ENGLISH AS MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION (EMI) AT PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN INDONESIA: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Abstract
English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) method bloomed widely in the educational context as the impact of advanced globalization. Pros and cons emerge worldwide toward the implementation of this teaching method. A study of EMI on the primary level becomes interesting since the teachers are faced with double challenges. While teaching young learners with their unique characteristics is a big challenge, they are required to teach the learners using an unfamiliar language which is English. Therefore, a descriptive-qualitative study was conducted to uncover this issue. Literature review, observation, and interviews with some teachers of international standard primary schools in Indonesia were employed to obtain comprehensive data on this issue. The result revealed many challenges and opportunities in the implementation of EMI at the primary level. This study suggests a better policy in the educational system shading the implementation of EMI in Indonesia and many supports are still needed.

Keywords: EMI, primary school, challenge, opportunity, ISS

Introduction
English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) means using English in giving instruction for English and non-English subjects (Ernawati et al., 2021; Paris et al., 2022; Qomariah et al., 2022). Using English as the medium of instruction and the target language in the classroom is critical to the language learning process because it greatly increases the students’ exposure to the target language. By using the target language in the classroom, students receive more comprehensible input, which leads to more complex language structures.

Global educational systems have expressed interest in using English as a Medium of Instruction between 1995 and 2005. In Europe, one of the methods implementing the EMI approach, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), became a recognized methodological approach in 1995. Being successful in teaching using a second language in several educational settings, this pedagogical technique was quickly adopted at all educational levels throughout the world between 2000 and 2006 (Marsh, 2006).

EMI has been implemented in many countries around the world. In Scandinavia, there has been a 100% increase in EMI courses across Europe between 2007 and 2014. A major investment was made in 37 prestigious universities in Japan to improve their standing in international league tables. Moreover, the percentage of EMI classes at Korean universities grew from 3% to 4% in 2006 to 25% to 30% in 2014 (Lamb et al., 2021).

However, the effectiveness of EMI is still disputable. The employment of a foreign language, like English, as the primary language of teaching in schools is closely associated with educational failure and marginalization in some of the world’s poorest nations. For instance, there is a language policy in Ghana that mandates that English be used as the medium of instruction for students in Primary Four (P4) to JHS, but it is broken because of low English proficiency (Owu-ewie & Eshun, 2015). Meanwhile, in Thailand, it is said that the English-medium courses have typically not taken into account the perspectives and experiences of the pupils (Hengsadeekul et al., 2010). Then in South Africa, it is estimated that over 75% of youngsters do not complete their education. The use of English as the primary language of education was one of the obstacles (Marsh, 2006).

In Indonesia, globalization has spread in the last two decades. To provide competitive human resources, the government previously developed International Standard Schools (ISS) based on Law No. 20 of the Year 2003. Some schools were appointed to be the pilot project of
this program. Being nationally standardized schools, these institutions used English not only as a subject to learn but also as a medium of instruction in the learning process (Ernawati et al., 2021).

By 2013, this program had changed to consider the different advantages and disadvantages. But over time, some Indonesian schools—particularly the private ones that joined the ISS program—continue to teach students by international standards by including English language instruction and using curriculum from abroad, such as Pearson Edexcel and Cambridge. On one side, this is a good improvement in education quality to achieve the goal of national education which is producing global competitive human resources. On the other side, this phenomenon also raises new challenges in the practice of Education (Ernawati et al., 2021; Escobar-Alméciga, 2022; Qomariah et al., 2022; Toth, 2018).

The challenges faced as the impact of the use of EMI come from many sides including the educational institutions, the teachers, and also the students. First, there is a lack of institutional preparedness in terms of developing policies and curricula that meet both national and international standards, there are no standardized assessments available for bilingual education, and there isn't a model that can be used as a guide when EMI is implemented (Barnard, 2014; Ryhan, 2014). Second, the other difficulties come from the teachers as the human resources. Not all teachers master English well. Thus, they end up with continuous training to improve their language skills as well as their international standardized teaching skills (Haryanto, 2013; N. T. Zacharias, 2013). Third, because English is used so much, it can make kids less motivated to learn. Moreover, because of the excessively high learning load associated with EMI, pupils’ language proficiency may also suffer (Barnard, 2014; Simasiku et al., 2015). Because they struggle with English, a lot of pupils lack confidence. As a result, classroom interaction becomes passive (Nur et al., 2023; Ryhan, 2014).

