

## **SPEAKING SKILL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH EMI: EVIDENCE FROM A SURAKARTA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study investigates the influence of English Medium Instruction (EMI) on the development of students' speaking competence in an international high school in Surakarta. As English mastery becomes an essential skill in the globalized era, understanding how EMI shapes speaking proficiency is increasingly urgent for Indonesian education. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through classroom observations, interviews, and speaking assessments. Findings reveal that students face persistent challenges in grammar and pronunciation, while low confidence and limited academic vocabulary hinder active participation in EMI-based classrooms. The study also identifies role-play as the most effective technique for enhancing speaking performance within EMI contexts. This research offers novel insights into how EMI operates in Indonesian international schooling and contributes both theoretically and practically by informing teachers and policymakers on strategies to optimize EMI implementation and strengthen students' speaking competence.*

**Keywords:** *English language teaching, EMI, learning strategies, student challenges, Speaking Competence*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In Indonesia, the use of English is becoming increasingly important due to the development of globalization and the need for students to have a high level of language proficiency. In the era of globalization, mastery of English improves not only cognitive skills but also critical thinking skills, which are needed to form quality human resources who are ready to face global challenges (Wang, 2021). One of the main debates in this context is the effectiveness of teaching methods that can improve students' English competence, including the extent to which focusing on fluency can affect overall learning outcomes (Gelete & Dhaba, 2023; Zhai & Razali, 2022). In addition, there is an ongoing discussion about the importance of teachers' speaking competence and its impact on student learning outcomes (Alibakhshi et al., 2020). Teachers' mastery of English speaking skills is crucial, as this ability enables them to communicate effectively including managing conversations, providing feedback, and supporting students in overcoming the language difficulties they face (Alibakhshi et al., 2020; Williams, 2024).

English Medium Instruction (EMI) is one of the most important learning methods in international schools in Indonesia to improve students' English language

acquisition. English Medium Instruction (EMI) encourages the active use of English in the teaching-learning process, which helps students become more accustomed to communicating in English in various academic contexts (Macaro, 2018). However, the implementation of EMI in secondary schools faces various challenges, especially related to the variation of English language competence among students which impacts learning effectiveness, learning outcomes, and classroom interaction (Pun & Thomas, 2020). In addition, some teachers may find it difficult to teach using EMI, especially if they have not received specialized training on EMI-based teaching (Macaro, 2018). Therefore, EMI-based learning strategies should be designed with approaches that can effectively support the development of students' speaking competence optimally.

Speaking competence is a skill students require to effectively communicate in English in their studies and workplace (Simanjuntak et al., 2024). Speaking competence in real communication is the ability of an individual to make effective use of language, including linguistic control and strategic use of language in context (Richards, 2017). Recent studies have dwelt on interactional competence placed on the values of being able to handle and sustain conversations with appropriate turn-taking, topic handling, and interlocutor responsiveness (Plough et al., 2018). Good speakers also comprise speakers who can control their language usage across contexts to ensure they exercise clarity, coherence, and suitability in communication. In the context of language learning, assessing speaking competence is an important aspect of understanding the development of students' skills. Lim (2018), emphasizes that the assessment of speaking skills in a second language should reflect students' ability to use language in various real communication situations, not just based on mastery of linguistic structures alone. Therefore, this study has important significance in the context of education in Indonesia, especially in the era of globalization, where English language proficiency is a basic skill needed by students to compete globally. The implementation of EMI in international schools aims to improve student's English language skills, not only for academic purposes but also to strengthen their readiness to face the world of work. In addition, this study also provides insight for teachers, schools, and education policymakers in designing more effective EMI-

based teaching methods. By examining the implementation of EMI in international schools in Surakarta, this study is expected to contribute to understanding how EMI affects the development of students' speaking competence, the challenges faced, and solutions that can be applied to optimize learning outcomes.

