



DOI: 10.22144/ctu.jen.2019.024

## An investigation into English preparatory programs for EMI learning in higher education institutes in Vietnam

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### Article info.

Received 16 Feb 2019

Revised 19 Apr 2019

Accepted 30 Jul 2019

### Keywords

English as a medium of instruction (EMI), English preparatory programs, National Foreign Language Project 2020, higher education, Vietnam

### ABSTRACT

*In the era of globalization, the development of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) is of great interest to language and language policy researchers. Therefore, one of the main goals of the National Foreign Language Project launched by the Vietnamese Ministry of Education is to adopt EMI courses in all higher education institutes by 2020. However, in such a context that English is learnt as a foreign language in Vietnam, students' English proficiency is quite a great challenge for them to follow EMI programs. This strongly challenges students' learning and the effectiveness of EMI training. Therefore, this article critically examines the expectations of HEIs in Vietnam towards EMI students' English proficiency and how they prepare students with sufficient English for EMI learning. With a qualitative approach, this study employs document analysis method using purposive sampling to collect data in eight universities. The results show the inconsistency about the English entry each university requires and various practices of English preparatory programs for EMI learning. Based on the findings, recommendations are made to promote the effectiveness of the implementation of EMI programs in Vietnam and in similar contexts.*

Cited as: Quyen, T.T.T. and Yen, P.H., 2019. An investigation into English preparatory programs for EMI learning in higher education institutes in Vietnam. Can Tho University Journal of Science. 11(2): 51-60.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, people need a common language to communicate with each other and access information, mainly in English. According to Naisbitt and Aburdene (1990), over 80% of all information stored in computers all over the world is in English, and more than half of technical and scientific journals and publications in the world are written in the English language. In addition, Vietnam's participation in the World Trade Organization in 2007 facilitated the global

integration of Vietnam and created an ever-increasing demand for a workforce with multilingual competence, especially English language competence (Pham, 2011). To keep up with globalization, education systems and policies have been ceaselessly changed and improved to train labor resources with competitive capacities in international fields and the abilities to communicate in English.

Oh and Lee (2010) argue that English as a medium of instruction (EMI) or Teaching English through English (TETE) classes at universities have played

a positive role in lowering students' anxiety and enhancing students' English abilities by having students exposed to natural and authentic classroom. In fact, EMI in higher education is becoming more common all over the world (Mok, 2007 and Altbach *et al.*, 2009) to boost university rankings (Rauhvargers, 2013), and a recognition that, in a globalized world, students need higher levels of English language competence if they are to compete on the international market (Graddol, 2006). In addition, factors such as the promotion of job mobility, employability, staff and student exchanges and joint- and double- degrees substantiate the case for English-taught degree courses (Fortanet, 2008).

Integrating with the international trend, in Vietnam, the Prime Ministerial Decision number 1400/QĐ-TTg (30 September 2008) is a national initiative on foreign language teaching and learning in the educational system from 2008 to 2020, known as the National Foreign Language Project 2020. According to Le (2012), by 2015 the project intends to begin EMI courses for 20% of university students in some disciplines and aims for all higher education institutes (HEIs) to adopt EMI courses by 2020. Indeed, 30 Advanced Programs were released by Vietnam's Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) at several higher education institutions nationwide from 2008 to 2015.

However, there have been worries and concerns about EMI programs. Local mass media report that English skills among undergraduates are a problem. A great number of graduates cannot communicate in English. In a notable study of to assess Vietnamese students' English skill, Vu and Nguyen (2004) researched on 1,000 students in five major universities in Ho Chi Minh City, the largest city of Vietnam. The results showed that Vietnamese students' language competency was insufficient to express their ideas or to communicate in everyday conversation, making them unable to understand materials from their lectures in English.

