

## **English medium instruction: Beliefs and attitudes of university lecturers in Bangladesh and Malaysia**

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Evolution of English medium instruction (EMI) in non-native English-speaking countries in recent years has inspired researchers to investigate the various dimensions of this phenomenon. Internationalising higher education, realising the local needs of English-speaking graduates, and eliciting the economic and social benefits of English are often reported as the major factors behind the adoption and implementation of EMI. However, these goals and demands of EMI are perceived and realised to varying extents in diverse higher education contexts. This article reports on a small-scale study conducted in Malaysia and Bangladesh exploring the beliefs and attitudes of university lecturers to EMI. Based on the data extracted from interviews, this study highlights the needs and aspirations of EMI in Malaysia and Bangladesh and identifies several common issues that influenced the adoption of EMI in both countries. However, Malaysia's desire to become a hub of higher education in the region and to encourage the recruitment of international students has been reported by the lecturers in Malaysia as the most prominent reason for their adoption of EMI. Such EMI-related policies in Malaysia have shaped positively the beliefs and attitudes of lecturers towards its adoption and implementation. Furthermore, these policies also supported the lecturers to develop a considerate attitude to students' challenges with regard to EMI.

### **Introduction**

In the context of the internationalisation of higher education around the world, language policy has become extremely relevant and significant (Macaro, Curle, Pun, An & Dearden, 2018; Liddicoat, 2016; Rahman, Singh & Karim, 2018). Language policy choice such as English as a medium of instruction (EMI) is a concurrent global phenomenon in education in non-native English-speaking countries (Hamid, Nguyen & Baldauf, 2014; Macaro et al., 2018; Rahman, Singh & Karim, 2018). In higher education, the adoption of EMI is intended to be a key strategic higher education policy through which universities respond to the impact of globalisation driven by academic, political, social, and economic motivation (Altbach & Knight, 2007). In the process, English has become the universal second language and medium of communication in higher education (Brumfit, 2004). Although the term EMI has not been universally defined, the following definition by Macaro (2018) has been widely accepted:

The use of the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English (Macaro, 2018, p.1).

Higher education policy shifts concerning medium of instruction (MOI) in a given context should be analysed through language policy lenses, since several studies have reported sociolinguistic issues, such as language-related beliefs or ideologies, indicating an observable attitude towards the use of language and implementing language policy in a given context (Spolsky, 2009). They have played a central role in the adoption and implementation of EMI in higher education (Aizawa & Rose, 2019; Bradford, 2016; Haidar, 2019; Hu & Hei, 2014; Rahman & Singh, 2020; Song, 2019; Zhang, 2018; among others). It is also important to assess how stakeholders such as university policy makers, students and lecturers have responded to the EMI push in these contexts. The data reported in this study reveal the beliefs and attitudes of lecturers towards the adoption of EMI in two universities in Malaysia and Bangladesh and presents their perceived needs and rationale for EMI adoption and implementation in these contexts.

Micro-language policy and planning theorists, including Spolsky (2009), explained language policy adoption and implementation as a localised phenomenon (Rahman, Singh & Karim, 2020). Language policy is not a collective judgment and intervention by the government alone; all of these policies require a broader framework that promotes an individual's interest in linguistic usage in a given context (Spolsky, 2009). Spolsky conceptualised three key components of language policy: language practice, language management, and language ideology. Spolsky (2009) pointed out that language ideology defines the preference of language to be used within the community by highlighting the deeply held attitudes and assumptions of the speaking community about what is thought to be an appropriate choice of language (e.g., English as MOI in the universities in Malaysia and Bangladesh). Indeed, language policy and planning goes far beyond mere political judgments and acts of public or private administration (Rahman, Singh & Karim, 2020). It also includes the practices and beliefs of natural speakers (Spolsky, 2009). As Ricento (2000, p. 7) put it, 'to ignore the role of ideology, or to relegate it to a bin of "extraneous" variables, too fraught with ambiguity to be useful in empirical research, is to engage in an ideological subterfuge of the worst sort'. The speakers' attitudes and beliefs towards language(s) are therefore central to their language preference – not only of those who are the official language policy makers in the speech community (focal universities in Malaysia and Bangladesh) but also the other stakeholders (e.g., university lecturers).

