

**Session A Key Input: Lecture 2**  
**Translanguaging: Theory and Practice – The role of language in EMI**  
*Lecture Transcript*

Presented by **Dr Kari Sahan**

Welcome back! My name is Dr Kari Sahan, and this is 2<sup>nd</sup> part of our lecture on translanguaging theory and practice. In today's lecture, we will be looking at the relationship between translanguaging and teaching in EMI contexts. We'll do this by addressing the role of language in EMI. So, let's start today's lecture with a question:

Does EMI mean English-*only* instruction?

Now, research has told us that *some* teachers and students working in EMI contexts believe that EMI should be English-only or English-mostly. And if you're an EAP teacher, this might sound familiar to you, too.

According to research, there are 2 main reasons for this belief:

1. The belief that an English immersion environment is best for students' English language learning
2. The belief that it's better to use English when you have international students in the class

First, many teachers and students believe that an English immersion environment is best for improving students' English language skills – so they think they should use only English or mostly English to help students learn English.

The second reason we see in the research is that teachers and students think that it is better to use English when you have international students in the class – this relates to ideas of fairness, because international students might not know the local languages, and since the teacher might not know everyone's first language, English is the common default language.

So those are 2 main reasons that teachers and students give for English-only teaching. But let's look at the research behind both of these assumptions in more detail.

Does English-only mean better English learning?

Let's start with that first idea: the belief that students' English language skills will improve *more* if they are in an English-only environment.

Unfortunately, the research on language learning through EMI does not provide enough evidence to support this idea. A recent systematic review concluded that: "the research evidence to date is insufficient to assert that EMI benefits language learning" (Macaro et al., 2018)

Scholars have also criticised this assumption as: "the naïve notion of learning by osmosis" (Block & Moncada-Comas, 2022)

In other words, language learning requires more than just sitting in a classroom where the language is spoken; it takes more to learn English than just listening to a teacher speak English.

We know that many other factors go into language learning...so, if you want to improve your students' English, the better question might be: **how** can we support their learning in English? – we'll come back to this later.

Here, we also need to stop and reflect on the aims of EMI: is the primary aim of your EMI program to improve students' English language skills? Or, is it to teach them to academic content? Or, is it a combination of both language and content learning? Reflecting on these goals, we might find that

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English-only teaching is not the best option for our students in terms of meeting the learning outcomes from their EMI course.

What about international students?

Next, let's think about the relationship between English and internationalization. You might have international students in your EMI classes. Research has found that some teachers are hesitant to use the local language because they do not want to exclude, or be rude, to international students who do not speak the local language.

And these are very real concerns – we want to make our international students feel included.

However, research has also found that there are many ways in which the L1 can be used without making students feel excluded – For example, through group work, or asking students to draw on their own linguistic resources or point students to examples of resources in other languages.

Stay tuned, because we'll cover these later in Module 4!

Importantly, research has shown that teachers and students have complex attitudes and beliefs towards language use. Research has also shown that the first language – or multiple languages – are used in EMI classes.

So English-only EMI does not reflect the reality of language use across global contexts and in classrooms.

Let's start by looking at the research on teachers and students' beliefs...

The figure that I'm sharing with you here comes from a recent study we conducted in Thailand and Vietnam. As you can see from the figure, teachers and students had complicated beliefs about language use: they gave us many reasons why English only should be used, but they also gave us many reasons why the first language should be used.

You'll see some of those reasons favoring English-only instruction are similar to what we discussed on the previous slide – but you'll also see that the local language has many beneficial functions in the EMI class. For example:

- It can help students understand content better
- And it can help teachers explain content better
- It can help clarify new, technical, or confusing terminology
- And, importantly, it can help teachers and students feel comfortable and connected to their local culture and identity.

These findings come from a study we conducted in Thailand and Vietnam, but similar results have been found in other contexts, too.

These findings across global contexts are important because they show us that teachers and students are aware of many ways in which using the local language can help them teach and learn better in EMI classes.

And indeed, we also have tons of research evidence showing us that EMI is not English only in practice – meaning that teachers and students use the local language for a variety of purposes,

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although the L1 is used to various degrees in different classroom contexts – we'll pick this up in our next lecture, in which we look at translanguaging practices more closely!

So, to summarize what we've talked about here:

- Teachers and students hold very complex views of the role of language in EMI.
- Research has found that teachers and students believe that the L1 can be used to support teaching and learning, as well as help students feel comfortable and connect to their local culture and identity.

And overall, research has shown that EMI is not English-only in practice – and for some very good reasons, which we'll discuss in more detail in our next video.

See you then!

I cited 3 studies in today's lecture. If you want to read more about any of them – including the British Council study we conducted in Vietnam and Thailand – the references are here. See you next time!

### **References**

Block, D., & Moncada-Comas, B. (2022). English-medium instruction in higher education and the ELT gaze: STEM lecturers' self-positioning as NOT English language teachers. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 25(2), 401-417.

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Macaro, E., Curle, S., Pun, J., An, J., & Dearden, J. (2018). A systematic review of English medium instruction in higher education. *Language Teaching*, 51(1), 36-76.