purpose approach, which aims to simultaneously advance students' content mastery and English proficiency, a concept Macaro (2018) described as a "win-win solution." However, the implementation of EMI is not without challenges, as the use of English in classroom interaction can influence students' comprehension of academic content, particularly in contexts where English is not the primary language of the majority population (Aizawa et al., 2025). These challenges raise critical questions about how EMI policies translate into classroom realities and how they address the linguistic and cultural diversity of student populations.

The adoption of EMI has expanded rapidly across Asia, with countries such as China, Japan, and South Korea integrating it into their higher education strategies to enhance academic quality and global competitiveness (Saragih, 2024). Indonesia has followed this regional trend by embedding EMI within its broader internationalization policies, as evidenced by initiatives from the Ministry of Education and Culture. These include the promotion of bilingual and international class programs, as well as Ministerial Decree No. 3/M/2021, which ties university funding and evaluation to metrics such as international collaboration and student mobility (Simbolon, 2021; Irham & Wahyudi, 2024). These policies have spurred the establishment of International Undergraduate Programs (IUPs) and joint-degree collaborations, many of which adopt EMI as a core component. However, the rapid expansion of EMI in Indonesia has raised concerns about institutional readiness. While universities often prioritize internationalization indicators, such as global visibility and rankings, the development of adequate linguistic, academic, and social support systems for international students has not always kept pace (Yuan, 2024; As Sabiq et al., 2025). This misalignment between policy ambitions and institutional capacity underscores the challenges of ensuring that EMI benefits both local and international students.

Across EMI scholarship, a broad consensus has emerged that successful implementation depends less on formal policy frameworks and more on the multilingual interactional practices through which English is enacted in classrooms. In Indonesia, this policy-practice gap is particularly pronounced, as EMI intersects with broader sociopolitical debates about national identity and the role of English in higher education (Tang et al., 2024; Dewi, 2017). While EMI policies emphasize English as a medium for academic excellence and internationalization, their enactment is shaped by institutional constraints, stakeholder attitudes, and the sociocultural meanings attached to English. Lecturers, as key agents of EMI, navigate these tensions by adapting their practices to balance institutional expectations with classroom realities. However, variability in lecturers' English proficiency, communicative clarity, and consistency in language use has significant implications for students' access to content (Bolton et al., 2023; Saragih, 2024). This variability highlights a central tension in EMI: while policies aim for English-dominant instruction, classroom practices often reflect multilingual norms, including code-switching and the use of bilingual materials, which complicate the realization of EMI's dual objectives (Simbolon, 2021; Irham & Wahyudi, 2024).

Multilingual realities further complicate EMI implementation in Indonesia. Classrooms often function as dynamic, multilingual spaces where English interacts with Bahasa Indonesia and other local languages. Code-switching, a common strategy for managing local students' comprehension, has been found to enhance meaning-making and reduce cognitive load for local learners (Aba

Sha'Ar & Rofiah, 2024; Tai, 2022). However, these practices can marginalize international students who do not speak Bahasa Indonesia, requiring them to navigate additional linguistic challenges, such as translating bilingual materials and reconciling divergent language norms (Simbolon et al., 2025). This tension underscores a broader equity issue in EMI: while multilingual practices may support local students, they can simultaneously reproduce barriers for international students, limiting their access and participation.

Peer language practices represent another underexplored dimension of EMI implementation. Research indicates that peer interactions in EMI classrooms often default to the local language, particularly during group work and informal discussions, as this is faster and more socially comfortable for local students (Puspitasari & Ishak, 2023; Santoso et al., 2024). For international students, such practices create micro-exclusion, where they are physically present but unable to fully engage due to language barriers (Salihu et al., 2025). Unlike lecturers, who are institutionally accountable for using English, peers have greater flexibility in their language choices, which can further disadvantage international students in multilingual settings. While some peer networks provide informal support through translation or language mediation, these efforts are often inconsistent and place the burden of inclusion on international students themselves (Liu, 2020; Simbolon et al., 2025). This dynamic highlights the need for more structured approaches to fostering linguistic equity and social inclusion in EMI classrooms.

