

## **English-medium instruction in Vietnamese higher education: A ROAD-MAPPING perspective**

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The past few decades have witnessed an exponential growth in English-medium instruction (EMI) programs across the globe where English is used as a vehicle for subject matter delivery. Studies examining EMI issues have been conducted in various contexts, especially in European and Asian countries, but little has been documented regarding how EMI is implemented in Vietnam's higher education sector; in particular, there is a scarcity of research on macro-level EMI policy and planning. Drawing on Dafouz and Smit's (2016) *ROAD-MAPPING* framework with its six dimensions for EMI, this paper aims to examine EMI-related policies in Vietnam. This critical review of relevant policy documents provides an in-depth understanding of the multifaceted dimensions of EMI in Vietnam's tertiary sector and discusses implications for EMI policy practices.

### **Introduction**

The fast-growing forces of globalisation have had a considerable influence on many countries' higher education (HE) policies in general and English language education policy in particular (Hamid, Nguyen & Baldauf, 2013; Hamid, Jahan & Islam, 2013; Seargeant, 2011; Tollefson & Tsui, 2014). One important aspect of globalisation has been the fading significance of national boundaries and the ever growing free mobility of individuals travelling around the globe for all kinds of reasons, including employment and education. Consequently, universities nowadays are increasingly competing with each other at a supra-national level; this is a competition for students, for highly qualified academic and professional staff, for break-through ideas. In order to maintain their competitive edge in an increasingly globalised world, many higher education institutions (HEIs) around the world have pursued various internationalisation strategies (Altbach & Knight, 2007), including implementing English-medium instruction (EMI) programs and courses (Kirkpatrick, 2017; Wächter & Maiworm, 2008, 2014); as the name suggests, these are programs using English as a vehicle for delivering academic content.

EMI as a higher education internationalisation strategy has in recent years undergone an explosive growth. In Europe, for instance, in 2002 just over 400 HEIs were offering EMI programs, but by 2014 this number had more than doubled to 817 (Wächter & Maiworm, 2008, 2014). EMI growth across Asia has likewise been quite impressive, with hundreds of universities offering EMI programs, including South Korea (420), Malaysia (over 100), Bangladesh (80), Indonesia (over 70), Vietnam (over 70), Japan (over 30), China (30 of the highest ranking universities) (Hamid & Kirkpatrick, 2016).

EMI was first introduced in Vietnam in the early 1990s. Initially, these English-taught programs involved joint delivery by national and foreign HEIs (Nguyen et al., 2017). Since 2000, the Vietnamese government has developed and implemented a number of policies

and projects which have effectively mandated EMI adoption by Vietnamese HEIs. These resolutions instruct Vietnamese HEIs (among other things) to identify high quality programs in strategic disciplines provided by high-ranking universities overseas and to start delivering these programs at Vietnamese universities – jointly with the foreign provider or locally. Most of these programs are to be delivered via EMI for raising the country's HE quality and improving Vietnamese HEIs' international standing. Some of these policy documents also provide concrete guidelines for EMI program development and delivery. EMI specifically and internationalisation of the curriculum generally are seen as a remedy for the perceived crisis of quality in Vietnamese HE. This shift from Vietnamese as the mother tongue to English is quite remarkable given earlier attitudes to English as “the language of the enemy” (Bui & Nguyen, 2016, p. 365). English now is rather seen as a key contributor to national industrialisation and modernisation, and to global integration (Vietnamese Government, 2008a).

EMI policies and practices are contextually determined (Dafouz & Smit, 2016). How an EMI program is conceived and/or how it is implemented is typically a function of the socio-cultural context where this program occurs. EMI-related research in various contexts has been quite extensive. Studies have investigated the impact of EMI programs on students' language and academic achievement (Dafouz et al., 2014; Dafouz & Camacho, 2016), on teachers' and students' attitudes towards EMI implementation (Helm & Guarda, 2015; Hu & Lei, 2014; Le, 2017) and on EMI policy and its practices (Airey et al., 2017; Ali, 2013; Nguyen et al., 2016). The findings reveal stakeholders' positive attitudes towards perceived benefits of EMI, and also touch on several problems. These problems include misalignment between EMI policy goals and actual implementation, students' inadequate English proficiency for disciplinary learning, content lecturers' insufficient command of English, and a lack of policy guidelines on how to teach through EMI.