Another recent investigation from Da Nang University (2012) shows that 70% of the newly enrolled students have insufficient English proficiency to pursue studies in English. In addition, Vietnam is still ranked as a "low English proficiency" country (Education First, 2013). With such low English language competency, students would be unable to comprehend lectures or materials in English. This study is, therefore, of great interest to investigate how universities in Vietnam prepare students for EMI learning. Two research questions explored in the current study include:

1. What are the expectations of Vietnamese HEIs toward the English proficiency of EMI students?
2. What have the English preparatory programs provided for EMI learning in these institutes?

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 The English as Medium of Instruction Approach

The English as Medium of Instruction (EMI) is tracked back to the European content and language integrated learning (CLIL) approach, content-based teaching (CBT) and bilingual education in native English-speaking (NES) contexts. Macaro *et al.* (2018) define EMI as the use of the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English. In this way, learners acquire both the subject content and target language in a natural setting (Sert, 2008). However, in Vietnamese pedagogy, this notion can be interpreted in different dimensions. For example, EMI may mean teaching all subjects in the curriculum in English comprising of subjects such as physical education, military education, Communism, Marxism, Ho Chi Minh thoughts. Yet, with EMI programs in Vietnam, only professional courses are taught in English and teachers of such listed courses above are free to use Vietnamese for instruction.

For an EMI program to be successful, Byun *et al.* (2011) identify three required factors comprising of students' and instructors' language proficiencies, the varying demands of different academic subjects and a facilitative body which can support EMI implementation. In the same vain, Kaplan and Baldauf (2005) propose that success "largely depends on policy decisions related to the teachers, the courses of study and materials and the resources to be made available" (p. 1014). However, these areas are developed differently in a particular nation "depending on how that nation's education system operates" (Kaplan and Baldauf, 1997, p. 217).

### 2.2 Challenges of EMI implementation

The fact that EMI requires instructions delivered in English leads to apparent obstacles. A review of literature reveals four major EMI challenges including teachers' language abilities, students' proficiency, methods, and inadequate resources. The first major challenge is lecturers' English abilities, particularly in contexts where English is a foreign language, and lecturers are non-native English speakers. This is in line with findings in

previous studies (Vinke *et al.*, 1998; Wilkinson, 2005; Kyeyune, 2010; Kennedy, 2011; Le, 2012 and Hamid *et al.*, 2013) showing that the inadequate English proficiency of EMI lecturers is one of the greatest hindrances for an EMI program to succeed. Vinke *et al.* (1998) report that content lecturers in the Netherlands had difficulty in expressing themselves effectively, especially in paraphrasing, searching for words, and refining statements, which results in detrimental effects on students' learning, such as less content coverage and knowledge loss. In the context of Israel, Shohamy (2012) claims that "It is often the case that academic professors will have high knowledge in one of the areas [content], not the other [language]" (p. 203). Indeed, to become a successful EMI instructor, there should be a combination of linguistic, academic and pedagogical competence, which few lecturers possess (Shohamy, 2012).

The second challenge for a success of EMI relates to the concerns of students' language abilities (Tsuneyoshi, 2005; Kyeyune, 2010; To, 2010; Byun *et al.*, 2011; Le, 2012). Kyeyune (2010) reports the frustrating communication failures in Ugandan classrooms because of students' low English proficiency. Another problem is a search for effective pedagogy. Wilkinson (2005) suggests that EMI can lead to effective content learning if instructional techniques (e.g. codeswitching between L1 and L2) are adapted, more time is allocated. However, unsupportive evidence for codeswitching is also found in other studies (Ibrahim, 2001; Shohamy, 2012; Mohamed, 2013). This controversy and limited literature on EMI pedagogy does not provide clear and appropriate teaching methods for effective EMI training.

The final challenge is limited resources (Le, 2012; Dang *et al.*, 2013). Baldauf *et al.* (2011) examine several Asian countries' language policies and conclude that "funding for normal programs, the training of teachers and money for textbooks are all inadequate" (p. 318).

In short, there have been multiple challenges in adopting EMI. It is undeniable that although each context may experience different problems. The next section examines the context of EMI in Vietnamese learning and teaching setting.