International students occupy a unique position within EMI classrooms because they simultaneously navigate institutional language policies, lecturer language practices, peer interaction, and multilingual classroom norms (Boonsuk, 2025; Hartle et al., 2025). Their experiences therefore provide a valuable lens for understanding how EMI policies are enacted in everyday classroom practice rather than merely how they are formulated (Erliana et al., 2024). Unlike lecturers, who enact EMI policy, or local students, who already have access to the dominant classroom language and sociocultural norms, international students experience the cumulative consequences of these processes in real time (Abnassyrova & Zhunussova, 2025; Dang et al., 2025; Jiang, 2025). Their experiences therefore provide a valuable lens for understanding how EMI policies are enacted in everyday classroom practice rather than merely how they are formulated (Erliana et al., 2024). These experiences reveal how policy expectations about English as the medium of instruction are mediated by lecturer-dependent factors, such as accent intelligibility and code-switching, as well as peer language practices during group work and informal interaction (Bolton et al., 2023; Puspitasari & Ishak, 2023).

Theoretically, centering international students' voices provides a critical lens for examining the EMI policy-practice gap because it reveals how institutional language policies are interpreted, negotiated, and experienced in everyday classroom interaction (Erliana et al., 2024; Hartle et al., 2025). Their accounts illuminate how language policy, classroom interaction, and social integration intersect in multilingual EMI classrooms, revealing dimensions of participation and belonging that are less visible from the perspectives of lecturers or local students (Jiang, 2025; Yuan et al., 2025). By examining how international students negotiate participation and inclusion in multilingual EMI classrooms, this study contributes to current discussions on EMI by demonstrating how translanguaging practices and everyday language choices shape equitable participation and access in higher education (Boonsuk, 2025; Zheng & Qiu, 2024).

Although previous EMI research has generated important insights into lecturer language practices, institutional policy, and student attitudes, these aspects have often been examined separately, with relatively limited attention to how they interact to shape international students' participation and inclusion within the same multilingual classroom (Macaro & Rose, 2023; Rose et al., 2026). Consequently, relatively little attention has been given to how lecturer language practices and peer language practices jointly shape international students' participation and inclusion within the same multilingual EMI classroom, despite growing recognition that both are central to students'

learning experiences (Erliana et al., 2024; Jiang, 2025; Rose et al., 2026). Addressing this interactional relationship constitutes the primary theoretical contribution of the present study, extending current understandings of how multilingual EMI classrooms shape international students' participation and inclusion.

Against this backdrop, the present study aims to illuminate the multilingual realities of EMI in Indonesian universities by centering international students' voices. Specifically, it seeks to answer two interrelated questions: (1) How do international students experience lecturers' language practices in EMI classrooms in Indonesian universities? (2) How do peer language practices shape international students' participation and inclusion in EMI contexts? By examining both lecturer language practices (including accent intelligibility, code-switching patterns, and clarity of instruction) and peer language practices (including language choices during group work and informal interaction), this study contributes a focused account of how participation and inclusion are negotiated in everyday EMI classrooms. It also offers practical insights for designing more inclusive and linguistically supportive EMI programs, particularly in contexts where English operates alongside other dominant languages.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to examine international students' experiences of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) at a university in East Java within the context of existing language policies. This approach allowed the researcher to explore participants' lived experiences, narratives, and sense-making, uncovering the contradictions between policy intentions and classroom realities. The study prioritized depth of understanding over statistical generalizability, consistent with qualitative research principles.

Research Site and Participants

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, a method designed to identify information-rich individuals who could provide in-depth insights into the phenomenon under investigation. The sample consisted of nine current university students enrolled in undergraduate ($n = 6$) and postgraduate ($n = 3$) EMI programs. Maximum variation sampling was employed to ensure diversity in linguistic and cultural backgrounds, with participants from Africa, Asia, and Europe. This diversity was not intended to represent all continental regions but to enrich the analysis by capturing multiple perspectives on the same EMI context. Although participants came from varied linguistic and educational backgrounds, they formed a relatively homogeneous group with respect to the phenomenon under investigation: international students enrolled in EMI programs at the same Indonesian university. This balance between diversity and homogeneity allowed the study to explore contextual heterogeneity while maintaining analytical focus.

