FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND VIETNAMESE

ENGLISH MEDIUM INSTRUCTION IN VIETNAMESE HIGHER EDUCATION: A CRITICAL NARRATIVE REVIEW OF POLICY PEDAGOGY LEARNING AND EQUITY

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ABSTRACT: English medium instruction (EMI) is an important component of internationalisation in Vietnamese higher education, but programme expansion provides limited evidence of educational effectiveness. This critical narrative review examines selected Vietnamese studies, a comparative institutional report, regional and international reviews, and current policy. Sources were located through targeted searches and checked through 1 October 2026; full text and abstract level evidence are distinguished. ROAD-MAPPING provides the principal analytical framework, supplemented by an implementation perspective. The synthesis identifies a recurring discrepancy between aspirations for English development and employment and evidence of classroom participation and disciplinary learning. Survey findings primarily establish perceptions; qualitative studies illuminate processes without estimating national effects. Observational evidence places interaction difficulties within pedagogy and subject understanding as well as English proficiency. Three interpretive mechanisms are proposed: access and gatekeeping, pedagogical mediation, and cumulative resource advantages. These mechanisms connect policy, classroom practice, and inequality, but require empirical testing. The review also examines assessment validity and the implications of Decree No. 222/2025/ND-CP while recognising differences among institutional and programme arrangements. It recommends coordinated disciplinary language support, supported lecturer development, explicit assessment criteria, and evaluation of outcomes and participation by student background. Future research should distinguish instructional language effects from selection and resource differences. The central conclusion is conditional: EMI can expand academic opportunities when institutions demonstrate meaningful learning and equitable access through adequately supported provision.

KEY WORDS: English medium instruction; Vietnamese higher education; ROAD-MAPPING; disciplinary learning; multilingual pedagogy; educational equity.

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1. Introduction

English medium instruction (EMI) has become part of higher education internationalisation in contexts where English is not the majority language (Macaro et al., 2018; Rose et al., 2021). In Vietnam, English also carries symbolic value as a marker of internationalisation, with institutional strategies for staff development accompanying its adoption (Duong & Chua, 2016). However, the international orientation of a programme does not determine how disciplinary knowledge is made accessible in its classrooms. Research on Vietnamese economics courses identifies a discrepancy between expectations and local teaching realities, including insufficient adaptation of imported curricula and pedagogies (Vo et al., 2022). EMI therefore needs to be examined as an institutional and educational arrangement whose outcomes depend on its enactment.

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The appeal of EMI rests partly on anticipated English development and future opportunities, but those expectations must be distinguished from demonstrated outcomes. International reviews provide qualified and evolving evidence on language and content learning rather than a universal guarantee of improvement (Macaro et al., 2018; Rose et al., 2026). In a Japanese business programme, English proficiency and academic language skills predicted course performance, while measured motivation did not correlate with higher grades (Rose et al., 2019). This finding cannot establish Vietnamese effects, but it explains why motivation alone is an inadequate indicator of readiness or success. Comparative evaluation also requires attention to how EMI is defined and to differences among programme arrangements (Rose et al., 2021).

Vietnamese studies illuminate different parts of this problem: policy enactment and pedagogical adaptation in situated courses (Vo et al., 2022), lecturers' responses to institutional demands (Dang et al., 2024), and graduates' accounts of unequal resources and opportunities (Tang et al., 2023). These forms of evidence support interpretation of processes, but do not by themselves identify effects caused by instructional language. The unresolved analytical task is to connect access conditions, classroom practices, and later opportunities while maintaining these evidential distinctions. ROAD-MAPPING offers a basis for that connection by relating language management, disciplines, agents, educational practices, and internationalisation (Dafouz & Smit, 2016).

This review addresses three questions. How do policy and institutional arrangements shape EMI provision? What does the evidence establish about disciplinary learning, language development, and participation? Through which processes might opportunities become unevenly distributed? Its contribution is a mechanism based interpretation of these relationships rather than another inventory of benefits and barriers. It argues that access conditions, pedagogical mediation, and resource accumulation jointly shape what EMI can offer, with potentially different consequences across programmes and student groups.

