

University Students' Experiences in a Newly Established EMI Program: Motivations, Satisfaction, and Challenges

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A B S T R A C T

Despite the increasing implementation of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in Indonesian Islamic higher education, limited research has addressed how students from Islamic education backgrounds navigate the linguistic and academic demands of such programs. The aims of the current research were threefold. First, it aimed to find out the motivations of students in Islamic education programs to choose an EMI program. Secondly, it was conducted to reveal the student satisfaction with the program. Third, it sought to explore the difficulties or challenges perceived by students in the program. This study employed a quantitative descriptive approach, surveying 22 students from an international class at an Islamic state university in Jogjakarta, Indonesia. The results revealed that students were mainly motivated by the need to access international publications, improve English proficiency, and enhance career prospects. Most participants felt the program offered positive challenges, boosted motivation, and improved their vocabulary related to their courses. Additionally, most of them expressed satisfaction with the lecturers' spoken English and the simplified content delivered in English. In terms of challenges, nearly half of them reported difficulties in understanding lectures and course contents, writing notes, and following peer discussions. These insights highlight the need for targeted support and instructional strategies to address the linguistic demands of EMI programs in the Indonesian Islamic higher education context.

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Introduction

English as a medium of instruction (henceforth EMI) has experienced an exponential increase in tertiary education, driven by both institutional goals and student aspirations. For universities, EMI is to internationalize the institutions (Dewi, 2017; Muttaqin & Chuang, 2022; Zein et al., 2020), to boost their national and international profiles (Irham & Wahyudi, 2023; Lamb et al., 2021; Wilkinson, 2016), and to enhance global recognition and improve the quality of education at universities (Muslim et al., 2022). In addition to benefitting the institution, EMI is claimed to provide multiple advantages for students, such as improving their linguistic skills (Irham & Wahyudi, 2023; Puspitasari & Ishak, 2023), helping them for a student exchange program, and facilitating foreign students enrolling to the university (Simbolon, 2018). EMI is also believed to provide students with subject content with a more global view (Puspitasari & Ishak, 2023), enhance employability upon graduation (Zein et al., 2020), as well as helping preparing young generation for the global economy (Macaro & Akincioglu, 2018). It is also an attempt to reduce the migration of Indonesian students abroad (Munadi, 2020).

Despite the optimisms and the potential benefits of EMI, several scholars argued that it may be counter-productive. For instance, learners or educators not sufficiently proficient in English may experience academic, social, and psychological challenges (Ibrahim, 2001). Nearly two decades later, (Al Zumor, 2019) reported that without preparation, EMI programs could result in nervousness, frustration, emotional stress, fear, embarrassment, and poor academic performance among students. The disparity between students who enter university with the necessary economic, cultural, and social resources and those who hope to acquire them during their time at university continues to be a challenge in EMI environments (Kir, 2024). In conclusion, while EMI offers valuable opportunities for global engagement, it is essential to address the associated challenges of language proficiency and socio-economic disparities to ensure an equitable and supportive educational experience for all students.

The challenges and potential benefits of EMI have attracted scholars to investigate the lecturers' and students' perceptions of its implementation. Some of the studies identified the problems with EMI implementation. For example, Simbolon (2021) found that teachers often lack a clear understanding of EMI practices in several key areas, including selecting learning materials and methods for assessing student learning in EMI classrooms. Dewi (2017) highlighted the multifaceted perceptions of lecturers toward EMI in Indonesian universities, addressing not just linguistic issues but also significant factors like national identity and sentiments regarding English as a Western instructional language.

However, other studies showed positive perceptions of the lecturers towards EMI programs. For example, Lecturers had a remarkably positive attitude towards EMI, both those who are or have taught EMI and those who plan to teach EMI soon (Lamb et al., 2021). Simbolon (2018) found that both lecturers and the campus authorities in an Indonesian university were aware of the essential role of English proficiency for their students and graduates. Sidabutar et al. (2022) found that teachers tended to have a favorable opinion of EMI, as they believe it can improve students' language skills. However, some teachers express hesitation and prefer a blended approach that incorporates both their native language and English in their teaching.

