

STUDENTS' CHALLENGES AND TEACHER'S STRATEGIES IN ENGLISH-MEDIUM INSTRUCTION PRACTICES: VOICES FROM VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

¹Adellia Ersanda Putri Purwanto, ^{1*}Frida Unsiah, ²Khairil Azwar Razali

¹ English Language Education, Faculty of Cultural Studies, Universitas Brawijaya, Jl. Veteran No.10-11, Ketawanggede, Malang, East Java, Indonesia

² English Language Department, Faculty of Sustainable Tourism and Contemporary Languages, International Islamic University, Malaysia

*Corresponding Author Email: frida_unsiah@ub.ac.id

Article Info	Abstract
Article History Received: January 2026 Revised: March 2026 Accepted: August 2026 Published: October 2026	<i>The use of EMI in vocational high schools is on the rise as part of efforts to improve students' English proficiency and their competitiveness in the global workforce after graduation. However, the implementation of EMI still faces various challenges, particularly regarding students' English proficiency levels, which necessitates the use of appropriate teaching strategies. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify the challenges faced by students as well as the strategies employed by teachers when implementing EMI in vocational high schools in Indonesia. This study uses a mixed-methods approach, involving 85 11th-grade students from three classes and a subject teacher who implements EMI. Students completed a questionnaire to collect quantitative data, while the teacher conducted semi-structured interviews to gather qualitative data. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings indicate that students still rely on translators, have difficulty following the teacher's instructions in English, and lack confidence in interacting in English during the learning process. To address these challenges, the teacher implemented various strategies when using EMI, including language simplification, translanguaging, material repetition, peer tutoring, and game-based learning to enhance student engagement during the learning process. The results of this study also indicate that the successful implementation of EMI in vocational high schools requires gradual language support, adequate teacher preparation, and contextualized translanguaging procedures.</i>
Keywords EMY issues; Vocational schools; Students' challenges; Teachers' strategies;	
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INTRODUCTION

English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) can be defined as the use of English as the language of instruction for non-English subjects in regions where English is not the primary language (Macaro, 2018; Lai & Idris, 2025). In recent decades, the use of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) has grown in various countries where English is not the primary language. EMI has become a global phenomenon and continues to grow in several non-English-speaking countries, such as Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, China, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Korea, and Denmark (Khadka, 2025; Wu & Tsai, 2022; Galloway et al., 2020). EMI is considered an important key to opening the door to global opportunities, therefore many

countries with languages other than English are trying to implement EMI in schools (Nyoni et al., 2023). The implementation of EMI is part of the internationalization of education and a response to the demands of globalization. Through EMI, educational institutions are expected not only to improve students' mastery of academic material, but also to develop the English language skills necessary to access global information and compete in the international job market.

The use of EMI in vocational education is increasingly important because vocational high schools (SMK) play a critical role in preparing students for the industrial world and the world of work. Vocational schools were established to provide graduates with practical skills and theoretical knowledge that can be directly applied in the workplace Riyanto et al., (2025). This is in line with global needs, where the use of English is increasingly common in technical manuals, technology, certification, and professional communication. However, the application of EMI in vocational schools differs from that in higher education. A study by Unsiah et al., (2024) shows that in the context of higher education, EMI is viewed positively by students and is considered beneficial in improving English language skills and academic achievement because it is supported by a supportive atmosphere. Vocational school students have a wide range of English language proficiency levels and require more practical and contextual learning, thus the EMI approach used in universities cannot be implemented directly. This is supported by Akmal and Unsiah (2025), who found that vocational high school students face ongoing challenges in EMI classrooms, including limited vocabulary, anxiety about speaking, and frequent reliance on their mother tongue, demonstrating the need for tailored, vocationally oriented EMI practices.

Although the use of EMI in vocational schools is expanding, many students continue to have limits in their English language skills, particularly in understanding technical vocabulary relevant to their field of competence, which can impede their academic progress. This claim is supported by Ardiyanti and Unsiah., (2025), who found that vocational high school students with limited English vocabulary rely on Google Translate to understand terms related to their subjects and fields of expertise, indicating that limited vocabulary remains a significant challenge in academic learning. Students with weak English proficiency may struggle to perform effectively in EMI-based learning (Yuan et al., 2024). This condition is supported by the results of the 2025 English Proficiency Index (EPI) from English First (EF), which reveal that Indonesia ranks 12th out of 25 Asian countries with an average score of 471. Language difficulties have a significant impact on students' overall comprehension, engagement, and academic success. Jarar and Kurniawati., (2025) emphasize the importance of language comprehension in students' ability to absorb reading material and achieve academic success. On the other hand, teachers face difficulties in balancing content and the use of English as a foreign language. As a result, teachers must understand the needs and problems of students in EMI-based learning in order to effectively change teaching strategies, such as using simpler language.