The interrelationship between stakeholders' language beliefs and attitudes and the selection of a MOI corresponds with the recent developments in internationalisation of higher education (Rahman & Singh, 2021). EMI has been widely viewed as a beneficial policy in higher education by the macro (government or ministry of education), meso (university) and micro (students and lecturers) stakeholders in several contexts where EMI was adopted. The justification for EMI adoption is normally found in the form of stakeholders' EMI related ideology and attitudes (Spolsky, 2009; Rahman & Singh, 2021). Ideology linked to language choice is an important factor in recent EMI adoption studies (Karim et al., 2021; Rahman, et al., 2020). In Turkey, Ozer's (2020) study concluded that

lecturers are more in favour than against the university's EMI policy. Similarly, Song (2019), in her study, found a positive attitude towards the adoption and implementation of EMI among international students studying in China. It is often believed that the attributed importance given to English nowadays and the benefits of users of the language in the current global order of language, have driven policy makers to adopt English as MOI globally (Zhang, 2018).

However, lecturers and student participants in Rahman and Singh's (2021) study suggested that the institution adopted an English-only MOI without engaging micro-level stakeholders in the context of a private university in Bangladesh and they believe that while such a policy appears useful in light of globalisation, a multilingual approach to language policy adoption is more practical. Besides, the desire for internationalisation of higher education and building educational hubs in many non-native English-speaking countries is contributing to the growth and expansion of this phenomenon, for example in South Korea (Evans & Morrison, 2018), in Japan (Aizawa & Rose, 2019), in China (Song, 2019), and in Sweden (Bolton & Kuteeva, 2012), among others. Furthermore, countries such as Bangladesh (Rahman & Singh, 2020) and Taiwan (Lin, 2019) aspire to supply the growing demand for English-proficient graduates for the local market and abroad. Notably, Japan's EMI adoption is largely to attract international students through the internationalisation of higher education (Rose & McKinley, 2018), which is not similar to countries like Bangladesh that adopted EMI due to the practical need for developing skilled English-speaking manpower to meet the demands of the growing private sector locally and aspirations to supply skilled employees abroad (Rahman et al, 2020). Therefore, the role of English and English-related ideologies in society does not evolve in a vacuum. Rather, there is a deep-held positive attitude and ideology regarding language that encourages language policy adoption, including English as MOI in higher education.

### **EMI in Malaysian and Bangladeshi higher education**

The internationalisation of higher education is the main strategic thrust of Malaysia's national higher education policy. Currently, Malaysia has become a favourite destination for Middle Eastern, South Asian and South-East Asian countries (Singh, 2016). They make up the largest portion of the international student population in Malaysia. Furthermore, the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) declared its goal of becoming an excellent international higher education hub and attracting at least 250,000 foreign students to Malaysian institutions of higher education by 2025 (Munusamy & Hashim, 2019). English, thus, has been playing a major contributing role in achieving the nation's goal of becoming the educational hub in Asia. Although EMI in Malaysian public universities has not been officiated by the government (e.g., the university of the current study), it is a de facto policy in higher education in Malaysian public universities and MOI in private universities (Ali & Hamid, 2018). Considering the benefits of this form of language provision in today's global higher education, EMI programs are becoming increasingly popular in the education system.

Given that there was no written directive on the EMI policy, a previous study by Gill (2006) in the context of Malaysia inspected the nature of the distribution of the English as MOI policy from the macro-level (government, ministry) to the meso and micro-level (public universities). The results found that while one-third of the academics disagreed with the change in the MOI from Malay to English, 65 percent of the lecturers did not oppose the shift, as they perceived English as the language of knowledge which will equip students with the workplace skills (Gill, 2006, cited in Ali & Hamid, 2018). Furthermore, a similar belief regarding the outcomes of EMI-based programs was found in the study of Ali and Hamid (2018). Their study revealed lecturers' views were not uninformed regarding the utility of EMI to achieve educational outcomes. In addition, English was used as the medium of instruction by the lecturers, but not as the language of the classroom since there was frequent switching from English to the local language, which indicates that the "linguistic environment in the EMI classroom is far from adequate for developing students' ability to communicate in English" (Ali & Hamid, 2018, p. 246). Therefore, amid the Malay-medium instruction in public universities (which is the case in the current study), it is important to understand why EMI has been adopted and how the lecturers' beliefs and attitudes have been supplementing or resisting the introduction of EMI.