EMI-related research has until now devoted very little attention to how EMI policies in Vietnam are conceived or constructed, particularly how EMI is depicted in the Government's top-down policy documents. Drawing on Dafouz and Smit's (2016) *ROAD-MAPPING* framework, this paper aims to examine the multi-dimensional nature of EMI programs as reflected in government policies. This paper addresses two research questions:

1. What do government-initiated language policy documents reveal about the multi-dimensional nature of EMI programs in Vietnam?
2. How is the multi-dimensional nature of EMI programs discursively constructed in these top-down language policy documents?

This top-down policy analysis is expected to provide a better understanding of how Vietnamese policymakers have conceptualised EMI-based education and its implementation. Insights gained from this analysis can lay the groundwork for EMI policy implementation in processes of interpretation and appropriation at the institutional and interpersonal levels (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996). Our findings are expected to

contribute to the growing scholarship of EMI language policy and planning and to a reference framework for other contexts.

### Conceptual framework: ROAD-MAPPING

This study draws on the *ROAD-MAPPING* framework for English-medium education in multilingual university settings (EMEMUS) (Dafouz & Smit, 2016). ROAD-MAPPING, an acronym comprising the first letters of the six dimensions, has drawn its theoretical underpinnings from sociolinguistics, ecology of language, expanded language policy, and social practices as discourses. ROAD-MAPPING is employed since it is a holistic model of integrative perspectives, enabling the framework to capture and explain the multifaceted dimensions of EMI-based education. An understanding of the multidimensionality of EMI programs which ROAD-MAPPING offers has the capacity to inform policy developers and other stakeholders of effective EMI policy practices.

ROAD-MAPPING consists of 6 conceptual dimensions:

Roles of English	RO	refers to the multiple functions of English in relation to other languages in respective EMI contexts.
Academic disciplines	AD	deals with the types of academic disciplines (hard vs. soft and pure vs. applied) for EMI and the distinctive features of each academic discipline.
(Language) management	M	concerns language policies promulgated by agents or actors with power at different levels in order to regulate people's language practices and/or beliefs in a specific context/domain.
Agents	A	describes different actors with their individual or collective roles or responsibilities for EMI planning, implementation and assessment.
Practices and processes	PP	addresses EMI-related teaching and learning activities as well as teachers' responsibility for students' disciplinary literacy development.
Internationalisation and globalisation	ING	encompasses "international, global, national, and local forces" (Dafouz & Smit, 2016, p. 408) that need to be considered by higher education institutions in the 21st century knowledge economy.

Discourses serve as the main point of access to these six components and because of that *discourse* is an essential construct of the framework (Dafouz & Smit, 2016). Discourses are conceptualised as social practices including policy documents, interviews, discussions, etc. In this study, the primary access point is the discourse of policymakers manifested in Vietnamese government policies regarding EMI.

### Data sources

Language policy is conceptualised as multiple layers metaphorically depicted as the layers of an onion (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996). There are three layers: the outer layer referring to the national level where the government launches or enacts language policy; the second layer referring to the institutional level where stakeholders interpret, translate and implement the top-down policy; and the inner layer referring to the interpersonal level

where individuals (classroom practitioners) negotiate and implement the policy. In this paper, language policy is used in a narrow sense referring to official published regulations at the national level. Data regarding EMI policies were published in Vietnamese and collected from the two online portals of the Vietnamese Government and Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). Seven blueprint policy documents in a chronological order abbreviated as V2005, V2008/Sept, M2008, V2008/Oct, V2012, M2013, and M2014 were collected and used for analysis. In M2013, MOET commissioned Ha Noi University to develop and design the EMI curricula in IT, Business Administration, Banking and Finance, Tourism, and Accounting as a reference framework for other Vietnamese universities. These curricula are abbreviated as M2013/IT, M2013/BA, M2013/BF, M2013/T, and M2013/A respectively (Table 1).