All participants had completed at least one semester of study, ensuring they had sufficient exposure to EMI teaching and university life to provide reflective and insightful accounts. This criterion ensured that participants were familiar with both the academic and social dimensions of EMI classrooms. Participant demographics, including linguistic and educational backgrounds, are presented in Table 1. The inclusion of participants with varying levels of prior EMI exposure further enriched the analysis by highlighting how different linguistic and educational histories shaped their experiences in the same institutional context.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Study Level	Country of Origin	First Language	Prior EMI Exposure
Julia	Female	Undergraduate	France	French	No prior EMI; all schooling in French
Fatima	Female	Postgraduate	Gambia	Mandinka	Extensive; Gambian education in English
Anton	Male	Undergraduate	Malaysia	Malay	Moderate; Malaysian schooling partly in English
James	Male	Undergraduate	UK	English	Extensive; British education in English
Ahmad	Male	Undergraduate	Nigeria	Hausa	Extensive; Nigerian education in English
Isma'il	Male	Master's (MA)	Pakistan	Urdu	Extensive; Pakistani education in English
Ali	Male	Undergraduate	Yemen	Arabic	Enrolled in International Class for 1.5 years
Tony	Male	Master's (MA)	Tajikistan	Tajik	2-3 years in English medium programs
Daniel	Male	Undergraduate	Gambia	Mandinka	Extensive; Lifelong English learner

Sample adequacy was determined based on the specificity of the research aim, the richness of the interview data, and the recurring patterns identified during analysis. The study focused on understanding how international students experience lecturer and peer language practices within EMI classrooms at a single university, a relatively specific and bounded context. Semi-structured interviews lasting 35–45 minutes provided rich, detailed narratives, enabling the identification of recurring themes and nuanced variations across participants. The relatively small sample size allowed for intensive qualitative analysis, prioritizing depth over breadth. The concept of information power, as outlined by Malterud et al. (2016), further supports the adequacy of the sample. Given the focused research aim, the homogeneity of the participant group in terms of their shared institutional context, and the in-depth nature of the interviews, the sample provided sufficient information power to address the research questions comprehensively. During iterative coding and analysis, recurring patterns consistently emerged across interviews, and no new themes or meaningful variations were identified beyond the ninth interview, indicating that thematic saturation had been reached.

Ethical approval was obtained from the International Office (11th June, 2025) prior to data collection. Participants were recruited through the International Student Office and provided informed consent before participation. To protect anonymity, participants are referred to using pseudonyms throughout the analysis, and all personal identifiers were masked.

Data collection and analysis

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted in English and audio-recorded with participants' consent. The interview protocol was explicitly designed to align with the two research questions. First, questions explored how international students experienced lecturers' language practices in EMI classrooms, including patterns of language choice, code-switching, clarity of explanation, and their effects on comprehension and engagement. Second, questions examined how peer language practices shaped students' participation and sense of inclusion, focusing on classroom interaction, group work, informal communication, and social integration. The semi-structured format allowed participants to elaborate on their lived experiences while ensuring that

discussion remained focused on lecturers’ and peers’ language practices in EMI contexts. Open-ended questions encouraged detailed reflections on how these language practices influenced their academic participation, classroom engagement, and social inclusion.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase approach. The transcripts were read repeatedly for familiarization and systematically coded to identify meaningful segments related to the research questions. Initial codes were generated inductively from the data and then grouped into broader themes through an iterative process of comparison and refinement. This approach ensured that themes remained grounded in participants’ accounts while being interpreted within the broader context of existing EMI scholarship. The codes were reviewed against the data and research questions to ensure consistency and relevance. During this iterative process, no new themes emerged beyond the ninth interview, confirming that thematic saturation had been reached. The final themes were interpreted in light of the existing literature on EMI, internationalization, and multilingual classroom dynamics to situate the findings within the broader academic discourse.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This section presents the findings from semi-structured interviews with nine international students enrolled in English-Medium Instruction (EMI) programmes at a university in East Java, Indonesia. The analysis is organized according to the two research questions: first, how international students experience lecturers' language practices in EMI classrooms, and second, how peer language practices shape their participation and inclusion.