2. Review Approach and Conceptual Scope

2.1. Source identification and boundaries

This is a critical narrative review, not a systematic review or meta-analysis. The starting corpus comprised Vietnamese policy and student studies and a regional scoping review. Targeted web searches extended that corpus, using combinations of "English medium instruction", "EMI", "Vietnam", "Vietnamese higher education", "language use", "lecturer challenges", "learning outcomes", "professional development", and "equity". Initial searches and source verification were conducted on 30 September 2026, with a citation focused update on 1 October 2026. Publisher websites, journal archives, university repositories, and British Council publications were consulted; official government sources were used for current regulation. DOI records were checked where available. The update prioritised relevant journal articles whose journals' Scopus or Web of Science listing could be corroborated through publisher or institutional records; indexing was not treated as a substitute for appraisal of study design.

Selection prioritised research directly addressing disciplinary teaching through English in Vietnamese higher education. Earlier conceptual work was retained when necessary to explain the analytical framework. Regional and global reviews supplied comparative context, not substitute evidence of Vietnamese outcomes. Newspaper commentary and general English teaching materials were excluded from the scholarly evidence base. No publication period filter was imposed, although the selected literature extends from 2014 to 2026. There was no exhaustive database search, independent duplicate screening, or formal risk of bias assessment. Consequently, neither coverage completeness nor publication bias can be estimated.

Full texts were read when accessible. For sources available only through publisher or institutional abstracts and bibliographic records, claims were restricted to the reported scope and headline findings. Table 1 records access and design for the principal Vietnamese and comparative sources.

The added studies by Duong and Chua (2016), Vo et al. (2022), Rose et al. (2019), and Macaro et al. (2020), and the conceptual discussions by Read (2015) and Rose et al. (2021), were consulted through publisher or institutional abstracts and records; claims from them are correspondingly restricted. Such restricted access prevents detailed appraisal of sampling, instruments, and analysis in several recent studies. International reviews by Macaro et al. (2018) and Rose et al. (2026) were consulted at abstract level; their conclusions are used only as broad contextual signposts. Publication year is distinguished from evidence currency: Pham et al. (2025), published online in 2025, searched literature only through 6 October 2023.

2.2. Analytical procedure and evidential distinctions

For the selected sources, the synthesis compared setting, programme or discipline, participants, design, reported findings, and limitations. Findings were organised around policy enactment, student readiness, teaching and interaction, multilingual practices, assessment, and equity. ROAD-MAPPING dimensions guided interpretation, while design and access differences constrained the conclusions drawn. This was a qualitative comparison of a purposively assembled corpus, not a reproducible coding study with an interrater reliability statistic.

Four evidential distinctions structure the argument. Policy analysis describes rules and intentions rather than their effects. Surveys and interviews establish perceptions and accounts. Observations provide direct evidence of situated practices but do not by themselves establish causality. Measured learning and employment effects require designs capable of addressing selection, prior attainment, and resource differences. Apparent convergence across publications must also be interpreted cautiously because regional reviews can include the same primary studies discussed separately here.

Table 1. *Principal evidence and limits of inference*

Source	Context and design	Evidence contribution	Inference limit	Access
Tri and Moskovsky 2019	Vietnamese policy ROAD-MAPPING analysis	Policy intentions and implementation gaps	Historical documents; no measured outcomes	Full text
Duong and Chua 2016	One public university Qualitative case study	Institutional strategies for lecturers' English	One institution; methods appraisal limited by access	Full text
Nguyen 2021 Nguyen and Ngo 2022	Implementation analyses	Staged EMI proposal; institutional domains	Conceptual recommendations rather than intervention tests	Full texts
Nguyen et al. 2021	Two Hue campuses 215 questionnaires; 10 interviews	Expectations, readiness, language preferences	Self-report; discipline and campus confounding	Full text
Phuong and Nguyen 2019	Business and IT 136 questionnaires; 6 interviews	Perceived vocabulary and participation benefits	Perceptions cannot establish measured gains	Full text

Source	Context and design	Evidence contribution	Inference limit	Access
Vu and Burns 2014	Vietnamese undergraduate programme Qualitative investigation	Lecturer challenges across language and teaching	Detailed appraisal limited by access	Full text
Galloway and Sahan 2021	Thailand and Vietnam Surveys and qualitative data	Variation in institutional support	Comparative totals cannot be assigned to Vietnam	Full text
Dang et al. 2024	10 universities 15 lecturer interviews	Accounts of pedagogical agency	14 studied abroad; interviews do not verify attainment	Full text
Nguyen 2024	Advanced engineering programme Observations; 6 lecturers; 35 students	Situated interaction and participation	One programme; no causal estimate	Full text
Vo et al. 2022	Economics courses 4 teachers and students; interviews and observations	Expectations and local enactment	Situated case; no causal learning estimate	Full text
Tri and Moskovsky 2021	Vietnamese EMI Stakeholder study	Policy and enacted language use	Methods not fully appraised	Full text
Tang et al. 2023	IT graduates 8 interviews	Resource and opportunity inequalities	Small retrospective study; no employment effect estimate	Full text
Pham et al. 2025	6 countries Scoping review of 11 papers	First language practices and preferences	Search to October 2023; primary study overlap	Full text
Tri 2026a and 2026b	Vietnamese EMI Policy and stakeholder evidence	Privilege; proficiency and development	Abstract level interpretation; dataset independence unchecked	Full text

