



# Investigating the Perceptions of Thai University EFL Students towards English as a Medium of Instruction at a Tutorial School: A Case Study

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Received 10/01/2025	<b>ABSTRACT</b>  This study investigates the use of English as the medium of instruction (EMI) by a non-native speaker as part of shadow education. Data were collected from a group of Thai students (n = 5) enrolled in an English course at a local tutorial school during their last year of tertiary education. Specifically, the study focused on the perceptions and experiences of the participants' being tutored under EMI by a non-native teacher. Email interviews were conducted with the participants and were later transcribed. In addition, three essays were collected from each of the participants, totaling 15 pieces and analyzed focusing on global, morphological and syntactical levels. Also, interaction behavior and attitudes towards English were observed. Salient findings are as follows: 1) the participants appeared to display positive perceptions towards EMI instruction; 2) drastic improvements were observed in terms of word choices and more correct syntactical structures and 3) most participants were willing to speak English more often among themselves. Limitations were reported and implications discussed about teaching performances.
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## Introduction

It is indisputable that English has become an increasingly important part in almost every aspect of life even in a monolingual country like Thailand where English is used only as a foreign language (Bolton et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2023; Terasawa, 2024). Students are required to take English classes even when in high school all the way through their university. The all-pervasive influence of English has spread across the academic and professional domains into the daily lifestyles of the locals, especially those living in big cities. In other words, English is ubiquitous when it comes to contemporary society (Bennui & Hashim, 2014; Chaiyasat & Inthakaew, 2023).

The whys and wherefores of most Thai people's apparent inability to communicate in English are, thus, mindboggling to academicians given the almost overabundance of resources for the general public to practice their English. Many Thai schools and universities have been successful in only teaching the rudiments of English to students and turning them into neophytes, which is seen as quite insufficient for the more competitive environment where English is required (Nunan, 2003). The consequences of such have given rise to numerous tutorial schools across the country to assist students in test preparations as well as the many international programs available at various schools and universities (Ku et al., 2022; Suante & Bray, 2022; Yung, K., 2019).

To the best of our knowledge, relatively few studies have been conducted focusing on EMI in tutorial schools taught primarily by non-native English-speaking teachers. Granted, the current study attempts to understand the English learning experiences and general perceptions of studying under 'English as a medium of instruction' or EMI by a non-native teacher of English among five local Thai students enrolled in an English writing class at a tutorial school. The section below shows relevant studies on EMI and discussions of sociocultural conditions contextualized specifically to fit in with those living and learning in Thailand. Following this section are the research methods we used in gathering data about the EMI experiences of this group of participants as well as all the different angles of vision and reflection from them on their learning experiences under EMI à la Thailand's shadow education.

Given the objectives of this research, the following two research questions were addressed:

1. What experiences do the participants under EMI have in tutorial classes?

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2. How do the participants perceive the effectiveness of EMI?**Researcher Positionality**

The researchers were aware that their roles as a full-time English tutor (the first researcher) and part-time tutor (the second researcher) for a number of years could have influenced data interpretations. However, the emic approach to collecting and interpreting the data enabled the researchers, particularly the first one, to observe the study as a participant and thus gain revealing insights into the group's first-hand experience and a clearer perception of the participants towards EMI use in classroom settings. Simultaneously, the second researcher, an experienced SLA lecturer and a part-time tutor, was able to add additional insights into the undertaking of this research. That said, the researchers, especially the first one found it next to impossible to attain total objectivity in interpreting the results.

**Literature Review****English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI)**

According to Macaro (2018), English as a medium of instruction (EMI) is defined as “the use of the English language to teach academic subjects [...] in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English” (p. 19). In fact, EMI has been playing an increasingly important role in university education around the globe and Thailand is no exception (Deng & Wannaruk, 2021; Srimalee et al., 2025; Thippayacharoen et al., 2023). While EMI has become a widely accepted practice, it is not without challenges. For example, some students have experienced high levels of anxiety of being taught through EMI. Moreover, some local teachers have been observed to lack sufficient English proficiency to handle EMI-based instructions. Although replete with all the good intentions, EMI appears not to have successfully delivered its promises. To illustrate, certain content teachers who are non-native speakers of English have encountered some difficulties giving lectures using English. In addition, the majority of students in a typical EMI classroom do not seem sufficiently equipped, linguistically speaking, thereby making EMI-based instruction truly challenging.

