



The Voice of EMI Lecturers: Beliefs, Practices and Identity

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Abstract

English-medium instruction (EMI) is increasingly implemented in higher education as institutions respond to internationalization and the growing role of English as a global academic language. Yet its implementation is complex and shaped by lecturers' beliefs, instructional practices, multilingual pedagogies, and the emotional demands of teaching through an additional language. This exploratory qualitative study examined the experiences of ten instructors with diverse disciplinary and plurilingual backgrounds at two Israeli higher education institutions—a university and a teacher education college. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and analyzed through an ecological lens. The findings reveal three interdependent layers shaping EMI practice: the lecturer, the institutional context, and broader professional practices. Participants described tensions between maintaining academic rigor and ensuring student comprehension, as well as between institutional expectations and the situated needs of instructors and students. Translanguaging, lecturer identity, self-efficacy, and emotional responses emerged as central to how EMI was enacted. The findings also point to differences in institutional support, policy clarity, and pedagogical flexibility across the two settings. The study highlights the need for comprehensive support systems, including faculty development in EMI pedagogy, greater recognition of the emotional demands of EMI, enhanced resources for students' English development, and institutionally responsive language policies. Such support is essential for effective and equitable EMI implementation in multilingual higher education contexts.

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Introduction

English Medium Instruction (EMI), defined as the use of English to teach academic content in contexts where English is not the dominant language, has become increasingly prominent in global higher education, including in academic courses and international telecollaboration projects (Guo et al., 2024; Macaro, 2018). In Israel, the Council for Higher Education (CHE) mandated in 2018 that all undergraduate students must complete two EMI courses as part of their degree requirements. This policy, implemented in 2021, aims to enhance students' academic and professional readiness for global engagement (CHE, 2018). While EMI offers potential benefits such as increased access to international academic discourse, its implementation in linguistically and culturally diverse contexts poses distinct challenges.

Research consistently emphasizes the influential role of instructors' beliefs and self-efficacy in EMI practices and lived experiences (Dafouz & Smit, 2021; Lasagabaster, 2022). Equally important is the role of pedagogical orientations and especially translanguaging, an approach that recognizes and leverages the full linguistic repertoires of multilingual students as learning resources (García & Wei, 2014). While much has been written about students' outcomes, less attention has been paid to the lecturers' beliefs, identities, and emotional lives as they teach in English in non-Anglophone settings.

The present study situates itself at the intersection of EMI policy, instructors' cognition, and translanguaging, with a focus on the lived experiences of EMI instructors in Israel. A unique aspect of the study concerns lecturers' perception of their identities and emotions while enacting EMI in the Israeli multilingual context.

Literature Review

Lecturers' Beliefs about EMI

Teachers' or lecturers' beliefs, often used interchangeably with 'perceptions' or 'perspectives', play a central role in their instructional practices and educational change (Haim & Tannenbaum, 2022). The term is generally used to refer to teachers' personal theories or assumptions about their subject matter, perceptual roles, positioning, values, and approaches to language teaching and learning (Borg, 2009). Teachers' or lecturers' beliefs, though seemingly contradictory or ambiguous at times, are commonly resistant

to change and strongly influence their practices, including strategies, linguistic and pedagogical choices, and interaction patterns (Farrell & Ives, 2015; Tannenbaum et al., 2024). Teachers' beliefs evolve through a dynamic interplay of factors such as personal background, prior learning, classroom experiences, and interactions within their professional and sociocultural contexts (Barnard & Burns, 2012; Johnson, 2009; van Manen, 1990; Yazan, 2018).

Specifically regarding EMI, various dimensions of teachers' beliefs, practices, and lived experiences have been examined in different contexts, including Europe (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011; Lasagabaster, 2022), Asia (Li & Wu, 2021; Liu et al., 2020), and Africa (Archer, 2022). Drawing on various theoretical perspectives, this body of research portrays EMI as a complex, conflictual, and multidimensional educational phenomenon. Findings frequently point to tensions in the teachers' beliefs and lived experiences, linked to internationalization processes and to localized ideological, pedagogical, and sociolinguistic dimensions (Dafouz & Smit, 2016; Jinghui, 2023).

Dafouz and Smit's (2016) *Road-mapping* framework identifies six interrelated dimensions that shape EMI in higher education, ranging from its multilingual nature and disciplinary influences to curriculum management, participant roles, and pedagogical practices, as well as broader ideological and material forces (such as internationalization and Englishization). Research by Dafouz (2018) on ideological forces and identity construction through the lens of investment theory and road-mapping models indicated that lecturers viewed EMI as a means of enhancing their linguistic and social capital, particularly by fostering a more international professional identity among younger faculty. However, they also expressed concern about balancing Spanish and English to ensure that students develop disciplinary literacy relevant to both local and global professional contexts.