Many studies have looked at teachers' opinions on using English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) and the problems they face in real life. Ojha., (2022) and Rifiyanti & Dewi., (2023) found that teachers in general give positive responses to EMI, since they believe it enhances students' English proficiency and broadens their future employment chances. In Ojha's study of two teachers in Mahendranagar, they often used their own language to explain hard topics because students' English was not strong. In the same way, Rifiyanti & Dewi's research on 37 teachers in Jakarta showed that even though most felt sure about using EMI, they still had issues like not enough English skills and lack of teaching methods. Mahara., (2023) also found good opinions among three English teachers in public schools in Nepal, but they still had trouble with weak English, little training and tools, students who were not interested, and not much help from parents or the government.

Although some studies have explored students' perspectives on the use of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) and the challenges they face during the learning process, research on this topic is still limited, especially in the context of vocational high schools (SMK). Puspitasari and Ishak., (2023) discovered that students in Indonesia typically responded positively to the use of EMI, despite encountering linguistic and pedagogical challenges, particularly in understanding the material and participating in class discussions. In line with these findings, Yuan et al., (2025) found that students in China had good attitudes regarding EMI and English language acquisition. However, this study found that students continued to rely substantially on their mother tongue (L1), with code-switching regarded as vital to assist them in understanding the learning material.

Although various studies on EMI have been conducted globally, research on EMI in vocational high schools in Indonesia remains very scarce and limited. Existing studies have largely focused on higher education settings and teachers' perspectives on the implementation of EMI, with findings indicating that EMI can lead to a decline in comprehension, an increase in cognitive load, and a decline in academic achievement (Simbolon, 2021). Consequently, little attention has been paid to the challenges faced by vocational high school students or the strategies teachers use to address these challenges in EMI classrooms. This gap is particularly critical because vocational high school students are currently required to study subject-specific content as well as English communication skills relevant to the demands of the labor market. Therefore, understanding how EMI is implemented in vocational education and how students and teachers address these issues is becoming increasingly important. To date, research on EMI that simultaneously examines student challenges and teacher strategies remains limited, particularly in vocational high schools.

To complement the analysis of EMI implementation in vocational schools, this study uses Spolsky's (2004) language policy model, which includes language practices, language beliefs, and language management. Language practices refer to patterns of language use that occur spontaneously in conversation, while language beliefs indicate attitudes, views, and values related to a particular language. Language management refers to deliberate efforts made by institutions or individuals to regulate language use through policy.

This study aims to address existing research gaps in English language instruction by examining the barriers faced by vocational high school students and the strategies teachers employ during the learning process. This differs from previous studies, which focused on higher education and emphasized the perspectives of university faculty. This study delves deeper into the barriers faced by students and how teachers address these challenges in vocational schools. Thus, this study contributes to a better understanding of how English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) is implemented in vocational subjects, where students must develop both English language knowledge and communication skills relevant to the expectations of the workforce. Therefore, to clarify the direction of this study, several research questions are formulated as the main focus as follows: What are the students' challenges in implementing EMI? And What are teacher's strategies to overcome the students' challenges?

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design that utilized both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by students and the strategies employed by teachers when implementing EMI. Quantitative data were collected and analyzed first, followed by qualitative data to complement and enrich the quantitative findings. The sequential explanatory design was chosen because this study aims to identify the challenges faced by students using quantitative data, and then investigate how teachers address these challenges through qualitative analysis.

Questionnaire responses were used to identify the barriers faced by students, while interview data provided a deeper understanding of the strategies used to overcome these challenges. The integration of these two data sets provided a more comprehensive picture of the implementation of EMI in vocational high schools.