EMI is most common in countries where English is not used as the native language and its prevalence is driven by socioeconomic, political and even educational forces (Doiz, 2012). The use of EMI, particularly in Thailand, is no longer confined merely to the mainstream educational settings as in bygone days but has spread far and wide into another rapidly thriving industry – shadow education.

## Shadow Education

Shadow education has long been recognized as an integral part of, yet separated from, the mainstream educational system as it also offers training of all subjects taught in schools but with a twist. Students looking for help in test preparation outside of school can depend on shadow education to help them catch up with lessons and be ready for school or university exams (Chou & Yuan, 2011). The term ‘shadow education’ has been used to describe the extra teaching, be it done one-to-one, one-to-group, video viewing, or online classes, each with a varying degree of success (Byun & Baker, 2015).

This style of teaching has become so popular all over the world because it is seen as an adjunct to formal education. According to Byun & Baker (2015), supporters of shadow education believe that mainstream schools have failed to deliver quality education necessary for students to pass exams because of two main reasons. One, teachers in mainstream schools only follow the curricula prescribed by either the schools themselves or the Ministry of Education without putting more effort into motivating students to think outside the box, focusing on test-taking strategies, or updating themselves with the markedly changing batteries of tests. Two, these very same teachers from mainstream schools are paid very low salaries and hence are not inspired to do their utmost in teaching all these students. It opens up ways for these teachers to moonlight after classes by becoming tutors themselves to supplement their income.

Opponents of shadow education, however, argue that this type of learning does not produce any significant changes in scores. In fact, whether or not this kind of education can be successful depends considerably on the motivation, attitudes, learning and teaching styles of both learners and teachers (Bray & Lykins, 2012). Another argument against shadow education also shows that wealthier families are able to afford extra tutorials for their children, whereas lower-income families are unable to do the same or lack access to tutorial centers because they live in remote locations (Bray & Lykins, 2012). Despite all of these criticisms, shadow education has become increasingly popular among students and even their parents who do not have time or knowledge comprehensive enough to teach their own children.

It must be noted, however, that the aforementioned transformation from a Thai language-based tutoring to an English private tutoring is not completely done in English even though the materials and past papers are all in English and can be categorized under English Private Tutorial (EPT). What happens is that the tutors from these many cram schools catering to those wishing to get into international programs use Thai as a medium of instruction in their classes. The focus is, therefore, more on improving test-

taking strategies rather than bettering English communicative/interactive skills. This is in line with a study done by Yung (2015) who found that Chinese participants in EPT in Hong Kong regarded the tutorial lessons as a good way to improve examination skills rather than a way to use it for global communication. This limitation has led to the birth of another kind of cram school in response to the proliferation of international programs where teachers of all races and languages are employed to teach those planning to study in these programs where English speaking is a must. These teachers, both native and non-native, have to use English as a medium of instruction in imparting knowledge to their students.

Upon venturing into an international cram school in Thailand, it is not at all surprising to also see non-native speaking teachers, Thai ones included, rendering their lessons in English. This observable phenomenon begs the question of how and from where these non-native teachers hail and land teaching jobs at these institutes. In the English Language Teaching (ELT) industry, “expertise is defined and dominated by native speakers” (Canagarajah, 1999a, p. 85). It is indeed an unfamiliar sight to see non-native speakers fully proficient in using English to teach their classes with an emphasis on test-taking strategies and intercultural communication skills. Such reasons should suffice to investigate the provenance of these new kinds of Englishes and the growing influence of using English as a medium of instruction in class.

## **English as a Lingua Franca**

The emergence of this phenomenon is due to the rapidly growing use of English as a lingua franca (ELF), especially in Southeast Asia. In addition to the demand for native speakers as English teachers, Thailand is also one of the biggest hubs of English tutorial schools in Asia as we are open to non-native speakers of English from every race, background and expertise. Thus, the kind of English used in most business establishments and educational settings is ELF in nature as native speakers are usually not involved. As pointed out by Jenkins (2006), there is this trend of ‘paradigm shift’ from the monocentric to the pluri-centric view of English – in other words – from the native English to the non-native ones. It is riveting to look at how ELF is used in tutorial settings in Thailand as a medium of instruction as there is not much extensive research carried out in Thailand on this topic.

