

HỢP TÁC GIỮA GIẢNG VIÊN TIẾNG ANH VÀ GIẢNG VIÊN CHUYÊN NGÀNH: MỘT HOẠT ĐỘNG PHÁT TRIỂN CHUYÊN MÔN

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Việc sử dụng tiếng Anh để giảng dạy các môn học chuyên ngành (EMI) đã được áp dụng rộng rãi tại các cơ sở giáo dục đại học của Việt Nam. Thực tế triển khai đã bộc lộ rất nhiều thách thức do năng lực ngôn ngữ và kiến thức chuyên ngành của các giảng viên tham gia giảng dạy các môn học này. Mục đích của nghiên cứu này là tìm hiểu mức độ phối hợp giữa giảng viên tiếng Anh chuyên ngành và giảng viên chuyên ngành cùng tham gia chương trình giảng dạy các môn học chuyên ngành để cùng nhau vượt qua các thách thức. Đây là một nghiên cứu định tính sử dụng dữ liệu phỏng vấn với 07 giảng viên đã có kinh nghiệm giảng dạy các môn học chuyên ngành ở tại một trường đại học ở Miền Trung Việt Nam. Kết quả chỉ ra rằng hầu như chưa có sự phối hợp giữa các giảng viên này mặc dù họ đều cảm nhận được mức độ cần thiết và đều ý thức việc tham gia hoạt động phối hợp là một trong những giải pháp tốt nhất để nâng cao năng lực ngôn ngữ và kiến thức chuyên ngành cho sinh viên. Nghiên cứu cũng đưa ra một số giải pháp để thực hiện hoạt động phối hợp nhằm phát triển chuyên môn nghiệp vụ thường xuyên.

Từ khóa: *Dạy chuyên ngành bằng tiếng Anh (EMI), giảng viên tiếng Anh chuyên ngành, giảng viên chuyên ngành, phối hợp, phát triển chuyên môn.*

English as a medium of instruction (EMI) has been popularly applied in higher education contexts in Vietnam. EMI lecturers have to face many challenges in terms of language proficiency and content knowledge. This qualitative study aims to examine how much the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and content lecturers collaborate to help each other overcome such difficulties in the EMI context. Interviews were conducted with seven EMI lecturers at a university in Central Vietnam. The findings showed that there was a lack of collaboration between ESP and EMI lecturers although the participants were aware of its necessity as one of the best solutions for enhancing both English competence and content knowledge. The study also suggests some ways to practice continuous collaboration as a professional development activity.

Keywords: *English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI), ESP lecturer, EMI lecturer, collaboration, professional development.*

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COLLABORATION OF ESP AND CONTENT LECTURERS AS A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

Introduction

The role of English has been changed in every level of education including higher education contexts. Not only is English a subject in the curriculum of almost all universities, but it has now also become a language of instruction for other academic subjects. Given the status of English as a global lingua franca and language of transactional research (Coleman, 2006), English-medium education has become a necessity for many European universities, and then for many other higher education contexts around the world, including Viet Nam. English-medium instruction (EMI) was defined by Macaro (2018, p.19) as “the use of the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English”.

Due to the education goals and the training ability of different universities, EMI teachers have been recognized differently. In some education contexts, EMI teachers are English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teachers, while in others, almost all EMI classrooms are taught by content subject teachers who were either trained in an English-speaking country or got a required English Certificate. The complex situation in recognizing the identity of EMI teachers means that there should be some professional development

activities that involve both content subject lecturers and ESP ones.

Many studies have revealed the perceived roles of EMI teachers as a person to teach content but not language (Lasagabaster, 2018). It was also believed by many EMI teachers that language learning is not the focus of an EMI class but it incidentally takes place there (Lo et al., 2015). It is this perception that leads to the limitation of English proficiency of the EMI students, clearly affecting the effectiveness of EMI education. Understanding this, many recent studies have suggested that the collaboration between language and content subject teachers be a possible solution to boost content lecturers’ understanding and perceptions of the role that language should play in their classes. In fact, this collaboration has worked well at pre-university level (Lasagabaster, 2018), but it is very difficult to find such a collaboration at university education where the discipline characteristics strongly influenced the perceptions of both language and content subject lecturers about their roles in teaching (Brown, 2017).

The question raised is whether the collaboration between ESP teachers (ESPTs) and the content subject teachers (CSTs) will help boost the effectiveness of EMI tertiary classrooms and may be treated as a continuing professional development activity for a better university EMI context.