Previous studies have discussed the implementation of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in various contexts. However, the challenges in implementing EMI in Indonesian schools are many and still a major concern. For example, research (Setoningsih, 2022) found that EMI challenges in international schools in Malang include language proficiency, comprehension difficulties, students' lack of vocabulary, and teachers' need to code-switch to Indonesian to improve students' understanding. Meanwhile, Nur et al., (2023) noted that the implementation of EMI in South Sulawesi faces challenges, such as limited English proficiency among teachers, lack of training and resources, generation gap, and lack of policy socialization. The challenges faced by teachers can have an impact on students, such as decreased student learning outcomes and increased student workload. The study Oktaviani et al., (2021), in Palembang also found that teachers experienced obstacles in explaining academic or technical terms using English, while students who had low English skills tended to lack confidence and participation in class discussions. In addition, (Lee et al 2021; Moorhouse & Wan, 2023) highlighted that graduate students in EMI courses face difficulties due to the students' low English proficiency, which points to the lack of English language skills.

Therefore, this study was conducted to fill the gap in English Medium Instruction (EMI) studies, particularly in the context of international secondary schools in Indonesia, which have received little attention in recent empirical research (Macaro, 2018). This study not only assesses speaking competence thoroughly based on the five aspects proposed by Brown (2004), grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, organization, and fluency, but also explores students' learning experiences in the EMI-based learning process. The results showed that students' main difficulties lie in the aspects of grammar and pronunciation, as well as the influence of psychological factors such as students' lack of confidence. In addition, the learning strategy that students are most interested in improving their speaking skills is role play. By focusing on students' real experiences and teaching

strategies used by teachers, this study is expected to make practical and theoretical contributions in the development of more effective EMI methods at the secondary school level.

The sociocultural perspective allows for an understanding of how the process of learning occurs within English-Medium Instruction (EMI), which is primarily defined as being both socially mediated and reliant on interaction. The process of developing students' language skills through social interaction is a central tenet of sociocultural theory, and EMI studies conducted after 2018 have indicated the necessity of meaningful interaction between teachers and their students and among the peers in the EMI classroom to enhance the development of students' language skills in the EMI classroom (Macaro, 2018; Moorhouse & Wan, 2023). In addition, the sociocultural perspective on learning recognises that teachers and more proficient peer tutors provide scaffolding to enable student learning growth in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Studies conducted within the EMI context in the past year explicitly document how scaffolding, collaborative interaction, and active engagement via interactive activities have helped students improve their oral English proficiency and gain self-efficacy in learning academic content in English (Moorhouse & Wan, 2023).

Paradowski et al (2024), found this theory applies to second language learning and they showed peer interaction dynamics greatly affect language skills growth when learning is context-based like EMI. Piaget (1952), constructivist theory says learning is active student construction of knowledge via experience plus environmental interaction. Nurhuda et al. (2023), Put forth a view that was in line with this principle. Constructivist learning allows students to actively participate in and to directly experience things, so they then build a deep understanding. In the context of EMI, students learn actively about language, where an English-speaking environment is where learning is better.

To further explore this theoretical framework, Krashen (1985) Second Language Acquisition Theory was also adopted which highlights understandable input in language learning. Being attentive within EMI-related communication suggests that students have the ability to develop their speaking skills. As Long (1983), Interaction Hypothesis highlights, classroom interaction is important,

contributing to students' language skill improvement, and explains how teacher-student interaction is necessary for cooperative learning development. Findings from Paradowski et al., (2024), suggest students engage within social networks and interact collaboratively as they learn so they acquire dynamic language. Finally, the theoretical considerations in this study include the EMI context's translanguaging approach. Yuksel (2025), revealed that the students in the study of a particular academic discipline largely influenced those positive attitudes toward the translanguaging practices as well as that English skill. This impact evidenced the relevance of language flexibility in the EMI setting. This study has filled an existing research gap by examining the processes of speaking development within international schools in Indonesia, an area that continues to be largely unaddressed in the literature regarding English as the Medium of Instruction. The main contribution of this research is that it integrates systematic assessments of oral communication with students' learning experiences and how these were facilitated through various types of teaching strategies in the EMI context. This study is of great importance because it provides both theoretical and practical recommendations to improve EMI practices in secondary education.