Many universities in Thailand now offer international programs for students who want to improve their English skills while learning specialized subjects in their desired fields without having to go abroad for further study. Lavankura (2013) cites such motives for so doing as a result of thirsting for English tuition, social status upgrading, demands from the private sector and

students, and income generation. These are some of the main reasons for internationalizing Thailand's higher education. The proliferation of such programs has paved the way for a growing number of tutorial schools to provide prep courses for students who aim to enroll in international schools at the said universities or even for those who aspire to study abroad. More often than not, these tutorial schools provide mostly English-speaking Thai teachers as well as non-native ones to teach their students a variety of subjects by using English as a medium of instruction (EMI).

What was previously described, however, shows only one aspect of shadow education in Thailand whereby lessons are taught using EMI. This section of the tutorial market is much smaller when compared with the many more tutorial schools that offer classes using Thai as a medium of instruction. Such institutes offer classes conducted in Thai ranging from biology, chemistry, mathematics to even English, to name just a few. All things considered, this sort of teaching in which test-taking strategies are emphasized is preferred (Kaewmahit, 2023). That is, Thai-speaking tutors focus evidently on test-taking strategies in the hope that their students will obtain better scores in examinations. For certain subjects, delivering lessons in Thai is much easier as the tutors can better explain some difficult concepts while the tutees can pick up the ideas very quickly. After all, what the tutees want as their priority is a score high enough for them to pass an exam either at school or at university. The tutors are not required to be fluent in using English but should just have a basic command of the language when teaching any subjects other than English. Those teaching English also focus more on exam techniques rather than English proficiency, hence their teaching English in Thai.

For the smaller segment of shadow education in Thailand whereby students need to not only obtain high scores in standardized tests but also develop proficiency in English, using EMI seems a better option as students are assumed to benefit from both simultaneously. However, relatively little research has been done to investigate what tutees feel about being tutored using EMI. Critics of this pedagogy argue that there are several problematic issues. One of them is that the knowledge content might be watered down considerably if the tutors and the tutees are not able to use English fluently. In order to make students understand them, the tutors must simplify their concepts to convey their messages. The tutees' level of English must also be taken into account for EMI to work. If the tutees are not yet able to grasp at the very least the basic English skills, they may not be able to understand their lessons at all and are more likely to lag behind their peers who receive tutorials in English. Thus, this paper seeks to investigate the extent to which EMI is perceived to be effective in helping the participants learn English in tutorial classes.

## Methodology

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach focusing on narrative inquiry by email. The aim was to explore the learners' EMI experiences and their reflections on such experiences. According to Barkhuizen et al. (2014) narrative inquiry involves telling, analyzing, and criticizing anecdotes through interviews in order for researchers to gain a richer understanding of the teaching and learning process.

Because of the time constraints of this study, however, the researchers had to resort to sending a questionnaire to the participants by email as aforementioned and asking them to record their reflections on experiences with EMI verbally to send back to the researchers by email for subsequent transcriptions. Three essays were collected from each participant done while in class at school to look for signs of improvement in their writing taught under EMI.

## Participants

For purposive sampling, five 4<sup>th</sup> year undergraduate students studying in two different universities were invited to participate in this study. These students enrolled in a 50-hour IELTS preparation course at the tutorial school where the first researcher served as a tutor. The course ran for about three months and was divided into four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The first researcher was responsible for teaching the writing section once a week for the total of nine classes, each one consuming two hours from. He took the opportunity to involve the students in his study as his participants with their consent. The questionnaire asked them for biographical information, experiences with EMI including the types of tutoring and periods of participation.

All the participants, aged between 20-22, came from Thai schools and were, at the time of the study and interview, in year four at university. Four of them were in the same university in the faculty of accountancy, while only one was in another university in the faculty of engineering. None of them had been in international programs and therefore was not exposed to English used as the only medium of instruction. However, all the participants had had some tutorial experience learning English in Thai and in partial EMI before they started the class at the tutorial school in which the first researcher was working at the time.