On the other hand, to keep up with the pace of global competition, Bangladesh has invested substantially in the development of English-language teaching and learning (Rahman & Pandian, 2018; Rahman et al., 2019). The government has enabled the private universities to thrive given that the engagement of the stakeholders of the public universities in the mainstream politics has stymied the growth of higher education (Hamid & Baldauf, 2014; Rahman et al., 2019). The growing need to pursue higher education was evident, and given the limited number of public universities, it was impossible for the government to cater to these increased needs. The government institutionalised the plan to establish private universities through the *Private University Act* in 1992. The Private University Act of 1992, amended in 2010, supports university-level English proficiency among the learners. However, there is no specific directive regarding EMI provided anywhere in the Act, nor any supplementary instructions concerning the language policy (Rahman, et al., 2019; Rahman & Singh, 2020; Rahman, Singh, & Karim, 2020). Results from the review of higher education language practices at the tertiary-level, however, indicate that English is predominant in science, technology, engineering, and medicine, while Bangla dominates humanities and social sciences disciplines in public universities (Hamid & Baldauf, 2014). A mixture of English and Bangla is generally expected to be used in public universities (Karim et al., 2021).

Private and public universities follow distinctive language policy and practices when it comes to MOI (Rahman, Singh & Karim, 2020). The MOI policy in private universities is specific since they have incorporated EMI into their programs through their MOI policy (Rahman & Singh, 2020). They further indicated that a total of 103 private colleges are currently in existence in Bangladesh and almost all of them define themselves as English-medium institutions. Bangla is the national language and provides the macro policy guidelines which should be operational in higher education (Karim et al., 2021; Rahman et al., 2020). However, the language proficiency that is required to successfully implement

EMI in higher education has been questioned in a recent study by Islam and Stapa (2021). Their findings indicate that students from various MOI backgrounds - Bangla, English and Madrasa - are not yet ready to comply with EMI. Thus, Sultana (2014), and recently Khan and Sultana (2020), considering the educational and social inequality associated with EMI, questioned the initiation and implementation of EMI in the context of Bangladesh. Against this backdrop, the question arises whether the country is ready for the adoption of EMI in the private higher education sector (Rahman & Singh, 2020). It is unfortunate that despite having one of the largest English-speaking learning communities, higher education and EMI studies in Bangladesh have remained largely unexplored, due to the absence of local expertise in language education research (Hamid & Erling, 2016; Rahman & Singh, 2021).

Among lecturers in Malaysia and Bangladesh, divergence in attitudes regarding how well-established EMI is at the tertiary level might be expected, considering the role of English in higher education in these two countries, and the on-going national debates regarding the threat to the national language in these contexts, if EMI is implemented on a massive scale. Convergence on the question of the implications that EMI may have on institutional internationalisation in Malaysia and Bangladesh could be anticipated. However, Dearden and Macaro's (2016) comparative study on EMI indicated several divergences in lecturers' beliefs and attitudes due to the linguistic situation and higher educational goals in the EU, where teachers from Austria and Poland have shown a positive outlook towards the incorporation of EMI as they are internationalising their universities. In contrast, due to language proficiency, lecturers from Italy were not optimistic about EMI implementation in Italian higher education. Furthermore, the existing studies are not enough to understand the stakeholders' views regarding the MOI in Malaysian and Bangladeshi universities (Ali & Hamid, 2018; Rahman, Singh & Karim, 2020 as exceptions), and there is no research that has compared Malaysian and Bangladeshi lecturers' beliefs and attitudes towards English and adopting EMI in higher education. This, therefore, necessitates a comparative analysis concerning the language beliefs and attitudes that underlie the rationale for adopting English as their MOI. Considering the above background of EMI and the brief descriptions of EMI in Malaysia and Bangladesh, this small-scale comparative qualitative study from two universities in Malaysia and Bangladesh aim to explore the following research questions:

- RQ1: What are the beliefs and attitudes of the lecturers of two universities in Malaysia and Bangladesh towards the introduction of English-medium instruction?
- RQ2: Is there any difference between the views of the lecturers of the two universities in Malaysia and Bangladesh on the adoption of EMI?