Research Participants

This study involved one teacher who implemented English as the medium instruction and eleventh-grade students at a vocational high school in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. The student population consisted of 20 classes with a total of 662 eleventh-grade students. However, not all students participated in EMI-based learning, as EMI was implemented only in selected classes taught by a teacher who adopted this instructional approach. Consequently, the research sample consisted of one vocational subject teacher and 85 11th-grade students who had direct experience with EMI-based learning and met the selection criteria.

Sampling was conducted using purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling strategy in which participants are deliberately selected based on specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives. In this study, the selected students were those who had consistent experience learning through EMI in the classroom. The sample of 85 students was drawn from three 11th-grade classes representing the Visual Communication Design, Automotive Electronics, and Light Vehicle Engineering programs. These classes were selected due to time and resource constraints, and all participating students were taught by the same EMI teacher, who also conducted the interviews.

This technique was applied because not all teachers and students participated in EMI, and only those who met the criteria were selected. Requirements for teachers include teaching vocational subjects, implementing EMI in the classroom, having at least 1–2 years of teaching experience, and a willingness to participate and share teaching experiences. Students must be in 11th grade and majoring in visual communication design, automotive electronics, or light vehicle engineering, have participated in EMI based learning for at least one academic year and be able to reflect on and share their learning experiences. Since only one teacher participated in the qualitative phase of this study, findings related to teaching strategies should be interpreted as reflecting the experiences of that particular teacher and should not be generalized to other teachers or educational contexts.

Instruments

The questionnaire consisted of 15 items across three dimensions and was adapted from Ubaidah and Unsiah (2024) to better suit the context of vocational high school students. The instrument was designed to explore the challenges experienced by students, which were categorized into three dimensions: language-related, material comprehension, and emotional and learning environment difficulties. As reflected in the items of the instrument, questions referring to students' difficulties in understanding technical vocabulary, writing or speaking in English, and their use of translation tools. The instrument also covered items related to students' anxiety of making mistakes when speaking English. Examples of questionnaire items included "I have difficulty understanding technical terms in English," "I have difficulty understanding the material because the teacher speaks English too fast," "I feel less confident when lessons are delivered in English."

The section discussing challenges in understanding the material focuses on students' difficulties to follow lessons in English as the main topic in the comprehension challenges section. The problems encountered include the inability to ask questions due to language barriers, difficulty understanding teachers who speak too quickly, and difficulty understanding the content of the material and work instructions. Students' feelings during EMI (English Medium Instruction) learning are discussed in the section on emotional and learning environment issues. Feelings of insecurity, difficulty interacting with friends, and lack of opportunities to practice English outside of class are all discussed in this section. All

items were rated using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). The questionnaire was adapted and translated into Indonesian to ensure that items were clear and easy to understand by vocational high school students. Likert scales are usually used to analyze attitudes, perceptions, and levels of agreement with certain statements (Joshi et al., 2015). The questionnaire was reviewed by experts in the field of English language education to ensure the validity of its content. Before the main data collection was conducted, the instrument was validated and deemed reliable. The findings of the validity test showed that all items met the required validity standards. Cronbach's Alpha was used to test reliability, and the three dimensions yielded coefficients of 0.605, 0.666, and 0.722, indicating acceptable reliability.

The qualitative interview, adapted from Richards and Pun (2021), comprising seven questions dealing with teachers' strategies for addressing students' challenges in EMI learning. The interview was conducted using a semi structured format, which allowed data collection to be more flexible while remaining focused. This approach enabled the researcher to explore more deeply the teachers' experiences in addressing students' challenges and the strategies they applied. The interview topics included teacher background, teaching practices and strategies in EMI, language use and communication, support, and reflection. The interviews were conducted in Indonesian to allow participant to express their thoughts and experiences more freely. This was expected to minimize communication barriers and enhance the accuracy and clarity of the data obtained. These interview questions align with the second research questions regarding teachers' strategies for addressing the challenges faced by students. The interview guide was also reviewed by experts to ensure the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the questions.

Data collections

Data were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. prior to data collection, this study obtained permission from the school and informed the participants about the purpose of the study. A total of 85 11th-grade students majoring in Visual Communication Design, Automotive Electronics, and Light Vehicle Engineering completed the questionnaire online using Google Forms after receiving it via WhatsApp. The questionnaire was designed to identify the difficulties students experienced during EMI-based learning.