Table 1: Vietnamese Government policies in relation to EMI

Year	Policy abbreviation	Translated policy full name
2 November 2005	V2005	Substantial and comprehensive reform of Vietnam's higher education in 2006-2020 period
30 September 2008	V2008/Sept	Teaching and learning foreign languages in the national educational system in 2008-2020 period
8 August 2008	M2008	Proposal for the advanced program project in some Vietnamese universities in 2008-2015 period
15 October 2008	V2008/Oct	The approval of the advanced program project in some Vietnamese universities in 2008-2015 period
26 September 2012	V2012	Foreign cooperation and investment in education
22 November 2013	M2013: + M2013/IT + M2013/BA + M2013/BF + M2013/T + M2013/A	The introduction of the curricula in the national foreign language project 2020: Pilot EMI curriculum in: + IT (Tran et al., 2013). + Business Administration (Nguyen, et al., 2013). + Banking & Finance (Dao et al., 2013). + Tourism (Nguyen et al., 2013). + Accounting (Do et al., 2013).
18 July 2014	M2014	Regulations on high quality programs in universities

All the policy documents were entered into *NVivo 12* for management and analysis. Data coding was guided by Kuckartz's (2014) "thematic qualitative text analysis", involving a combination of deductive and inductive strategies. Initial coding of the data was deductively based on the ROAD-MAPPING framework (concept-driven) and open coding was also used and analysed inductively to identify any emerging themes from the data (data-driven). All of the different codes were sorted out, combined and organised into themes and/or sub-themes. The coded extracts in the data set were made relevant to each of the identified themes and/or sub-themes and were translated from Vietnamese into English as illustrative examples.

## Findings

### Roles of English

The specific roles that English plays in EMI programs are manifested in the policy documents as follows.

#### *English as an instrument for professional and academic purposes*

English is considered as the global language that facilitates producing and transmitting scientific knowledge. The policies examined here abound with terms/references underscoring the capacity of higher English proficiency for professional and academic advancement. Below is a brief extract from M2008, which very clearly illustrates the type of discourse one finds in these policies:

The English-taught advanced program aims to equip undergraduate students with *updated knowledge, life skills, professional skills, learner autonomy, research competence, and adaptability to the working environment* upon graduation, which meets the socio-economic development requirements of the nation in the new epoch, (...) to improve Vietnamese teaching staff's *specialist knowledge, pedagogy, and English proficiency* to get engaged in lecture delivery and *research collaboration* at overseas HEIs (M2008, p. 15) (emphases added).

EMI courses enable students to gain direct access to original knowledge (M2013/BA; M2013/T; M2013/A; M2013/BF) without depending on presumably flawed Vietnamese translations; in other words, the higher English proficiency gained via EMI delivery affords students with fast and unimpeded access to the broader academic world. English is also seen as an instrument for HE internationalisation, because higher English proficiency promotes study mobility among students and transnational or cross-border professional and academic “research collaboration” among teaching staff (M2008, p. 15), turning Vietnam into an international and regional educational centre. The flipside is an implied inferiority of the Vietnamese language – arguably for its inability to convey original and updated knowledge and content. These documents proscribe use of Vietnamese in the EMI classroom where English only is advocated.

#### *English as a benchmark for entry and exit requirements*

Language eligibility for both students and staff involved in EMI courses/programs in effect makes English a gatekeeper for these courses/programs in terms of defining both entry and exit requirements. To be eligible for teaching EMI courses/programs, content lecturers are required to have – alongside high scholarly expertise – a good command of English with C1 level on CEFR or an equivalent English proficiency level; graduates from overseas English-speaking HEIs are exempted (M2008; M2014; V2012). Likewise, English proficiency is one of the requirements students need to meet for direct entry into EMI programs (B2 level on CEFR). Students who cannot meet the English requirements must take intensive English courses in order to gain admission into the program (M2008; V2012). English serves as a learning outcome requirement at the exit level for graduates. Students are expected to achieve “at a minimum level 4 (B2) on CEFR for Vietnam”

(M2014, p. 39), IELTS band scores 6.0 (M2013/BA, p. 20; M2013/A, p. 22; M2013/BF, p. 23), or “TOEFL Paper-based scores 550” (M2008, p. 19) to fulfil the EMI program.