2.3. EMI and the analytical framework

EMI refers here to disciplinary teaching through English in a setting where English is not the majority population's first language (Rose et al., 2021). As Rose et al. (2021) explain, the boundary between EMI and language focused education remains contested; this review distinguishes disciplinary instruction from teaching English as a subject and from explicitly integrated content and language objectives. Nevertheless, subject understanding requires access to disciplinary discourse.

EMI programmes therefore need to specify whether English development is an intended, supported, and assessed outcome.

ROAD-MAPPING is the principal framework (Dafouz & Smit, 2016; Tri & Moskovsky, 2019). Its dimensions connect the roles of English and other languages, academic disciplines, language management, agents, practices and processes, and internationalisation and glocalisation. In this review, language management links admission and policy to classroom expectations; agents and practices explain lecturer adaptation and participation; academic disciplines locate variation in communicative demands; and internationalisation and glocalisation connect external curricula with local knowledge and opportunity. These relationships are used analytically rather than treated as separate lists of barriers.

Nguyen and Ngo's (2022) implementation perspective is a subsidiary lens for identifying operational responsibilities concerning personnel, curriculum, resources, access, and evaluation. It helps translate the principal framework into institutional questions without introducing a competing explanation. The three mechanisms developed in Section 8 are this review's interpretive propositions, not validated components added to ROAD-MAPPING.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Policy Aspirations and Institutional Implementation

Historical policy analyses identify a distance between internationalisation ambitions and arrangements for delivery (Tri & Moskovsky, 2019; Vo et al., 2022). Tri and Moskovsky (2019) examine the positioning of English and imported curricula, including limited attention to disciplinary differences. Nguyen and Ngo (2022) broaden implementation scrutiny across connected institutional domains. Their implication is that specifying a teaching language cannot establish adequate staffing, curricular adaptation, or learning support. These findings concern the periods and sources examined and should not be treated as descriptions of every current university.

Decree No. 222/2025/ND-CP, issued on 8 August 2025 and effective from 25 September 2025, changes the regulatory context (Nguyen, 2026). It regulates foreign language teaching of content, with requirements concerning programmes, materials, participants, assessment, quality assurance, and fees. Higher education lecturers are subject to a minimum level 5 foreign language requirement under Vietnam's six level framework, with specified exemption provisions. Its scope excludes foreign joint training arrangements and foreign educational programmes, among other exclusions. Consequently, it should not be assumed to govern all arrangements commonly grouped together as EMI in the research literature.

This development shifts the analytical question from whether implementation is formally addressed to how applicable requirements are enacted. Documentary compliance, lecturers' language qualifications, and effective disciplinary teaching remain distinct matters. A university may meet a language threshold while still needing to develop lecturers' explanation, feedback, and assessment practices. Tri's (2026b) abstract level account of lecturer proficiency requirements and professional development reinforces the relevance of examining the relationship between institutional provision and professional needs; its detailed methods could not be appraised here.

Programme labels also require care. Advanced programmes, foreign partnerships, institutionally designated high quality provision, and individual English taught modules may differ in governance, fees, resources, and language expectations; such contextual distinctions are essential for meaningful comparisons (Rose et al., 2021). Full and staged EMI further differ in exposure and transition demands. Researchers should document these characteristics directly rather than infer them from an EMI label. Historical evidence of policy gaps and current regulatory provisions cannot establish whether such differences have narrowed.

3.2. Student Expectations and Learning Outcomes

3.2.1. Aspirations and readiness

Nguyen et al. (2021) surveyed 215 students and interviewed ten across natural science and social science programmes at two Hue University campuses. Employment opportunities and English improvement were prominent expectations, yet only 27.5% of natural science respondents and 33.7% of social science respondents agreed that they communicated well in English. This juxtaposition shows that motivation and communicative readiness can diverge. It does not demonstrate failed learning: the data concern attitudes and perceived ability, and disciplinary comparisons are entangled with programme and campus differences.