Conducted at a university in Central Vietnam, this study aims to examine how much the ESPTs and CSTs there collaborate to help each other overcome difficulties in their EMI classes. Accordingly, the study suggests some ways to practice continuous collaboration as a professional development activity. To achieve the aim, the study is set to answer two research questions:

1. To what extent does the collaboration between the ESPTs and CSTs at the university support their teaching in EMI classes?
2. In what way can collaboration activities be used as continuing professional development practices to better tertiary EMI classes?

Literature review

Challenges of teachers in EMI classes

According to Morton (2016), EMI teachers have to suffer the dual responsibility of a CST and an ESPT because, in an EMI program, there are two goals to achieve. First, the content knowledge must taught in English. Second, both content knowledge and English are integrated and considered as the goal of the program. As the goal of an EMI class is not only content subject knowledge but also language competence, in this type of class, students should be asked to acquire English competence by working in English with teachers and classmates more often than in a normal program. The difficulty here is that English used in this program must be an academic language that expresses the complex and abstract terms for a specific

discipline (Zwiers, 2008). Accordingly, EMI teachers should be responsible not only for explaining the content knowledge but also for helping their students to use English receptively and productively in the discipline. In this sense, it is required that EMI teachers have knowledge and competence related to the content discipline and ESP teaching.

According to Brüning and Purrmann (2014), several key competencies of an EMI teacher can be identified: (i) understanding of the theoretical background of CLIL (content language integrated learning); (ii) knowing about teaching language, content, and their integration; and (iii) ability of lesson planning and pedagogy. The first aspect concerns EMI teachers' understanding of the characteristics of EMI classes - integrating both language and content in a subject- and their required role, which is integrating language teaching in their content lessons. The second and the third aspects are about teachers' knowledge of CLIL methodology which enhances their ability to design the class activities for both language and content competence and deliver their lessons to the students.

It can be seen that EMI teachers are required much more than any other teachers of normal education contexts. However, as stated by Wolff (2012), in most EMI contexts, a majority of EMI teachers have been trained in either English language or content teaching, which created some difficulties for them. Many studies have identified the challenges that both ESP teachers and CSTs have to face.

For example, Cammarata and Haley (2018) claimed that the problem facing CSTs resulted from the lack of language teaching strategies, and in the same way, the insufficient content knowledge made the ESPTs unconfident in their teaching. As a result, it seems that there is a need for them to collaborate to support their weaknesses to ensure the goal of an EMI context.

Teacher collaboration and its challenges

Collaboration as defined by Cook and Friend (1995) is an interaction style between two or more coequal parties voluntarily working together toward a common education goal. DelliCarpini and Alonso (2015) stated that collaboration between ESPTs and CSTs has been considered a way to solve the difficulties that exist in developing the English academic language in a content-based classroom and has been applied in many education settings in Australia (Davison, 2001), in Canada (Early, 2001) and in many different education levels such as international schools (Hurst & Davison, 2005) or in the tertiary education settings (Crandall & Kaufmann, 2002). In these studies, collaboration is understood as the cooperative relations between ESPTs and CSTs in a content-based context.

Teacher collaboration, according to Arkoudis (2006), is a challenge because it requires teachers to identify their roles and responsibilities “to share their ideas, classroom resources, skills, and physical space with other educators to provide an optimal learning environment”. Besides, it

also requires adequate administrative support to engage in collaborative practices (Peercy et al., 2016). Therefore, Little (1990) considered collaboration seems to be fragile and unstable because it asks for efforts and support not only from each teacher involved but also from the administration. There are so many things to do to ensure a successful collaboration activity in terms of careful planning for experimentation, considering teachers’ teaching loads, and policies for building strong interpersonal relationships. As a result, the most effective way to overcome the challenges of collaboration is for teachers to engage in “ongoing, regularly scheduled collaboration” organized and supported by the school administrators (DelliCarpini, 2018).

From what has been presented, the necessity of English-content collaboration is undeniable; however, there exist many challenges for EMI teachers in these collaborative activities due to their different belief in their roles, their workload, and many other factors.