## Data Collection

The school under the study assigned one of the researchers (the first researcher) an 18-hour course to teach a group of five students the writing

section of the academic module of the IELTS. This module consisted of comparing and contrasting a graph, a diagram, or a picture in 20 minutes with at least 150 words and the other essay on a given topic in 40 minutes with at least 250 words. This course was scheduled to last a little longer than three months, which went beyond than the time he had to complete this study. It was sheer luck that the students were all from the Thai programs both in high school and in university, and all of them were minimally exposed to lessons with EMI. Four of the participants, except for one who was a bit less proficient in English, had more or less the same level of English skills. All of the said participants had never taken the IELTS test before and enrolled in this preparation course for the very first time. This was considered an ideal situation because the researchers wanted to see how the participants would react and respond to the EMI approach if they were taught only in English.

During the first class, the first researcher explained only in English to all the participants the format of the IELTS test and all the other details they needed to know. He also told them about this EMI study and asked if they would be willing to volunteer as the participants in the study. Upon obtaining their consent, he also informed them of the plan of this study.

Three pieces of writing from each one of them were collected for analyses and evaluation to see if there was any progress at all in their writing. Each of the three writing pieces was collected at the beginning, the middle and the end of the program to see any signs of improvement in the participants' writing skills. In particular, the IELTS rubric was used in evaluating, which included Task Achievement, Coherence and Cohesion, Lexical Resource, and Grammatical Range and Accuracy. The scale went from Band 0 up to Band 9. Furthermore, the first researcher gave the participants a questionnaire to which they would have to respond by audio recording their reflections and sending them to me later by email. He had to collect the information this way because both he and all of the participants were very busy, making it difficult to arrange a meeting at the same time. The good point about this email interview was that the participants managed to have some time to read through all the questions, digest the information in order to understand them, and offer their opinion on the subject without the pressure from my presence. The participants provided their reflections from audio recording in English and sent them to the first researcher by return email.

## **Data Analysis**

The self-reported interviews provided a general overview of the EMI experiences this group of participants had, and the three pieces of writing from each of them showed how much they had improved in terms of writing



starting from their day one of taking classes. The qualitative data derived from such interviews were transcribed and themes arranged according to the questions asked in the email so as to answer the main research questions. The interview data were categorized based on their English skills before and after taking tutorial classes and the participants' reflections on the use of EMI in class. Such keywords as prior English learning experiences, program of study at university, frequency and types of exposure to English, reasons for taking tutorial classes, reflections of EMI by non-native teachers were identified, compared and contrasted.

## Results and Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the extent to which English as the medium of instruction (EMI) was perceived to be effective in helping the participants at a cram school learn English in their tutorial classes. When talking about cram schools in Thailand in general, it is normal to think of those that provide tutorials in Thai focusing only on test-taking strategies rather than on overall improvement of the language skills. Most tutors are also more likely to be Thai who happen to use their mother tongue, in this case 'Thai', as a medium of instruction in the genuine belief that their students can become familiar with the intended test-taking methods faster. That this study looked at a cram school with a non-native English-speaking Thai tutor using English in delivering lessons and interacting with the students offers a different perspective in the tutorial community. The five participants taking part in this research were anonymously named from S1 to S5. Below are the findings of the study in terms of possible signs of English writing improvement and the participants' perceptions/experience with EMI through email interviews:

### Signs of English Writing Improvement

The table below shows the score bands gauged in accordance with the IELTS rubric on a scale of 0 to 9 from 3 different periods labeled pre, while, and post. The pre-test was administered on the first day, the while-test in the middle, and the post-test at the end of the course to see signs of improvement in terms of writing. On the whole, the five participants' score bands mostly improved in almost every descriptor with only a few exceptions that remained unchanged. As expected, the first four participants (S1 to S4) averaged between 5.5 to 7 as they were usually exposed to English despite coming from the Thai program of their university. The fifth participant, S5, also did better moving from 4 at the beginning of the program to 4.5 towards

the end despite having had very minimal exposure to English prior to taking the course.