#### *English as linguistic capital*

The analysis highlights that English functions as linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1977) that can contribute to national economic development. English could meet the inbound and outbound goals. Inbound goals include “national modernisation and industrialisation” and a thriving domestic employment market (V2008/Sept, p. 1), thanks to high-quality human resources. Outbound goals concern attracting international students recognised as an important revenue source for Vietnamese HEIs (Wilkinson, 2013); we find rather ambitious targets in these documents in relation to this:

By 2015 there will be approximately 3,000 international students enrolling [in] English-taught Advanced Programs at Vietnamese HEIs (V2008/Oct, p. 2).

### **Academic disciplines**

#### *Academic disciplines for EMI: hard vs. soft and pure vs. applied classification*

Becher (1989) grouped disciplines into four types which depend on their knowledge features: pure hard (e.g. chemistry or physics), pure soft (e.g. history or anthropology), hard applied (e.g. engineering) and soft applied (e.g. education). According to V2008/Sept, top priority should be given to academic disciplines for EMI that can be clustered into two groups: hard applied and soft applied. The former includes information technology (IT), business administration, banking and finance, and accounting, with tourism in the soft applied category. These disciplines are prioritised for EMI since they are believed to foster Vietnam’s socio-economic development. Vietnamese HEIs can, of course, provide EMI in other disciplines, as long as they can ensure adequately qualified human resources and suitable facilities.

#### *Disciplinary differences*

Each academic discipline is characterised by its own academic literacy, such as a specific genre/discourse type and a highly specialised terminology, which is reflected in discipline-specific practices (Dafouz & Smit, 2016). Both content and language teachers should have a clear understanding of these discipline-related differences in order to maximise students’ disciplinary knowledge and academic literacy. It is somewhat disappointing that we find no acknowledgement of disciplinary differences in most of the policy documents reviewed here. Instead, the rhetoric in these documents is largely directed towards the presumed benefits of EMI over Vietnamese-medium instruction. It is pointed out, for instance, that Vietnamese translations might “encounter constraints in language expression as well as terminology” (M2013/T, p. 6), hindering disciplinary learning. EMI programs or courses, on the other hand, presumably enable easy “accessibility to original learning resources” (M2013/BA, p. 16), direct exposure to “updated knowledge” (M2013/T, p. 5) and “international practice” (M2013/A, p. 14). They develop students’ disciplinary knowledge as well as discipline-specific language ability, offering them more opportunities for further study and career prospects. This is what we find in one of the policy documents in relation to IT:

First, nearly all materials, configurations and software are written in English. Second, IT develops nonstop and changes every second (...). Therefore, English-taught IT equips students with *specialist knowledge* and *English competence* to get *engaged in the global labour market* (M2013/IT, p. 5-8) (emphasis added).

The rhetoric in relation to EMI in accounting and tourism is quite similar (M2013/A, p. 14; M2013/T, p. 5-6).

*Academic disciplinary practices: Pre-EMI intensive English courses*

The documents rightly identify students' English proficiency as the crucial determinant of EMI success: one which facilitates or hinders students' disciplinary learning. In order to address this, the policy stipulates that students must spend their first year studying intensive English courses (M2008), including general English, English for academic purposes, and English for specific purposes. These intensive English courses play an indispensable role in building students' English proficiency and their pre-EMI academic literacy.

*Homogenisation of EMI programs: Anglo-American curricula*

As noted above, most EMI programs wholly import academic programs from highly ranked foreign universities – mainly from the USA, the UK and Australia (M2008), which has effectively led to a homogenisation of academic disciplines by aligning them with the Anglo-American model of education. The wholesale adoption of Western academic programs is intended to raise the international standing of Vietnamese higher education, and there is an expectation that “by 2020 several Vietnamese HEIs will be ranked in the world's top 200 universities” (M2008, p. 15; V2008/Oct, p. 1). Such policy borrowing without any curricular adaptations for the local context is likely to have counterproductive effects (Nguyen & Tran, 2018).

## **Language management**

MOET is in charge of national education in Vietnam. MOET is responsible for drafting, issuing and overseeing educational policies in general, and language policies in particular. EMI policy documents have been promulgated in written form, uploaded to the Government portal and sent as guidelines to universities which have expressed an interest in delivering EMI programs. EMI guidelines, nonetheless, have been criticised as being “too general to lead to informed practices” (Nguyen et al. 2017, p. 42).