Methodology

This qualitative study was conducted at a university in Central Vietnam, called QNU. This is a public university with 12 faculties, 3 of which are delivering EMI courses. With the limited number of EMI courses in this education setting, the qualitative method is confirmed as the best means to seek a deeper understanding of the problems in question. Participants are three ESPTs who are teaching English for Economics lessons and 4 CSTs who are

teaching economics lessons in English to the same students who majored in Economics. Because the researcher is one of the English teachers at the university, the interview with ESPTs and CSTs was informally set somewhere on the university campus in the first semester of the school year 2022-2023. Four major interview questions were raised in terms of what they think about their roles in an EMI class, how much and in what way they collaborate to help each other in an EMI class, what factors may influence the possible collaboration activities, and what to be done to better the situation. The interviewees' reply recordings were qualitatively interpreted and discussed in the four above-mentioned themes to help the researcher answer the two research questions. All extracts from the recordings were coded following the participant codes (ESPT1 – ESPT3 and CST1 – CST4).

Findings and discussions

Teachers' perceptions about their roles in EMI classes

When asked to indicate their opinions about their roles in the EMI education program, content subjects and ESP teacher respondents showed their different points of view. It was assumed by the CSTs that they did not see English as important as the content knowledge of the subject. Although they knew that they should have corrected students' English mistakes somewhere in the lessons, they still believed that their responsibility was to teach the knowledge of the subject, not the English language. One of the interviewed

teachers explained that the assessment criteria for the subject is much more focused on the subject knowledge than on the student's language competence. Clarifying the way of teaching in an EMI class, for example, CST1 pointed out, *"I often have to correct students' mistakes in grammar like tenses or reported speech, but I pay more attention to the content of their answer in the subject"*. CST3 shared the same viewpoint when saying *"When students answered my questions in English, I just asked them to clarify some unclear points caused by the wrong use of English, but if the content of the answer is clear, I accepted these English mistakes"*. Therefore, it can be assumed that CSTs are aware that English is just an important means for teachers to deliver lectures and for students to acquire knowledge of a particular subject.

On the other hand, ESPTs emphasized that teaching both general and academic subject-related English is equally important, but they pointed out that the job must be shared by the CSTs. For instance, ESPT3 said, *"Academic English is important for students in EMI classrooms because this is the language of their future profession, but general English is needed for their daily communication in the job market, so CSTs must pay attention to students' English."* In the same vein, ESPT1 expected to see the CSTs' responsibility in teaching academic English in their lesson because *"English in their classrooms is compulsory in this EMI setting where almost all professional subjects are taught by CSTs in English."*

From what was presented above, it is clear that there exist some significantly different perceptions of the roles of EMI teachers between CSTs and ESPTs. While the CSTs thought that it was the responsibility of English teachers to teach students academic English and that of content subject teachers to convey knowledge of the subject, ESPTs agreed on their duty to teach academic subject-related English in lessons, but they emphasized that teaching English was also the duty of the CSTs. The difference in the perception of both teacher groups may affect their practice of collaboration.

It can be seen that interviewed teachers' perceptions of their role do not seem to match with the assumed characteristics of EMI classrooms claimed by many researchers like Fortune et al. (2008) and Llinares et al. (2012). More specifically, in these studies, EMI programs consider English both as the medium and as the goal of the learning process; therefore, EMI teachers must be responsible for the student's language competence and subject knowledge. In the same vein, another study by Cammarata & Haley (2018) also pointed out that CSTs had to pay more attention to students' language competence and support students to better their English.

Teachers' practices of collaboration in EMI settings

In this part of the interview, teachers were asked three sub-questions about their perceptions of the effectiveness of collaboration, their willingness, and their real practice.

As for the effectiveness of collaboration, all teachers agreed that collaboration in teaching could enhance students not only the content subject knowledge but also English language competence. For instance, ESPT2 highlighted the idea that in an EMI class, if there was a clear and effective collaboration of ESPTs and CSTs, students would have chances to read or listen to a subject-related document in English, so they would acquire not only English grammar, vocabulary, reading skills, and listening skills but also the knowledge of their discipline. Besides, with the teachers' help, students could communicate by writing or speaking in English about their subject (CST4 and ESPT2). In the same vein, ESPT3 said, "*Collaboration between CSTs and ESPTs is effective in helping students learn the content subjects through a foreign language*". Similarly, CST2 emphasized the possibility of enhancing "*students' English proficiency*" if there is a collaboration between CSTs and ESPTs. Moreover, the effectiveness of collaboration was positively evaluated as beneficial for teachers themselves. "*I think if there is a collaboration between me and CSTs, I will get an understanding of some subject terms to improve my lecture, and I can save more time*", said ESPT 1. CST3 and CST4 shared the same view because they really needed help from ESPTs in "*designing some activities*" for students, and in raising "*effective guiding questions for a reading lesson*".