Qualitative data were collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews with the teacher who implemented EMI-based learning. These interviews aimed to investigate the strategies used by the teacher to address the problems students faced during the learning process. With the participants' permission, the interview was audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. To ensure data confidentiality, participants' identities were anonymized and used solely for research purposes.

Data Analysis

The questionnaire results were analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics. However, prior to analysis, Google Form responses were collected in Excel and then imported into SPSS (version 22). Each respondent was assigned a unique code based on the Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The mean score for each dimension was calculated by averaging the score of all items within the same dimension. To facilitate interpretation, mean scores were categorized as follows: 1.00 - 2.33 (low), 2.34 - 3.67 (moderate), and 3.68 - 5.00 (high). High average scores indicate that students tend to agree or strongly agree, while low scores indicate disagreement among students. Because this quantitative analysis relied primarily on descriptive statistics, the findings were taken as an indication of the level of difficulty encountered by the students, rather than a measure of the success or impact of EMI implementation.

The qualitative were analyzed using thematic analysis, interviews were recorded in audio-recorded and transcribed. and verified through member checking to ensure accuracy. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, the coding process and theme development were also discussed with the research supervisor through peer debriefing.. According to Nowell et al. (2017), thematic analysis is a versatile qualitative research method that can be applied to various epistemological frameworks and answer various research questions. Repeated readings of the transcripts were conducted to understand the data thoroughly, followed by coding of statements based on the teacher's approach. Similar codes were grouped into broader categories, which were then organized into themes describing the teacher's strategies used to address students' problems during the EMI implementation process. These themes were then reviewed and refined to ensure consistency with the interview data before being interpreted based on the research questions. Table 2 illustrates an example of the coding process, showing how raw data from interviews were organized into initial codes, broader categories, and main themes.

Table 1
Transcript Code

Transcript	Initial Code	category	Theme
<i>"I study the material in advance using Google and look for reading references before teaching. I also discuss with experienced teachers to ensure that the material is appropriate."</i>	Creating learning materials and collaborating with peers	material preparation	Teacher pedagogical planning
<i>"I explain unfamiliar terms that often appear in the material so that students can understand better."</i>	Explaining unfamiliar terms	Language support	Scaffolding academic content

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

These findings address two research questions regarding the problems experienced by students and the strategies teachers employ to address them. Overall, the questionnaire results indicate that students face challenges across three dimensions: language challenges, challenges in understanding the material, and emotional and learning environment challenges. However, among these dimensions, language challenges received the highest score, followed by students' reliance on translators. The findings from the interviews further discuss how teachers use strategies such as translanguaging, language simplification, repetition of instructions, peer-to-peer teaching, and game-based learning.

This section discusses the research results. Descriptive statistics were used for each question item, including the mean, minimum, maximum, and standard deviation values. These statistical findings were utilised to address the first study question about students' learning challenges. Meanwhile, the interview findings were used to answer the second research question, which concerned teachers' tactics for resolving student challenges.

Table 2
Mean Dimension of Language Challenges

No	Questions	N	MIN	MAX	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	Q1	85	1	5	2.99	.824
2.	Q2	85	1	5	3.06	.850

3.	Q3	85	1	5	3.51	.684
4.	Q4	85	1	5	3.88	.793
5	Q5	85	1	5	3.18	1.125
SCORE					3,32	

The findings of the analysis in table 4.1 for the variable “language challenges” show that each student has unique challenges. The greatest mean is obtained in Q4 - dependency on the use of translation (M= 3.88), indicating that students agree with the challenge. This suggests that their learning process relies heavily on translation. However, the lowest average is shown in Q1 - difficulty understanding technical vocabulary (M=2.99), indicating that, while students have challenges when using technical vocabulary in English, their level of agreement with this challenge is lower than the others. Meanwhile, other indicators, such as difficulty writing Q2 (M=3.06), difficulty speaking Q3 (M=3.51), and fear of making mistakes when speaking Q5 (M=3.18), were moderate, showing that students agreed with these challenges, but not as strongly as their reliance on translation.