Several studies have also reported on the university students' perceptions of EMI programs (Bolton et al., 2023; Despitasari, 2021; Puspitasari & Ishak, 2023; Tanjung et al., 2021). Bolton et al. (2023) reported that 77 percent of students at a university in Indonesia supported the use of EMI, with either agreement or strong agreement, while only 0.9 percent of respondents disagreed. Despitasari (2021) reported that a study involving 40 undergraduate students from the business management department of a private higher education institution in Indonesia revealed a positive response to the EMI program offered there. The students acknowledged the importance of English for their educational experiences and future careers in a global context, expressing the belief that EMI does not pose a threat to the Indonesian language and culture. Many of them are considering opportunities abroad for better career prospects. Puspitasari and Ishak (2023) found that students in a Psychology program generally viewed EMI positively but faced challenges, including difficulties understanding lectures and limited English proficiency in discussions. Similarly, Tanjung et al. (2021) reported the positive perceptions of students in the Economic development study program. Finally, Prapunta (2024) revealed that the international students majoring in business English program at a university in China felt highly motivated and could perform authentic, vision-building tasks and projects related to their future professional goals in the English for Business and Trade Course.

Despite the well-documented studies in public university settings, EMI programs in Indonesian Islamic Universities are scarcely examined (Irham & Wahyudi, 2023). This gap is significant, as it restricts our understanding of how EMI functions across diverse educational contexts, particularly within Indonesian Islamic institutions. Moreover, the participants' TOEFL ITP scores, which range from 408 to 547, with 86.36% categorized as B1 level (intermediate users), significantly enhance the urgency of the study. By concentrating on this intermediate proficiency level, the study can identify targeted instructional strategies and support mechanisms that are well-suited to this demographic. This approach not only enhances the comprehensibility of the findings but also increases their applicability in improving the educational outcomes for students in similar contexts. To address this gap, the current research focuses on the following questions:

1. What are the motivations of students in an Islamic education program for joining a newly established EMI program?
2. How satisfied are the students in an Islamic education program with the newly established EMI program?
3. What difficulties do students in an Islamic education program perceive while participating in the EMI program?

English Medium Instruction in Indonesia

Historically, EMI programs have been present in Indonesian higher education since the 1920s, with early graduates achieving a high level of English proficiency (Hamied & Lengkanawati, 2018). Simbolon (2018) stated that over the past 20 years, EMI in Indonesia has been implemented in diverse ways, often using terms like 'bilingual classes' or 'international classes.' In 2015, the Indonesian Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education (RISTEKDIKTI) announced intentions to introduce a bilingual curriculum in Indonesian universities that would incorporate both Bahasa Indonesia and English, which inspired many higher education institutions to either develop or strengthen their EMI programs in response to this encouragement (Lamb et al., 2021).

Despite the encouragement by the government, there is a lack of clearly defined regulations surrounding the implementation of EMI (Simbolon, 2018). Its implementation appears to have been a largely autonomous 'bottom-up' movement (Lamb et al., 2021; Santoso et al., 2024), resulting in different practices of EMI programs in universities (Bolton et al., 2023). One of the different practices is the language qualification for joining the program. For instance, Hamied and Lengkanawati (2018) reported that students applying for an EMI program must pass one of three admission tests: national selection, state-university joint selection, or independent selection. Muttaqin (2020) found that several prominent universities in Indonesia require students to possess language proficiency certificates (TOEFL ITP scores between 500 and 550 or IELTS scores between 5.5 and 6.0) for admission into their EMI programs. Additionally, one of the universities involved in the study mandates that students live in a dormitory for one year, where English is used as the primary language of communication. A recent study by Santoso et al. (2024) found that participants in the EMI program had standardized test scores that ranged from 475 to 550 on the TOEFL paper-based test, 60 to 80 on the TOEFL internet-based test, and between 5.5 and 6 on the IELTS test. These studies imply that different institutions have varying policies regarding the qualifications needed for entry into their programs. In the context of the current study, students should have TOEFL ITP/Prediction scores of 400 or above to meet the language requirement.