In EMI contexts, the lecturers' judgements of their potential success as teachers (Wyatt, 2018) often depend on how they position themselves linguistically and on their perception of their competence in English relative to their other languages (Inbar-Lourie & Donitsa-Schmidt, 2020; Ou & Gu, 2024). Karakaş (2014) found that more than 90% of lecturers in EMI universities in Turkey rated their English proficiency as good or excellent and reported feeling confident teaching in English. Gender and institutional affiliation showed only minor effects, though the vocabulary of female lecturers was somewhat stronger. Other studies suggest that non-native English-

speaking lecturers often experience self-doubt and diminished teaching efficacy due to concerns about pronunciation, accent, and fluency (e.g., Ball & Lindsay, 2013; Klaassen & de Graaff, 2001). Similar patterns emerged in South Korea, where Kim et al. (2018) reported that lecturers expressed uncertainty regarding the dual goals of content and language learning within EMI courses.

Similarly, Block and Moncada-Comas (2022) showed that STEM lecturers resisted positioning themselves as English-language teachers, viewing language instruction as beyond their disciplinary field. These beliefs influenced their pedagogical practices, leading them to provide only incidental linguistic support while prioritizing content expertise within the internationalized university context. Thus, lecturers' self-efficacy beliefs are not solely a function of linguistic ability but are also intertwined with their plurilingual identity, contextual factors, and the institutional language policy.

Research further shows that lecturers' practices and lived experiences are significantly influenced by institutional support systems and policy frameworks (e.g., Shrestha, 2021). In this connection, Baker and Hüttner's (2017) comparative study of higher education institutions in the UK, Austria, and Thailand showed that the beliefs and practices of EMI lecturers were affected by tensions between institutional monolingual policies and multilingual classroom realities. Institutional management often promotes English-only policies, but the lecturers may hold mixed ideologies, ranging from adherence to English-dominant norms to the use of more flexible, multilingual practices. The findings indicate that EMI lecturers continuously struggle with complex linguistic environments, balancing expectations of high levels of English proficiency with pedagogical needs that require reliance on the students' broader linguistic repertoires.

EMI: Pedagogical Practices

Research on EMI lecturers' perspectives identifies several challenges, including reduced content comprehension, linguistic inequities, and increased cognitive load for both students and instructors (Ball & Lindsay, 2013; Kir, 2025). Pedagogies developed to address these challenges include, among others, reliance on various technological tools (e.g., Kern, 2013), as well as lecturers' tendency to simplify the language they use and the tasks assigned to students (e.g., Smit & Dafouz, 2012).

A growing body of research also highlights the potential contribution of multimodal pedagogies in EMI. Relying on social semiotic perspectives, these approaches recognize that meaning is constructed through multiple semiotic resources, beyond language, including images, gestures, visual representations, sound, digital media, and material artefacts (Jewitt, 2009; Kress, 2010). In linguistically diverse EMI classrooms, multimodality complements translanguaging by allowing students and lecturers to utilize a broader repertoire of communicative resources, thereby promoting comprehension, participation, and learning in general (Airey, 2024; Beltrán-Palanques & Smit, 2026; Nguyen et al., 2025).

Translanguaging, i.e., the flexible and dynamic use of one's full linguistic repertoire to make meaning (García, 2009), has been shown to support content learning, reinforce learners' identities, and advance equity in multilingual contexts (García & Wei, 2014; Haim & Manor, 2025; MacSwan, 2022). Its use is in dispute, however, because it clashes with the dominant policies of monolingualism in higher education (Pennycook, 2006). And yet, studies have shown that EMI lecturers do adopt translanguaging and code-switching to meet linguistic demands and facilitate communication (Kadel & Budhathoki, 2024; Lu et al., 2025).

Emotions in EMI

EMI evokes a wide range of emotions among stakeholders. Teachers, in particular, report experiences of identity negotiation, linguistic discomfort, pedagogical intensity, and intercultural demands (e.g., Sah, 2022, 2023). Within EMI settings, research adopting an ecological perspective has shown that instructors' emotions emerge in interactions focused on classroom practices, institutional policies, and wider sociopolitical conditions. For example, Deignan and Morton (2022) note that institutional indifference to students' English development and the blurred boundaries between language support and pedagogy create significant emotional strain for EMI teachers. Nazari and De Costa (2024) found that emotions among EMI teachers arose across three interconnected ecological environments: the classroom, where students' expectations constrained effective content enactment; the institutional setting, where heavy workloads limited investment in professional growth; and the sociocultural surroundings, where restricted international collaboration hindered the dissemination of knowledge. Studies highlighted related emotions, such as anxiety and insecurity

among both lecturers and students (e.g., Hoang, 2025; Lasagabaster & Fernández-Costales, 2025).

