



## Unlocking English-Medium Instruction (EMI) Success: Exploring Language–Content Teacher Collaboration for Enhanced Learning in Bilingual Classrooms

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**Abstract:** This study aims to identify the forms of collaboration between content and language teachers in EMI, examine the challenges they encounter, and proposes strategies to enhance effective cooperation. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with teachers at Sekolah Dasar Muhammadiyah Terpadu Ponorogo. The data analysis technique in this study employed an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion formulation or verification. Findings reveal that collaboration takes place mainly during lesson preparation, where content teachers ensure the accuracy of disciplinary concepts while English teachers simplify and scaffold the language for student comprehension. However, teachers face difficulties in balancing linguistic simplicity with subject accuracy, the limited availability of bilingual teaching resources, and diverse levels of student motivation. To address these challenges, teachers employ strategies such as scaffolding, repetition, curriculum adjustment, parental involvement, and differentiated support. These practices highlight the dual role of English teachers as both language and subject instructors and the advisory role of content teachers in safeguarding content precision. The study concludes that effective bilingual education depends on structured collaboration, adaptive pedagogy, and continuous professional development. The findings suggest school should mandate weekly co-planning and offer focused training on content-language integration in EMI classroom.

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## Introduction

The phenomenon of implementing English-Medium Instruction (EMI) in bilingual classrooms has been increasingly prominent as a strategy to enhance global competencies among students, particularly in non-Anglophone contexts (Damayanti & Mukarto, 2024; Macaro & Tian, 2020; Malmström & Zhou, 2025; McKinley et al., 2021). This practice is especially critical within multilingual educational settings like Indonesia, where proficiency in English is closely tied to academic and professional opportunities. Empirical data reveal that EMI often presents linguistic and pedagogical challenges; for instance, content teachers frequently struggle with discipline-specific vocabulary and spontaneous interaction in English (Liao et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2025). According to (Damayanti & Mukarto, 2024; Macaro & Tian, 2020; Malmström & Zhou, 2025; McKinley et al., 2021), successful collaboration between subject-matter and language teachers is vital to address such obstacles effectively.



Moreover, Damayanti and Mukarto (2024) highlight that EMI adoption in homeschooling contexts underscores the need for teacher partnerships to bridge content knowledge and language skills.

A growing body of research has investigated EMI teacher development and collaborative practices, yet several limitations persist. A systematic review by Wang (2022) confirms that while collaboration can yield professional growth, issues such as unequal authority, time constraints, and limited engagement continue to hinder effectiveness (Wang et al., 2025). A Taiwanese case study by Lu (2022) found that interdisciplinary collaboration among content teachers improved attitudes and instructional strategies toward EMI, though the impact was context-specific and limited in scope (Y. H. Lu, 2022). Studies from China (2021) illustrate that inadequate institutional support and misaligned policies often leave EMI implementation to isolated teacher efforts, leading to burnout and reduced quality of instruction. Thus, while the literature recognizes the value of collaboration, it remains under-theorized and lacks scalable models across diverse educational contexts (Xu, 2021).

Indonesia presents a distinctive sociolinguistic and policy context that shape teacher collaboration in EMI classroom differently from setting commonly discussed in global research. As a multilingual nation, primary students navigate local languages, Bahasa Indonesia as the national academic language, and English as the medium of instruction, requiring language and content teachers to coordinate not only pedagogically but also across layered linguistic transitions. Moreover, since EMI is not uniformly mandated as the national level following the discontinuation of the international-standard school policy, its implementation is often decentralized and school-initiated, placing greater responsibility on local teacher collaboration. Cultural values such as *gotong Ryong* (mutual cooperation) further frame collaboration as a communal and relational practice, while hierarchical school structure may simultaneously constrain equal authority among teachers. These sociolinguistic, cultural, and bureaucratic characteristics indicate that teacher collaboration in Indonesia EMI contexts operates within a unique ecosystem that cannot be fully explained by existing global models.