International Students’ Experiences of Lecturers’ Language Practices

Table 2 summarizes the two interrelated themes that emerged from participants' accounts of lecturers' language practices in EMI classrooms. Together, these themes illustrate that access to English-medium instruction is shaped not only by institutional EMI policy but also by lecturers' communicative competence and their multilingual classroom practices.

Table 2. Conceptual Themes and Subthemes for Research Question 1

Theme	Subthemes	Central Interpretation	Illustrative Quotation
Access to EMI Is Shaped by Lecturer Communicative Competence	Accent intelligibility, fluency, clarity, consistency	Students’ access to EMI depends less on institutional policy and more on lecturers’ ability to deliver clear, comprehensible English.	“Sometimes the teachers’ English is not up to the standard.” (James)
Multilingual Classroom Practices Create Unequal Participation	Code-switching, mixed-language materials, comprehension gaps	Multilingual practices often privilege local students, unintentionally marginalizing international students.	“Sometimes the slides are in Bahasa, so I have to translate.” (Julia)

Access to EMI Is Shaped by Lecturer Communicative Competence

Across the interviews, participants emphasized that lecturers' communicative competence, particularly accent intelligibility, fluency, clarity of explanation, and consistency, was the primary factor determining access to EMI.

For example, unfamiliar accents initially challenged students, with James explaining, “Sometimes the teachers’ English is not up to the standard, so it’s hard to understand the instructions.” Similarly, Julia noted that adjusting to lecturers' accents required time and effort, particularly in her first few weeks of classes. Fatima, with extensive prior EMI exposure, added that although she could generally follow lecturers, inconsistent fluency occasionally disrupted comprehension.

Collectively, these accounts reveal that EMI access is contingent on how individual lecturers enact institutional language policies. While some participants viewed these challenges as temporary, others described a persistent adjustment burden, particularly when unclear instructions affected assignments and assessments. This lecturer-dependent variability underscores a key policy–practice gap: the institutional promise of EMI does not always translate into equitable access for all students.

These findings suggest that EMI in practice is less a stable institutional framework and more a flexible, lecturer-mediated reality. Students’ access to English-medium learning is shaped by how effectively lecturers communicate in English, highlighting the need for targeted professional development in EMI delivery.

Multilingual Classroom Practices Create Unequal Participation

The second theme highlights how multilingual classroom practices, intended to support comprehension, can inadvertently marginalize international students. Participants reported that code-switching between English and Bahasa Indonesia, as well as the use of mixed-language materials, often disrupted their understanding and created feelings of exclusion.

Julia described how reliance on bilingual slides added to her cognitive load: *“Sometimes the slides are in Bahasa, so I have to translate.”* Similarly, James noted a mismatch between his expectations of EMI and classroom practices: *“It’s supposed to be English, but even sometimes the teachers still use Indonesian.”* Isma’il elaborated on the emotional impact of sudden language shifts, explaining, *“When they suddenly shift to Bahasa Indonesia, it breaks the pattern of understanding. I feel frustrated because I don’t understand what they are saying.”*

These accounts illustrate that multilingual practices, while supporting local students, often impose additional burdens on international students. The use of Bahasa Indonesia as a “support language” creates asymmetries in classroom participation, privileging those who share the local language while leaving others to rely on translation tools or peer assistance.

Rather than functioning solely as pedagogical resources, multilingual practices also structure unequal opportunities for participation. Participants’ experiences reveal that the benefits of translanguaging for local students can simultaneously generate barriers for international students, exposing a critical tension within multilingual EMI environments.

International Students' Experiences of Peer Language Practices

Participants' accounts indicate that peer language practices shape participation in two closely related ways (Table 3). While the dominant use of Bahasa Indonesia often restricts participation, bilingual classmates and translation practices can partially offset these barriers.