EMI programs in Indonesian Islamic universities remain underexplored, particularly in comparison to the extensive body of research available in public university settings (Irham & Wahyudi, 2023m p.3). As Islamic universities play a crucial role in the educational landscape of Indonesia, influencing both local and global academic discourses, the current study is essential for policymakers, educators, and researchers who seek to foster inclusive and effective educational frameworks in Indonesia and beyond.

Students' motivations, satisfaction, and challenges in EMI programs

The increasing prevalence of EMI programs globally has drawn significant interest from researchers examining students' motivations, satisfaction, and challenges. This literature review brings together findings from various studies to enhance our understanding of these aspects.

Regarding motivation, Lamb et al. (2021) reported that university students in Indonesia perceive English Medium Instruction (EMI) as beneficial for enhancing English skills and international opportunities. Iwaniec and Wang (2023) found that EMI programs attract students in China for various reasons, such as better job opportunities, engagement with an international community, and enhanced learning outcomes in terms of specific vocabulary related to both language and subject matter. Additionally, Macaro and Akincioglu (2018) found that the main reasons students chose to participate in EMI programs were the enhancement of their English language skills and the opportunities to study and/or work abroad. A study by Şahan and Sahan (2023) found that the primary motivations of the students to join the program are related to the professional benefits linked to EMI and a motivation to enhance their English proficiency.

In terms of satisfaction, the previously reported studies indicate a relatively high level of satisfaction towards EMI programs in various contexts. For instance, a study by Macaro and Akincioglu (2018) found that students from both private and state universities in Turkey reported high levels of satisfaction with their academic progress and EMI offerings (Macaro & Akincioglu, 2018). A similar study in Turkey by Karakas (2017) indicated that the majority of students were satisfied with their language abilities, comprehension in university courses, and participation in EMI programs offered at their campus. Another positive perception towards the EMI program is also reported in other nations. For instance, in the context of Vietnam, Le and Nguyen (2023) found that students generally held a positive view of the EMI courses they participated in. They reported the highest satisfaction with their teachers' instructional qualities, while their satisfaction was lowest concerning their own learning characteristics, which they attributed to insufficient professional knowledge and English proficiency. The research conducted by Chu et al. (2017) revealed that both local and international students in Taiwan generally shared similar satisfaction ratings regarding various aspects, such as their ability to communicate in English during class, their perceptions of the course content, and their views on the college's internationalization. Nonetheless, the level of satisfaction differed between the two groups on certain factors. In the Indonesian context, Puspitasari and Ishak (2023) found that most students view the implementation of English Medium Instruction (EMI) positively.

In terms of challenges, Lamb et al. (2021) reported that university students in Indonesia face challenges like comprehension difficulties, limited lecturer availability, extended program durations, and peer resentment as they perceive them as privileged. Muttaqin et al. (2025) also reported challenges such as understanding academic terms in English, which are different from casual or everyday English. However, the participants have reportedly positive perception in the areas of understanding contents in EMI courses,

reading references in English, and following the teachers' explanations. Siregar (2023) reported that students faced challenges due to their limited proficiency in English, particularly in grammar, vocabulary, and the comprehension of technical terms. In a study conducted by Hamied and Lengkanawati (2018), it was found that while the overall proficiency in English among university students was not particularly strong, the classroom interactions and other communicative exchanges showed a smooth progression of pedagogical steps and active engagement in the teaching-learning process. This progress was aided by teaching materials such as charts, tables, and realia.

Research Method

The current research adopted a quantitative descriptive research design to systematically describe and analyze the perceptions and experiences of students enrolled in an Islamic Education Program using English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI). This approach is particularly suited for gathering statistical data that can elucidate patterns and trends among participants regarding their motivations, satisfaction, and perceived difficulties (Creswell et al., 2018).