This study seeks to address these gaps by exploring the collaborative dynamics between language teachers and subject-matter teachers in Indonesian EMI settings. Specifically, this study aims to: (1) identify the forms of collaboration that occur within EMI between content teachers and language teachers; (2) examine the main challenges encountered by both teacher groups when collaborating; and (3) propose strategies to overcome these challenges and promote effective cooperation. By attending to these three research questions, the study endeavors to contribute practical insights and context-sensitive models of teacher collaboration in bilingual classrooms.

This study argues that structured collaboration is not merely a technical arrangement but a negotiated pedagogical space. This study asserts that such synergy is more effective when both teacher types perceive themselves as pedagogical partners rather than marginal contributors. Furthermore, we propose that enabling institutional policies (e.g., recognition, workload allocation) and gradual implementation (e.g., pilot collaborative units) will facilitate sustainable collaboration, echoing recommendations by (Malmström & Zhou, 2025) and addressing systemic barriers identified in prior studies (Liao et al., 2025; Y. H. Lu, 2022; Xu, 2021).

## Research Method

A qualitative case study design was used in this study to investigate the dynamics of collaboration between language and content teachers in bilingual classes. In order to fully



grasp the complexities of English-Medium Instruction, researchers decided to employ a qualitative technique, which enables them to record detailed, comprehensive accounts of participants' experiences and viewpoints (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants consisted of three teachers involved in bilingual program at Sekolah Dasar Muhammadiyah Terpadu (SDMT) Ponorogo: two content teachers (a Mathematics teacher and a Social Science/ IPAS teacher) and one English language teacher, each with approximately 3-8 years of experience teaching in the EMI program. SDMT Ponorogo was selected as the research site because it is one of the leading and highly competitive primary school in Ponorogo, recognized for its established bilingual program and consistent implementation of English-Medium Instruction at the primary level, making it a relevant and information-rich setting for examining teacher collaboration practices. Purposive sampling was used in their selection because it is an effective technique for finding individuals who are actively involved in the phenomenon being studied and who may offer pertinent insights (Patton, 2015).

Semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were used to gather data. While FGDs promoted interactive discussion among participants, allowing reflection on shared experiences and collaborative practices, semi-structured interviews allowed the flexible but methodical study of individual perspectives (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

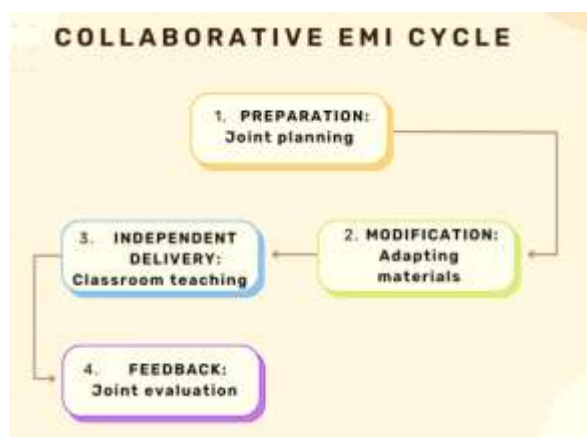
The three cyclical stages of the interactive model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014)—data reduction, data display, and conclusion formulation or verification—were followed in the data analysis (Miles et al., 2014). This iterative approach ensured that the new concepts were backed by real facts and refined through continuous reflection. The study used member checking, in which participants confirmed the accuracy of the researchers' interpretations, and source triangulation, which compares the findings from interviews and focus group discussions, to increase credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These steps guaranteed the study's validity and integrity, allowing it to significantly add to the expanding corpus of research on EMI and teacher collaboration.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Teacher Collaboration in EMI Bilingual Classrooms**

The interview findings revealed that collaboration in bilingual classrooms at Sekolah Dasar Muhammadiyah Terpadu (SDMT) Ponorogo primarily occurs between English language teachers and content teachers of Mathematics and Natural and Social Sciences (IPAS). In this model, English teachers are responsible not only for language instruction but also for delivering subject content in English.