The majority of research on EMI's usefulness in learning, despite its widespread use, is conducted at the postsecondary level. Studies analyzing the impact of EMI on young learners’ language development are still hard to come by, particularly in primary schools where EMI has been used for a long time. A study of EMI on the primary level becomes interesting since primary students who belong to young learners are still in the process of maturing their first language acquisition. It is thought that young learners are in the golden age in which they can pick up two or more languages at the same time, just way they acquire their first language when they get adequate exposure to both languages (Amin et al., 2023; Copland & Garton, 2014). This condition can only be satisfied, though, under certain conditions. Initially, young learners must receive the same amount of exposure to the second language as they do to their native tongue. Second, speakers of the second language who are also fluent in their mother tongue must provide the input (N. Zacharias, 2010). Considering the reason above, this research aimed to explore the challenges and opportunities of EMI implementation at Primary schools in Indonesia.

Method

This descriptive-qualitative study used both empirical and theoretical methods. Because it naturally depicts a phenomenon from the context in which it is observed, the descriptive qualitative approach is thought to be ideal for this study (Inayati & Waloyo, 2022; Licorish et al., 2017). The creation of models, frameworks, and theories based on preexisting information, reasoning, and intuition is the theoretical method. In the meantime, an empirical approach uses data collection and analysis to verify hypotheses and models. This type of technique is based on direct or indirect observation of the outside environment and is frequently carried out at the observational or experimental level (Team, 2023). In an attempt to be as thorough as possible, several surveys were sent out and interviews with International Standard Primary School teachers were done to learn more about the implementation of EMI and the difficulties they were facing.
Findings and Discussions

Based on the observation, literature review, and interview results, it was found that several challenges faced by the teachers in implementing EMI at primary schools can be classified into some points namely language status, language acquisition process, human resources, and the factors of environment.

Language Status

The first challenge identified is the language status. In Indonesia, English is a foreign language which means it is not a daily language. Most of the students in International Standard Primary Schools come from a wide range of ethnicities, like Chinese, and Arabian, and even the original ethnicities of Indonesia like Javanese, Sundanese, and so on. Each of these ethnicities has its mother tongue although most of them speak Indonesian. These international standard primary schools are a small part of the face of Indonesia's diversity.

The nation of Indonesia is multicultural. Despite Indonesian being the country's official language, there are numerous mother tongues or local languages. English is not a common language in Indonesia since it is considered a foreign language. However, the need for English proficiency is very strong because English is the world's lingua franca, or the language utilized globally in many spheres of life. In Indonesia, English has emerged as the most popular foreign language to learn (Prihatin et al., 2021). However, exposure to English is restricted to the classroom setting because it is not an everyday language (N. Zacharias, 2010). Consequently, despite children's innate capacity to pick up language skills more quickly than adults, becoming a native-like English speaker appears to be difficult to attain (Amin et al., 2023; Rich, 2014).

Here teachers are faced with the demands of producing international-quality graduates without abandoning local wisdom and building a spirit of nationalism at the same time. However, they agree that the use of English in the classroom does not impact students' feelings of nationalism when there is effective curriculum management and a dedication to fostering a learning environment that fosters love of the homeland and local wisdom.

Language Acquisition Process

The second challenge is the process of language acquisition. Language acquisition is a process of acquiring language which requires conscious and unconscious activities (Ellis, 2006). Acquiring a language means understanding the language and being able to use it in the right context. Children, primary students, are still in the process of acquiring their first language.

Indeed, the process of learning a second language is influenced in some way by one's proficiency in the first language. Positive transfer and negative transfer are terms used to describe the language transfer process. When the first and second languages share the same structure, learning the first language becomes easier and helps with learning the second. This is known as positive transfer. Conversely, negative transfer occurs when there is a discrepancy between the first and second language's rules. The negative transfer generates challenges. For instance, the majority of English language learners typically acquire content words before function words (Fadillah, 2009).

The maxim "the earlier the better" is accepted by a large number of linguists (Amin et al., 2023; Anggraini, 2018). The first is Noam Chomsky's concept of the Language Acquisition Device (LAD). According to him, each person is born with a certain brain device that is capable of processing linguistic information and producing an output (Amin et al., 2023; N. Zacharias, 2010). The second is B.F. Skinner's perspective on behaviorism. According to him, learning is the act of creating a habit through the provision of stimulus, reaction, and reinforcement (Budiman, 2017). The third is the idea of the golden age or critical time, which has been clinically validated by numerous scientists. According to Rich (2014), the critical period is the age at which the brain functions like a sponge, readily absorbing a wide range of information.