## **MATERIALS AND METHOD**

This study used a qualitative case study design to explore in depth the impact of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) implementation on the development of students' speaking skills at an international high school in Surakarta. A qualitative approach was chosen because this study aimed to understand the learning process, students' learning experiences, and classroom interaction patterns within the context of EMI context contextually and holistically, which cannot be fully explained through a quantitative approach. The research subjects consisted of 22 tenth-grade students who had participated in EMI-based learning for at least one year and one Civics teacher. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and a speaking test in the form of a 4–5-minute monologue. Students' speaking skills were analyzed based on five main indicators: pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, organization, and fluency, with reference to Brown's (2004) rubric. To increase data validity, this study applied method triangulation, while data analysis was conducted using the interactive analysis

model of using (Miles & Huberman, 1994) which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

## RESULTS

Based on the results of the study, the application of English medium instruction (EMI) in classroom learning has a positive impact on students' speaking competence. After the application of EMI in the classroom, students are able to pronounce English correctly due to continuous exposure. However, when the research analyzed based on five indicators (grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, and organization) to students found that there were still obstacles experienced by students, especially in grammar and pronunciation. The assessment was conducted on ten grade X students who participated in the study. The scoring was done by 1 English teacher and the researcher. Each aspect was rated on a scale of 1-4, where 1 indicates a very poor category and 4 indicates a good category. The results can be seen in the following table:

*Table 1. Student speaking test result*

No	Student	Vocabulary	Pronunciation	Grammar	Organization	Fluency	Total
1.	Danin	3	2	2	3	2	12
2.	Almira	4	4	3	4	4	19
3.	Aisyah	4	4	4	3	4	19
4.	Salwa	3	3	3	2	3	14
5.	Nayla	4	4	3	4	4	19
6.	Almer	2	3	2	3	2	12
7.	Nendra	3	3	2	4	3	15
8.	Tsamara	4	3	3	4	4	18
9.	Kayla	3	2	3	3	2	13
10.	Zulfan	3	2	2	2	3	12
Jumlah		33	30	27	32	31	153

Based on the total score of each indicator, the aspects that have the lowest score are Grammar (27) and pronunciation (30). This indicates that most students have difficulty in grammatical structure and pronunciation. On the other hand, vocabulary (33) and organization (32) had higher scores, indicating that students had a better ability to choose the right vocabulary and organize ideas precisely and coherently. Of the ten students assessed, there were three students who obtained the highest score of 19. All three showed good performance in all indicators, especially in pronunciation and fluency. On the other hand, three students obtained the lowest score (12) with consistent weaknesses in grammar and fluency. This indicates that the implementation of EMI needs to be accompanied by explicit supporting strategies, especially in teaching grammar and pronunciation. This shows that students still have difficulties in distinguishing past tense and present tense, in accordance with the findings of Ellis (2003), who said that the acquisition of a grammar in second language learning goes through a gradual process to reorganize students' linguistic understanding. Meanwhile, the researcher found that students who experienced good pronunciation, due to frequent independent practice from listening to native speakers through other media. This is in line with the research of Celce-Murcia (2007), who stated that structured teaching methods, consistent instructions, and transparent explanations are necessary for students to improve their articulation skills in an efficient way.

In addition to further research on the challenges faced by students during EMI-based learning, from some of the challenges that the researcher observed, it was found that the main challenges faced by students in the development of speaking skills in the context of English medium instruction are students' low self-confidence and limited academic vocabulary. The results of this study reflect that although students are accustomed to using English both in learning and daily communication, students still experience significant psychological and linguistic barriers. *"Not too comfortable sometimes, because I have to find the right answer or fit when given a question. But when I present, sometimes I'm also confident because I've prepared"* (Int.R6-SKH/29). *"Sometimes confident, sometimes nervous. yes because often I'm afraid that people will judge me "ih, I'm not fluent in English" "how strange is the connection of words" etc.* (Int.R7-THN/29).