To conceptualize how teacher collaboration operates in practice, the implementation of EMI at SDMT Ponorogo can be framed as cyclical process consisting of four interrelated stages: Preparation, Modification, independent Delivery, and Feedback (see Figure 1). The cycle begins with structured joint planning, where language and content teacher negotiate conceptual priorities and linguistic demands. This is followed by the modification stage, in which subject materials are systematically adapted to balance disciplinary accuracy with comprehensible English input. Although classroom delivery is conducted independently by the English teacher, it remains grounded in prior collaborative decisions, reflecting distributed expertise rather than isolated instructions. The cycle concludes with joint evaluation, enabling reflective dialogue and iterative refinement of subsequent lessons. This model suggests that collaboration in the SDMT EMI context functions as an embedded pedagogical mechanism that sustains instructional coherence, mitigates content-language tension, and supports continuous professional learning.



**Figure 1. Collaborative EMI cycle**

The English teacher described this dual role by saying, “*In our bilingual class, I am not only teaching English but also Mathematics and IPAS. So, I need to make sure that I use English properly and also understand the subjects well, otherwise the students will not be able to follow the lessons.*” This reflects the heavy responsibility placed on language teachers to balance both linguistic and disciplinary knowledge.

In support of this, one content teacher emphasized the collaborative preparation process that ensures content accuracy. As this teacher explained, “*Before the English teacher teaches IPAS or Math, we usually sit together and check the materials. I provide the concepts, and then the English teacher adapts them into simpler vocabulary so the students can follow in English.*” This shows how content teachers play an important advisory role in safeguarding the disciplinary precision of the lesson. Another content teacher gave a concrete example of this collaboration during lesson planning.

According to this teacher, “*When we planned the topic about plants and their parts, I gave the science framework, and then the English teacher modified it into easier English words. That way, the science remained accurate, but the students could still understand it in English.*” This illustrates how the content teachers and the English teacher share their expertise in order to make lessons both accessible and accurate.

In classroom practice, however, the English teacher usually teaches independently. Despite this, consultation with content teachers before teaching remains essential. As the English teacher noted, “*Most of the time I am teaching alone in the classroom, but before that I have already discussed the lesson with the content teacher. That discussion makes me feel more confident to teach the material in English.*”

The findings from SDMT Ponorogo reflect principles of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), where teachers integrate subject matter and language instruction to foster both comprehension and acquisition (Coyle et al., 2010). In this model, English teachers face dual demands as language and subject instructors, illustrating the balance between linguistic accuracy and disciplinary knowledge.

Collaboration between English and content teachers—where content teachers provide conceptual precision and English teachers simplify language—aligns with studies on co-teaching and co-planning, which enhance instruction and learner engagement (DelliCarpini, 2018; Dove & Honigsfeld, 2018). Although classroom teaching is conducted independently, the consultation stage strengthens both content accuracy and linguistic accessibility.

This practice also reflects academic vocabulary scaffolding, where complex concepts are simplified without losing meaning. Robertson (2008) stresses that explicit vocabulary

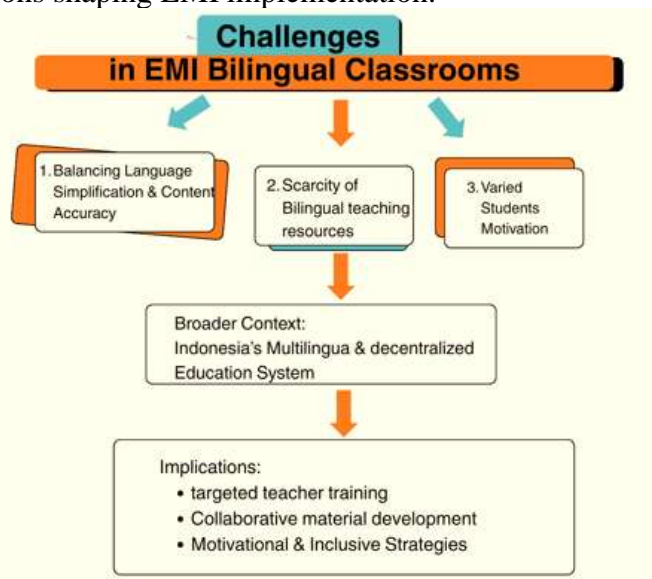
instruction is crucial in Mathematics and Science, as illustrated by content teachers adapting scientific terms into simpler English.