Phuong and Nguyen (2019) likewise report uneven perceived benefits among 136 second year business and information technology students, with six follow-up interviews. Vocabulary benefits were endorsed by 86.8%, while 36.7% reported confidence in discussion. The contrast suggests that perceived lexical development need not translate into confidence in public academic interaction. Both measures are self-reports rather than independent tests of gains.

Across these studies, enrolment enthusiasm cannot serve as a proxy for learning effectiveness. Students may value future possibilities while finding present participation difficult. Institutions therefore need to monitor the trajectory between admission, classroom engagement, and attainment instead of treating demand as sufficient evidence of quality.

3.2.2. What can be concluded about achievement

Macaro et al. (2018) identify limited evidence for firm claims about language improvement or harm to content learning. Rose et al. (2026) report a more favourable international picture for receptive skills and vocabulary, mixed evidence for productive skills, and generally comparable content attainment. These broad conclusions, consulted through abstracts, do not establish Vietnamese effect sizes or demonstrate equal benefits across student groups.

Evidence from Japan also connects independently assessed language ability with disciplinary performance: Rose et al. (2019) analysed data from 146 business students and follow-up interviews with seven. English proficiency and academic language skills were significant predictors of course success. This observational relationship supports attention to preparation and disciplinary language support; it does not estimate an EMI versus VMI instructional effect or establish an equivalent relationship in Vietnam.

The decisive local problem is confounding. EMI students may enter with stronger English, different prior attainment, greater financial resources, or different motivations. Their programmes may also provide smaller classes, additional materials, or different assessment. Achievement differences between EMI and Vietnamese medium instruction (VMI) could therefore arise from several features of provision, a concern consistent with the evidential cautions in Macaro et al. (2018). A credible comparison must document these features and measure baseline differences.

Content attainment, English development, participation, and progression should be analysed separately. Examination success may coexist with limited ability to explain professional reasoning orally, while early hesitation may diminish with sustained support. The current corpus gives stronger grounds for describing experiences and implementation processes than for estimating Vietnamese causal learning effects. This evidential imbalance is a research priority rather than grounds for declaring EMI either universally effective or educationally harmful.

3.3. Lecturer Capacity and Classroom Pedagogy

Vu and Burns (2014), consulted through an institutional abstract, situate lecturers' challenges within language, student learning, pedagogy, and resources. The comparative report by Galloway and Sahan (2021) similarly identifies uneven institutional support. Its questionnaires involved 1,377 students and 231 teachers, and its interview and focus group work covered 17 universities in Thailand

and Vietnam. These are comparative totals, not Vietnamese sample sizes. Its findings support scrutiny of how assistance is organised but cannot establish a national Vietnamese prevalence.

Dang et al. (2024) illuminate agency through interviews with 15 lecturers at ten Vietnamese universities. Participants described pedagogical adaptation and purposeful language choices. Fourteen had studied abroad, making their professional backgrounds important when considering transferability. Interview accounts establish how these lecturers understood and responded to constraints; they do not independently demonstrate effects on attainment.

Nguyen (2024) adds classroom observations and interviews involving six lecturers and 35 students in an advanced transport and civil engineering programme. Teacher centred interaction, language switching, and limited participation were reported. Student difficulty involved subject understanding and hesitation as well as English. This triangulated case therefore locates participation within the organisation of teaching, rather than treating it solely as a proficiency deficit. Its findings remain specific to one programme and observation period.

Taken together, these sources suggest a relationship between management, agents, and practices. Institutional language expectations are interpreted by lecturers working with particular students and disciplinary tasks (Dafouz & Smit, 2016; Vo et al., 2022). Agency can improve the fit between these conditions, but relying on individual improvisation makes support uneven. Teacher development should therefore combine opportunities to rehearse explanations, observe interaction, examine student work, and revise assessments, with allocated time and collegial feedback. These are proposed institutional responses, not interventions whose effectiveness has been demonstrated by the reviewed studies.

Disciplinary variation matters because language demands are embedded in subject practices rather than exhausted by general proficiency (Dafouz & Smit, 2016; Rose et al., 2019). A numerical solution, a design justification, a business negotiation, and a discussion of historical interpretation demand different forms of communication. The humanities and social sciences may involve extensive interpretive argument; technical programmes also require specialised explanation and professional judgement. Such differences should guide local needs analysis without creating a hierarchy in which some subjects are presumed inherently easier to teach through English.