Examination of the policy shows language management is concerned with such mechanisms as eligibility requirements for lecturers and students, and language practices. The issue of staff and student eligibility was briefly considered within the section on English as a benchmark for entry and exit requirements. Regarding language use for EMI teaching and learning, the policies stipulate that except for some Vietnamese-taught subjects, disciplinary courses are comprehensively taught in English. One excerpt from the EMI curriculum in IT (M2013/IT, p. 52) states:

Lecturers *strictly use English* in the classroom and *minimize using Vietnamese* even when they explain a difficult issue or concept. Lecturers remind students of *using 100% of English* in the classroom, in the lab, in exchange of email or on the online forum. (emphases added)

These and other similar statements make it unequivocally clear that the use of the mother tongue should be avoided at all cost. Instead, the position of “100% English” is strongly advocated, because English-only arguably maximises exposure to the target language and thus enables students to more quickly reach a language proficiency level that will help them “gain direct access to original learning resources” and “work and think in English” without “depending on Vietnamese translations” (M2013/BA, p. 6). Accessibility to English resources is key to keeping up-to-date with the rapidly changing academic world.

## Agents

Agents all have the capacity to shape, to one extent or another, the success or failure of EMI implementation. Four types of agents emerge from the data: *people with power*, *people with expertise*, *people with influence* and *people with interest* (Zhao & Baldauf, 2012).

### *People with power*

At the national level, MOET is the key power broker that formulates EMI policies, provides procedural guidelines, and also oversees and evaluates EMI implementation. MOET works collaboratively with a number of ministries in relation to EMI budget allocation, international cooperation, assessment and inspection of research output activities, and the supervision of investment plans (V2008/Sept; V2008/Oct; V2012).

At the institutional level, the relevant agents are university administrators, including presidents, vice-presidents, deans, and heads of school. Under MOET’s supervision and in compliance with MOET’s guidelines, universities are required to establish, in collaboration with relevant faculties and schools, an EMI steering committee for the purposes of curriculum development and design, selection of foreign partner institutions, recruitment of teaching staff and students, institutional support for content lecturers and students, and periodic EMI appraisal (M2008; M2014).

### *People with expertise*

This group refers to language experts or general academics who are engaged in implementation processes, including content lecturers, teaching assistants, alumni and employers. The policy documents read:

Invite foreign lecturers or overseas Vietnamese lecturers to deliver EMI courses and to train local lecturers how to deliver academic subjects in English (M2008, p. 18).

Collaborate with business employers in the Advanced Program (M2008, p. 27).

Teaching staff, quality assurance offices, alumni, and employers are required to get involved in the design and development of high-quality EMI programs (V2014, p. 39).

English language lecturers assume the responsibility for designing and delivering intensive English courses to students who need to enhance their English proficiency in order to get



admission into EMI programs/courses (M2013/IT; M2013/BA; M2013/T; M2013/A; M2013/BF).

Content teaching staff comprising both Vietnamese and foreign lecturers are expected to contribute to EMI program design and delivery. Foreign lecturers and overseas Vietnamese lecturers are also expected to “train local lecturers how to deliver academic subjects in English” (M2008, p.18). Working alongside content lecturers are teaching assistants helping students with “doing exercises, working in the lab, discussing, conducting a project and writing the thesis” (M2014, p. 39).

Two other groups of EMI power brokers whose agency should not be underestimated include alumni and employers. Alumni are graduates who have previously completed an EMI program and are already employed on the basis of their university degree; their real-life experiences and opinions can help identify the strengths and weaknesses of the program, contributing to quality assurance processes. Given their understanding of the labour market, employers are in a strong position to help align EMI curriculum with the real demands of the labour market; employers can contribute further by offering students internships and by appraising students’ skills after graduation (M2008; M2014).