Table 3
Mean Dimension of Challenges in Understanding the Material

No	Questions	N	MIN	MAX	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	Q6	85	1	5	3.04	1.017
2.	Q7	85	1	5	2.99	1.006
3.	Q8	85	1	5	3.32	.743
4.	Q9	85	1	5	3.21	.952
5.	Q10	85	1	5	3.26	.953
SCORE					3,16	

The results in the 4.2 table in the second dimension of "challenges in understanding the material" reveal that students confront a variety of difficulties in understanding the learning material in English. Q8 had the highest average of the group, with difficulties understanding task instructions (M=3.32). This statement demonstrates that students agree on the issues they confront. Q7 has the lowest average - material is difficult to understand due to language barriers (M=2.99). This demonstrates that students have challenges in various areas, although their level of agreement is lower than for the other indications. Other factors, such as professors speaking too quickly Q6 (M=3.04), trouble following practical explanations Q9 (M=3.21), and difficulty asking questions when puzzled Q10 (M=3.26), were in the intermediate range. This demonstrates that students are somewhat in agreement with these challenges.

Table 4
Mean Dimension of Emotional and Learning Environment Challenges

No	Questions	N	MIN	MAX	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	Q11	85	1	5	3.18	.990
2.	Q12	85	1	5	3.15	1.064
3.	Q13	85	1	5	3.27	.808
4.	Q14	85	1	5	3.14	.990
5.	Q15	85	1	5	3.15	1.075
SCORE					3,17	

The findings from the fourth table in the third dimension on “emotional and learning environment challenges” show that students face many non-cognitive challenges that can affect their comfort when learning based on EMI. The highest average can be seen in Q13 — Unfamiliarity with the use of EMI in the classroom (M=3.27), indicating that students strongly agree with the challenges associated with unfamiliarity with using EMI in the

classroom. Q14 has the lowest average ($M=3.14$), indicating that students agree with these challenges but that they are not a major problem for them in the classroom. Meanwhile, indicators such as lack of confidence in class Q11 ($M=3.18$), fear of being mocked by friends Q12 ($M=3.15$), and lack of support from the surrounding environment for language practice Q15 ($M=3.15$) are mild. This demonstrates that students agree with these problems, albeit not to the same extent as individuals unfamiliar with EMI.

To deepen this study, the interview findings show how teachers have used various strategies to support learning in the context of EMI. Initial strategies can be seen from how teachers prepare materials, provide linguistic encouragement, manage the classroom, and utilize technology to support learning. The qualitative findings describe the actual practices of teachers in the classroom and the challenges they face with students.

First, when preparing materials, teachers conduct digital research and consult with active teachers in the classroom to adapt the materials to be given to students. This can be seen from the teachers' explanations. *"I study the material in advance using Google and look for reading references before teaching. I also discuss with experienced teachers to ensure that the material is appropriate."* This statement shows that teachers gather content from various sources to adjust the level of difficulty of the material in EMI-based learning to the students' skills, making it easier to understand. In the learning process, teachers also provide linguistic support to students in an effort to overcome the language gap experienced by students. *"I explain unfamiliar terms that often appear in the material so that students can understand better."*

As mentioned above, teachers help explain technical concepts by simplifying them or providing additional explanations. Teachers often use their native language (L1) or repeat instructions to ensure students understand what is being conveyed. *"I translate the explanation into Indonesian and repeat the instructions so that students understand"*. According to the teacher, this strategy was used to encourage students to become more responsible of what the teacher is saying, and misunderstandings are reduced. This method is consistent with the scaffolding practice commonly found in EMI classrooms. In addition to providing linguistic support, teachers use collaborative and technology-based approaches, as described: *"I use small groups and peer tutors to increase student engagement. I sometimes use assessment games such as Quizizz to make learning more enjoyable."* Because the learning process is enjoyable, this strategy has the potential to increase student engagement in the classroom. From this statement, it is clear that teachers do not just set rules unilaterally, but involve students in making classroom rules. This can help students become more responsible and disciplined towards the rules or agreements that have been established.

In classroom management techniques, teachers and students reach a mutual agreement on what is and is not allowed in the classroom during learning activities. In addition, teachers take a personal approach to students to create a positive environment. *"I made an agreement with the students at the beginning. If there is a violation of the agreement, the students will do something that we have agreed upon. I can also repeat instructions, give punishments, or take a personal approach if necessary."* This sentence shows that teachers do not just set rules unilaterally, but also involve students in developing classroom rules. This can help students become more responsible and disciplin.