The study highlights the need for strong teacher competences in bilingual education, combining language proficiency, subject mastery, and integrative pedagogy (Ruiz-Cecilia & Aguilar, 2023). While English teachers must adapt linguistically and conceptually, content teachers require metalinguistic awareness to support learning.

These findings underline that effective bilingual instruction requires not only collaboration but also a continuous exchange of expertise between language and content teachers. By integrating linguistic scaffolding with disciplinary accuracy, teachers can create more inclusive and comprehensible learning environments for young learners. At the same time, the study emphasizes the importance of sustained professional development to equip teachers with both pedagogical flexibility and interdisciplinary awareness. Such efforts are essential to ensure that bilingual programs like those at SDMT Ponorogo can achieve their dual goals of fostering language acquisition and deepening subject knowledge.

#### Challenges of Teacher Collaboration in EMI Bilingual Classrooms

Based on interview findings, teachers identified three key challenges in EMI bilingual classroom: balancing language simplification with content accuracy, limited bilingual resources, and varied students motivation. The following diagram visualizes these interconnected challenges and situates them within Indonesia's multilingual and decentralized educational context, highlighting the link between classroom realities and broader systemic conditions shaping EMI implementation.



**Figure 2. Challenges in EMI Bilingual Classroom**

The English teacher emphasized the difficulty of maintaining a balance between simplifying language and preserving the accuracy of the subject matter. She explained, *“When I explain new lessons in English, I need to make the language simple enough for the students to understand, but at the same time I must make sure the content remains accurate. It is not easy to keep this balance.”*

One of the content teachers pointed out the lack of teaching resources designed specifically for bilingual settings. She stated, *“Most of the materials available are only in Indonesian, so I have to adapt them into English. This takes more time, and sometimes the adaptation does not really match what my students need.”*



Another content teacher highlighted the issue of student motivation, which strongly influences the classroom atmosphere. He noted, “*Some students are really motivated and excited to learn in English, but others feel afraid and reluctant. This difference sometimes makes the class atmosphere less effective.*” These statements reflect the main challenges faced by both language and content teachers in bilingual classrooms, which include the complexity of instructional delivery, the scarcity of appropriate learning materials, and the variations in student motivation.

The findings highlight three major challenges faced by teachers in bilingual classrooms: balancing language simplification with subject accuracy, the scarcity of bilingual teaching resources, and varied student motivation. These challenges resonate with broader issues reported in recent research on English-Medium Instruction (EMI) and bilingual education.

First, the English teacher’s struggle to balance simplified language with maintaining content accuracy reflects the dual demand of ensuring accessibility without diluting academic rigor. This is consistent with recent studies showing that EMI teachers often experience tension between linguistic clarity and disciplinary precision (Mede et al., 2020; Ou & Gu, 2024). Simplifying input is crucial for learners’ comprehension, yet oversimplification risks undermining subject mastery. Therefore, effective teacher training should focus on strategies that integrate language scaffolding with subject knowledge delivery (Gu et al., 2023).

Second, the lack of context-appropriate bilingual materials underscores a common gap in EMI implementation in primary education. As one content teacher noted, adaptation of Indonesian resources into English requires significant time and may not always align with learners’ needs. Recent research has similarly emphasized that limited teaching resources tailored for bilingual contexts constrain pedagogical effectiveness (Dafouz & Smit, 2020; de Diezmas & Barrera, 2021). To address this, collaborative material development involving language and content teachers has been suggested as a sustainable approach to ensure both linguistic appropriateness and content alignment (Ducker, 2019).