Regarding whether they are willing to help and collaborate, both CSTs and ESPTs have expressed their concerns about

some difficulties caused by the amount of extra work they have to do when involved in collaboration. The answer from ESPT1 and CST3 seemed to be in line with the idea that there could be some problems when teachers of different disciplines work together because all of them had their responsibility in their teaching and they could not have time for this activity. Moreover, CST1 and CST4 also showed their hesitance to collaborate with their ESPT partner due to lack of time. Or ESPT2 stated that she did not know the way to collaborate with CSTs due to their “*difference in disciplines*”.

The last question asked the interviewees to recall their experience in collaboration. It is a surprise that 2 out of 3 ESP teacher respondents and 2 out of 4 CSTs said that they did not have much time for this activity, so the idea of working together to enhance EMI lectures seemed to be unfamiliar to them. The finding shows that the collaboration among ESPTs and CSTs in this tertiary education was still unpopularly implemented. ESPT3 even said that there was very little communication between the two groups of teachers involved in the EMI curriculum. “*Sometimes I realized that I asked students to do similar tasks or projects already required by the CSTs in the previous periods*”. She gave an example.

As for those who experienced English-content collaborative practice (CST4, CST1, ESPT3), they listed three typical types of activities that they did such as discussion about teaching materials and assessment criteria, working together on a

project, and sharing the duties in some extra-curricular activities.

Both CST4 and CST1 experienced collaborations where ESPTs assisted CSTs in proofreading the teaching materials and test papers. CST4 explained that he once had to write material on economics in English and he got help from an English teacher to “*proofread the teaching materials and test papers for the subject*”. Similarly, CST1 confirmed:

Last year when my group was asked to design some English content-based tests for a new subject in the department, we got help from two English teachers to proofread the tests and to comment on the criteria related to English assessment.

ESPT3 mentioned the way she helped CSTs and explained, “*Actually, we just helped CSTs if they asked us to do so. We do not think we will volunteer to do it because we do not have time.*”. As a result, it seems that the collaboration practice was just limited to the help of ESPTs when CSTs got into trouble in their teaching, and this is not a real collaboration when only ESPTs solve CSTs’ problems on their own.

As for project-based learning, ESPT3 said

I and CST1 thought of some topic that required students to apply their English to show their knowledge of business and then we are both responsible for their English and content.

When asked about the way to assess students, CST1 replied

Before the delivery of the project, we discussed the assessment criteria to assess

students' project results with my focusing on the content input and her (ESPT3) focusing on language output.

Mentioning extra-curricular activities as an example of her collaboration with ESPTs, CST4 said

Last year, my faculty held "English Day" and "English Fun Conner" for EMI students. We got help from some teachers in the Foreign Language Department for checking the questions in English and for their participation in the events.

Similarly, ESPT3 described an English event named "Green Summer" where she worked together with the CSTs in the Economics and Accounting Faculty to assess students' presentation in English.

It seems that such kinds of collaboration are more one-way assistance than mutual interaction between CSTs and ESPTs. The information exchange between them is perhaps like this: CSTs got English problems in their content teaching, they asked ESPTs for help, and ESPTs gave a way out by themselves. This may result from the difference in their perception of their roles in EMI classrooms. And this finding is in line with Siskin (1994) who said that the teachers' hesitance in collaboration of these two groups of teachers can be explained that most schools have their own "departmental cultures" and "subject boundaries". The findings are also supported by Arkoudis (2003) and Trent (2010) who stated that the content and language teachers have different "epistemological beliefs about their disciplines" and such differences may

explain why teachers do not practice collaboration.

Factors affecting English - content collaboration implementation

Both groups of teachers mentioned some major factors promoting or hindering the implementation of English-content collaboration in their context, namely time constraints, workload, lack of university policy, and no demand.