**Table 1**

*IELTS-Based Writing Band Description of Five Participants*

Writing band descriptors / Students	S1			S2			S3			S4			S5		
	Pre	While	Post	Pre	While	Post	Pre	While	Post	Pre	While	Post	Pre	While	Post
Task Response	6	6.5	7	5	6	6.5	6	7	7	5	6	6	4	4.5	5
Coherence and Cohesion	6	6.5	7	6	6.5	7	6	7	6.5	6	6	6.5	4	4	4.5
Lexical Resource	7	7.5	7.5	6	6	6.5	7	7	7	6	6	6.5	4	4.5	4.5
Grammatical Range and Accuracy	6	6	6	5	6	6	6	6	6.5	5	5	5.5	4	4	4
Total	25	26.5	27.5	22	24.5	26	25	27	27	22	23	24.5	16	17	18
Writing band	6.5	6.5	7	5.5	6	6.5	6.5	7	7	5.5	6	6	4	4.5	4.5

According to Table 1, the scores from each writing band descriptor were totaled up and averaged out to get the writing bands for all three tests for each participant. It is interesting to note that all the participants, on the whole, improved their writing skills with an increase of at least 0.5 band with an exception of S2 whose band jumped from 5.5 to 6.5, a marked increase when compared with the others’.

**Table 2**

*IELTS Bands Before, During, and After the Study of Five Participants*

Students	Writing Tasks		
	Pre	While	Post
S1	6.5	6.5	7
S2	5.5	6	6.5
S3	6.5	7	7
S4	5.5	6	6
S5	4	4.5	4.5

Table 2 illustrates how each student improved their writing skills from their pretest all the way to their posttest during the period of just a little over three months. Since S2 made more encouraging progress than the others by

moving a band forward, the researchers feel it is necessary to delve into some linguistic features that enabled this participant to make such a prodigious leap in her writing. The few extracts below were identified and selected as examples of how the said participant had made headway in writing English essays under EMI. For a closer look at the essays by all participants, the researchers have appended them to this paper for a more in-depth perusal. (See Appendix B)

***Extract 1: run-on sentence***

**Pretest:** *The immigrants may evade into the country in whatever way possible but if they get in illegally. I believe they would cause a social problem in citizens' work intervention, misappropriated benefits and human trafficking.*

**Posttest:** *It is no doubt that media has been playing an important role in social these days. Celebrities' issues, whether they are true of not, can spread worldwide in just a blink of an eye.*

**Nota Bene:** The sentence from the pretest was deprived of any connectors or punctuation where there should have been one. It was quite long and consisted of unparalleled tenses. The sentence in the posttest, on the other hand, was much shorter and separated into smaller sentences for easier understanding. Despite a few mistakes in terms of diction, spelling and use of idiomatic expressions, the sentence did not hinder understanding and was more properly segmented by punctuation to facilitate comprehension.

***Extract 2: the reason is.....because/ that***

**Pretest:** *First of all, immigrants would not leave their own country if they were treated in the right way so the reason they flee their country is because they have been taken away the right they are supposed to have such as a privilege to have a profession in the field that they are capable of.*

**Posttest:** *The reason that I disagree is the celebrities' rights as human beings.*

**Nota Bene:** Not only was the pretest sentence pleonastic, but its usage of the structure 'the reason is' was also questionable in standard written English as it was not supposed to be followed by 'because'.

***Extract 3: incomplete sentence***

**Pretest:** *While Thai citizens also have a full right to be protected from interference in workplace by immigrants who do not belong to the country.*

**Posttest:** *Since every move of celebrities' is in spotlight, it is unavoidable to submit that someone, especially adolescents, might follow what celebrities do without thinking back and forth.*

**Nota Bene:** The pretest sentence consisted of a conjunction and only one clause instead of two, thus making it incomplete. The posttest sentence,

however, showed the use of a conjunction with two clauses, rendering it a complete sentence both in terms of syntax and meaning.

Apart from looking for signs of improvement in English writing, this study also attempted to find out how each participant perceived such classes taught under EMI.

### **The Roles of Native Speakers VS Non-Native Speakers**

All of the five participants in the study did not have any opposition to learning English from non-native speakers as long as these tutors were fluent in English and could deliver their lessons with as few mistakes as possible. The participants felt that being a native speaker did not automatically qualify the person as a good teacher. What is more important to them was for that teacher to go through teacher training and have a teaching degree.