Third, differences in student motivation, as observed by another content teacher, significantly influence classroom dynamics. Motivation is widely acknowledged as a key determinant of success in EMI classrooms, particularly at the primary level (Lanvers & Martin-Rubió, 2020). Highly motivated learners tend to embrace the challenges of learning through English, while those with lower confidence may experience anxiety or resistance (Pun et al., 2022). Research indicates that fostering a supportive and inclusive classroom atmosphere, combined with culturally responsive pedagogy, can help reduce affective barriers and enhance learner engagement (Schmidt-Unterberger, 2018; Widodo, 2022).

The challenges identified in this study—balancing language and content, the lack of bilingual resources, and varying student motivation—must be situated within Indonesia’s multilingual and decentralized educational context. Primary students navigate local languages, Bahasa Indonesia, and English simultaneously, making the tension between linguistic simplification and disciplinary accuracy more than a pedagogical concern; it reflects the absence of coherent national framework for content-language integration. Moreover, the scarcity of EMI-aligned materials is not merely an institutional shortcoming but systemic issue. Because EMI is not formally embedded in the national primary curriculum, responsibility for materials development and implementation is largely devolved to individual schools. This decentralization produces structural inequality, where well-resourced schools can sustain EMI innovation while others depend heavily on teacher-led adaptation, increasing workload and risking instructional inconsistency.

These findings contribute to the growing body of research on bilingual education by offering context-specific insights from Indonesian classrooms, where EMI is still developing. By underscoring the need for targeted teacher training, collaborative material development, and motivational strategies, this study provides practical implications for policymakers, educators, and curriculum designers. Future research should explore intervention-based approaches and cross-institutional collaborations to build sustainable EMI practices that not only enhance language proficiency but also support students' holistic academic development. Teacher strategies for overcoming challenges in EMI bilingual classrooms

Based on the interview findings, teachers in EMI bilingual classroom demonstrated a range of adaptive practices aimed at balancing language development with content mastery: simplifying instructional language without reducing academic rigor, using repetition to strengthen comprehension and retention, and encouraging parental support to reinforce learning beyond classroom time. These strategies reflect deliberate efforts to maintain conceptual depth while responding to students' linguistic needs and limited instructional time. To provide a clearer synthesis of these practices, the following diagram illustrates how these three interconnected strategies function collectively to support effective EMI implementation at primary level.



**Figure 3. Effective Strategies in Emi Bilingual Classroom**

One of the most significant practices was simplifying instructional language without reducing academic rigor, as illustrated by the English teacher's statement, "I try to make the language simpler so students can follow, but I don't reduce the academic meaning." This approach aligns with the principle of scaffolding, which prioritizes clarity of language while maintaining disciplinary precision. Importantly, teachers also reported that when students demonstrated clear signs of confusion or anxiety, they occasionally used Bahasa Indonesia as a supportive bridge to ensure comprehension and reduce cognitive stress. Rather than representing a failure of EMI implementation, this strategic shift reflects what translanguaging theory conceptualizes as flexible deployment of learners' full linguistic repertoires to facilitate meaning-making (Garcia & Wei, 2014). In multilingual contexts such as Indonesia, translanguaging functions as an inclusive pedagogical resource that protects conceptual depth while preventing linguistic exclusion. By allowing temporary resource to the first language, teachers maintained epistemic accuracy and emotional safety, especially for students with lower English proficiency.