One of the teachers stated that in her school the implementation of EMI is conducted in some stages namely 25:75, 50:50, and 75:25. It means that in the first year, they use 25% of English and 75% of Indonesian in giving the instruction. In the second year, the percentage of
language use increases to 50%. For the third graders and above, they use 75% English and 25% Indonesian. This strategy is considered good to provide an adaptation process to the new environment.

**Human Resources**

Providing an environment that supports the acquisition of foreign languages for primary students is a double big challenge. First, they are young learners with their unique characteristics and second, they are still in the process of learning the language itself (Pujiani et al., 2022). One of the problems that needs to be taken into account is human resources. Many educators working with young learners come from backgrounds other than English education (Copland & Garton, 2014). In primary schools, there is a homeroom teacher that is a teacher who has the responsibility to handle one class and usually, they teach all subjects. Therefore, when they are required to teach the subjects in English, they need big efforts. Teaching becomes more complicated since they have to teach subjects that they understand well using the language that they do not comprehend.

Based on the interview results, the teachers shared their ideas that to be a teacher at International Standard Primary School, there is a requirement to master English proven by an English certificate and recruitment test. Their institution also supports them with many pieces of training like English training, curriculum training, and international standard teaching training, which, add to their working load.

This is consistent with Zacharias's (2013) earlier research, in which she spoke with twelve ISS instructors in Central Java. The outcome demonstrated that ISS teachers have received unwelcome and undesirable attention as a result of the ISS policy. All of a sudden, ISS teachers were viewed as inept and their prior education insufficient. As a result, they underwent numerous English trainings to hone their teaching skills and meet ISS requirements. The degree to which these training sessions improve teachers' overall English competency and teaching skills is still unknown, despite the significant efforts made to improve ISS teachers.

**Social Environment**

The next challenge is about the social environment. This includes the human environment and the physical environment. Regarding the human environment, children spend most time at home with their parents and neighbors which they speak in their first language, some of them Indonesian and the other regional language. The varied social, economic, and educational background somehow influence their English proficiency. The English mastery of our society, indeed, can be considered very low, only a few are familiar with English (Anggraini, 2018; Copland et al., 2014; Pramesty et al., 2022; Prihatin et al., 2021; Widodo & Dewi, 2019).

The physical environment includes the facilities and the learning resources. The teachers stated that they sometimes have difficulties finding the appropriate learning sources that can help them to present all subjects in English. Moreover, not all students are familiar with online learning resources that can help them learn independently. One of the teachers said that it can be caused by the lack of knowledge about online learning platforms and also the lack of the student's motivation to learn independently. However, some parents send their children to private courses after school. It, of course, requires more cost and not all parents can afford it. In some cases, this results in a gap between students from high economic backgrounds and the low ones (Haryanto, 2012).

**Opportunities Behind the Implementation of EMI in Primary School**

Despite the challenges faced due to the EMI policy, there are also some opportunities or benefits that can be taken into account. The first is the opportunities of being English native-like speakers. As mentioned above there is a condition that enables people to be native-like speakers of their second language. This condition can be achieved only if people obtain the same exposure to a second language as much as the first language (Copland & Garton, 2014). ISS provides a supporting environment that enables the students to get more exposure to English.
The second is about the thought that children are in a critical period (Amin et al., 2023). In this period their language development grows rapidly. Thus, they can learn a second language more easily than adults.

Third, mastering English gives many benefits for children academically and non-academically. It helps children feel more confident and obtain excellent academic achievement. Moreover, it may be the key to getting a better education, for example, to get a scholarship or to study abroad, and to get a better future career (Amin et al., 2023; Kusmaryati, 2020; Supriyanti, 2012).

Conclusion
This study concludes that the implementation of EMI at primary schools in Indonesia still has many challenges. The challenges include the language status, the learners' age who are still in the process of language acquisition and the critical period, the quality of human resources, and the social environment. However, out of the challenges, there are many benefits of learning a second language or implementing EMI at primary schools such as improving academic and non-academic achievement, improving the learners' confidence, and also opening the chance to get a better future. Therefore, the implementation of EMI needs support from all parties including the government policy for a better educational system, the commitment from all educational institutions to improve their teachers' wealth and quality, and the improvement of the availability of learning sources and facilities.

References


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