## **Method**

The present study is a small-scale qualitative inquiry of university lecturers in one institution in each of the two countries, Malaysia, and Bangladesh (Table 1). The data reported in this study were collected as part of two larger studies on English as MOI in the two countries. Universities were selected based on convenience (see convenience

sampling by Dörnyei, 2007) and accessibility to the research sites, and the purpose of the study. Based on the conceptualisation and characteristics of EMI and the aim of the study, purposive sampling (see purposive sampling by Creswell & Poth, 2017) of the research site and lecturers considered the following inclusion criteria: (a) current EMI practice in a context where English is not the native language; (b) use of English as the medium of content subject instruction, instructional materials in English and communication of assessment in English; (c) predominant perception of English as a requirement for student admission and lecturer recruitment; and (d) teaching content subject through English.

Both the selected universities fulfil these criteria. Although it is understandable that the issue of generalisability of this selected small-scale qualitative research is not possible to attain, thus, it is replaced by the notion of transferability in qualitative research (Duff, 2006; Rahman, Singh & Fersi, 2020; Yin, 2018). Given the selection procedure mentioned above and the thick description of the research site and participants below, the findings of the study would provide readers with an opportunity to "facilitate understanding of one's own as well as others' contexts and lives, both through similarities and differences across settings or cases" (Duff, 2006, p. 75).

Table 1: Participants' information (MY= Malaysia; BD=Bangladesh)

Participant code	Discipline	Years of experience	EMI teaching experience	Highest educ. qualification	Country of previous degree
EMI-MY1	Social science	4	4	PhD (MOI-English)	Malaysia
EMI-MY2	Business studies	5	3	PhD (MOI-English)	Malaysia
EMI-MY3	Technology	7	6	PhD (MOI-English)	Malaysia
EMI-MY4	Management	8	8	PhD (MOI-English)	Malaysia
EMI-BD1	Engineering	5	5	Masters (MOI-English)	Bangladesh
EMI-BD2	Business	7	7	Masters (MOI-English)	Bangladesh
EMI-BD3	Business	3	3	MPhil (MOI-English)	India
EMI-BD4	Engineering	5	5	Masters (MOI-English)	Bangladesh
EMI-BD5	Pharmacy	8	8	Master (MOI-English)	Malaysia

The university selected from Malaysia is a leading university (Tun Mahathir University - pseudonym). Currently, there are approximately 21,000 students and 15 percent of them are international students. Although the MOI policy has not been explicitly articulated anywhere on the website, the focal university has established itself as one of the leading international student destinations in Malaysia, and therefore, English is used as the de

facto language of the university for both official and educational purposes. Accordingly, the MOI of most undergraduate and postgraduate academic programs in the science discipline is English, unless the alternative is otherwise stated.

The focal university in Bangladesh is a private university based in Dhaka (Sheik Hasina University - pseudonym). During the time of data collection more than 8000 undergraduate and postgraduate students were enrolled at the university. The university has four schools, seven departments, and three institutes, and it has roughly 700 full-time faculty members. The MOI of the focal university has been English since its establishment. English plays a significant role in both the enrolment process for students and the recruitment process for lecturers. This was a small comparative study sample of university lecturers in each of the two countries in one institution.