3.4. Multilingual Practices and Disciplinary Access

The roles of English and Vietnamese cannot be inferred from programme branding alone. Nguyen et al. (2021) report varied language preferences, while Tri and Moskovsky's (2023) abstract identifies differences between language policy and practice. Together, these sources direct attention to enacted language arrangements rather than an assumed monolingual classroom.

Pham et al. (2025) synthesise 11 papers across six Southeast Asian countries, including Vietnamese studies. The review describes first language use for individual comprehension, collaborative meaning making, and social relations. These regional findings concern participants' first languages, not Vietnamese in every setting. Some underlying studies overlap with the Vietnamese literature, so the review should not be counted as wholly independent confirmation. Its search endpoint also limits its coverage of more recent changes.

Evidence from China provides a useful comparison. Macaro et al. (2020) studied five EMI teachers and their students, finding infrequent but variable first language use, chiefly for conceptual explanation. Some students nevertheless preferred a prior attempt to explain in English. This suggests that the function and sequence of language choices deserve scrutiny; it neither establishes that switching improves attainment nor supplies evidence of Vietnamese practice.

A reasoned pedagogical implication is to specify the purpose of language choices. Students might discuss a difficult problem bilingually before producing an English explanation, or compare Vietnamese and English terminology where local professional practice requires both. Such examples

are proposed scaffolding arrangements. Preference for first language use, or observation of switching, does not prove that a particular sequence improves learning.

Evaluation should ask whether a practice increases conceptual precision, access to interaction, and progress towards intended English communication. Routine translation may consume time without changing understanding, while English only interaction may conceal unresolved misconceptions. Planned multilingual support requires clear objectives and evidence from student explanations, work, and assessment. Its value should be judged by these outcomes, with attention to learners who initially participate least.

3.5. Assessment Validity and Educational Quality

Assessment is a missing link between many EMI aspirations and claims of success. When subject mastery is the intended construct, an examination that heavily penalises incidental English errors may measure language ability alongside content. When disciplinary English is explicitly an outcome, excluding it from evaluation would also misrepresent programme aims. Assessment design must state which abilities are being judged and why. Read's (2015) discussion of post-entry assessment similarly foregrounds construct definition, diagnosis, and validation of consequences, providing a basis for examining what a language assessment measures and how it contributes to learning.

This review proposes analytic rubrics that distinguish conceptual accuracy, application, argument or professional reasoning, and language performance where relevant. A disciplinary explanation requires enough linguistic precision to communicate meaning, but accent conformity or grammatical accuracy should not silently dominate a content score. Shared marking examples and moderation can help lecturers apply these distinctions consistently. These proposals address validity; the reviewed corpus does not establish their local effectiveness.

Entry proficiency certificates provide one indicator of readiness, not a complete account of disciplinary literacy or lecturer pedagogical competence (Read, 2015; Rose et al., 2019). Diagnostics could include interpreting a technical passage, explaining evidence, or writing a short reasoned response. Results should guide support as well as admission, following the concern with assessment consequences raised by Read (2015). Formative assessment during the degree can reveal whether difficulties concern concepts, task interpretation, or English expression, allowing different responses to different problems.

Comparisons with VMI must also examine assessment comparability. Similar grades do not imply similar attainment when assignments, marking criteria, or standards differ. Evaluation should include aligned content tasks, separately reported language outcomes, and transparent progression requirements. Quality assurance becomes more informative when it connects observed classroom processes with what assessments actually require students to demonstrate.

3.6. Discussion of Mechanisms and Alternative Explanations

3.6.1. Access and gatekeeping

The first proposed mechanism concerns the conversion of prior resources into programme access. English preparation and the affordability of participation may shape admission and persistence. Consequently, an apparent EMI advantage can begin before instruction. Student readiness evidence identifies one relevant condition, but direct relationships among family background, preparation costs, and selection require investigation. This mechanism links language management and agents to the distribution of opportunity.

Gatekeeping need not have the same effects everywhere. Funded preparation, staged entry, and sustained support may broaden participation, whereas requirements without assistance may narrow it. Research must include rejected applicants, nonparticipants, and students who transfer or withdraw. Studying only enrolled students can underestimate exclusion and overstate how broadly benefits are available.