### 2.3 EMI in Vietnamese context

EMI is implemented in Vietnam through various forms of cooperation with international organizations and institutions, primarily in English speaking countries such as Australia, the UK and the US as well as some European countries where English is an established lingua franca. This

cooperation model is founded on and reflects Vietnam's National higher education reform agenda, which supports collaboration with overseas institutions as key to the development and internationalization of Vietnamese HEIs (Government of Vietnam, 2005).

Overall, there are two main types of EMI programs namely advanced programs and high quality ones. However, the challenges inherent in the adoption of EMI at tertiary level in Vietnam discussed by Le (2012) and Vu and Burns (2014) is the lack of adequate linguistic competence of teachers and students has impeded the effectiveness of the EMI programs.

Bain (2004) identifies characteristics of a good college teacher, including good knowledge of his/her subject, possession of a long and impressive publication list, good ability to do scientific research, etc. However, the teaching staff in HEIs in Vietnam in general have both a shortage and weakness of professional knowledge. Specifically, the ex-president of Vietnam National University, in Hanoi, Nguyen (2004) claims that the teaching staff of HEIs are bookish, poor in professional knowledge and skills, lag behind the development of the modern world, are too old and suffer from inertia to keep up with the changing world. Due to language incompetence, a majority of academic staff are unable to read professional materials or journals in English to update their knowledge. Recent statistics show that on average, one Vietnamese professor only publishes 0.58 article in world-recognized refereed journals during a 10-year period (1996–2005) (VietnamnetBridge, 2008).

Regarding Vietnamese EMI students, Huong (2008, cited in Le, 2012) claims that due to their limited English skills, students do not dare to share ideas with other classmates or with lecturers. What they do is to sit in a place and listen to the lectures in a passive way. Since both teachers and students are not proficient in English, teachers are unable to deliver lectures in English. Likewise, students with poor language skills are unable to absorb the subject content. In addition to teachers' and students' insufficient English proficiency, a number of potential difficulties have arisen when implementing the EMI program at HEIs in Vietnam, which needs more scientific research in this field.

### 2.4 Related studies on the importance of students' English proficiency for effective EMI learning

Kang and Park (2005) state that students' appropriate level of English proficiency is a requirement for the successful implementation of an

EMI policy. This was strongly demonstrated through the strong positive correlations between students' English fluency and their understanding of textbooks and lectures and between their English fluency and performance in EMI classes. Kang and Park (2004) also suggest that the school should provide a variety of EMI support programs such as undergraduate English writing classes and preparation classes for EMI in major areas.

In Turkey, Kirkgöz (2009) investigated teacher and student perceptions about the effectiveness of English language instruction in an EMI university in Turkey. The results showed that over 90% of students were not adequately prepared English to learn academic subjects through EMI. In addition, Akyel and Özek (2010) used questionnaires and interviews with both EMI teachers and students in a single Turkish university and found that the teachers focused more on reading and listening as the important skills to be developed. However, both teachers and students felt a neglect on speaking skills which allowed students to operate successfully in their undergraduate EMI programs.

Kim (2014) also highlighted the problem of students' insufficient English ability for EMI. Over 40% of undergraduate students and 28% of graduate students were ill-equipped for EMI classes. Despite students' insufficient English abilities, appropriate measures have not been taken to develop students' English proficiency. Kim (2014) also suggested that in order to help enhance students' English language skills, the instructors may provide feedback on students' English problems in their oral or written work with the help of English professors.

Thus, for successful EMI, the HEIs must focus on developing and improving their students' English skills first and foremost. Indeed, Baker & Jones (1998) raise the importance of a bridging program with an argument that the more demanding the curriculum area, the higher the level of learning expected, and the later switch to learning through a second language, the more important it is to provide bridging programs. In this sense, the English preparatory programs are considered to be an important bridging program, supporting students with sufficient English abilities for EMI learning. However, very few studies are conducted to examine how universities prepare their students English proficiency for effective EMI learning so far, especially in the context of Vietnam, making this present study more timely and significant.