The participants of this study consisted of twenty-two master's students majoring in an Islamic Education Program at a university in Indonesia. There were 17 female (77%) and five male (23%) students in the class. The average age of the students was 25 years. They were the first cohort of an international class program delivered through English as Medium Instruction (EMI), and they had joined the program for two semesters when participating in the study. As the part of requirement of the program, all the participants had taken TOEFL ITP or Prediction tests. According to the questionnaire responses, participants' reported scores range from 408 (categorized as a basic user) to 547 (considered as an upper-intermediate user), with 86.36% of the participants in the B1 level (intermediate user). Participants were intentionally selected using purposive sampling based on their experience in at least one semester of EMI classes and their consent to participate (as indicated in Section 2 of the survey), ensuring they could provide relevant insights for the empirical investigation (Merriam, 2009; Robinson, 2014). For ethical reasons, participants were informed in Section 2 of the survey that no identifying information, including their names, contact details, or affiliations, would be disclosed in any written or verbal communication (Hennink et al., 2011).

The closed questionnaire, consisting of 35 items, was adopted from (Macaro & Akincioglu, 2018), who applied it in Turkish Universities. The reliability of the instrument has been assessed twice. The first assessment involved 989 respondents and yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.90, while the second assessment obtained a value of 0.84. Both results confirm the internal reliability of the survey instrument (Macaro & Akincioglu, 2018). The questionnaire distributed via Google form consisted of seven parts, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Questionnaire item

Section	Data collected	Item total
1	Information about the survey for participants	
2	Participant consent form	
3	Participants' name, gender, and TOEFL/IELTS test score	
4	Motivations for Choosing the Program	10
5	Satisfaction with EMI Program on offer	9
6	Satisfaction with the Program Quality	7
7	Challenges experienced in the EMI Program	9
	Total	35

As shown in Table 1., the questionnaire or survey begins with an introduction outlining its purpose and essential details for participants, followed by a consent agreement to ensure informed participation. The third section collects basic demographic information, including names, gender, and TOEFL/IELTS scores, to provide context for the responses. Parts 4 to 7 of the survey address the three research questions by exploring participants' motivations for choosing the program (RQ1), their satisfaction with the EMI and overall program quality (RQ2), and the challenges encountered during the program (RQ3).

The questionnaire designed based on the framework established by (Macaro & Akincioglu, 2018) was translated into Indonesian to facilitate better comprehension and response quality and distributed via a WhatsApp group specifically for students in the international class. It remained accessible from September 1 to October 31, 2023. Additionally, it was sent privately to each respondent's WhatsApp for increased visibility and participation. A total of 22 students completed the questionnaire, comprising 17 females and 5 males, offering diverse perspectives on factors influencing their choice of English Medium Instruction

Upon collecting the participants' responses, the researchers exported the data into a spreadsheet for quantitative analysis. The primary aim was to calculate the distribution of responses or the percentage for each data category, enabling a clear understanding of the results. The percentage was subsequently analysed using descriptive statistics, following the categorization framework established by (Riduwan, 2019).

Result and Discussion

In this section, the findings will be organized according to the research questions. The first question explores the motivations of students in the Islamic education program to select an EMI program. The third question examines the difficulties perceived by students in participating in the program.

Motivations for Choosing the EMI Program

The questionnaire explored students' motivations for selecting the English Medium Instruction (EMI) program, focusing on aspects like career advancement, access to global resources, and language development. The findings are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Motivations for choosing an EMI program (N=22)

Motivations	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
To enhance my career prospects in Indonesia	54.5	31.8	13.6	0	0
To access international news	54.5	31.8	9.1	0	4.5
To enhance my financial circumstances	50.0	18.2	18.2	9.1	4.5
To access international publications	59.1	36.4	0	0	4.5
To expand my career opportunities overseas	45.5	31.8	18.2	0	4.5
To advance to the next level of education	63.6	22.7	9.1	0	4.5
To prepare myself for a career in an international work environment	59.1	27.3	13.6	0	0
To provide myself the opportunity to study overseas	68.2	18.2	13.6	0	0
To improve my English for my subjects	72.7	13.6	13.6	0	0
To enhance my overall English proficiency	63.6	27.3	4.5	0	4.5

Note: 1 = strongly disagree (SD); 5 = strongly agree (SA)

Table 2 shows that motivations for enrolling in an English Medium Instruction (EMI) program among the 22 participants revealed clear priorities, with notable emphasis on accessing international publications and improving overall English proficiency. Specifically, around 95% of participants indicated support for accessing international

publications (59.1% strongly agree, 36.4% agree), highlighting the importance of language skills in achieving academic success. Similarly, around 90% of them expressed motivation to enhance their overall English proficiency (63.6% strongly agree, 27.3% agree), underscoring the value placed on language development for personal and academic growth.