The emotional experience of teaching or studying in an L2, however, extends far beyond these settings. Research on bi/multilingual language use has consistently shown that emotional intensity is deeper in a person's first language (L1) than in those acquired later (Dewaele & Nakano, 2013; Tannenbaum, 2012), even among highly proficient speakers. Individuals may also present different facets of themselves in their various languages, at times describing a sense of splitting or a dual self (Koven, 2007). Beyond the suggested psychological, neurological, and sociocultural explanations, the key issue in understanding EMI is that using an L2 or LX often evokes anxiety, awkwardness, or distance, especially in performance-oriented contexts, possibly affecting lecturer–student interactions in ways still unexplored.

The emotional dimensions involved in EMI instruction align with contemporary views of teacher identity as dynamic, contextually situated, discursively negotiated, and often marked by tensions between professional expectations and institutional demands, while individual beliefs and histories, as well as institutional environments, act as mediating factors (Varghese, 2018). In higher education, lecturers' identities further intersect with multiple professional roles—teacher, researcher, academic—and are continuously negotiated through interactions with students, colleagues, and broader sociocultural contexts (Ou & Gu, 2024). These emotionally mediated experiences play a central role in the ongoing construction of EMI teachers' identity, agency, sense of legitimacy, and pedagogical decision-making (Nazari & De Costa, 2024).

Rationale

Throughout Israel's history, even before it became a sovereign state, Hebrew has been the dominant language, symbolizing a new Jewish-Israeli collective identity. Hebrew serves as a medium of instruction in Jewish schools and as a compulsory second language for all minorities. Arabic is also the medium of instruction in schools for the Arab minority (21% of the total population). Further diversifying the Israeli linguistic landscape are the numerous heritage languages of the Jewish immigrant populations, who make up approximately a third of the country's population (Central Bureau of Statistics [CBS], 2022). English remains the main foreign language. It is extensively

used as an international language in various domains and taught as the first foreign language throughout schooling (Tannenbaum & Shohamy, 2023).

In higher education, English has evolved over the years from a supporting skill (reading) to a rigorous academic requirement, as evident in EMI courses in all undergraduate and some graduate programs nationwide. Research points to the complexities of EMI in higher education worldwide, though it has not been extensively researched in the Israeli context.

Relying on an ecological approach (Opfer & Pedder, 2011), which views practitioners as operating within three concentric, interdependent systems, the present study aims to deepen our understanding of the EMI instructors' perspectives regarding their experiences, including teaching challenges, teaching practices, institutional policy, the broader socio-political context, as well as emotional aspects involved in those courses.

We conducted the current study at a teacher education college and a university, two institutions of higher education that differ in their institutional missions—one emphasizing professional training and the other prioritizing research and disciplinary specialization. The student populations in both are pluricultural and linguistically diverse and include Jewish and Arab students who, although educated in largely separate systems, come together in higher education settings. These shared academic spaces reflect linguistic and cultural asymmetries as well as identity tensions present in Israel's broader sociopolitical dynamics, particularly the ongoing negotiation by Arab citizens of their national (Arab-Palestinian) and civic (Israeli) identities, shaped by intersecting cultural, linguistic, and political forces (Amara, 2024). Based on the above literature review, the study's guiding question was: What are the beliefs and experiences of course instructors regarding EMI in Israeli institutions of higher education?

Methodology

We used a qualitative approach in search of a deeper, more refined understanding of the instructors' beliefs and experiences.

Participants

Participants were ten EMI course instructors, five from a university and five from a teacher education college, both located in central Israel. In each institution, we

contacted the unit responsible for coordinating EMI courses and requested a list of lecturers teaching these courses. We then sent lecturers an invitation letter explaining the purpose of this exploratory study, inviting them to be interviewed about their experience (see Table 1).

Table 1

Participants' Professional Background

Pseudonym	Teaching Area	EMI Experience	L1
Teacher Education College			
Samantha	EFL/ EPIC	3	English
Risa	Geography	1	Hebrew
Sean	Arts/Filming	2	Hebrew
Melody	EFL/EPIC	3	English
Ada	Sociology	4	Hebrew
University			
Daisy	Ancient Egypt	5	Hebrew
Maria	Multilingual Education	4	Arabic
Maya	Multilingual Education	5	Hebrew
Ruth	Medicine	6	Hebrew
Orit	Biology	4	Hebrew

Note. All names are pseudonyms. Institutional contexts are described in general terms to preserve anonymity.

From those who agreed to participate, we selected five lecturers from each institution to ensure variation in teaching experience and disciplinary background. The participants represented a wide range of academic disciplines, including art, education, medicine, and sociology, among others. Their overall teaching experience ranged from 7 to 30 years, while their experience teaching EMI courses ranged from 1 to 6 years. Three participants were native speakers of English, one was a native speaker of Arabic, and the remaining six were native speakers of Hebrew who used English as an additional language (see Table 1).

Depending on the disciplinary program in which the courses were offered, the EMI courses had either been adapted from existing Hebrew-medium courses or developed specifically for English-medium instruction.