### 3 METHOD

This study employed qualitative approach using document analysis of university regulations for the

EMI programs as a method to collect data. A purposive sampling approach (Riffe *et al.*, 2005) was used to locate sources for content analysis. These sources must meet certain criteria: (1) the university websites; (2) EMI implementation or programs called as advanced or high quality programs; (3) higher education contexts, and (4) descriptions of the English preparatory programs for EMI learning. Having outlined these criteria, sources were located by exploring databases on universities websites.

Through the purposive sampling approach, a total of eight universities' websites were identified to match the criteria comprising of Hanoi Foreign Trade University, Center for advanced educational programs-Hanoi National Economics University, Vietnam Maritime University, Ho Chi Minh National University – University of Information Technology, Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology, The University of Da Nang - University of Science and Technology, VNU University of Economics and Business, Banking University of Ho Chi Minh City and Can Tho University. Data were analyzed in terms of four emerging themes comprising of the name of the university, the names of the advanced and high quality programs, English proficiency requirements for entrance to these programs and English proficiency requirement for graduation.

### 4 RESULTS

The data show that there are two main types of EMI programs comprising of high quality and advanced programs, in which the former has more diversity in majors than the later. Even some universities have the high-quality programs only, namely Banking University Ho Chi Minh City, VNU University of Economics and Business, Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology and The University of Da Nang - University of Science and Technology. In addition, the majors or disciplines of these EMI programs also differ from one university to another due to its specializations. Among the investigated universities, Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology, the University of Da Nang - University of Science and Technology and Center for advanced educational programs – Hanoi National Economics University have the most various majors with more than 10 disciplines whereas the other universities just have two or three EMI majors. The tables below show more information on the English requirements for EMI students as well as the English preparatory programs to meet the learning outcomes in these eight major universities that have offered EMI programs in Vietnam.

**4.1 Information on the English requirement eligible for entering EMI learning**

Information about the compulsory English entry for EMI students is illustrated in Table 1.

In terms of the entrance English requirement, only three universities comprising of Ha Noi Foreign Trade University, Banking University of Ho Chi Minh City and Can Tho University show specific English proficiency in terms of international standards which students have to obtain to be allowed to register for EMI programs. Especially, Hanoi Foreign Trade University has a detailed requirement of the English proficiency level prior to entering the EMI programs, which calls for B2 V-step (Vietnamese Standardized Test of English Proficiency), TOEIC 500, TOFEL iBT 60 or IELTS 5.0 as a compulsory condition for students to enter

the EMI programs accompanied with student interviews in English about general knowledge, expectations and goals for learning in the advanced and high quality programs. This is also the highest English requirement as opposed to other universities, followed by Banking University of Ho Chi Minh City. The least demanding is Can Tho University, at just A2-CEFR, IELTS 3.0 or TOEIC 400. Meanwhile, Center for advanced educational programs – Hanoi National Economics University and VNU University of Economics and Business just have a kind of placement test to measure students’ English abilities, which students must reach a certain score to be allowed for EMI learning. The other three universities either require students’ specific English competence or reveal no information in this area.

**Table 1: Information on the English requirement eligible for entering EMI learning**

No.	Institutes	Entrance English requirements
1.	<i>Hanoi Foreign Trade University</i>	<b><i>B2 V-step, TOEIC 600, TOFEL (paper-based) 450 IELTS 4.5 or pass the University’s English entrance exam.</i></b>
2.	Center for advanced educational programs – Hanoi National Economics University	English Test, Essay Writing and Interview
3.	VNU University of Economics and Business	English Test (4/10) and x2
4.	Ho Chi Minh National University – University of Information Technology	No information
5.	Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology	Not required
6.	<b><i>Banking University of Ho Chi Minh City</i></b>	<b><i>TOEIC 450</i></b>
7.	The University of Da Nang - University of Science and Technology	No information
8.	<b><i>Can Tho University</i></b>	<b><i>A2 CEFR, IELTS 3.0, TOIEC 400, TOEFL ITP 337, TOEFL iBT 31, KET 70, PET 45.</i></b> Or English placement Test: 36 marks at least

**4.2 Information on the English preparatory programs for EMI learning**

The English preparatory programs the investigated universities prepare for EMI students’ learning are shown in Table 2.