Table 3. Conceptual Themes and Subthemes for Research Question 2

Theme	Subthemes	Central Interpretation	Illustrative Quotation
Peer Language Practices Regulate Participation	Indonesian-default talk, speed of speech, local abbreviations	Peer language choices function as informal gatekeeping mechanisms that structure unequal opportunities for participation.	<i>"I feel left out because they speak Indonesian."</i> (Julia)
Inclusion Depends on Informal Language Brokerage	Bilingual classmates, translation tools, help-seeking	Participation often depends on informal peer mediation, placing the burden of inclusion on international students rather than on institutional support.	<i>"I ask them to explain it in English."</i> (Isma'il)

Theme 1: Peer Language Practices Regulate Participation

Participation in EMI classrooms was shaped not simply by students' willingness to engage, but by the linguistic norms established within peer groups. Across interviews, Bahasa Indonesia

functioned as the default language of interaction, creating unequal opportunities for participation among international students. This pattern was not driven by explicit exclusion but emerged through routine habits—rapid speech, local abbreviations, and the practical efficiency of using the shared language of the majority.

Julia explained the mechanism: *"Sometimes, when I'm with the group, they don't speak English every time because I'm the only international student, so it's easier for them to speak Indonesian."* Her account reveals how peer language choices are rationally motivated from the perspective of local students, yet systematically disadvantage those outside the linguistic majority. The burden of access falls on the international student, who must interrupt conversation, request translation, and repeatedly mark herself as linguistically outside the group. James described the academic consequences: *"In group projects, they tend to talk among themselves, and then you keep silent."* This silence was not voluntary but structurally produced—a direct result of peer language practices that made participation contingent on shared linguistic competence.

The difficulty extended beyond simple comprehension. Isma'il noted that *"they use abbreviations, and even if we try to translate, we can't get the right answer."* This observation points to a deeper barrier: peer language practices create forms of exclusion that cannot be easily repaired through translation tools or individual effort. Local abbreviations and shorthand carry cultural and linguistic meanings that resist external translation, making the exclusion structurally difficult to overcome. In this sense, peer language practices become an informal language policy operating alongside institutional EMI policy. Although English is officially the language of instruction, participation is negotiated through the dominant language practices of peer groups, revealing how informal norms can override formal policy.

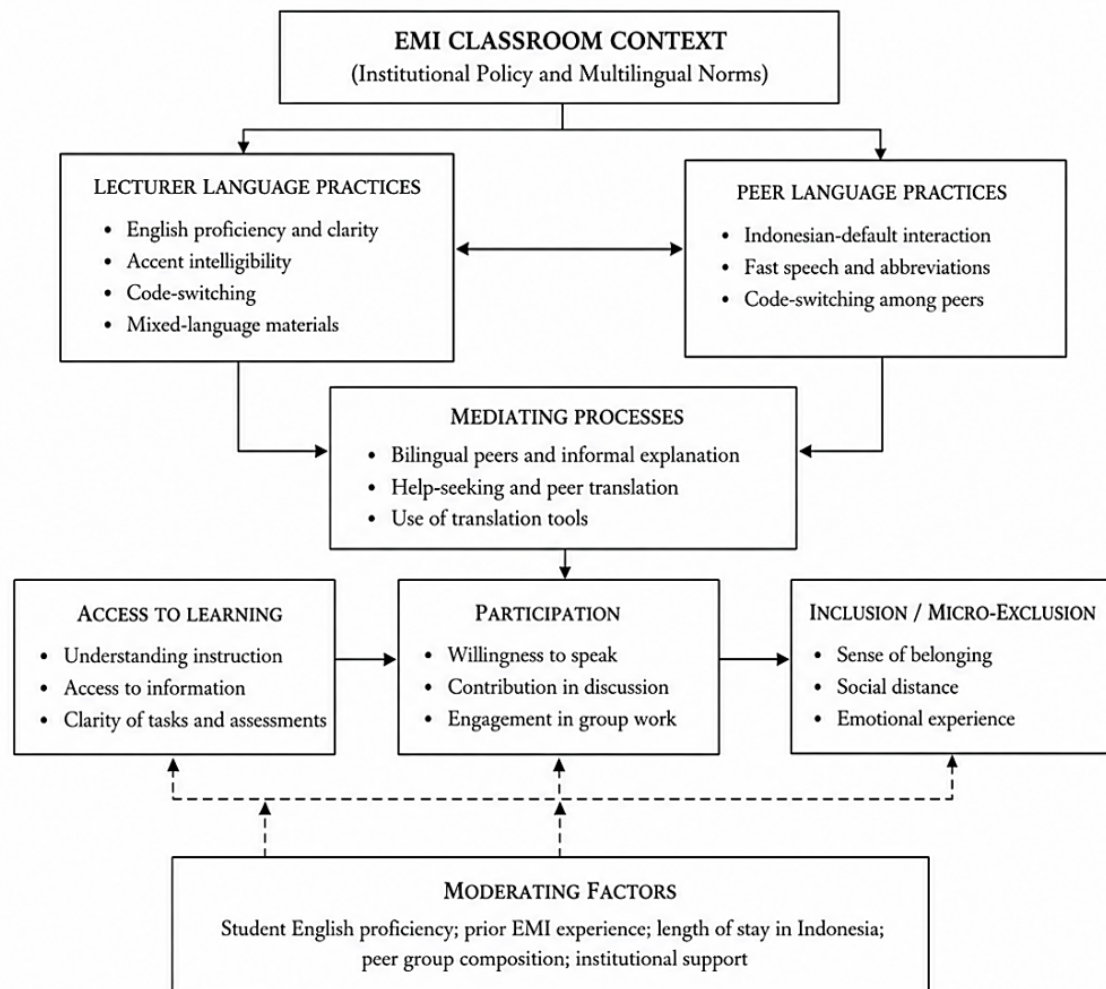
Theme 2: Inclusion Depends on Informal Language Brokerage