#### ***Excerpt 1 - S2 nicely encapsulates the requirements of a good teacher:***

A good English teacher should have taken a teaching course. It assures students that their teachers really know how to teach and encourage them to be more comfortable with English. I believe non-native speaking teachers can even do better in teaching English than native speaking teachers if they have been trained properly. (S2)

All of the participants, however, agreed that students might be able to benefit more from native speakers of English in terms of learning correct pronunciation and even cultivating their accents. As a result, it was perhaps better to learn speaking and listening from native speakers if students wanted to sound as close to native speakers as possible. It must be noted, however, that this was not a must if they only wanted to form meaningful conversations in English.

#### ***Excerpt 2 - S3 succinctly put forward his viewpoint regarding pronunciation below:***

For me, to learn English from native speaking teachers is to have a correct accent. English is the infinite use of finite means. It means that we do not need perfect English to have an interesting conversation. The only thing that we need is a passion for English. (S3)

One of the participants strongly felt that education, not nationality, was what determined the qualifications of a good English teacher. In fact, when it comes to vocabulary and grammar, non-native speakers were fully entrusted to do the job.

***Excerpt 3 - S1 set out her reasons for preferring non-native speakers to help her with reading and writing below:***

From my point of view, it is not necessary to study English from native teachers. The most important qualification of English teachers is their education, not nationality. Both lexicon and syntax are the core of English, so good teachers should be able to use them correctly. As for reading and writing skills, native teachers are not needed. (S1)

The participants felt that some other factors were more important in attracting students to learn English than being native or non-native speakers of English. These were the abilities of tutors to bring enjoyment to class, arouse lifelong passion for learning English and inspire students to become better at using this language. One of the participants, interestingly, proposed two key factors in making English learning fruitful.

***Excerpt 4 - S3 gave his reason below as to why bringing and deriving enjoyment can enhance students' learning experience:***

Two significant factors exert considerable impact on students' passion for learning English. The first key factor is the instructor. If teachers are friendly and can make their students enjoy English, the students will surely be left with a good first impression as they will like English and love to learn it. The other key factor is the learner himself. Students must take it easy and are willing to learn English. When learning a language, the students should slow down and enjoy the process. The learning of English should be as enjoyable as the end goal. In other words, tutors should make students enjoy English, while the latter must be willing to derive that enjoyment. (S3)

## **The Usefulness of Using EMI**

To a certain extent, it has been questioned whether using EMI will be beneficial to students at all if the aim of the tutorial itself is only for the students to score high in examinations. One of the main reasons most students seek help from tutors in the first place is to score as high as possible in the exams of their choice given the limited time they have. These students, as a result, fear that having to train in total EMI will probably require them to do even more work and to strive harder to understand the subjects with which they have to deal. This difficulty is especially obvious if a member or more in the class lag behind the others in terms of English fluency as they may not totally understand when and what the tutors speak to them.

***Excerpt 5 - S5 from my study offered his opinion on his preference for partial EMI below. It is also interesting to note that his idea was also agreed upon by the other three participants who had had lots of experience with EMI:***

I agree with using partial EMI because it is possible for someone from the Thai program like me to understand the lesson and adapt myself to learning English in English. I suggest that 90% of the lesson should be in English and the other 10% in Thai for the students to understand the teacher more. (S5)

***Excerpt 6 - The only participant, S2, who struck a discordant note set out her reasons for total EMI below:***

I prefer total EMI during classes. I think the best way for one to be able to use any language is to feel as much familiar with the language as possible. From my experience as an exchange student in Sweden, I needed to learn Swedish by surrounding myself with Swedish culture and managed to speak on Swedish with my host family and friends in just three months. The main reason was that I lived in the family where my host sisters could not speak a word of English. Thus, I had to struggle to communicate with all the people in the house. The struggling pushed me forward across the language barrier. For me, languages are akin to other things in life that require a little struggle before we can achieve them. I prefer using only English in English classes. And if there are words that require translation, I hope that the teacher can explain them in English as well. (S2)

Of particular concern is when it comes to explaining technical terms, it might unnecessarily take a much longer time to expatiate on them when a few Thai words will probably suffice to make students grasp the concepts.