Research tools

Data collection consisted of in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Interview questions included both open and closed questions on the lecturers' personal and professional backgrounds (teaching experience, language background, biography, educational background), institutional context, EMI course goals and content, pedagogical strategies, and perceptions of EMI policy and implementation (see Appendix 1 for the full interview protocol).

Procedure

Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was then transcribed verbatim. The interviews were held via Zoom or in person in Hebrew or English, according to the lecturers' preferences.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed in two phases. In the first phase, we conducted inductive qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018) through a three-stage coding process: open coding, labeling data segments to capture emerging meanings; axial coding, exploring relationships between the initial codes and grouping them into categories, and selective coding, refining categories into overarching themes that addressed the research question: beliefs, practices, identity, emotional and contextual issues. Three researchers independently coded a subset of the data, compared interpretations, and reached agreement on discrepancies before applying the coding scheme across the full dataset. In the second phase, we interpreted themes through an ecological lens (Inbar-Lourie & Haim, 2023; Opfer & Pedder, 2011), situating findings across three overlapping ecological systems: (1) the lecturer, (2) the context (institutional and societal), and (3) the professional practices shaping EMI instruction. We used Atlas AI computer software for data analysis.

Findings

Findings are presented according to the three ecological systems underlying our analyses: the lecturer, the institutional/societal context, and professional practices. Each system is first described briefly, followed by illustrative quotes¹.

The Lecturer

Analysis of the data within this system, which includes the lecturer's beliefs, thoughts, feelings, and both personal and professional identity, yielded two interrelated themes: Identity and emotional aspects of EMI.

Identity

Identity issues include professional and plurilingual aspects. The lecturers, who positioned themselves as experts in their disciplinary fields, made concerted attempts to facilitate the comprehensibility of the contents of instruction to their students. This professional commitment is demonstrated in the excerpts below:

In the courses I teach, the central emphasis is on the content, and language serves as a means of expressing ideas rather than as an end in itself. Therefore, less attention is given to strict linguistic accuracy, and more to the relevance and significance of knowledge to the students. [Maria, university]

I approach almost every course with a Socratic agenda. Regardless of the subject matter or the knowledge that the students already possess, the experience of acquiring knowledge itself is paramount. [Sean, Teacher Education College]

Lecturers related to their mother tongue as a powerful anchor, a crucial factor in how they make sense of themselves and how they position themselves as professionals. Consider, for instance, the following testimony of a lecturer who describes the centrality of Hebrew as a defining feature of his personal and professional self-image:

Hebrew is my mother tongue. It is my professional language, a voice that speaks within me and is deeply embedded in both my professional and

¹ Interview excerpts originally expressed in Hebrew were translated into English by the authors for publication. To ensure the accuracy and faithfulness of the participants' intended meanings, the translations were verified through a back-translation procedure.

personal identity. This is not merely the identity of someone who speaks the language at a native level, but of someone who masters it in all its intricacies and subtleties, for whom the language, and the mastery of it, are defining elements of the self. [Sean, Teacher Education College]

When this lecturer went abroad for his doctoral studies, the need to shift to English as the medium of his academic life disrupted his deeply rooted identity:

When I went abroad to do my doctorate, my English was reasonably good, but not of the kind suited for easy small talk, and certainly not for giving a lecture. Nervous and excited, I stood in front of a class and began to practice. I still remember my first session. I was trembling with anxiety. I wrote down everything I needed to say, almost like a bar-mitzvah speech, in a size 28 font so I could read it off the desk. Half a year later, the barriers were broken—mainly the psychological barrier, but also the identity barrier. During those six months, I was on the verge of an identity crisis, in the sense that the central medium through which I had so far expressed myself, both professionally and personally, was taken away from me. And yet, I managed to compensate—I found a balance. At some point, my thinking began to flow naturally in the concepts and linguistic structures of professional English.

Lecturers' beliefs about EMI instruction and practices emerged as closely related to their personal and professional backgrounds. Their plurilingual repertoires and professional trajectories were interwoven with their teaching philosophies and their negotiation of classroom practices in EMI contexts. For example, one lecturer reflected on a fluid linguistic trajectory:

My approach is certainly influenced by my special education training and my experiences of learning Hebrew. When I came to Israel, I never learned Hebrew formally. I was sort of thrown into the water and started. So, English and Hebrew were kind of fluid. [Samantha, Teacher Education College]

Learning Hebrew without formal instruction and being “thrown into the water” shaped this lecturer's openness to flexibility and improvisation in language use. Her background in special education and EFL instruction also contributed to an empathetic pedagogy, sensitive to the struggles students face when learning in an additional language. For this lecturer, English and Hebrew are not sharply divided, but instead

exist in a dynamic relationship, with the movement between them viewed as natural and productive.