3.6.2. Pedagogical mediation

The second mechanism concerns how instruction converts access into learning. Classroom interaction, disciplinary explanation, feedback, and purposeful multilingual support may mediate the relationship between studying through English and attaining content objectives. Observations in Nguyen (2024) and lecturer accounts in Dang et al. (2024) provide situated evidence that this relationship involves teaching practices. They do not identify a general causal pathway or quantify its strength.

This proposition explains why similar language entry requirements may yield different experiences. Students with adequate general English can still encounter unfamiliar disciplinary discourse or limited opportunities to test understanding (Rose et al., 2019; Vo et al., 2022). Conversely, structured interaction may support students whose initial confidence is lower. A direct test would connect observed teaching practices with repeated content and language measures, accounting for prior preparation and disciplinary demands.

3.6.3. Cumulative resource advantages

The third mechanism concerns the accumulation of institutional and personal advantages. Tang et al. (2023), available at abstract level, draw on eight IT graduates' interviews to examine unequal resources and professional opportunities across EMI and VMI. The study suggests pathways through which language resources and employment access reinforce advantages, but cannot estimate national employment effects.

Tri's (2026a) publisher abstract examines elite dimensions of English medium higher education through policy and stakeholder evidence. It extends the relevance of institutional privilege and language hierarchy, although full methods were unavailable. These publications should not be treated as independent replications without checking datasets and contexts. Together they motivate, rather than settle, investigation of resource accumulation.

A plausible process is that better resourced provision expands access to materials, networks, or internships, which can then support later opportunities. English is one component of that process. Programme finance, reputation, selection, and labour market demand are competing or complementary explanations. Graduate research should therefore document the resources encountered and the routes into employment, including differences within EMI cohorts.

3.6.4. Contribution and limits of the synthesis

The three mechanisms connect institutional management, classroom practices, and internationalisation to trajectories of participation. They explain how valued opportunities and exclusion can coexist without assuming that English itself produces either outcome. They also identify different intervention points: admission and funding, instruction and assessment, and resource distribution beyond the classroom.

The interpretation remains provisional. Much of the corpus is qualitative or based on self-report; some studies are accessible only through abstracts; and institutional and disciplinary coverage is uneven. The review does not establish national prevalence, causal direction, or the magnitude of any mechanism. Its contribution is a set of testable relationships and a more discriminating basis for institutional evaluation.

3.7. Institutional Implications

The recommendations in Table 2 translate the proposed relationships into responsibilities and observable indicators. They are proposals for local adaptation, not established interventions. Universities should begin with programme specific needs analysis and a documented baseline, then review whether support changes participation and learning over successive cohorts.

Table 2. *Proposed institutional actions and evaluation indicators*

Priority	Responsible actors	Required provision	Indicators for review
Access and transition	Programme leaders and student services	Budgeted diagnostics, bridging support, and financial assistance	Admission, progression, and withdrawal by baseline proficiency and relevant background
Teaching and language support	Departments with language specialists	Allocated collaboration time; mentoring and discipline specific support	Observed reasoning and participation; support uptake; repeated content and English measures
Assessment	Course teams and quality assurance units	Explicit rubrics, aligned tasks, marking moderation	Content and language scores reported separately where relevant; consistency across markers
Resources and opportunity	University leadership and programme committees	Transparent fees and support budgets; review of materials and placement access	Affordability, access to resources, completion, and graduate opportunities across EMI and VMI

Nguyen (2024) and Nguyen (2026) proposes partial EMI as a response to implementation constraints. Staged provision may be appropriate where preparation or staffing is uneven, but the proposal is not experimental evidence of superiority. Decisions about full or staged EMI should follow curricular goals, documented capacity, and learner needs. Transitions need clear expectations and review points rather than an assumption that greater English exposure necessarily improves quality.

Equity evaluation should examine who receives support, who can afford participation, and who progresses. Indicators should be interpreted alongside interviews and classroom evidence; a participation count alone does not reveal the quality of reasoning. Where background information is collected, analysis should protect confidentiality and avoid treating group differences as learner deficits. Resources for EMI should also be assessed in relation to opportunities available to VMI students.

3.8. Future Research Priorities

The first priority is longitudinal, multisite evaluation of learning. Studies should record baseline content attainment and English proficiency, programme characteristics, support, and resources, then measure disciplinary and language outcomes separately, responding to the evidential limitations identified in Macaro et al. (2018) and Rose et al. (2026). Comparable VMI groups and transparent adjustment for selection can strengthen interpretation, although statistical adjustment cannot remove all unobserved differences. Sampling should extend beyond prominent urban providers and include disciplinary and institutional diversity.