Semi-structured interviews with 9 lecturers (Table 1) were conducted on an individual basis, 4 from Malaysia and 5 from Bangladesh. Table 1 presents information about lecturers while maintaining confidentiality and anonymity (and their universities). The data collection process started in Malaysia from May 2020 to July 2020. Data were collected from the participants in Bangladesh from September 2019 to February 2021. The interviews were audio-recorded and lasted about 20 minutes (see Appendix 1). The language of interview sessions was English. The analysis process included coding data and evaluating our themes in three steps, a data analysis method defined by Creswell and Poth (2017). Interviews were first transcribed (word count 19054) and examined for common patterns (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The codes and categories were carefully read in the second phase. Themes emerged from an inductive approach of data analysis based on the transcripts of the interviews. Alternatively, a deductive approach was used to develop key themes in response to the study's objectives. The article reports findings on the basis of the research questions followed by the issues raised by the interviewees. Identical themes as response to the first research question have been presented first. Then, the themes that present a comparative picture of EMI in Malaysia and Bangladesh as perceived by the lecturers have been described and explained.

## Findings

RQ1: What are the beliefs and attitudes of the lecturers of two universities in Malaysia and Bangladesh towards the introduction of English medium instruction?

### English, EMI, and internationalisation/globalisation

Internationalisation has recurrently been articulated by the lecturers in the interviews. It seems it has become a buzzword on the EMI campuses. In the interviews, lecturers frequently stressed the importance of English in the internationalisation of higher education. One of the Malaysian lecturers said, "*internationalisation is important for higher education*" (EMI-MY2). EMI is a constructive tactical initiative to prepare university students to meet the needs and aspirations of economic globalisation, and to develop a workforce that can function both at home and abroad. The widespread belief associated

with English language is: *"English is a passport to the world today,"* as stated by EMI-MY4. Lecturers also believed that EMI could be *"[...] useful for higher education students who might have to look for opportunities for higher education or work abroad"* (EMI-BD5).

The positive beliefs about and attitudes to EMI are forged by the predominant English language teaching ideology that learners would pick up English simply by being exposed to it. One of the Malaysian lecturers explained, *"More English language input will be made available to EMI students"* (EMI-MY2). In the same vein, another Bangladeshi lecturer advocated the importance of EMI and said, *"They must use English as a medium of instruction in classroom English and students must use English on campus all the time"* (EMI-BD1). It was evident from the interview data that lecturers from both countries held positive beliefs about the use of English and EMI in higher education, especially for getting a job or further education. The reason for this unparalleled adoption of English in higher education seemed to be associated with the benefits of English in internationalisation and globalisation and teaching or learning of the language would transform a graduate into a global citizen.

### **English as the language of academia**

Widespread use of English in academia coupled with its status as a global lingua franca (Jenkins, 2007) has positioned it as an unavoidable medium of instruction in higher education in many parts of the world. An important aspect that strengthens the position of English in the academy is teaching materials, such as books and journals, which are written exclusively in English. As EMI-MY1 pointed out:

In order to meet the current global standard of academia, English proficiency is the required qualification for university graduates. We need to optimise our English-language programs so that they can learn English and be successful in their academic endeavours here and abroad.

The other factor that has contributed significantly to the adoption of EMI in higher education is the potential production of scholarship by university lecturers, which depends on publication in international journals to showcase research activities and receive professional benefits. As EMI-MY4 highlighted, *"[...] international journals and conferences are looking for articles and presentations in English. It's the norm."* Since the language of teaching materials is English, teaching content and terminology in English makes it easier to understand. It would also help students learn the higher education language. Moreover, since books are in English, it is often easier to teach and learn first, than to translate the content: *"It is easy for me to use English for communication rather than to first translate it into Bangla and then explain it"* (EMI-BD5). The status of English as the language of advanced knowledge and higher education is driving the successful adoption of English globally.