#### *People with influence*

These are actors who may not be invested with institutional power, but who can affect other community members’ language behaviour. In Vietnam’s EMI domain, students are good example of actors without real power, but with some influence. For instance, the policy requires institutions “to survey students’ opinions at least once per semester in terms of academic content, teaching methods, management, service and facilities, as well as to respond to students’ feedback” (M2014, p. 42). This and other statements like it indicate that students’ feedback should be taken into account and relied on to improve EMI delivery. Similarly, EMI graduates and industry representatives can exert a positive influence on both EMI development and EMI delivery with reference to their real-life experiences, knowledge and skills. This is clearly reflected in the policy documents calling for alumni and employers’ involvement in the process of EMI program development (M2008; M2014).

#### *People with interest*

This group comprises the “ordinary citizens”, including students and their parents – the general public. Given their apparent disempowerment, this group was labelled “invisible actors” by Pakir (1999). However, members of the general community – particularly students and their parents – clearly have a substantial vested interest in getting access to high-quality education. EMI related documents acknowledge the role of the general public by requiring universities to publicise their EMI courses on their university websites and solicit feedback from the general public about them (M2014). Moreover, members of the general public (e.g. business representatives) can play a facilitating role by providing material assistance, e.g., by sponsoring “facilities such as teaching equipment and lab rooms” (M2008, p. 30) as well as internships or industrial placements to institutions delivering EMI programs. Business representatives/employers are a good example of how

the same actors can represent two or more different types of agency – *people with influence* and *people with interest*.

## Practices and processes

### *General paradigm shift of pedagogical practices for EMI*

Vietnamese higher education has long been influenced by Confucianism and Taoism, which assign a central role to the teacher as an impeccably authoritative and flawless source of knowledge. In this cultural tradition teachers are highly valued and honoured members of the community – much more so than in contemporary western cultures. One undesirable consequence of Vietnamese teachers' high social status concerns students' tendency to accept their teachers' (and the textbook's) knowledge unquestioningly – often through passive rote learning, without active engagement with the subject-matter or with opportunities to participate in critical thinking activities (MOET, 2008; Tran et al., 2014). Some of the rhetoric in the policy documents suggests that EMI is regarded as a remedy to this problem – a comprehensive curricular reform not only of the scholarly content of what is delivered, but also of “the teaching methods, assessment and evaluation, and education and training procedures” (M2008, p. 15). We find frequent references in these documents to “learner-centred teaching” (M2008: 20), as well as “individualised” and “autonomous learning” (M2103/T, p. 51) and “critical thinking” (M2013/T, p. 17). They also emphasise the importance of using “advanced pedagogy” (M2103/T, p. 17) and “novel teaching methods” (M2014, p. 41).

The policy direction seems unambiguously clear – towards increasingly adopting the student-centred approach typical of education in Western cultures as a model of high-quality teaching and learning. Vietnamese academics involved in EMI delivery are therefore expected to reform their pedagogy from teacher-fronted to learner-centred through “interactive classroom activities” and “modern facilities” (M2008, p. 20), which will enable students to develop “communicative, group-work, presentation, and critical thinking skills” (M2103/BA, p. 17). According to Wilkinson (2011), student-centred EMI curriculum design and delivery promote learner autonomy and advance learning outcomes in terms of increased competence of both language and scholarly content. EMI students are to be trained to use effective learning strategies, such as “data collection and analysis, writing, time management, teamwork” (M2013/BA, p. 16) in order to be proactive and autonomous in their own learning. Besides formal learning in the classroom, students are also provided real-life working experiences through “field trips, internships, or practica at organisations, enterprises, or companies at home and abroad” (M2014, p. 41).

### *Student disciplinary literacy development*

Both language instructors and content teachers are responsible for developing students' disciplinary literacy in different phases. The pre-EMI phase involves intensive English courses by English language instructors. This stage is of critical importance, because it equips students with general English skills, discipline-specific vocabulary, and academic literacy skills related to their EMI disciplines ((M2013/IT; M2013/BA; M2013/T; M2013/A; M2013/BF). Content lecturers are in charge of content delivery. Students are expected to build their disciplinary literacy skills by actively participating in classroom

activities (e.g., presentations) and research projects with content lecturers. The policy, however, makes no reference to a possible collaboration between content lecturers and language instructors regarding content and language integrated learning.