The second priority is process research on pedagogical mediation. Recorded interaction, observations, student work, and stimulated recall can connect teaching decisions with demonstrated understanding. Evaluations of multilingual support should specify the practice, its purpose, and

whose participation changes. Well designed local interventions can establish contextual usefulness before broader claims are made.

The third priority is access and graduate trajectories. Applicant data, nonparticipant accounts, withdrawal patterns, financial costs, and employment follow-up can test the proposed gatekeeping and accumulation mechanisms. Employment aspirations and graduate satisfaction should be distinguished from job quality, professional communication, and access to particular sectors.

Finally, research on the 2025 decree should establish which programme arrangements fall within its scope and document implementation over time. Studies can examine whether institutional compliance is accompanied by changes in support, teaching, and assessment. Recent publications should be incorporated through full text appraisal where possible, and overlapping datasets identified before counting studies as independent evidence.

4. Conclusion

As the present critical narrative review shows, English medium instruction in Vietnamese higher education is an institutionally-arranged form of pedagogy whose educational value will depend on how it is carried out. Opportunities provided by access to the knowledge in English, development in English, and participation in international academic and professional networks are suggested in the reviewed literature. However, these opportunities are linked to different levels of student preparedness, availability of institutional resources, and difficulties of adapting teaching to disciplinary and linguistic requirements. Therefore, students' hopes for improvements in English and employment should be distinguished from any proved achievements. International literature offers a wider background to assess these hopes, but its results cannot be taken as equivalent to those obtained in Vietnamese institutions and programmes (Macaro et al., 2018; Rose et al., 2026).

The quality of evidence will depend on research questions raised in each study. Surveys can help to understand students' expectations, perceived benefits and communicative confidence, while interviews and observations of classroom interactions will shed light on the ways how lecturers and students cope with instructional challenges in specific circumstances (Dang et al., 2024; Nguyen et al., 2021; Nguyen, 2024). The former type of studies will be more informative when drawing conclusions about experience, institutional conditions and practices than about causes of achievements in disciplinary learning, English or employment. The difference between EMI and Vietnamese medium instruction is explained by students' prior preparation, selection, programme resources, and arrangements of assessment. Thus, the literature does not support any general claim that EMI guarantees better educational outcomes in Vietnamese higher education. However, it clearly demonstrates that the language proficiency is not a complete explanation of participation and learning.

Using the theoretical model called ROAD-MAPPING (Dafouz & Smit, 2016), the review suggests three related mechanisms that can help to understand the role of institutional arrangements in the shaping of EMI experience and outcomes: access and gatekeeping, pedagogical mediation, and cumulative resource advantages. Access and gatekeeping mechanism highlights the importance of language requirements, financial means and preparation of students as barriers to enter into EMI programmes and persist there. Pedagogical mediation mechanism deals with the means of enabling students' participation in knowledge acquisition through disciplinary explanation, interaction, feedback, assessment and multilingual practices. Cumulative resource advantages mechanism looks at the ways how access to institutional resources and opportunities opened by EMI can contribute to sustaining of the existing advantages over time. These mechanisms provide an interpretive contribution to understanding of policy, classroom practices and inequality within one conceptual framework. However, they are not confirmed causal processes and extensions of the framework.

The implications for institutional practice are the conditions under which EMI could be an opportunity for meaningful and equal education. Programme expansion should go along with the

provision of disciplinary language support, lecturer development, learning materials and clear assessment criteria for knowledge and language outcomes. While the qualifications of entry are necessary, further opportunities to diagnose and help students with difficulties in the course of studies should be provided. Also, multilingual practices should be assessed in terms of helping students in participating in knowledge rather than simply being contrasted to English only expectations. Institutional evaluations should identify whose participation is facilitated, whose progress is hindered and how students with various educational and socioeconomic backgrounds are provided with additional support. In this way, the educational quality will become more visible than the programme labels and international branding alone.

Decree No. 222/2025/ND-CP creates a policy environment for teaching and learning through foreign languages, but the mere existence of formal requirements does not prove the effective implementation of them in particular programmes (Nguyen, 2026). Therefore, future research should focus on the connection of policy implementation to evidence of teaching practices, support, assessment and students' progression. The longitudinal and multisite studies, including comparison of Vietnamese medium instruction groups where possible, are needed to differentiate the effects of the language of instruction from selection and resource factors. Also, research should consider disciplinary and institutional diversity, graduate trajectories and unequal distribution of opportunities among students.