### **The economic and social value of English**

One of the common reasons that appeared in the interviews was the economic and social value of English. EMI courses are highly desirable in the context of Malaysia and



Bangladesh, especially for students who have finished their English-medium schooling and students who are from mainstream, mother-tongue-based schools possess a good command of English. EMI-BD3 explained that the advantage of the English medium program over the mother tongue program in the current globalised world is that the objective of the EMI program is to better equip students with the skills needed by the job sector:

If you compare the non-English medium-based program with our program, our students are proficient in English language and communication skills, which is important for jobs in the local private sector. We must not ignore the reality of the world today. (EMI-BD3)

In the same way, Malaysian lecturers believe that due to the emergence of private sectors in Malaysia, English has become important for securing a job. As EMI-MY3 explained, "*English is considered as an essential skill in multinational and private companies in Malaysia.*"

Lecturers also reported that the social value attached to the language also played an important role in this student enrolment, which encouraged universities to implement EMI at the university. As regards the value of English and EMI-based university programs, both parents and learners are positive. As the EMI-MY1 pointed out:

There is a widespread belief in society that English is a prestigious and prosperous gateway. Students, as well as their parents, want higher education in English, given the importance of English today in the field of international education.

In Bangladesh, similar views emerged from the lecturers. EMI-BD1 articulated, "*The popular belief regarding English is that it is an important language to learn as it is prestigious.*" Such strong positive beliefs related to the English language have been instrumental in EMI adoption in Malaysia and Bangladesh.

A number of themes emerged from the interviews with the lecturers who projected their beliefs about English and their attitudes towards EMI, which are generally positive about the adoption of EMI. To sum up, English is now of paramount importance among the academics of the focal universities in Malaysia and Bangladesh. Both students and lecturers need to be well versed in the language, not only because the students need English for their future work, higher education, and social prestige associated with the language, but also because they need competence in English to produce and to disseminate high quality research and scholarships.

RQ2: Is there any difference between the views of the lecturers of the two universities in Malaysia and Bangladesh on the adoption of EMI?

### **Distinctive local needs and aspirations**

Despite articulating convergent beliefs and attitudes towards the need for English and the adoption of the EMI in Malaysia and Bangladesh, the lecturers of the two universities expressed some significantly divergent opinions on various facets of EMI policy as perceived in these regions. For one thing, the lecturers believe that these regions have

their own needs and aspirations as countries and as universities, although the motivation and rationale for the adoption of English-medium instruction in universities are in most ways the same. Bangladesh, for example, emphasises the English proficiency of the tertiary students through EMI policy and practice so that they can acquire the communicative competence in English that is demanded by industry:

As you know, producing local graduates who can communicate in English is the most important need in the adoption of EMI. English is important in Bangladesh today [presently]. (BD1-EMI).

Our students need to learn English in order to compete globally, whether for work or education. During the course of their studies, students must feel more comfortable with English, so that there is no problem going to another country or traveling abroad. And when you use it more, you learn more English. EMI therefore facilitates the learning of English. (EMI-BD5)

On the other hand, Malaysian higher education has been transformed into a higher education hub of the region for international students. There is, therefore, a need for a common language to communicate on the campus, in the classrooms and in the workplace:

An optimistic growth plan for higher education in Malaysia will improve its capacity for innovation and attract more international students. On that note, Malaysia sees itself as an important part of obtaining state-of-the-art information in English. (EMI-MY2)

We are living in a globally competitive era of higher education. MOE's vision is to transform Malaysian higher education into a regional hub for higher education. English will play a key role as an international language. (EMI-MY-4)

Malaysia is offering better EMI programs than its regional competitors, such as China, Japan, or South Korea, as Malaysia is an ESL context. Our English programs should be enhanced [increased in number] in order to give [provide] international students more choice of study (EMI-MY1)

The other distinctive aspects that instigated Malaysia to implement EMI include: (a) Malaysia's motive to internationalise HE; and (b) Malaysia's aspiration to become a global leader in research and teaching at the tertiary level. The drive to become a well-ranked university is evident in Malaysia's higher education policy. In order to achieve this goal, Malaysian universities accentuated on research publications in English at a massive-scale, which will generate citations and will attract international students. As a Malaysian lecturer commented:

You see, we need to publish in high-ranking journals to secure our job and get a promotion. It is an important criterion to be ranked higher in the international university ranking along with the recruitment of international students and faculty members. It's only possible if you're good in English. We therefore need English for sustainability. And we must give our students the opportunity to get used to the current academic norm (EMI-MY2).