Repetition was another key strategy. One content teacher noted, "Sometimes it takes two or three meetings to finish one topic, but students really need that repetition to understand and remember," to ensure comprehension and retention. Curriculum adjustments—such as narrowing the number of targeted skills to focus on depth—further reduced overload



and supported conceptual mastery. As another teacher shared, *“In bilingual classes we reduce the skills, for example from six to four, so students can go deeper and not feel overwhelmed.”*

Teachers also stressed the role of parents in sustaining learning at home. The English teacher stated, *“We encourage parents to support their children, because classroom time is not enough.”* Finally, differentiated support was considered essential. A content teacher explained, *“Some students explore independently, while those who struggle get more personal attention during the lesson.”*

The findings of this study highlight that teachers in EMI bilingual classrooms employed adaptive strategies to balance content delivery with language learning. One of the most significant practices was simplifying instructional language without reducing academic rigor, as illustrated by the English teacher’s statement, *“I try to make the language simpler so students can follow, but I don’t reduce the academic meaning.”* This approach aligns with the principle of scaffolding, which prioritizes clarity of language while maintaining disciplinary precision. Recent studies in EMI contexts confirm that effective scaffolding allows learners to access complex concepts without eroding epistemic rigor (Tajeddin et al., 2020). Similarly, research on translanguaging shows that leveraging students’ linguistic repertoires can bridge comprehension and disciplinary talk, helping teachers maintain conceptual depth while modulating language demands (C. Lu & So, 2023).

Repetition also emerged as a vital strategy, with content teachers noting that it often required *“two or three meetings to finish one topic”* to ensure comprehension and retention. This practice resonates with evidence from second-language learning research, which highlights the positive effects of spaced exposure and repeated retrieval for long-term retention (Karatas et al., 2025). In parallel, curriculum adjustments, such as narrowing the number of skills to focus on depth rather than breadth, mirror recommendations in EMI curriculum design. By reducing the scope of instruction, teachers allow students to engage more meaningfully with both content and language learning, echoing findings from CLIL science classrooms where targeted academic vocabulary and discourse practices enhance conceptual transfer (Chumbay & Ochoa, 2020).

The study also underlines the importance of parental involvement. Teachers emphasized that *“classroom time is not enough”* and encouraged parents to support learning at home. This finding resonates with a recent multilevel meta-analysis showing that parental efficacy and active home–school partnerships have small-to-moderate but reliable effects on children’s learning-support behaviors (Holzer et al., 2024). Such findings affirm that effective EMI practices extend beyond the classroom, relying on collaboration between schools and families to reinforce bilingual learning.

Finally, differentiated instruction was another essential strategy, as teachers reported giving more personal attention to struggling students while allowing advanced learners to explore independently. This reflects concerns in EMI literature that without calibrated support, programs risk privileging already-strong bilinguals while marginalizing less proficient peers (De Costa et al., 2021). Differentiation thus plays a critical role in ensuring equitable access to both language and content learning, aligning with established frameworks for tailoring instruction to diverse learner readiness.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that EMI teachers at the primary level are not merely translating content but are intentionally engaging in adaptive practices—simplification, scaffolding, repetition, curriculum narrowing, parental engagement, and differentiated instruction—that resonate strongly with contemporary EMI/CLIL research.



These strategies collectively provide a research-anchored pathway for improving bilingual classroom practices while maintaining academic integrity.

### Conclusion

This study highlights that effective EMI in primary bilingual classrooms relies on teacher collaboration, adaptive strategies, and ongoing professional growth. At SDMT Ponorogo, English and content teachers balanced linguistic accessibility with subject accuracy through scaffolding, simplification, repetition, and differentiated instruction. These practices, while addressing challenges such as limited resources and diverse student motivation, created more inclusive and academically rigorous learning environments.

The findings carry important implications for practice and policy. Strengthening collaboration between language and content teachers, investing in the development of context-appropriate bilingual materials, and providing targeted professional training are essential to sustain EMI programs in Indonesia and beyond.

### Recommendation

This study is limited by its single-site focus and reliance on interview data, which may not fully capture classroom dynamics in EMI contexts. Future research should involve multiple schools and integrate classroom observations with Stimulated Recall Interviews and Video-based Discourse Analysis to examine teacher's real time pedagogical decisions and interactional practices. Moreover, adopting a mixed-methods design that correlates teacher collaboration patterns with students language and content learning outcomes would provide stronger empirical evidence for developing sustainable and evidence-based EMI practices.

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