When inclusion did occur, it relied heavily on informal peer mediation rather than on institutional language support. Several participants described bilingual classmates as important language mediators who enabled access to classroom discussion. Ahmad explained that friends translated lecturers' explanations, while James similarly relied on bilingual classmates when communication became difficult. These moments of peer-mediated inclusion were critical for bridging linguistic gaps, particularly when Indonesian became the default language in group interaction.

However, this reliance on informal brokerage revealed a significant structural problem: inclusion became an individual rather than an institutional responsibility. Isma'il described his help-seeking process: *"I ask them to explain it in English, or I use Google Translate when I don't understand."* His account illustrates how international students managed their own access through repeated requests and digital tools. Fatima added that *"in our class group chat, information is shared in Indonesian, so I use translation tools to understand."* While these strategies provided practical support, they also exposed the absence of systematic institutional provision for multilingual communication.

Digital translation tools played an ambiguous role. They functioned as a safety net, allowing international students to access information they would otherwise miss. Yet their necessity also highlighted a gap: the university had not structured peer communication or classroom materials to ensure equitable access from the outset. Rather than fostering direct interaction between international and local students, translation tools sometimes functioned as a *"digital wall"*—supporting academic survival while reducing opportunities for spontaneous conversation and relationship-building. In this way, peer-mediated inclusion, though valuable, also masked the absence of more systematic support for multilingual participation.

Figure 1. A conceptual model of how lecturer and peer language practices shape international students' access, participation, and inclusion in EMI classrooms



As conceptualized in Figure 1, international students' experiences in EMI classrooms are shaped by the interaction between lecturer language practices and peer language practices rather than by EMI policy alone. Lecturer-related factors, including English communicative competence, code-switching, and the use of mixed-language materials, together with peer language practices, including Indonesian-default interaction, informal language brokerage, and translation support, collectively influence students' access to learning, classroom participation, and experiences of inclusion or micro-exclusion.

Discussion

International Students' Experiences of Lecturers' Language Practices

Although EMI is institutionalized through policy, its effectiveness ultimately depends on how lecturers translate that policy into everyday classroom interaction. The present findings suggest that lecturers' communicative competence constitutes the practical mechanism through which EMI is enacted. Consequently, English-medium instruction cannot be understood solely as an institutional designation but as a classroom practice whose success depends on the quality of pedagogical communication (Rose et al., 2026).

This distinction is important because it reframes the persistent policy-practice gap identified in Indonesian EMI research. Rather than merely confirming its existence, the present study explains how this gap emerges through everyday classroom interaction (Erliana et al., 2024). When

lecturers consistently use clear and well-paced English during instruction, international students experience better comprehension and greater confidence in classroom participation. Similarly, Simbolon (2021) found that although English was officially designated as the medium of instruction, lecturers frequently alternated between English and Bahasa Indonesia, resulting in inconsistent EMI implementation. These findings suggest that the quality of EMI is not determined solely by institutional policy but largely depends on lecturers' communicative competence, which shapes international students' access to disciplinary knowledge and meaningful classroom participation.