Throughout the interviews, the Malaysian lecturers reiterated that EMI in Malaysia has been conceived to internationalise its HE institutions so that the higher education institutions are ranked higher in the international rankings, an essential condition for their national aspiration to transform Malaysia into a regional higher education hub. On the other hand, Bangladesh's EMI aspiration is still largely surrounded by the notion of producing local English-speaking students who will be capable of global mobility.

### **Linguistic challenges with EMI**

While dealing with the EMI, linguistic challenges are understandable. EMI in EFL contexts competes with the widespread use of the local languages. It was perceived from the interviews that the proportion of English education in the university classrooms in these countries varies because of the level of English proficiency of the lecturers and the students, lecturers' educational qualifications, and the demography of students. Therefore, the views of the lecturers on the role of EMI instruction are found to be different. Bangla is widely used by Bangladeshi lecturers as most of the students cannot understand the entire English-language lecture, especially when talking about a critical concept in the classroom:

Bangladeshi students enrolled in the classroom cannot speak anything like a native English-speaking language or understand concepts. Bangladeshi students need time to adjust their understanding of concepts in a foreign language. As a result, most of the classes are held in Bangla. (EMI-BD3)

On the other hand, EMI is well perceived and used in the context of Malaysia due to the internationalisation of these universities, where a good number of students are international students. Thus, English is more widely used in classes, although there is a question of proficiency among students:

I'm sending the description in English and it's on slides and speaking in English most of the class time. However, some sections of my lectures are in Malay if there are no international students in the class, because most students will not understand the lecture. In content classes, it is important to explain critical concepts in the mother tongue sometimes for a better understanding (EMI-MY3)

The population of the class is usually diverse. As you know, many foreign students are in the classroom. I need to communicate in English, although I understand that many things are not well understood. However, I cannot speak the mother tongue of all of them to teach them individually (EMI-MY1)

Although students from both backgrounds found it difficult to speak English, given that the entire population of the class is non-native English speakers, the attitude of lecturers towards such a critical linguistic issue was found to be different. Bangladesh's lecturers have been found to be rigid with providing linguistic assistance to the students compared to Malaysia's lecturers who are more open to students' linguistic needs and challenges since there are students in the classroom with diverse linguistic backgrounds:

I'm not going to improve the language; I don't think so. I'm going to transfer fundamental knowledge to my class. Although this is not my duty, sometimes I identify gross errors in them. I shouldn't judge them about their English. (EMI-BD4)

I usually make comments both on language and on my capacity. You see, almost all of the students in my class are non-native English speakers. And linguistically, they need help. (EMI-MY4)

I encourage students to speak in class. I instructed my students that if you don't speak English, I won't answer you. And do not laugh when your friends speak anything in English. We need to help each other (EMI-MY-2)

Bangladeshi lecturers are not willing to help their students overcome English-related problems since the core beliefs among them are that they should only focus on content. Alternatively, they use Bangla in the classroom more. It is also related to the nature of the classes in these focal universities. Mostly, the lecturers from the focal university in Bangladesh use Bangla as an instructional medium in the classroom. On the other hand, it was evident among Malaysia's lecturers that their attitude towards learners is friendly, and they mostly use English because they believe that it would be inappropriate to use any language other than English in the classroom since it will exclude the international students. They try to encourage students to use English. They are also aware of the difficulties faced by the Malaysian students and international students whose mother tongue is not English. They, therefore, try to help students in any way possible by providing them with a positive environment to facilitate their learning.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

The present study was set out to ascertain Malaysian and Bangladeshi lecturers' beliefs and attitudes towards English and EMI adoption and implementation in their respective universities, and whether there are any differences between the views of Malaysian and Bangladeshi lecturers. Spolsky (2009) indicated that understanding the beliefs and ideology of the members of the speech community is important. Thus, it is understandable that stakeholders' own language beliefs and attitudes have an influence on the adoption of language policy. Furthermore, as Spolsky (2009) explained, language policy is not a political decision alone, and all these policies require a broader framework promoting an individual's interest in language use in each context of language use in society. The beliefs and attitudes of the focal university lecturers in Malaysia and Bangladesh were found to be positive towards English and EMI. According to the participants, there is no clear directive regarding the use of English as MOI in higher education at the macro level. Since there is consensus regarding EMI among the micro-level stakeholders, English is used in the investigated universities in Malaysia and Bangladesh.