***Excerpt 7 - This opinion was further clarified by S4 to explain why partial EMI is preferable.***

I prefer partial EMI just in case there are some sticky situations whereby the mother tongue is better when it comes to explanation. An example is that time when we learned the definition of the word “draft bill”. It was easier and faster for the tutor to say “ร่างกฎหมาย” than have the term explained in Thai. (S4)

The speaking ability of tutors should also be taken into account. Correct pronunciation and grammar as well as fluency are certainly the sine qua non of teaching using EMI. If the tutors do not have a good command of English, they will probably end up focusing more on forming intelligible sentences than on broadening their ideas.

## English Proficiency of Participants

It is interesting to note that all of the participants came from Thai high schools where Thai was mainly used as a medium of instruction. A few, however, were enrolled in an Intensive English program where English was used more than the other Thai programs. One in particular was an exchange student in Sweden for almost a year. Four of the participants went on to the same university in the same Thai program of accountancy, which had almost nothing to do with English. The other one went to a Thai university, reading for a degree in civil engineering. Some of them had more English exposure than the others judging from the number of English classes taken per week/semester and daily English activities they engaged in. It is also quite obvious that the more exposure to English they have, the more skillful they are at using the language.

The different numbers of English subjects/classes they attended at their respective former high schools and/or currently do so at universities play an important role in laying a sound linguistic foundation as can be seen from some of their unique expressions below:

S1 was a senior at university during the time of this interview. She said that she had never been to any international high school, and most of what she did to improve her English skills was through English classes taken at school and later at university. Most of her courses at university required considerable reading skill as the textbooks were in English. Many a time her friends and she had to discuss various topics in class in English. Her continued exposure to English use enabled her to reach a reasonable level of competence in the language as demonstrated through her use of high-level academic vocabulary and almost error-free sentences.

### *Excerpt 8*

Normally, I take around two to four English-related courses each term. Every Thai program student who studies in the business field has to enroll in a mandatory English course per semester except in the last semester. However, there are countless English-related subjects in the curriculum. An example can be seen from the Cost and Management course where the lecturer used English business cases from the Harvard Business School as materials for discussion in class. (S1)

S3 had the edge over all the other participants in terms of frequency to English exposure. He had been to a Thai high school with a focus on English. The school was neither international nor bilingual in title or nature, but its students were required to take extra classes in what they termed ‘intensive English program’ in addition to all the other regular subjects

provided in high school. He also had a chance to be tutored by a non-native English teacher when he was preparing himself to get into university. His tutorials at the time emphasized grammatical rules, resulting in his being rather hitherto cautious about writing. Although his spoken English was considered fair to middling, his written English was almost always a hotbed of creativity and a rich vocabulary.

## Discussions

A notable result of this study was that the participants found their tutoring experiences fruitful, the use of EMI by the teacher (the first researcher) who was not a native speaker of English did not impede their perceived success of the tutorial sessions. Both the teacher and students, quintessential examples of ELF users, provides a powerful testament to the enable roles of EMI with ELF characteristics.

This group of participants, in line with research earlier done by Chou & Yuan (2011), was a classic example of those dependent on shadow education to help them improve their English skills and become well-prepared either for studying at a higher level or landing a desired job.

This study also confirmed a result earlier obtained by Byun & Baker (2015) that studying only in mainstream schools was insufficient in helping students achieve high scores on such standardized tests as IELTS or TOEIC. Many teachers from mainstream schools simply followed textbooks and were not inspired to improve their students' scores. Therefore, it was unsurprising to see many students search for good tutorial schools to help them cope with such tests. The participants in this study also expressed openly how they were not able learn as much English from their mainstream schools and how they had to seek out a tutorial school to help prep them for exams and refine their English skills.

Many of the participants in our study did mention the tuition fee as one of the determining factors in helping them make decisions on whether and where to take tutorial classes. At the end of the day, however, they were all willing to pay these extra costs in exchange for salutary lessons to help them get ready for a variety of tests they were planning to take with the financial help from their willing high-income families. This willingness to bear the rather heavy cost by students from higher-income families was consistent with an earlier study by Bray and Lykins (2012).

This study, however, was out of line with another study done by Yung (2015) who found that the participants in his study were more concerned about improving examination skills rather than about using it for global communication. It was obvious from the interview with the participants in this study that they were equally interested in passing standardized tests and in improving their overall English skills for more effective communication.



This was one of the reasons why they demanded that all their classes be taught using EMI.