The accent and pronunciation patterns reported by participants warrant careful interpretation. Rather than treating accent variation as a deficiency, the findings suggest that intelligibility—the clarity with which lecturers articulate and pace their speech—emerges as the operative concern (Aizawa et al., 2025). Participants with extensive prior EMI exposure (such as those educated in English-medium systems in Nigeria, Gambia, or the UK) still identified comprehension difficulties when lecturer delivery was unclear or heavily accented, indicating that accent alone does not explain access barriers. This nuance challenges native-speaker norms that often dominate EMI discourse. Within the context of this study, EMI development may benefit from reframing lecturer language support away from accent standardization and toward communicative clarity, interactive responsiveness, and pedagogical use of English—dimensions more directly tied to content accessibility and student engagement.

Code-Switching and Multilingual Classroom Practices

Code-switching in EMI classrooms operates as a simultaneous inclusion and exclusion mechanism, complicating established translanguaging literature. While translanguaging is widely documented as pedagogically beneficial for local students—enabling clearer explanations, stronger peer engagement, and reduced cognitive load—the present findings illuminate an equity dimension often underexamined in Indonesian EMI research (Permana & Rohmah, 2024). When lecturers shift into Bahasa Indonesia, they simultaneously create linguistic asymmetry: the local language becomes a legitimate classroom resource for some students while remaining inaccessible to international students who do not share it.

This dynamic reveals how classroom language choices create unequal learning opportunities. International students often become passive listeners to explanations delivered in Bahasa Indonesia and rely on English recaps or translation to understand course content. These findings extend translanguaging theory by showing that multilingual practices, while supporting local students' learning, may unintentionally create linguistic gatekeeping for international students. Mixed-language teaching materials further reinforce this imbalance by requiring international students to navigate resources independently. Within this study, EMI functions as a form of partial English-medium instruction, where English remains the official instructional language but classroom interaction is frequently negotiated through multiple languages. This finding is consistent with Simbolon et al. (2025), who reported similar challenges in Indonesian EMI courses. Therefore, lecturer language choices and multilingual classroom practices jointly determine equitable access to learning and participation in EMI contexts.

Peer Language Practices and Conditional Inclusion in EMI Classrooms

Micro-exclusion in EMI classrooms emerges not from multilingualism itself, but from unequal participation in translanguaging practices, where access to the local language determines access to classroom interaction. When peer groups default to Bahasa Indonesia during group work and informal discussion, international students who do not share that language face systematic barriers to participation. This occurs not through deliberate exclusion, but through the routine operation of local language norms that privilege those who belong to the linguistic majority. This finding is consistent with Dewi's (2017) observation that EMI implementation in Indonesian higher education

is shaped by lecturers' language choices and classroom realities rather than institutional policy alone. It also aligns with Permana and Rohmah (2024), who argue that translanguaging practices have become a common feature of Indonesian educational settings, where the use of multiple languages is routinely negotiated to facilitate communication. Consequently, inclusion in multilingual EMI contexts is not guaranteed by English-medium policy but is instead contingent on whether peers actively negotiate shared linguistic space.

Translanguaging theory in EMI emphasizes the pedagogical value of multilingual resource use for meaning-making and learner confidence. However, the present findings reveal that translanguaging operates asymmetrically depending on who has access to the languages being used. When local students switch to Bahasa Indonesia to clarify concepts or facilitate discussion, translanguaging supports their learning but simultaneously limits international students' participation. This finding extends Zheng and Qiu's (2024) discussion of translanguaging by showing that unequal access to local languages may produce inequitable participation despite the pedagogical benefits of multilingual practices. Rather than expanding inclusion for all learners, translanguaging may regulate participation by privileging those who share the dominant local language. This asymmetry reveals a critical gap in how translanguaging is theorized in EMI literature, which has largely focused on how multilingual resource-use supports learning without adequately addressing the equity implications when access to the languages being used is unequally distributed.