The findings of the current study resulted in several themes: (a) English, EMI, and internationalisation/ globalisation; (b) English as the language of academia; and (c) the economic and social value of English in the context of Malaysia and Bangladesh. These findings are compatible with earlier literature on EMI adoption and implementation in Asia and beyond (Aizawa & Rose, 2018; Ali & Hamid, 2018; Hu & Lei, 2014; Rahman &

Singh, 2020; Rahman et al., 2020). The stakeholders of higher education seem to be positive about English and EMI in both the regions. However, internationalisation does not have any definitive conceptualisation (Dearder & Macaro, 2016). For some universities, the idea may include the notion of local students studying in a foreign university abroad and in internationalised programs in a local setting. For others, it involves forming a partnership- sending students overseas as exchange students and drawing students from abroad. Nevertheless, going for globalisation and internationalisation largely varies according to local needs and policy adoption, as is the case for Malaysia and Bangladesh. Similarly, the role of English in academia and society has been an essential quality for ensuring a job or gaining social status both in Bangladesh and Malaysia. However, there are several divergences in the views among the lecturers with regard to EMI adoption and implementation in these contexts, especially with reference to the diverse English needs in these two nations, and the lecturers' attitudes towards the linguistic issues in the classroom.

This study in the contexts of Malaysia and Bangladesh helps to shed light on how these needs and aspirations may vary from country to country. Malaysia's aspiration of becoming a hub of higher education is the distinctive driving force for them welcoming and implementing EMI, while such spirit is absent in Bangladesh. Malaysian university lecturers hold a positive attitude towards the needs of their institutions to be internationalised and are ranked higher in the international rankings in accordance with their national aspiration to transform Malaysia into a regional hub (Singh, 2016), whereas no significant attempts have yet been observed in Bangladesh for internationalising higher education and attaining rankings. Furthermore, the importance of globalisation, university rankings, and international students are associated with each other. The focal Malaysian university and other Malaysian top universities are currently busy attracting international students to transform the outlook of the university into an international one, and it will also help climb up the rankings. On the other hand, Bangladeshi EMI aspirations still largely revolve around the notion of producing English-speaking local students who will be capable of global mobility and can serve local needs of English fluent graduates (Rahman & Singh, 2019). Although EMI is desired by many non-native English-speaking countries globally, they have few aspirations in common. They also have distinctive local needs. Therefore, the beliefs and attitudes towards EMI globally vary and need a more localised approach to find out those aspirations that have driven EMI to adoption and implementation in these contexts.

### **Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research**

The data for this research were collected from participants in two universities, based on convenience and accessibility. Therefore, the current researchers do acknowledge the fact that such comparison without further large-scale studies lacks broader generalisability. Although such small-scale studies are low in number, they are not absent from the literature (Dearden & Macaro, 2016; Rahman et al., 2020). Nevertheless, further large-scale, qualitative/quantitative/mixed method studies are recommended to compare multiple universities and multiple disciplines from these two countries to highlight

contrasting scenarios of EMI adoption, and more importantly, the way these language policies are implemented and practised in universities.

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## Appendix 1: Semi-structured interview questions

1. Are you familiar with your university's English medium instruction policy?
2. Why do you think your university has implemented an English-medium instruction policy?
3. What is your opinion on the role of English in society?
4. What role does English medium instruction play in higher education? Please elaborate.
5. Please explain how English will help students meet their urgent needs following graduation.
6. To what extent would the EMI policy help to meet the country's particular needs?
7. To what extent does English medium instruction aid in the development of learners' English language skills?
8. Do you face any problems with English medium instruction?
9. Do you believe that teaching and learning of other academic subjects will be impacted due to EMI?
10. Please elaborate your thoughts on English medium instruction in the future for the university and your students.

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