Emotional aspects of EMI

Some of the lecturers felt that their level of English proficiency was inadequate and described feelings of anxiety when teaching in English. They also reported spending more time planning EMI classes as compared to the regular classes they taught in Hebrew.

Of course, there are fluctuations. If I did not sleep well the night before, or if I am preoccupied with other things, then my heavy Israeli accent comes out. I search for words, and I become more hesitant. But when I am at ease, the language flows. [Daisy, University]

They also noted the anxiety experienced by the students, which had an impact on them too.

There's a lot of anxiety and tension around English, because students are fearful that they are not going to sound right, that they don't speak well, that they don't know enough, that they can't say it. [Ada, Teacher Education College]

Another lecturer described the emotional struggles students faced when required to work together in English. The variation in their levels of proficiency made weaker students feel overwhelmed:

Some were very scared. Some were much weaker, really struggled compared to the others, and I think they were awed by the idea of having to do all of this in English. [Orit, University]

Furthermore, they felt that EMI courses accentuate the supremacy of English over their native or community languages, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

I feel that the EMI courses accentuate the supremacy of the English language and English speakers. Many times, I feel that students who are English speakers are bored in these sessions. [Maria, University]

The lecturers' accounts also implied that teaching in EMI classes involves suppressing or masking negative emotions. Those who were not native English speakers felt inauthentic in a way.

As an Israeli and a Hebrew speaker, I sometimes feel strange using English with my Hebrew-speaking students. It feels artificial. It is not our natural way of interaction. [Maya, University]

At the same time, the lecturers also reported rewarding moments of students' curiosity, participation, and engagement. One lecturer reflected:

The students expressed interest, there was good interaction, and different ideas, some original, some less so; but the students were engaged. You could see young people, some sleepy, some drifting through the entire course, but some, you know, lit up. And that is fun. [Melody, Teacher Education College]

The Societal/Institutional Context

The societal/institutional context refers to the position of EMI courses within the academic institution where they are taught and to broader sociopolitical circumstances. Our analyses yielded two interrelated themes: EMI courses as enhancing intercultural communication and the relevance of the institutional policy and ideology.

EMI courses as enhancing intercultural communication

The lecturers' accounts portrayed some EMI courses as offering opportunities for intercultural exchange, particularly when they involved telecollaboration between students in different geographical and institutional contexts. Reflecting on her integration of telecollaboration into an EMI course, one lecturer pointed out:

I think that the students who participated in these content-based experiences felt a sense of accomplishment for using English for communicative purposes...because the situations were authentic. [Samantha, Teacher Education College]

The lecturer's emphasis on authenticity and a sense of accomplishment points to the role of emotionally salient learning experiences in EMI, when English is positioned not merely as a medium of instruction but as a resource for participation in meaningful academic and intercultural practices. Crucially, what made these pedagogical choices

possible was an institutional policy framework that encouraged innovation and legitimized experiential, internationally-oriented course designs.

Relatedly, one university lecturer explained that the mixed composition of Israeli and international students in her course renders English the “natural” medium of instruction. As she says, *“We speak English when there are international students in class; in seminar sessions, sometimes the groups are smaller, and there are only Hebrew-speaking students, so we use Hebrew, of course.”* [Ruth, University]

Moreover, telecollaboration within EMI settings surfaced potential international tensions but also fostered transformative learning opportunities. Despite the sociopolitical backdrop resulting from the war situation in Israel,² the telecollaborative environment in one of the EMI courses enabled authentic intercultural contact, which supported intercultural and social interactions and reduced anxiety associated with using English as an international language. For instance, one lecturer described how, despite initial anxieties stemming from the war and fears of rejection, Israeli students reported unexpectedly positive experiences when engaging with European peers through telecollaboration:

Socially and culturally, it was a very pleasant experience for both the Israeli and the Austrian students. My students had been concerned about the interaction with the Austrians because of the war and everything that was happening, and were surprised that it went so well. [Risa, Teacher Education College]

Institutional Policy

Institutional policy created the conditions for lecturers to translate abstract goals into concrete, affectively rich intercultural learning experiences. The two institutions adopted different approaches. At the teacher education college, following a call for proposals, lecturers submitted applications and received general guidelines for course development and implementation. This process positioned EMI as both an opportunity and a challenge, prompting lecturers to exercise pedagogical creativity to meet institutional expectations. As one lecturer noted, *“The moment I saw the call for*

² Referring to the war in Israel following the terror attack on October 7, 2023.

proposals, I said to myself, 'Wow, I have to come up with something new.'" [Risa, Teacher Education College]. In response to the question on institutional support, another lecturer said, *"I remember getting a letter from the Center for Teaching and Learning offering support, but I didn't need it"* [Sean, Teacher Education College].