Generally, the table indicates the inconsistency in the ways each university prepares their students with English competence eligible for EMI learning. Specifically, Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology and Banking University of Ho Chi Minh City designed a curriculum for the English preparatory program in terms of IELTS format which comprises of 4 levels from foundation to upper-intermediate. Depending on the students’ English background, they are placed in an appropriate course or level. Similarly, Banking University HCMC built five English preparatory courses accounting for 20 credits which students

learn in five consecutive semesters to gain V-step (B2) or IETLS 5.5. Meanwhile, The University of Da Nang - University of Science and Technology employs TOEFL iBT. They even cooperate with AMA Foreign Language Center to train students in EMI programs to obtain TOEFL iBT targeted at the score of 61.

Apart from Hanoi Foreign Trade University and Can Tho University, the remaining universities do not reveal any information on the type of test format employed to design the curriculum for the English preparatory programs. Another interesting thing is that there are some differences in the number of credits and courses for English learning among universities. Among them, Center for advanced educational programs – Hanoi National Economics University have the most credits (36), with figures for other universities ranging from 15 to 20 credits in their English preparatory programs. Another

noticeable point is that students will be equipped with more English learning hours in advance programs as compared to high quality ones since

advance programs often have associated education with foreign prestigious universities, requiring students with higher English proficiency.

**Table 2: Information on the English preparatory programs for EMI learning**

No.	Institutes	English preparatory programs
1.	Hanoi Foreign Trade University	16 credits, 6 English courses
2.	Center for advanced educational programs – Hanoi National Economics University	High quality programs: 18 credits Advance programs: 36 credits
3.	VNU University of Economics and Business	19 credits, 4 courses
4.	Ho Chi Minh National University – University of Information Technology	2 courses
5.	Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology	4 courses (IELTS format) from elementary to upper-intermediate levels
6.	Banking University of Ho Chi Minh City	20 credits, 5 courses (IELTS format)
7.	The University of Da Nang - University of Science and Technology	Cooperate with AMA Foreign Language Center (TOEFL)
8.	Can Tho University	20 credits, 9 courses

The English preparatory programs can be found in two universities. In the first case, the high quality program disciplined in Business Administration at Hanoi Foreign Trade University shows six English courses in which the first four courses have three credits each and involve in General English and in the rest two ones, each has two credits and focus more on Business situations. These English courses are taught by lecturers at the English for Specific Purposes Department. Detail descriptions of these courses are shown below.

The English 1 and 2 courses aim to provide students with the basic concepts and terms of business English together with the focus on listening and speaking practice to prepare students to perform effectively in English language tests in the form of IELTS, TOEFL or other 6-level language ability tests in Vietnam. The textbooks include *Pathways Reading, Writing and Critical Thinking 2*, *The Business 2.0 Pre-Intermediate* (3rd Edition Student Book) and *Effective Academic Writing 2* for English 1 course. The English 2 course utilize four main books comprising of *Pathways Listening, Speaking, and Critical Thinking 2*, *The Business 2.0 (B1+ Intermediate)* as main materials and *Skillful Listening & Speaking 2*, *English Pronunciation in Use (Intermediate)* and *Business Vocabulary in Use (Elementary to Pre-intermediate)* as compulsory reading books.

The English 3 course, in contrast, has more focus on advanced reading and writing skills so that students are able to use English effectively in different situations not only at work but also in daily life and meet the requirements of the standard equivalent output B2-CEFR. This course also expands and improves business English vocabulary for students.

The textbooks include *Pathways Reading, Writing and Critical Thinking and The Business 2.0 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition B2 Upper-Intermediate*. The English 4 course is the last course of the general English program designed for high quality students at advanced level, aiming to increase students' abilities in writing and speaking Business English through business skill-related speaking tasks and written business communications skills. The textbooks are the in-house material named as *English for Business – Speaking and Writing, In company 3.0 Advanced* together with articles in the field.