Teachers use technology to make resources more relevant to students' requirements when generating and integrating teaching modules, as stated: *"I only use books as additional references. I compile my own teaching materials with the help of AI or other sources, then combine them in Google Slides, including practice questions and formative and summative assessments."* This explanation demonstrates that teachers do more than just rely on books; they also actively construct teaching materials that are more contextual and tailored to the peculiarities of their students. Using AI and Google Slides, teachers exhibit their abilities to

adapt materials and use technology to assist teaching and learning activities in the classroom. To clarify complex ideas, teachers employ repetition and game-based learning. Teachers will conduct evaluations to answer any remaining queries about challenging concepts. *"I use repetition and give questions in the form of games. If students have not reached the target, I will re-explain the material and conduct an assessment through Google Forms, then discuss the questions that are considered difficult."*

The adoption of these strategies demonstrates that teacher endeavour to guarantee that all students comprehend difficult subjects in a gradual and repeating manner. Teachers use repetition to help pupils enhance their basic comprehension before progressing to more difficult levels. Lastly, teacher affirmed their usage of L1 as a teaching strategy. According to the teacher, Indonesian was used when youngsters struggled to understand English explanations. This was clarified in the statement. *"Yes, I use my mother tongue in class when I feel that students do not understand my explanations in English. Indonesian greatly helps students understand the material being presented"*. This statement shows that the use of L1 is an important method applied by teachers in the context of EMI to ensure that students understand the learning process. This method is not intended to replace English, but rather to bridge the gap in understanding when students cannot understand explanations in English.

The quantitative and qualitative findings show clear data triangulation between questionnaire responses and interviews. The questionnaire data show that students face moderate to high language barriers, particularly dependence on interpreters ($M = 3.88$), difficulty understanding task instructions ($M = 3.32$), and emotional barriers, such as lack of confidence when learning English ($M = 3.18$). These findings are supported by teachers' statements that they often use Indonesian, repeat instructions, explain technical terms, and apply scaffolding strategies to help students. Teachers' acknowledgment of students' weak language skills and lack of confidence is consistent with the questionnaire findings. In addition, teachers' responses to students' difficulties in understanding topics and actively participating in EMI classes included the use of collaborative learning, repetition of material, and technology, as revealed in the interviews. Therefore, the similarities between the questionnaire and interview results support the findings of this study.

Discussion

According to the findings of this study, the biggest challenges faced by students when implementing EMI in vocational schools are language challenges, especially dependence on translation, followed by difficulties in understanding learning materials and emotional and learning environment challenges. To overcome these challenges, teacher use various strategies, including adapting materials, providing linguistic assistance, using the mother tongue (L1), repeating instructions, collaborative learning, agreement-based classroom management, and utilizing technology to support learning. These findings are consistent with Spolsky's framework, which focuses on the dynamic interaction between language practices, beliefs, and language management. Within this perspective, students' dependence on translation and limited productive use of English reflects adaptive and pragmatic language practices.

In Spolsky's (2004) approach, language practices do not always reflect explicit policies but develop naturally in response to the communicative demands of speakers in the classroom. This statement is in line with the findings of Ojha (2022) and Rifiyanti and Dewi (2023), who found that even though EMI is implemented institutionally, classroom practices remain dominated by the use of the mother tongue (LI). To ensure understanding of the material, Indonesian-language vocational schools serve as the primary tool for bridging students' understanding of technical and procedural vocational material. The practice of code-switching that occurs in the classroom is not a failure in learning in the implementation of EMI, but

rather a communication strategy to ensure smooth learning. Students tend to switch to Indonesian when faced with complex instructions or technical terms that are unfamiliar in English. This pattern is consistent with the findings of Yuan et al. (2025), which show that the use of the mother tongue (LI) in the context of EMI serves as a mechanism to reduce cognitive load, especially in content-based learning.

The findings are in line with Hammou and Kesbi (2023) who found that code-switching is often used to explain abstract or technical concepts. In the context of vocational schools, where accurate understanding of procedures is crucial, this practice becomes increasingly relevant and functional. Furthermore, restrictions on the productive use of English, such as asking questions or expressing opinions, indicate that EMI is still underutilized as an academic communication technique in the classroom. English remains a medium of instruction, but it is not yet used as a language of two-way communication between teacher and students. Manan and Hajar (2024) found that EMI is often teacher-centered and focuses only on the delivery of information. Therefore, language activities in EMI classrooms in vocational schools that teach English and Indonesian have different purposes: English is used for teaching or delivering material, while Indonesian is used to aid student comprehension.