### **Internationalisation and globalisation**

Vietnam's higher education internationalisation has been under way for over a decade. Because of its perceived capacity to promote Vietnam's international integration and cooperation, EMI is regarded as an essential part of the sector's internationalisation. This is clearly articulated in one of the policy documents which advocates "international integration through implementing academic subject teaching and learning in a foreign language, especially in English" (V2005, p. 5). The move towards increased EMI delivery in Vietnam can be seen as a response to both global and local forces. In relation to the former, EMI is valued for its ability to attract international students, international academic staff and researchers, as well as to raise Vietnamese universities' standing in the global academe:

The implementation of some undergraduate English-taught advanced programs aims to establish and develop several international and regional level fields of study, faculties, and universities, improve HE quality, and have a number of Vietnamese universities gain the world's top 200 universities by 2020 (M2008, p. 15).

The English-taught advanced program aims to attract approximately 3,000 international students and at least 700 international academic staff who deliver lectures and conduct research (M2008, p. 15).

In response to the local forces, EMI is viewed as a comprehensive higher education reform strategy, because it promotes the sector's modernisation and innovation, delivers up-to-date cutting-edge conceptual content, involves improved pedagogy, assessment, evaluation and research, and creates high-quality human resources to participate in the highly competitive knowledge economy (M2008). Indeed, the documents specify some rather ambitious goals regarding this, including producing "approximately 4,000 BA graduates, and 600 MA and PhD postgraduates from the [EMI] program" (M2008, p. 15).

### **Discussion and implications**

The policies assign multiple roles and functions to EMI to meet Vietnam's academic, economic and integrative requirements. In the Government's modernisation strategy, EMI is regarded as a key part of the internationalisation of Vietnam's HEIs, turning them into international and regional level academic research hubs intended to become highly desirable destinations for international students and academic staff, and ultimately to promote Vietnamese universities' international standing. EMI will develop high-quality local human capital with a good command of specialist knowledge, research competence and English proficiency. These policy aspirations are not groundless; previous EMI-related studies support EMI as a strategic tool for internationalisation, especially overseas

student and staff mobility (Ali, 2013; Costa & Coleman, 2013; Wächter & Maiworm, 2008, 2014).

The Government's EMI policies are a manifestation of an effort to address the forces of globalisation and to give the country a competitive advantage in the 21st century world; in view of this, these policies seem undeniably positive. However, a lot of what we find in the documents under review seems to remain at the level of aspirational rhetoric which is generally unsupported by “systematic and institutionally supported implementation measures and guidelines” (Dafouz & Smit 2016, p. 408). In other words, these policy documents have few clearly articulated strategies and/or guidelines. These findings reveal the need for Vietnamese policymakers to clearly articulate coherently defined and well-informed measures and guidelines regarding content teacher education preparedness, in-service professional development, facilities and financial support for Vietnamese HEIs to respond to the global and local forces in EMI delivery.

Internationalisation of the curriculum in Vietnam is characterised by a homogenisation and Westernisation of tertiary education, but the push towards it does not seem to take into account the range of possible negative impacts due to fundamental social, cultural, educational and political differences between Vietnam and the West. As emphasised by Nguyen and Tran (2018, p. 40),

... effective hybridization and incorporation of external ideas and practices into the Vietnamese [higher education] system can help lift education quality but it requires adequate planning, design and implementation. Otherwise, flawed and ill-planned adaptation of Western values and practices can result in detrimental impact.

Some of EMI policies' aims – for instance, to attract up to 3000 international students to study in Vietnam by 2015 – appear over-ambitious and impossible to achieve, because EMI in Vietnam is still in its infancy and still faces quite severe challenges, including local lecturers' and students' low English competence, inadequate resources and facilities, and insufficient funding (Nguyen & Tran, 2018). This is not to say that no foreign students attend Vietnamese HEIs, but most of the ones who do, come to learn Vietnamese or to do Vietnamese studies instead of English-taught subjects or disciplines (Pham, 2017). Until these and other challenges are properly addressed, EMI in Vietnam would be unable to rise to the EMI standards of other Asian countries, including Singapore, South Korea, Japan, Malaysia, etc.