Other prominent motivations included improving English for university subjects (around 85% total agreement: 13.6% agree, 72.7% strongly agree), preparing for a career in an international work environment (roughly 86% total agreement: 59.1% strongly agree, 27.3% agree), and enhancing the opportunity to study overseas (86% total agreement: 68.2% strongly agree, 18.2% agree). Participants also indicated a desire to enhance their career prospects in Indonesia (85% agreement: 54.5% strongly agree, 31.8% agree) and access international news (roughly 85% total agreement: 54.5% strongly agree, 31.8% agree). These factors reflected a strategic view of EMI programs as pathways for global exposure and professional advancement.

In contrast, the motivation to improve financial circumstances received the lowest support, with less than 70% agreement (50.0% strongly agree, 18.2% agree). This suggests that while financial improvement was recognized as a potential benefit, it was not the primary driving force for most participants. Overall, the findings illustrated that the main motivations for pursuing EMI programs were centered on language enhancement, educational advancement, and global opportunities.

The findings of the first research question demonstrate that the primary motivations revolve around accessing international publications, enhancing overall English proficiency, improving English for university subjects, improving opportunities to study and work abroad, preparing for a career in a global work environment, accessing international news, and enhancing their career prospects in Indonesia. In other words, the main motivations are related to academic and professional aspects. The highest motivation reported in the finding, which is improving students' overall English proficiency, is similar to other contexts of studies. For instance, Siregar et al. (2023) that the main motivation for student participants enrolling in an EMI program is to improve their English skills and gain knowledge in their field of study. Santoso et al. (2024) found that students mainly regarded EMI as a way to improve their job prospects and enhance their English skills. Iwaniec and Wang (2023) reported that the EMI program attracts students in China for various reasons, including better job prospects, exposure to an international community, and improved learning outcomes in terms of specific language and subject matter vocabulary. According to Macaro and Akincioglu (2018), the primary motivators for students participating in EMI programs were enhancing their English language skills and the prospects of studying or working overseas, as English is essential for pursuing education at globally recognized universities (Hendra Yani et al., 2023). Similarly, Şahan and Sahan (2023) found that students' main motivations for joining the program were professional benefits related to English exposure and a desire to enhance their English skills. These motivations reflect the notions that EMI programs are generally aimed at achieving several goals, including enhancing students' English proficiency, promoting economic competitiveness by developing a skilled workforce, and equipping graduates with essential global literacy skills (Richards & Pun, 2023). Analyzing the factors that motivate the students to join EMI programs may increase student engagement and satisfaction towards the programs (Le & Nguyen, 2023).

Student Satisfaction with EMI Program on offer

The questionnaire assessed student satisfaction with the English Medium Instruction (EMI) program, focusing on factors like general English improvement, subject-specific vocabulary, and lesson engagement. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Student satisfaction with EMI program (N=22)

Satisfactions with EMI program	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
Improving my General English	18.2	54.5	18.2	4.5	4.5
Enhancing my English for my field of study	13.6	27.3	54.5	0	4.5
Enhancing my vocabulary related to my field of study	18.2	59.1	22.7	0	0
Positioning myself to be competitive in a global market	9.1	45.5	40.9	4.5	0
Making lessons/lectures more interesting	31.8	40.9	22.7	4.5	0
Motivating me	31.8	45.5	18.2	0	4.5
Facilitating a clearer understanding of the concepts in my subjects	18.2	31.8	36.4	4.5	9.1
Making problem solving easier	9.1	40.9	40.9	4.5	4.5
Giving me a positive challenge	31.8	50	18.2	0	0

Note: 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree

As displayed in Table 3, satisfaction levels of students enrolled in the EMI program provide valuable insights into their experiences. The highest-rated aspect was the program's ability to offer a positive challenge, with around 82% of students in agreement (50.0% agreed and 31.8% strongly agreed). This suggests that students valued the program for its encouragement of personal growth and skill enhancement.