The English 5 course is designed not only to provide students with useful specific knowledge in Business English but also to equip them with the written competence in common letters and business correspondence such as: inquiries and replies, offers and quotation, orders, complaints, adjustments, application letter and an effective professional CV for their job application. Textbooks encompass *Oxford Handbook of Commercial Correspondence*. Oxford University Press and compulsory readings such as *Oxford Handbook of Commercial Correspondence* and *The Language of Business Correspondence in English*. The English 5 course equips students with specialized knowledge in the Contractual English language from the processes of negotiation, drafting and interpreting the contract content. Two books used in this course include *Exporting and the Export Contract* and *Contract Law for Paralegals*.

Thus, the English preparatory programs for high quality students at Hanoi Foreign Trade University cover both General English that still covers technical English vocabulary in the field and general

Business - oriented situations. Meanwhile, the English preparatory program at Can Tho University mainly targets at improving students' General English only. To be more specific, there are nine courses accounting for 20 credits comprising of 2 Listening & Speaking courses, 2 Writing courses, 2 reading courses, a Grammar course, a Pronunciation course and an English presentation course. The English skills courses employ Skillful 2 course book together with some in-house material preparing

students for V-step exams. The other courses use materials designed by staff members at School of Foreign Languages, Can Tho University.

### 4.3 Information on the English requirement for students' graduation in EMI programs

The English requirements or the expected English proficiency EMI students have to achieve at the end of the EMI programs are illustrated in Table 3.

**Table 3: Information on the English requirement for graduation in EMI programs**

No.	Institutes	English requirement for graduation
1.	<b>Hanoi Foreign Trade University</b>	<b>TOEFL iBT 100 or TOEFL 600 paper-based)</b>
1.	Center for advanced educational programs – Hanoi National Economics University	TOEFL PBT 500; V-step (B2); IELTS: 5.0
3.	VNU University of Economics and Business	V-step 4/6 (B2); IELTS 5.5; TOEFL 500; or TOEIC 600
4.	Ho Chi Minh National University – University of Information Technology	High quality programs: TOEFL PBT 450 Advance programs: TOEFL PBT 550 or IELTS 6.0
5.	Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology	IELTS >= 6.0; TOEFL iBT ≥ 79
6.	Banking University of Ho Chi Minh City	V-step 4/6 (B2) or IETLS 5.5
7.	The University of Da Nang - University of Science and Technology	TOEFL iBT 61
8.	Can Tho University	B2 V-step

It can be seen from the table that there was the inconsistency among universities about the English requirements for EMI students to be graduated. Ha Noi Foreign Trade University has the most demanding English proficiency, at TOEFL iBT 100, which is equivalent to IELTS 7.0, followed by Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology, at nearly a band lower i.e. IELTS 6.0. Other universities require a slight mutual difference in students' English proficiency such as the levels of B2 (V-step), IELTS 5.0, IELTS 5.5, TOEFL 500, TOEIC 600 and so on. In addition, the English requirement for graduation in the advanced program is higher than that in the high-quality ones. This is TOEFL PBT 550 or IELTS 6.0 as opposed to TOEFL PBT 450 as shown in the table for Ho Chi Minh National University – University of Information Technology. Especially, in the case of Can Tho University, EMI students are only expected to obtain B2 V-step when they finish learning four academic years. In other words, the strict or compulsory regulation on EMI students' English proficiency prior to their graduation may vary from one university to another.

## 5 DISCUSSION

There are two main types of EMI programs comprising of high quality and advanced programs in higher education institutes in Vietnam. However, the current study shows the inconsistency in the

ways each university prepares English for their EMI students as well as their expectation about their students' English ability eligible for graduation. To be more specific, some universities have specific requirements about the students' English ability prior to EMI learning whereas the others mainly let students do a placement test to classify students and put them in appropriate pre-university courses. In this respect, Ha Noi Foreign Trade University has the highest requirement, followed by universities in Ho Chi Minh city, whereas Can Tho University situated in the Mekong Delta requires students with the least English proficiency to be eligible for EMI learning. This certainly reflects the discrepancy about the English proficiency among different regions in Vietnam as well as the teaching quality.