At the university, lecturers were assigned to teach EMI courses by an administrative directive and were offered instructional support by the EAP department. The absence of systematic EMI-focused training, clear guidelines on translanguaging, and concrete resources to support students' English development left instructors largely dependent on their own resourcefulness. Institutional support was perceived as vague, insufficient, or optional.

I was instructed by the university to offer an EMI course, but I didn't get any support. At first, we received support from the Division of Languages. Students could be awarded a CEFR certificate, so language issues had to be taken into account. Assessment was done according to predetermined categories. [Orit, University]

Professional Practices

Overall, the lecturers described themselves as novices in the context of teaching EMI courses. Some lecturers reported that, although they had only a few years of EMI teaching experience, this experience had contributed to the development and refinement of their instructional methods. The lecturers described a range of practices and methodologies that they developed to address the challenges of teaching in English, including the use of authentic tasks, group work, and translanguaging. Our analyses revealed three interrelated themes: Variety of pedagogies, translanguaging, and assessment dilemmas.

Variety of pedagogies

A recurring theme was the need to adapt pedagogies to balance academic institutional requirements with students' English proficiency while also attending to socio-emotional needs. Authentic assignments and activities created meaningful opportunities for students to engage with English beyond the classroom.

I created authentic situations that encouraged the use of English. For example, when teaching students from the faculty of Arts, they were asked to contact English-speaking artists and interview them. [Samantha, Teacher Education College]

One of my ideologies about this is that it has to be authentic. I didn't like the idea of having students study something in English just because the Council of Higher Education thinks they need it. I wanted them to feel there's a reason to do this. So there's always some authentic reason that English must be the language of communication and of interaction. [Samantha, Teacher Education College]

Group work and telecollaboration further supported this goal:

In the telecollaborations, we had language monitors. We divided the students into working groups. We tried to have stronger English speakers lead the groups, and I met with the group leaders to give them tools and guidelines so they could model and encourage the use of English. [Melody, Teacher Education College]

Differentiated task design also targeted the emotional climate of learning.

We then worked with the team leaders and showed them how to help students who felt overwhelmed to overcome those feelings. We looked at different tasks, looking at their strengths and at the parts of the group work they would be able to do more successfully. The main purpose was to make them feel more motivated and less intimidated. [Melody, Teacher Education College]

Translanguaging

In both institutions, lecturers intuitively drew on the students' full linguistic repertoires. Translanguaging emerged as a central pedagogical tool and a resourceful teaching strategy in EMI courses:

I use translanguaging as a method to connect to the topic of the session. At times, when the terms or concepts we discuss are complicated, I use it as a

bridge so that the students can overcome the difficulty. I also give examples in both Hebrew and Arabic. [Maria, University]

Some lecturers, however, expressed ambivalence toward translanguaging, recognizing its benefits but also the need for exposure to English. Others viewed it as an emotional safety net. Allowing students some use of Hebrew can help to reduce fear and make English more accessible and enjoyable.

Look, I don't like mixing languages. But I also know that if I tell them that not even one word of Hebrew is allowed, they won't sign up for my course. [Risa, Teacher Education College]

The lecturers also highlighted the socio-emotional and identity dimensions of translanguaging. For some lecturers, multilingual classroom practices offer ways of acknowledging ethnic diversity:

I think the presence of Arabic in the sessions is very meaningful to Arabic-speaking students and makes them feel more comfortable. EMI courses provide them with the opportunity to study in English, and they often feel more comfortable speaking English than Hebrew. [Maria, University]

Another lecturer reinforced the importance of simply acknowledging multilingualism:

I think that simply acknowledging rather than denying that these students have a language background is significant. It wasn't like we said, 'there will be nothing but English in this class.' And we didn't like to 'shush' them if they were talking between themselves in Hebrew or Arabic. I think that helped to ease some of the tension. [Samantha, Teacher Education College]

Assessment-related dilemmas

EMI lecturers reported pedagogical challenges and ethical dilemmas in assessment due to the students' varied levels of English proficiency. In particular, the lecturers described difficulties in explaining complex concepts entirely in English, while also balancing content delivery with language support, as illustrated in the excerpts below:

Another thing to think about is student assessment: Are you going to demand the same thing from everyone? Are you going to be a little bit more lenient here, and is that fair? And how are you going to do that? [Samantha, Teacher Education College]

I decided to assess students through essays rather than tests because essays allow me to see their thinking more clearly. But I constantly struggle with how to assess their papers fairly, as there are proficiency gaps among the students. [Daisy, University]

Discussion

EMI through an ecological lens

Our findings suggest that the ecological perspective, encompassing three interdependent layers: the lecturer, the institution, and professional practices (Inbar-Lourie & Haim, 2023; Opfer & Pedder, 2011), offers a useful lens for understanding the dynamic relationships between language, identity, and the institutional and broader social structures enacted in EMI contexts.