However, several other aspects received less than 80% agreement. For example, only about 77% of the participants felt that studying through EMI improved their subject-specific vocabulary (59.1% agreed and 18.2% strongly agreed). Similarly, motivation levels registered at around 77% (with 45.5% agreeing and 31.8% strongly agreeing), while about 72% acknowledged that EMI made lessons more interesting (40.9% agreed and 31.8% strongly agreed). Additionally, 72% of the students believed that the program improved their general English skills (54.5% agreed and 18.2% strongly agreed).

The areas with the lowest agreement (below 55%) included the following: the ability to position themselves competitively in a global market (45.5% agreed, 9.1% strongly agreed), enhancing clarity in understanding concepts (31.8% agreed, 18.2% strongly agreed), making problem-solving easier (40.9% agreed, 9.1% strongly agreed), and improving English specific to their major (27.3% agreed, 13.6% strongly agreed).

In terms of student satisfaction with the EMI program, the data revealed that among the highest levels of student satisfaction with the program are the aspects of providing a positive challenge. This indicates that students appreciated their experience in the EMI program, despite the challenges and unfavourable outcomes they faced (Kir, 2024). It also highlights the strong level of interest that serves as a motivating factor, encouraging students to put more effort into their studies and, consequently, achieve better outcomes (Guo et al., 2022). In addition to providing positive challenges, the participants expressed satisfaction with the program's ability to motivate them to achieve better academic outcomes. These findings align with those of Su and Kong (2023), who reported that students believe EMI courses enhance their academic interests. This can be seen as a positive thing as the student effort plays the most important role in the learning process (Guo et al., 2022). The students also expressed their satisfaction with the role of the EMI program in improving their vocabulary related to their major.

Student Satisfaction with the Program Quality

The questionnaire evaluated seven aspects of student satisfaction regarding program quality, emphasizing resource availability, lecturers' English proficiency, and the impact of language on learning. The findings are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Student Satisfaction with the Program Quality (N=22)

Satisfaction with the program quality	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
Lecturers possess a sufficient range of resources in English	18.2	59.1	18.2	0	4.5
Students have a sufficient variety of resources available in English	9.1	36.4	36.4	13.6	4.5
The university has a sufficient range of resources in English	36.4	36.4	18.2	9.1	0
Lecturers speak excellent English	18.2	72.7	4.5	4.5	0
Lecturers have difficulty speaking English	13.6	9.1	22.7	40.9	13.6
Lecturers simplify the content because it is delivered in English	18.2	68.2	13.6	0	0
I learn less when the subject is taught in English compared to when it is taught in Indonesian	31.8	45.5	22.7	0	0

Note: 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree

The findings in Table 4 revealed that the students had a complex perception of their learning experience in the EMI program. The majority of the students agreed (72.7%) or strongly agreed (18.2%) that the lecturers spoke excellent English, resulting in a total of 90% agreement. Another aspect with high satisfaction was that lecturers simplified the content because it was in English (86%, with 68.2% agreeing and 18.2% strongly agreeing), reflecting students' appreciation for lecturers' efforts to make the material more accessible.

Other aspects received no more than 77% agreement (agree or strongly agree) from the students. For instance, 59.1% agreed and 18.2% strongly agreed that lecturers possessed a sufficient range of resources in English. Similarly, 45.5% agreed and 31.8% strongly agreed that students learned less when the subject was taught in English compared to when it was taught in Indonesian. Moreover, only 72% of the students were in agreement that the university had a sufficient range of resources in English (36.4% agreed and 36.4% strongly agreed). However, less than half of the students agreed (36.4%) or strongly agreed (9.1%) that they had a sufficient variety of resources available in English.

The statement '*Lecturers have difficulty speaking English*' received an average agreement of 22%, with 9.1% agreeing and 13.6% strongly agreeing, suggesting that the students did not perceive significant issues with their lecturers' English proficiency. Overall, this indicates that the students felt their lecturers were competent in their language abilities.