Our review has revealed distinctly discriminatory attitudes towards the traditional Vietnamese-medium instruction (VMI) education. EMI programs are labelled as “advanced” or “high quality”. They are regarded as a model of high-quality education. VMI programs, by contrast, are framed as “mass education” – representing “normal” or even “poor quality” (Nguyen et al., 2016, p. 679). This situation is consistent with findings of previous studies (Hu & Alsagoff, 2010; Tollefson & Tsui, 2014) showing that EMI is perceived to far outweigh mother-tongue-medium education (MTM). Such attitudes devalue MTM and by doing so generate a range of negative consequences, such as divisions between English-proficient content teachers and English-incompetent MTM

teachers, between EMI and MTM students, inequity of access to education between advantaged and disadvantaged students, etc. A significant change in the policies' rhetoric is called for – especially regarding the glorification of Western educational models in general and EMI in particular. Relevant policy documents should highlight the undeniable benefits of MTM programs to minimise the stigmatisation of students enrolled in these programs.

One noteworthy finding concerns the mandated “100% English” nature of EMI delivery. The rationale behind this aspect of language management is clear – maximising learners' exposure to English will promote their EFL proficiency. As earlier studies (Garcia & Wei, 2014; Shohamy, 2013) demonstrate, however, using a second language (rather than the students' mother tongue) as a medium of instruction can impede disciplinary learning. These studies recommend controlled limited use of alternative linguistic resources alongside English, such as codeswitching and/or translanguaging (Macaro, 2005; Lo, 2015). It should be borne in mind, though, that codeswitching would only be applicable in classrooms where all students share the same L1, and can actually be counterproductive in mixed classes involving both domestic and international students (Ali, 2013).

One critical factor shaping EMI success or failure concerns the proper involvement of all relevant stakeholders in all aspects of EMI planning and the implementation. Our findings reveal a dynamic and complex network of different agents/actors who clearly have a stake in EMI – from the macro (MOET and other ministries) to the micro level (university administrators, lecturers, students, alumni, and employers). Effective educational change requires “permeable connectivity” engaging multiple agents at different levels (Fullan, 2007, p. 262); put simply, this is ideally a process involving regular interaction and collaboration across and within the macro, meso, and micro levels. Our review shows that although individual actors' roles are often acknowledged in the policy documents, the nature of both EMI planning and implementation has been essentially top-down, from the macro level (the Ministries), with little or no proper consultation with agents/actors representing the meso and micro levels. Such practices are sometimes bluntly described as ‘policy dumping’ (Hamid & Nguyen, 2016), and are almost invariably largely unsuccessful. Obviously, the long-term sustainability and success of EMI can only be ensured via continuous engagement of all relevant stakeholders and on-going communication among agents/actors representing all power levels.

## **Conclusion**

Using ROAD-MAPPING, this study has examined the multifaceted dimensions of EMI discursively constructed in the Vietnamese government's language policies. The analysis reveals the ways in which the multi-dimensionality of EMI is captured in the policy documents. EMI is discursively constructed as opportunities for getting directly exposed to the original knowledge and content, Anglo-American high quality education programs, and innovative teaching methods. These discursive statements highlight the policymakers' aspirations and planning efforts to promote EMI as a reform strategy to meet the nation's academic, economic and integrative demands in the epoch of globalisation.

The findings, however, show that the existing EMI policies promote practices of direct borrowing EMI programs from overseas higher education institutions, while at the same time lacking clear guidelines or recommendations for language management, internationalisation strategies, and proper involvement of multiple agents at different levels. All of these abstract and decontextualised policy documents result in ineffective EMI implementation. It is recommended that Vietnamese policymakers offer prompt and timely support policies and respond to micro-level actors' interests and concerns. Clear and effective channels of communication must be established between the macro and micro level to guarantee successful EMI implementation.

The analysis of Vietnam's national EMI policies could have the capacity to inform the strengths and weaknesses in EMI processes and practices as an illustrative reference point for other socio-cultural and educational contexts. It should be acknowledged that this study focuses on the top-down data sources without examining documents or practices at other levels, which is beyond this study's scope. There needs to be further investigation into EMI implementation to shed light on how EMI is interpreted, translated and appropriated at the meso and micro levels.

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