These conclusions are limited by purposive selection of literature, uneven access to full texts, and the methodological limitations of the underlying studies. However, the synthesis supports a clear position, the educational case for EMI depends on proved disciplinary learning, supported participation and equal access to opportunities. Sustainable development of EMI in Vietnam requires such conditions to be created in particular programmes and evaluated over time.

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Sử dụng tiếng Anh làm phương tiện giảng dạy trong giáo dục đại học Việt Nam: đánh giá tổng quan về chính sách, sư phạm, học tập và công bằng giáo dục

Tóm tắt: Sử dụng tiếng Anh làm phương tiện giảng dạy (English as a Medium of Instruction-EMI) đang trở thành một bộ phận quan trọng trong quá trình quốc tế hóa giáo dục đại học Việt Nam. Tuy nhiên, sự mở rộng nhanh chóng của các chương trình EMI chưa đi kèm với đầy đủ bằng chứng về hiệu quả giáo dục. Nghiên cứu này thực hiện tổng quan tường thuật phê phán dựa trên các nghiên cứu tiêu biểu tại Việt Nam, một báo cáo so sánh giữa các cơ sở giáo dục, các nghiên cứu tổng quan trong khu vực và quốc tế, cùng những văn bản chính sách hiện hành. Tài liệu được tìm kiếm có định hướng và rà soát đến ngày 01/10/2026; nghiên cứu phân biệt rõ bằng chứng thu thập từ toàn văn và bằng chứng chỉ có ở cấp độ tóm tắt. Khung ROAD-MAPPING được sử dụng làm cơ sở phân tích chính, kết hợp với góc nhìn về quá trình triển khai chính sách. Kết quả tổng hợp cho thấy một khoảng cách đáng chú ý giữa kỳ vọng nâng cao năng lực tiếng Anh và cơ hội việc làm với những bằng chứng thực tế về mức độ tham gia học tập trên lớp và khả năng tiếp thu kiến thức chuyên ngành của người học. Các nghiên cứu khảo sát chủ yếu phản ánh nhận thức và đánh giá của người tham gia, trong khi các nghiên cứu định tính giúp làm rõ quá trình triển khai nhưng chưa đủ cơ sở để khái quát tác động ở phạm vi quốc gia. Bằng chứng từ quan sát lớp học cho thấy những khó khăn trong tương tác không chỉ bắt nguồn từ năng lực tiếng Anh mà còn liên quan đến phương pháp giảng dạy và mức độ hiểu biết kiến thức chuyên ngành. Trên cơ sở tổng hợp tài liệu, nghiên cứu đề xuất ba cơ chế giải thích gồm: khả năng tiếp cận và các rào cản tham gia; vai trò trung gian của hoạt động sư phạm; và lợi thế tích lũy về nguồn lực. Ba cơ chế này góp phần lý giải mối quan hệ giữa chính sách, thực tiễn lớp học và bất bình đẳng trong giáo dục, song cần tiếp tục được kiểm chứng bằng các nghiên cứu thực nghiệm. Nghiên cứu cũng xem xét tính phù hợp và độ giá trị của hoạt động đánh giá, đồng thời phân tích những hàm ý của Nghị định số 222/2025/NĐ-CP, có tính đến sự khác biệt giữa các cơ sở giáo dục và mô hình chương trình. Từ kết quả tổng quan, nghiên cứu đề xuất tăng cường hỗ trợ ngôn ngữ gắn với chuyên ngành, phát triển năng lực giảng dạy cho giảng viên một cách có hệ thống, xây dựng tiêu chí đánh giá rõ ràng, đồng thời đánh giá kết quả học tập và mức độ tham gia của sinh viên theo các nhóm hoàn cảnh khác nhau. Các nghiên cứu trong tương lai cần phân biệt tác động thực sự của ngôn ngữ giảng dạy với ảnh hưởng của quá trình tuyển chọn người học và sự khác biệt về nguồn lực. Nhìn chung, EMI có thể góp phần mở rộng cơ hội học tập và hội nhập học thuật khi các cơ sở giáo dục bảo đảm được chất lượng học tập thực chất, khả năng tiếp cận công bằng và các điều kiện hỗ trợ phù hợp.

Từ khóa: Giảng dạy bằng tiếng Anh; giáo dục đại học Việt Nam; ROAD-MAPPING; học tập chuyên ngành; sư phạm đa ngôn ngữ; công bằng giáo dục.