Regarding the students' satisfaction with the program quality, the data shows that the highest satisfaction levels indicate that students feel positively about the quality of English spoken by their lecturers. This finding is similar to the study by Karakas (2017), reporting that students' highest degree of satisfaction was with the intelligibility of the teachers' spoken English. It demonstrates that teaching content in the EMI program demands subject expertise, effective communication skills, and strong English language proficiency (Walkinshaw et al., 2017). The students also appreciate the support provided by the lecturers through content simplification. However, this should be approached with caution, as the simplification of language used to deliver content is often perceived as beneficial for understanding the subject matter rather than language learning (Alhassan, 2021).

While some aspects receive positive responses, the students show a relatively considerable amount of agreement that they learn less when subjects are taught in English, suggesting that while students appreciate certain aspects, there may be challenges in their learning experience in EMI contexts. This aligns with the findings of Şahan and Sahan (2023), which found that students grasp the subject material in English less thoroughly than they do in their native language classes (L1). On the contrary, a study by Muttaqin et al. (2025) in several leading universities reported that students could widen their understanding of content subjects when taught using English. This effect may be attributed to the quality of the universities, where resources, peer interactions, and teaching methods may contribute to more effective learning.

Difficulties perceived by students in the EMI program

The questionnaire identified several difficulties students encountered in the English Medium Instruction (EMI) program. These challenges encompass various aspects of comprehension and communication, reflecting the complexities of studying in a non-native language. The findings are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Difficulties perceived by students on EMI program (N=22)

Difficulties	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
Comprehending the lecture or lesson contents	9.1	31.8	50.0	4.5	4.5
Comprehending the English vocabulary	9.1	18.2	63.6	9.1	0
Reading most texts	9.1	13.6	72.7	4.5	0
Reading slides	9.1	27.3	45.5	13.6	4.5
Writing notes	18.2	22.7	40.9	18.2	0
Listening to the lecturers' explanation	13.6	22.7	45.5	18.2	0
Listening to other students	18.2	22.7	50.0	9.1	0
Discussing with others	13.6	22.7	59.1	4.5	0
Speaking in front of others	18.2	13.6	54.5	13.6	0

Note: 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree

The findings from Table 5 indicated that students in the English Medium Instruction (EMI) program encountered a range of difficulties, with none exceeding 50% in total agreement. The most significant challenge reported was comprehending lecture or lesson content, with 41% of students indicating difficulty—31.8% agreeing and 9.1% strongly agreeing. Writing notes also proved to be a significant challenge, as reflected by a total of 40% of students expressing difficulty in this area, with 22.7% agreeing and 18.2% strongly agreeing. Additionally, listening to other students during discussions was similarly challenging, with 40% reporting difficulties (22.7% agreeing and 18.2% strongly agreeing).

Students also found it difficult to engage in discussions, with 36% indicating challenges in this regard (22.7% agreeing and 13.6% strongly agreeing). Listening to lecturers' explanations presented comparable difficulties, also with a 36% total agreement (22.7% agreeing and 13.6% strongly agreeing). Speaking in front of others is another area of concern, as 32% of students reported challenges (13.6% agreeing and 18.2% strongly agreeing).

Other difficulties included reading slides (27.3% agreeing and 9.1% strongly agreeing), comprehending English vocabulary, which 27% of students found challenging (18.2% agreeing and 9.1% strongly agreeing), and reading most texts, with 23% indicating difficulties in this area (13.6% agreeing and 9.1% strongly agreeing). Overall, these findings highlight the various obstacles faced by students in the EMI program, underscoring the need for targeted support to enhance their learning experiences.

Regarding the third research question, it is surprising that the difficulties perceived by students in the EMI program are reportedly not significant, with no percentage more than 50%. It implies that the B1 level of English, as indicated by the participants' reported TOEFL score, to some extent contributes to their performance during the class. Based on the data, almost half of the participants are concerned with their comprehension of the lecturer or the lesson content. Additionally, writing notes, a productive skill useful during lecturing, is another significant difficulty experienced by the participants. This is contradictory with the results showing that most students show high satisfaction with the lecturers' delivery in English. Therefore, this challenge might be caused by the students' unfamiliarity with the English vocabulary related to the subject matter. This finding confirms other findings reporting that students may find that listening to lecturers does not enhance their productive competencies (writing and speaking) (Wilkinson, 2016).