In both of the settings considered, instructors attempted to reconcile formal EMI policies and institutional expectations with the realities of student needs, their own linguistic repertoires, and professional experiences. These findings accord with research on EMI in other higher education contexts (such as Spain, Sweden, and South Korea; see Lasagabaster, 2022 for a review), which also documents tensions between top-down EMI policies and bottom-up classroom practices.

Language(s), identity, and self-efficacy

Consistent with prior work on EMI and CLIL (e.g., Dafouz & Smit, 2021; Lasagabaster, 2022), most lecturers in this study positioned themselves primarily as content specialists who happen to teach in English, rather than as language teachers. This self-positioning influenced both their pedagogical decisions and their emotional engagement with EMI, leading them to prioritize content while downplaying explicit language support, even when they acknowledged the students' linguistic challenges.

Lecturers' self-efficacy in EMI, their belief in their capability to teach content courses effectively in English (Wyatt, 2018), was closely linked to their perceived English proficiency (see also Dafouz, 2018; Haim et al., 2022). Those who felt

confident about their English proficiency reported greater flexibility in adapting instruction, engaging in spontaneous interaction, and experimenting with translanguaging. In contrast, lecturers who perceived their English as limited described higher levels of anxiety, greater reliance on scripted input, and more reluctance to deviate from traditional instructional methods, including monolingual norms. Self-efficacy thus appears to mediate between language proficiency and pedagogical repertoire in EMI contexts.

A central tension concerned translanguaging. Institutional guidelines on language use were often ambiguous, particularly regarding when and whether L1 could be used legitimately in EMI classrooms. This lack of clarity left many lecturers uncertain about the latitude for drawing on the students' and their own full linguistic repertoires. Translanguaging practices, however, differed significantly between the two institutions and between individual lecturers. Some used the L1 strategically for clarification, affective support, or assessment scaffolding, whereas others avoided it due to perceived policy constraints or ideological commitments to "pure" EMI. These differences echo research showing that teachers' beliefs about translanguaging are strongly shaped by institutional norms, local sociolinguistic ecologies, and student proficiency profiles (Karakaş, 2023), as well as by their own plurilingual biographies and language-learning trajectories (Haim & Manor, 2025; Haim & Tannenbaum, 2022).

Moreover, L1 emerged as a powerful anchor in the lecturers' identity construction (Cataldo-Schwarzl et al., 2023; Ellis, 2016; Haim et al., 2022). For some, L1 was closely tied to a sense of agency, professional authority, academic depth, and emotional comfort. Teaching in English was experienced as a partial displacement of that authority, requiring a sort of 'identity reconstruction' in another language. For others, prolonged immersion in multilingual environments and routine translanguaging led to more fluid and adaptive language identities. In other words, EMI appears as an identity-laden process wherein stability and fluidity, authority and adaptability intersect to shape lecturers' beliefs and practices, highlighting the emotional dimensions of teaching in English (see also Borg, 2009; Lasagabaster, 2022).

Equity, fairness, and pedagogical dilemmas

The study foregrounds equity concerns, particularly around assessment. Lecturers questioned whether assessing complex disciplinary knowledge through English enabled

a fair evaluation of students with heterogeneous language profiles, echoing previous similar concerns (e.g., Ball & Lindsay, 2013; Kir, 2025). Tensions emerged between the institutional expectation to assess content knowledge and the lecturers' awareness that students' performance was often constrained by their English proficiency, leading to practical dilemmas: To what extent should academic tasks be simplified? Should L1 use be acknowledged in written or oral work? How should student errors be interpreted, i.e., as misunderstandings of content or as linguistic issues?

Lecturers' accounts of students' experiences were characterized by contradiction. On the one hand, they viewed some of their students as struggling to express complex ideas, participate in discussions, and complete written assignments in English. On the other hand, they also described the students' sense of achievement and increased confidence when they succeeded in meeting EMI demands. EMI thus emerged as a source of both frustration and empowerment: a space that highlighted the students' linguistic limitations but was also associated with strong feelings of accomplishment and future opportunity when they overcame them.

The findings portray EMI courses as contexts where multiple conflicts intersect: ***Content vs. language:*** Lecturers contended with the balance between disciplinary depth and accessible language, and often felt compelled to simplify content or adjust tasks to accommodate linguistic constraints.

Language ideologies and hierarchies: Some of the participants explicitly reflected on English as a dominant language and its perceived impact on the status and use of local or minority languages, linking EMI to broader debates on language imperialism and linguistic justice.

Assessment and equity: Concerns about the fairness of evaluating students in a non-native medium sharpened existing inequalities, particularly for students with less prior exposure to English.

Emotional dimensions: EMI triggered strong emotions among both lecturers and students—anxiety, pride, frustration, and satisfaction—reinforcing the perception of EMI as not only a pedagogical arrangement but also an affective and identity-relevant experience.

Policy vs. practice: Ambiguous or monolingual-oriented policy discourses sat uneasily with multilingual classroom realities, forcing lecturers into continual negotiation and, at times, unofficial “workarounds.”