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In addition to language practices context, the research results reflect second language policies, particularly language beliefs. Lack of confidence, anxiety about making mistakes,

and inability to learn English all indicate that English is viewed as a difficult and unsafe academic language to use in the classroom. In Spolsky's (2004) theory, these linguistic beliefs have a significant impact on language use practices. These findings are in line with the research by Yuan et al. (2025), which found that even though students showed positive attitudes toward EMI, they still felt anxious when they had to actively use English in content learning. This belief is also influenced by the vocational school environment, which emphasizes practical skills and work readiness. Students prioritize vocational knowledge over language performance. This condition supports the findings of Puspitasari and Ishak (2023), which reveal that a positive attitude toward EMI doesn't always translate into active participation, especially when students believe that their language skills do not meet academic demands. Therefore, students' language beliefs in a vocational context shape an instrumental approach to English, viewing it as a secondary tool rather than the main learning objective.

In response to challenges arising from students' language practices and beliefs, teacher implemented various forms of language management through contextual pedagogical strategies. The use of code-switching, repetition of instructions, simplification of technical terms, and conscious use of Indonesian were applied to ensure the achievement of learning objectives. From Spolsky's perspective, these actions reflect unwritten micro-language policies, which are crucial for the effectiveness of EMI. These findings are in line with the research of Rifiyanti and Dewi (2023) and Ojha (2022), which emphasize that language flexibility is a realistic form of EMI management in the context of EFL.

In addition to language management, teacher used collaborative and technology-based learning practices to increase student engagement. Group work, peer tutoring, and game-based assessment have been shown to help create a safer and more supportive learning environment (Mahara, 2023; Hammou & Kesbi, 2023). These strategies show that language management in the context of EMI in vocational schools is not only about choosing a medium of instruction; it is also about creating pedagogical conditions that allow students to be exposed to English gradually, meaningfully, and in accordance with their vocational needs.

The implications of the above statement suggest that the implementation of EMI in vocational high schools should be directed towards a flexible and contextual approach that incorporates translanguaging activities as an important component in the learning process. According to Kamila and Unsiah (2024), translanguaging is an approach to ensure student understanding by combining English and Indonesian. The use of English and Indonesian does not need to be separated directly, but should be used strategically to help students adapt to the use of English and improve their understanding of technical and procedural information. In practice, translanguaging can be used to introduce English terms while providing conceptual explanations in Indonesian, to repeat instructions bilingually, and during group discussions. This strategy can help students focus on mastering occupational competencies while gradually exposing them to English.

These findings indicate that translanguaging serves as a pedagogical bridge to support the sustainability of EMI. Furthermore, English translanguaging can be combined with repetition strategies to help students understand complex learning material, reduce cognitive load, and reinforce understanding through repeated opportunities to hear, analyze, and recall information. Thus, combining these two strategies creates a more supportive and inclusive learning environment, especially for students with limited English proficiency. These findings are consistent with (Rahman & Hu, 2025) which states that translanguaging strategies implemented by teachers can improve students' understanding of the material while encouraging more active interaction during the learning process.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study aimed to explore the challenges that vocational high school students have when implementing EMI, as well as the techniques that teachers use to solve

these challenges. The findings show that students struggle with limited English ability, understanding the learning material, following class directions, and confidently using English during learning activities. To overcome these challenges, teachers used a variety of strategies, including language simplification, translanguaging, repeated instructions, and engaging learning activities. These findings emphasise the relevance of adaptable teaching approaches and institutional assistance in easing the implementation of EMI in vocational schools. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as context-specific and should not be generalized to all vocational schools or the other teachers. Further research is recommended to involve multiple teachers and schools to provide a broader understanding of EMI implementation in various vocational education contexts.

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INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Participation in this study was entirely voluntary. All participants were informed about the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits before participation. Their identities and information were kept confidential and used solely for research purposes. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data supporting the findings of this study are not publicly available due to privacy, confidentiality, and ethical obligations concerning the participants. Access to the dataset may be granted upon reasonable request to the corresponding author, subject to case-by-case consideration and approval by the appropriate institutional ethics review board to ensure compliance with ethical requirements and participant consent.

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