Beyond translanguaging theory, peer language practices function as an informal language policy that often operates alongside—and even overrides—official EMI policy. Although English is designated as the medium of instruction, peer groups establish their own linguistic norms through everyday interaction. When international students are a numerical minority, Bahasa Indonesia naturally becomes the dominant language because it is more efficient for local students. This finding is consistent with Puspitasari and Ishak (2023), who found that local language use remained prevalent despite EMI implementation. Although unwritten, these peer language norms strongly influence participation opportunities. Consequently, international students navigate a multilayered linguistic environment in which institutional policy promotes English, lecturers vary in implementing EMI, and peer interactions frequently privilege Bahasa Indonesia. As a result, participation becomes fragmented, with students' access to classroom interaction depending on the language practices adopted in each learning context.

Micro-exclusion is best understood as structural rather than intentional. Participants consistently described peers as using Bahasa Indonesia because it was easier, not to deliberately exclude international students. However, repeated language choices, rapid code-switching, and local abbreviations systematically reduced international students' access to classroom interaction and group participation. According to Tai (2022), translanguaging can promote inclusive learning when implemented strategically. In contrast, the present study shows that multilingual practices may also produce unequal participation when not all students have access to the languages being used. Therefore, inclusion in multilingual EMI classrooms depends not only on institutional policy but also on peers' collective responsibility to manage language practices that ensure equitable participation for all students.

When peers provide translation or switch to English, they act as informal language brokers, helping international students access classroom information and participate in group work. This support is valuable and reflects the scaffolding function of translanguaging described by Liu (2020). However, the present findings show that such support remains compensatory rather than structural. International students must repeatedly request translation, interrupt discussions, and bear the emotional and cognitive burden of relying on others for access to communication. Also, peer translation has clear limitations, as local abbreviations, rapid speech, and context-specific expressions cannot always be accurately translated. Therefore, relying on peer translation alone is

insufficient because it addresses immediate communication needs without resolving the broader issue of unequal access to multilingual classroom interaction.

Across these dimensions—translanguaging asymmetry, informal peer language policy, structural micro-exclusion, and compensatory peer translation—a consistent pattern emerges: inclusion in EMI classrooms is conditional rather than guaranteed. It depends on whether peers actively negotiate shared linguistic space, whether international students are willing to repeatedly request translation, and whether the pace and complexity of peer talk remain within the bounds of what can be translated or understood (Aba Sha'Ar & Rofiah, 2024). None of these conditions are assured. Consequently, international students cannot rely on stable, predictable access to peer interaction and group participation. EMI policy promises English-medium access, but classroom realities remain fundamentally multilingual, with English dominance contingent on individual choices and peer group composition.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study explored how lecturers' and peers' language practices influence international students' learning experiences in English Medium Instruction (EMI) classrooms at an Indonesian university. The findings show that EMI is not implemented as a fully English-speaking environment. Instead, classroom communication is continuously negotiated through both English and Bahasa Indonesia, affecting students' access to learning and participation.

Lecturers play an important role in determining the effectiveness of EMI. When they use clear and consistent English, international students understand the lesson more easily and feel more confident participating in class. However, when lecturers frequently switch to Bahasa Indonesia or use English that is difficult to understand, international students experience comprehension difficulties and reduced access to course content. These findings suggest that the success of EMI depends not only on institutional policy but also on lecturers' communicative competence in implementing English as the medium of instruction.

Peer language practices also shape students' classroom experiences. During group work and informal discussions, local students often switch to Bahasa Indonesia because it is faster and more comfortable. Although this practice helps local students communicate efficiently, it unintentionally excludes international students who do not understand Indonesian. As a result, international students often depend on classmates for translation or clarification. The finding highlights that multilingual practices can both support and restrict participation, depending on who has access to the languages being used.

Overall, inclusion in EMI classrooms is conditional rather than guaranteed. It depends on lecturers' consistent use of English, peers' willingness to communicate inclusively, and institutional support for equitable language practices. Therefore, universities should provide professional development for lecturers, establish guidelines for inclusive peer interaction, and ensure that teaching materials and classroom communication remain accessible to all students.

This study was conducted at a single Indonesian university and relied primarily on interview data. Future research should include classroom observations and perspectives from lecturers and local students to gain a more comprehensive understanding of language practices in EMI classrooms.

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