The most frequently mentioned factor is time constraint and workload. All three ESPTs and two CSTs interviewed believed this activity would ask them to work more with more responsibilities without being paid. More specifically, ESPT1 shared her opinion that she was too tired of the changes in syllabuses during her first years of teaching so she could not have time to think of collaborating with the other subjects. Similarly, ESPT3 said, "*We are assumed to help other CSTs, but actually we do not get help, and we do not need help from them at all.*" This factor can be counted as the unequal distribution of work between ESPTs and CSTs in the university, which causes workload for ESPTs. Confirming this, CST4 pointed out that "*sometimes some of us (CSTs) have relied on English teachers too much*". Sharing the same viewpoint, CST3 said, "*Whenever EMI students had any language difficulties, many of us just think that it must be the ESP's responsibility to help them.*"

Another major factor mentioned by both groups of teachers is a lack of university policy. ESPT1, ESPT3, and CST3 agreed on the fact that the university did not seem

to have a clear policy about this collaboration in terms of what to do and what to get if teachers are responsible for it. CST1 said, *“Without consistent monitoring from the university administrators, it would be difficult to implement the English–content collaboration between CSTs and ESPTs”*.

This can be clarified by CST3

For our subject, we feel that it is our department's responsibility to make our students understand the content subject lessons in English and enhance their English competence at the same time, but we really need help from the foreign languages department, which should have been implemented by the university administrators.

Their claims are easy to understand because CSTs have to spend time explaining the tasks and discussing the situation with ESPTs and wait for ESPTs' willingness to help them. CST4 admitted that without the school policy, it seemed *“we have to owe a lot to others to make the collaboration happen.”*

The last major factor – no demand - is related to three teachers' perceptions. CST2 and CST3 believed that some CSTs did not think they needed to collaborate with other language subject teachers. *“I think CSTs and ESPTs do not have the same aims or objectives in our lessons so how do we compromise the solution for a problem”*, explained CST2. CST3 added, *“ESPTs may not understand the relationship between language and concepts/ or terms in business or economy”*. CST2 went on saying, *“In teaching, I often highlighted the special usage of technical*

terms used in banking and business management, which is not the ESPTs' attention at all.” This view is also echoed by ESPT2 when she expressed her thought that almost all CSTs had abroad training time so they can control their teaching content well in English without ESPTs' help. The findings from teacher interviewees seem to reflect that there exists some uncertainty about the usefulness and necessity of their collaboration.

In short, although both groups of teachers were aware of the effectiveness of collaboration in EMI contexts to help students master both language and content, real collaboration was not widely practiced in the context in question. Such misalignment between teachers' beliefs and real practices of collaboration could be explained by some factors concerning teachers' beliefs about their role and the necessity of collaboration, time constraints, workload, and the administrators' central policy.

Some suggestions to better the situation

To better the implementation and effectiveness of ESPT - CST collaboration in EMI contexts, both teachers of the two groups and the management board have to change the way they perceive English–content collaboration. As can be seen from the findings, the collaboration between CSTs and ESPTs so far seems to be something called “pseudo-compliance” by Davison (2006). It is important to change this position into “convergence” or “creative co-construction” (Davison, 2006). Therefore, it is suggested that both teachers

of the two groups and the administrators seriously consider collaboration as one of their continuing professional development activities, which helps enhance not only language proficiency but also the content subject understanding for teachers. As a result, some following suggestions may help overcome the challenges mentioned.

The university authority with EMI classrooms needs to appreciate the practical difficulties in implementing an effective collaboration, thereby issuing any official regulation of ESPT – CST collaboration including information about

(1) the types of collaboration and those involved, which may bring about a more consistent and coordinated effort among teachers;

(2) timeframe for meetings, co-planning lesson preparation, and class observations among the CSTs and ESPTs;

(3) some ways of showing the recognition of teachers' efforts materially and spiritually; and

(4) regular training workshops for teachers to equip them with some types of collaboration and some fundamental principles and rationales of EMI education contexts.

It is clear that when CSTs and ESPTs know for sure the requirements and characteristics of language-content integration learning, they will gradually change their beliefs about their roles and the effectiveness of collaboration. When the teachers know that their collaboration activities are always supported by the management board, they will voluntarily and frequently be engaged and committed,

which may make the success of their collaboration.

Conclusion

The findings of the study have answered the two research questions raised. As for the frequency of collaboration between ESPTs and CSTs in EMI classrooms, the result shows that although both groups of teachers were aware of the necessity of collaboration, it is not as popularly implemented. The reasons for this contrast between their attitude and their real practice could be traced from their belief in their roles, the necessity of collaboration, time constraints, workload, and the administrators' central policy. Finally, the study also suggested some ways as a managerial implication to practice continuous collaboration as a professional development activity.

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