The other notable challenge is listening to their peers, which could indicate issues with comprehension and participation in English. It also highlights the deprivation of students' fundamental rights to effective understanding, communication, interaction, discussion, and inquiry (Al Zumor, 2019). It can give rise to further challenges, including elevated turnover intentions among students, reduced peer communications, diminished classroom participation, and diminished academic self-assurance (Su & Kong, 2023). Siregar (2023) further identified that students' inadequate proficiency in the language frequently resulted in feelings of shyness, leading them to refrain from participating in class discussions. As a result, they often stayed quiet even when they had questions about different parts of the lesson. It shows the contradictory condition with the goals of the EMI program to facilitate students in understanding the lessons through receptive skills and expressing ideas related to the subjects through productive skills (Han, 2023). These challenges could stem from students' lack of experience in the EMI environment, cultural disparities, and lower initial proficiency in English (Aizawa, 2024).

Therefore, it is essential to recognize that students' experiences with EMI can vary considerably based on their proficiency in English (Rose et al., 2020). Students and teachers who lack sufficient proficiency in English are likely to experience negative academic, social, and psychological consequences, including anxiety, frustration, tension, fear, and embarrassment, which negatively impacted their educational outcomes as a result of EMI implementation (Al Zumor, 2019; Ibrahim, 2001). As these challenges can create more obstacles than motivation for students, generating more specific policies as well as providing support for the students is essential. Although students entering the EMI program in this study were required to demonstrate a minimum level of English proficiency through a recognized language test, as recommended by Lamb et al. (2021), enrolment criteria should not be limited to language proficiency certificates. It would be beneficial to include internal assessments conducted by the university to evaluate productive skills, such as writing and speaking. Additionally, better plans by the university administrators for future implementation should be based on the reflection on the current program. This can be done by delivering customized language workshops, supplementary tutoring, and consistent language assistance over the course of the semester (Aizawa, 2024). Subandowo and Sárdi (2023) found that the quality and extent of support students receive at the institutional and course levels have a significant effect on their success in an EMI setting.

Conclusion

The findings of this study shed light on the motivations, satisfaction levels, and challenges faced by students in the English Medium Instruction (EMI) program. First, the

students are primarily driven by the desire to be able to access international publications and enhance their overall English proficiency, followed by aspirations for achieving academic and professional goals. In terms of satisfaction with the program, the participants mostly agreed that the program gives them positive challenges, increases their motivation, and enhances their vocabulary related to their university courses. Then, regarding satisfaction with the quality of the program, a significant number of students are satisfied with the quality of their lecturers' spoken English. Additionally, they are satisfied with the simplification of the content delivered in English. In terms of the perceived difficulties during the program, it is relatively manageable, as the number does not exceed 50% of the students. Surprisingly, despite the satisfaction with the lecturers' English delivery, comprehending the lecture or content lesson received the highest agreement of difficulties among almost half of the participants. Other relatively notable difficulties are writing notes and listening to other students.

The findings of this study have several important implications for the development of EMI programs. First, they suggest that EMI should not only focus on delivering academic content in English, but also pay attention to the language support students need to succeed. This includes providing regular assistance with listening and academic note-taking, which were reported as common challenges. Another implication is the need for ongoing training for lecturers, especially in adjusting their delivery to suit students with varying levels of English proficiency. Lastly, involving students in giving regular feedback on their experiences can help institutions better respond to their needs and continuously improve the program.

The study has several limitations. First, the small sample size may limit the generalizability of the findings. A larger and more diverse group would provide a richer understanding of student experiences across different contexts. Moreover, concentrating on just one university may restrict the relevance of the findings to other institutions or areas in Indonesia, where educational practices and cultural dynamics vary significantly. Moreover, data collection occurred during the second semester of the program, making it challenging to assess changes in motivations, satisfaction, or difficulties throughout subsequent semesters. Finally, variations in participants' English proficiency, as indicated by their TOEFL scores, may influence their experiences and perceptions, potentially affecting the overall findings.

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