Students' lack of confidence is reflected in their passivity during speaking activities in class. Students feel insecure when speaking because of the fear of mispronouncing and the fear of their friends' views on their pronunciation. This is in accordance with the findings of (Rifiyanti & Dewi, 2023; Setoningsih, 2022), which show that shyness and speaking anxiety are the main obstacles in learning English in the classroom. In addition, similar research in international schools by (An & Thomas, 2021; Galloway et al., 2017), also supports this, showing that many students in EMI classes experience affective distress that prevents them from actively participating, especially in oral activities.

On the other hand, limited academic vocabulary is also a significant obstacle. In the context of EMI, students are expected to not only understand the subject matter, but also be able to re-express it in English using appropriate academic standards. One of the students expressed: “ *Yes, sometimes I find it difficult, especially if the academic terms are rarely used in daily conversation. For example, technical words in science or history lessons that I have never heard before (Int. R2-APP/22)*”.

## DISCUSSION

Teachers provide simpler definitions or synonyms when difficult terms appear in the material. So, in this case, the limited amount of academic vocabulary is not only an obstacle for students, but encourages them and teachers to use more adaptive learning strategies. Many students struggle to give the right answers because they do not have sufficient knowledge of the academic context. According to Othman (2024), students' success in EMI contexts is crucial for academic achievement, which is generally not considered in classroom practice. This also highlights the importance of vocabulary in facilitating academic success in an effective way. The combination of low self-confidence and limited vocabulary causes students to avoid active participation in class discussions or presentations. They are more silent or code-switch to avoid mistakes. This implication suggests that the implementation of EMI does not necessarily improve speaking, if the necessary support for learning strategies that can alleviate such affective and linguistic barriers are not in place. The implementation of English medium



instruction (EMI) in learning requires special strategies so that students feel comfortable in learning and absorbing the material. The results show that role play is the most dominant and effective strategy used by teachers to support the development of students' speaking competence in EMI classes. This strategy is effective in terms of its ability to teach students the habit of communicating in real situations and provide space for students to be more active and individually involved in learning activities. This is in line with the view of Macaro (2018), emphasizing that teaching strategies in the EMI context do not only focus on delivering material in English, but also provide opportunities for students to interact meaningfully in the development of students' language skills. The observation also shows that role play is implemented by giving students the freedom to choose the topic they want to convey according to their interests. After determining the topic, students interview with peers, as well as students with different grade levels or teachers. Interaction with peers, teachers and students of different grade levels creates a more natural and supportive learning environment and gives the impression of a pleasant learning experience. With fun learning activities that are in line with students' interests, role play is effective in overcoming students' psychological barriers such as shyness or fear of speaking incorrectly. It can be seen when students make presentations or speak in front of the class after being given the space to choose a topic that they like and feel they have mastered the material, students look more confident, show more spontaneous speaking abilities, which indicates that the obstacles they face are starting to diminish. Thus it can be concluded that the application of role play in EMI class is a strategy that has a very positive impact on the development of students' speaking competence. This strategy also supports language development both from the cognitive aspect and effectively encourages students' confidence in the context of EMI-based learning.

## **CONCLUSION**

The final results showed that the implementation of EMI has a significant impact on students' speaking competence in one of the International High Schools in Surakarta. By observing and conducting interviews with students and teachers, it

was found that EMI encourages the active use of English in classroom interactions, helping the development of students' fluency and confidence in speaking. There are still some issues including grammar and pronunciation which still indicate that content learning is not enough for all-round language development. Similarly, other problems students face are insufficient academic vocabulary, lack of confidence, and lack of direct feedback from teachers on linguistic issues. In this context, communication-based teaching methods such as role-playing are the most effective. This approach increases students' engagement, courage and English speaking quality by providing students with free-choice topics based on their interests and real communication opportunities. Therefore, if supported by a learning approach that is responsive to students' language needs, EMI is a powerful medium for developing students' speaking skills.

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