Another noticeable point is that each university has its own curriculum for the English preparatory programs in terms of the number of credits for English courses, types of test format to follow and course-books. Although not all universities show the detailed curriculum and syllabus for each English course in the English preparatory programs, there are two different orientations can be clearly seen. One curriculum just focuses on building up students' English general knowledge according to a certain type of test format chosen. The other one covers both general English and technical English terms or vocabulary together with basic knowledge

or situations in specific disciplines so that students can be well prepared for studying EMI subjects later in the program. Therefore, students learnt with the former curriculum may encounter certain difficulties when they move to major subjects.

Similarly, the English requirement towards EMI students' graduation also differs from one university to another. This reflects the differences in the education quality as well as prestige of each university, leading to certain discrepancies in students' job or higher education opportunities. Although there are some inconsistencies in the ways the examined universities prepare English ability for EMI students, it shows their great consideration and effort to enhance Vietnamese students eligible for EMI learning. This idea is quite congruent with Byun *et al.* (2011) suggesting that there should be an establishment of an English threshold and improve students' English proficiency; otherwise, students suffer from both language and content loss in EMI environments (Kyeyune, 2010; Mohamed, 2013).

In addition, though the MOET has a general regulation for EMI students to obtain B2- VSTEP English proficiency or equivalent, with the discrepancies among universities in ways of recruiting students and the English requirement eligible for EMI learning, this strongly affects the curriculum designs and the quality of the English preparatory programs, leading to the effectiveness of EMI programs generally. Therefore, the MOET should legislate another common agreement on a certain general English standard required for EMI students prior to their entrance to EMI learning as well. Hamid and colleagues argue that if EMI is to be institutionalized, attention needs to be paid to the language-in-education policy areas of students and evaluation (Hamid *et al.*, 2013).

Moreover, in such a limited English speaking environment as in Vietnam, creating opportunities for EMI students to practice English with native speakers and outside the classroom should be taken into great consideration. Therefore, native speakers should be involved in teaching English preparatory courses for EMI students so that students can build up confidence in communicating and learning with foreign lecturers in subsequent subjects in their disciplines and in real life. Addition to taking English courses specifically oriented to academic teaching in a formal setting, EMI students should be offered opportunities to get engaged in more informal activities, such as study tours in English-speaking countries, scholar exchanges, and travel grants for international conferences (Wilkinson, 2005; Ball and Lindsay, 2013).

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

Two main types of EMI programs comprising of high quality and advanced programs are found in the eight examined universities in Vietnam. The findings also indicate the inconsistency in the ways each university prepares their students with English abilities eligible for EMI learning. Specifically, some universities employ IELTS or TOEFL, and some do not provide any information or have specific test format when designing the English preparatory courses. The discrepancies are also figured out in the number of credits spent to foster EMI students' English ability learning ranging from 18 to 20 for high quality programs and 20 to 36 for advanced programs. It also means that there are more English investments in advanced programs. The universities' expectations towards EMI students' English ability for graduation also differ from one university to another. In fact, EMI has a vast influence on aspects of life as it determines who will participate in power and wealth (Tsui and Tollefson, 2004). With such discrepancies and inconsistencies found, the Vietnamese MOET should take greater consideration into planning and implementing language policy to reinforce EMI programs throughout the nation.

This study is, however, still limited in the way that it just qualitatively analyzes data through available websites. The findings may therefore not cover details about the English preparatory programs in all of the examined universities. Future studies should be conducted with more universities and research tools such as interviews with EMI administrative staff to gain more insight into the issue. In addition, studies on the effectiveness of the English preparatory programs on students' EMI learning are also worth investigating in order to find ways to maximize the training quality and reinforce the sustainable development of EMI programs in similar contexts.

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