Yano (2001) was correct to point out that there should be some modifications to the Krachruvian model because such factors as globalization, technology, new formats of education played an increasingly important role in the use of English. The participants in this study made heavy use of technology, the Internet, and social media to help them learn and practice their English in order to adapt themselves to the more international curricula and connect with people all over the world. This whole idea was also in alignment with a study by Nunan (2003).

The study also corroborated the result of an earlier study by Bautista (2006) that there was an increasing employment of non-native English-speaking locals in schools and universities and that more and more classes were conducted in English by such teachers. This practice was quite enticing to those of the current generation as they felt they could benefit more from bilingual teachers who could explain to them in both English and Thai with equal ease. Having locals who were able to use English fluently teach classes using EMI also provided evidence that both non-native teachers and students could share a more common understanding and convey their ideas more easily. That both had to learn English as an additional language, as exemplified by the ELF phenomenon, allowed better and faster mutual understanding between the two sides.

### **Conclusion, Limitations, and Implications**

The data from this study show that the participants were on the whole satisfied with the class results that addressed both examination techniques and in-class interactions in English. They did not feel that they would have to acquire test-taking strategies at the expense of communicative opportunities in English. It is also interesting to note that the participants were taught 'English writing' by a Thai tutor who used English as the medium of instruction. They felt more level-headed upon knowing that the tutor could always switch back to Thai to further explain what they did not understand should they request so from the tutor. Such cases would never be possible if they were only taught by native English speakers. It is this very fact of EMI with ELF characteristics that made the tutoring experiences not just beneficial but reflective of an increasingly ELF-oriented pedagogy.

It should be noted that the participants revealed that they found it very difficult and time-consuming to understand certain concepts and terms from their reading articles and writing tasks if these details were explained to them only in English. They believed that fluent English-speaking Thai tutors could fit this role and do a better job than their native speaking counterparts

in getting ideas across quickly and more effectively. The participants believed that any Thai tutors proficient in speaking English could help them pursue effective test-taking strategies and broaden their communicative skills by using either total or at the very least partial EMI.

The study provides insights for curriculum designers and policymakers of tutorial and mainstream schools in general and tutors in particular. In other words, the long-held belief that tutorial schools are intended for developing exam techniques or that only the Thai language should be used when offering English tutorial classes is no longer relevant. Rather, English lessons can be considerably more edutaining if tutors incorporate EMI as part of their classroom teaching in addition to what is already set by the curricula. Students, accommodated by fluent non-native speaking tutors, should be able to interact more in English while in class. In fact, they should be made to feel that they do not need to pay a substantial amount of money to study abroad when it is possible to feel at home studying in an all-English environment with the possibility of asking questions and getting answers in their mother tongue if need be. EMI can lend more legitimacy to shadow education and enhance learning experiences for those seeking to hone their English skills and score high on high-stakes examinations at the same time.

There are, however, limitations inherent in the use of EMI by non-native speakers of English. For example, tutors who are able to function in top form using EMI should be near-native speakers of English – a point that previous literature has not explicitly mentioned. This is important as they need to use their fluency, correct pronunciation and use of the language in explaining abstruse ideas to students. If the tutors themselves were still struggling to speak English, they would do a disservice to the development of English skills of their students rather than help them. This study singled out just one such tutor from a pool of many with varying degrees of English competence, and this raised the issue of whether the perceptions of the students would still have been the same if they had been tutored by some other teachers with different English-speaking abilities.

### **Implications for Policymakers, Curriculum Designers, and Teachers**

Policymakers may benefit from investigating how shadow education delivered through EMI could make a difference in English education in Thailand. Rather than ostracizing shadow education as detrimental to the overall education system, they might want to learn from this increasingly large segment of “education” that could be rather promising.

As for curriculum designers, the extant designing practice might be made even more useful by incorporating curricula that have been extensively used in many successful tutorial schools. That is, a question that the designers

might begin asking is: Why is it the case that an increasingly large number of Thai college-bound students have been flocking to shadow education? As far as the researchers are concerned, there must be “something” that draws close attention from this cohort of students.

Regarding teachers in mainstream classrooms, perhaps they might profit from taking advantage of observing how those successful tutors teach English. The regular teachers may have already been successful in teaching, but nevertheless it does not hurt to learn from their counterparts in the shadow education sector.

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