These tensions mirror broader discussions in applied linguistics on language ideology, multilingualism, and educational equity (see, e.g., MacSwan, 2022; Pennycook, 2006). The contrast between formal monolingual EMI discourses and de facto multilingual practices underscores the need to re-examine how EMI is conceptualized and regulated at both institutional and policy levels.

The power of context: Institutional affordances and constraints

A key contribution of this study lies in its comparative perspective on EMI across two higher education contexts. The findings show that lecturers' beliefs and practices cannot be understood in isolation from their institutional and sociocultural environments. While both settings operated within a broad EMI framework, differences emerged in institutional culture, student intake, language policy clarity, and perceived support, which in turn shaped how EMI was actually enacted. For example, at the university, where there is a strong emphasis on research and disciplinary knowledge, lecturers tended to portray their professional role primarily as that of disciplinary experts. In contrast, lecturers in the teacher education college expressed stronger concerns about scaffolding and accommodating students' linguistic differences.

These differing approaches highlight the powerful role of context in affecting lecturers' professional practices. The centrality of teacher identity and agency was evident in both settings. Most lecturers described themselves as “novice” EMI teachers despite their experience as content experts, portraying their EMI practice as an ongoing process of trial and error. Within the constraints and affordances of their respective institutions, they experimented with different combinations of English-only instruction, occasional L1 use, and various multimodal scaffolding strategies. EMI thus appears as a contextually situated emergent practice rather than a fixed instructional model, in which lecturers actively negotiate and redefine their roles, often blurring the boundaries between content teaching, language support, and intercultural mediation.

In this sense, EMI juxtaposes a number of central educational issues: globalization and English dominance, students' plurilingual repertoires, translanguaging, emotional aspects of language use, equity and access, as well as teacher identity and agency. The three concentric systems underlying the findings of this study—lecturers, institutional structures including the broader sociopolitical discourse, and classroom interactions—are not separate layers but interdependent fields of influence. EMI lecturers work at their intersection, continually mediating between policy demands, norms, and

pedagogical and relational concerns. Recognizing this ecological complexity is essential for designing more coherent EMI policies, professional development, and support structures that align with the multilingual realities of higher education. Within this ecological complexity, it is noteworthy that despite the distinctive ideological status of Hebrew in Jewish Israeli society and the central role of Arabic in Arab identity, the findings align with those reported in other national and sociolinguistic contexts.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the sample was relatively small, which limits the generalizability of the results. However, it should be noted that, at the time of data collection, the number of lecturers teaching EMI courses at each institution was itself relatively limited. We therefore view this study as exploratory, providing an initial understanding of lecturers' experiences in a relatively new educational context. Future research should include a larger and more diverse sample across additional higher education institutions.

Second, the study focused exclusively on lecturers' perspectives. Including students' voices in future research would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the pedagogical, linguistic, and emotional dimensions of EMI from multiple stakeholder perspectives.

Finally, the study relied solely on semi-structured interviews. Future research could complement interview data with classroom observations, thereby capturing not only lecturers' reflections but also their actual classroom practices, language use, and interactions with students.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study contributes to the growing body of research on EMI by foregrounding the voices of instructors working in higher education contexts in Israel. The findings highlight the need for institutional policies that explicitly acknowledge and support translanguaging as a legitimate pedagogical resource rather than treating it as a deviation from EMI norms. Faculty development programs should therefore equip instructors with EMI-specific pedagogical strategies that integrate language and disciplinary content while drawing on students' full linguistic repertoires.

Higher education institutions should provide EMI lecturers with systematic professional development and sustained institutional support, recognizing that effective EMI teaching extends far beyond translating existing course content into English. Rather, it requires instructors to facilitate disciplinary learning, foster academic English proficiency, and promote intercultural communication by preparing students to engage with diverse linguistic and cultural perspectives in increasingly internationalized academic environments.

Institutions should also establish clear and coherent guidelines regarding language use, assessment practices, pedagogical flexibility, multimodal instructional approaches, and the role of students' additional languages. These guidelines should be communicated consistently while allowing instructors sufficient flexibility to respond to the needs of diverse learners. Translanguaging should be recognized as a purposeful pedagogical practice that serves important social functions, such as fostering rapport and inclusion; emotional functions, such as reducing anxiety and enhancing confidence; cognitive functions, such as promoting deeper conceptual understanding; and intercultural functions, by encouraging students to negotiate meaning across languages and cultures and to value linguistic diversity as an educational resource.

Future research should examine students' perspectives on translanguaging in EMI classrooms and investigate longitudinal changes in lecturers' beliefs and practices following targeted professional development. Such research may provide further insights into how translanguaging-informed EMI can promote equitable, meaningful, and interculturally responsive learning in linguistically diverse higher education settings.

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