Tertiary academic agency in English medium instruction in higher education in Vietnam: A case study

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Abstract

Internationalisation of higher education is an emerging trend around the world, including in Vietnam, where universities are forming global partnerships, enhancing student and staff mobility, and incorporating English as a tool for content delivery to improve global competitiveness and attract international students. As part of internationalisation, English medium instruction (EMI) programs require a great deal of policy and structural changes and support in which tertiary academics play a vital role. Their participation in this process is seen as complex and multilayered, contributing significantly to their professional agency enactment. Academic agency, the interplay between individual efforts, available resources, and contextual and structural factors within EMI programs in non-English-speaking institutions needs further research as little is known about how it functions in the internationalisation context. This doctoral thesis addresses this gap by investigating how academic agency manifests in EMI programs at a tertiary institution in Vietnam. It further explores the factors that facilitate or constrain such agency and examines its broader implications for shaping the teaching and learning environment.

Using a qualitative case study approach, the thesis collected data through document analysis, semi-structured interviews with academics, focus-group discussions with students, and class observations. The analysis of this data was guided by the ecological model for agency, which provided a robust theoretical framework for examining the multi-layered dimensions of agency within the EMI context.

The thesis makes significant empirical, theoretical, and practical contributions to the understanding and enhancement of academic agency in the internationalisation of higher education. Empirically, the research finds that to enhance their professional growth for educational transformation in an increasingly globalised context, academics enact three types of agency, namely pedagogical agency, relational agency, and reflexive agency, each influenced by individual capacities of academics and contextual factors of their workplace in different ways. While personal capacities considerably affect pedagogical and reflexive agency, broader cultural and structural factors tend to have more impact on relational agency of academics. Moreover, the study finds that affordances for academic agency include essential factors such as networking, interpersonal relationships, and professional learning communities. Conversely, restrictions on agency arise from challenges such as students' English proficiency, performativity pressures, and rigid communication structures. Theoretically, by adopting the

ecological framework to analyse EMI lecturer agency, the study shifts the focus from seeing agency as an inherent capacity to one that is emerging from interactions between such capacity and environmental factors, enriching existing theories by emphasising the complex nature of human agency. Practically, the research provides valuable insights for improving teacher training, professional development, and curriculum design in EMI programs, offering recommendations for policy-makers and institutional leaders to create supportive environments for effective EMI implementation.

Declaration of Authenticity

"I, Nguyen Minh Chau Pham, declare that the PhD thesis entitled *Tertiary academic agency in English medium instruction in higher education in Vietnam: A case study* is no more than 80,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work".

"I have conducted my research in alignment with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research and Victoria University's Higher Degree by Research Policy and Procedures".

Signature: 

Date: 15/11/2024

Ethics Declaration

All research procedures reported in the thesis were approved by the Victoria University Committee, application ID: HRE20-098.

Signature: 

Date: 15/11/2024

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List of Abbreviations

AP	Advanced program
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AUN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations' University Network
CBI	Content-based instruction
CLIL	Content and language integrated learning
EMEMUS	English-medium education in multilingual university settings
EMI	English medium instruction
FG	Focus group
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services
HE	Higher education
HEI	Higher education institution
HERA	Higher Education Reform Agenda
HQP	High-quality program
ICLHE	Integrating content and language in higher education
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IHE	Internationalisation of higher education
JP	Joint program
L1	First language
L2	Second language
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
NFL	National Foreign Languages Project
PD	Professional development
PLC	Professional learning community
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
VHE	Vietnamese higher education
VHEI	Vietnamese higher education institution
VMI	Vietnamese medium instruction

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I dedicate this thesis to my Mum and Dad.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.0 Chapter overview

This research explores the lived experiences of academics in English medium instruction (EMI) programs at a Vietnamese university to understand how they enact agency in a shifting educational context. This chapter contextualises the research problem by situating the case within the context of the internationalisation of higher education, with a focus on non-English-speaking Vietnam. This is followed by the study's aims, rationale and research questions. The theoretical framework and methodology are then presented before the chapter concludes with the structure of the research.

1.1 Internationalisation of higher education, English medium instruction, and the changing educational context

Amidst the rapid advancements of globalisation, information technology, and knowledge-based economies, internationalisation has become an inevitable trend in higher education (Altbach et al., 2010). The trend, which is believed to have started centuries ago with scholars journeying across national borders in search of education, has now spread to all corners of the world. Originating from the most basic form of travelling scholars, internationalisation now takes different shapes, from joint and twinning programs and internationalisation at home to collaborative research and branch campuses. As in other countries, Vietnamese higher education (VHE) has been experiencing every form of internationalisation and witnessing pervasive changes.

Starting from the common 1990s term "international education", which embraces activities such as "study abroad, foreign student advising, student and staff exchange, development education, and area studies" (de Wit, 2013, p. 6), internationalisation of higher education (IHE) gradually evolved to where it could be defined at the national and institutional levels as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (Knight, 2003, p. 2).

Despite being criticised for its Western-orientedness (Marginson, 2023; Yang, 2016), this definition is so far the most widely accepted. The attempts to conceptualise and reconceptualise IHE indicate a strong call for a more comprehensive approach to internationalisation rather than a fragmented one (de Wit & Altbach, 2020), as IHE remains one of the most powerful trends sweeping through the tertiary education sector.

In Asia, internationalisation has often been equated with Westernisation, modernisation, or Americanisation (Galloway et al., 2020; Keping, 2003; Lao, 2019). Despite post-World War II decolonisation, many Asian higher education systems still follow Anglo-Saxon models, characterised by EMI, adoption of Western curricula, and a focus on world-class university status (Mok, 2007; Phan, 2017). However, countries like China, Japan, and Singapore are now competing with Western institutions in international education, many of them having become exporters of education with greater influence on other countries (Huang, 2007). For instance, China has become a leading destination for inbound mobility students, while Malaysia, Singapore, and Japan are developing regional higher education (HE) hubs (Munusamy & Hashim, 2019; Wen & Hu, 2019). This shift reflects a growing independence from Western models, with Asian HE increasingly inspired by regional values (Phan, 2017). However, within this shifting focus, EMI is still prioritised. For example, in Japan, EMI policy is "intricately intertwined with the globalisation of Japan's higher education" (Qiu et al., 2022, p. 610), while in China, university offerings of full-English programs have accelerated since 2010 (McKinley et al., 2023; Zhao, 2020; Zhou & Rose, 2022) as a measure to attract inbound international students.

A key component of the internationalisation trend in HE is the adoption of EMI in non-English-speaking countries. In the wake of the Bologna Process in 1999, wherein education ministers representing 29 European nations agreed to establish a European Higher Education Area, interest in EMI resurged (European Commision, 1999). The Bologna Declaration of 1999 played a pivotal role in the integration of EMI into HE across Europe. Now covering 49 European states, this landmark accord, while primarily aimed at standardising HE systems within the European Higher Education Area (European Commision, 1999), notably facilitated the widespread adoption of English as a lingua franca in academic settings. To promote educational mobility and cross-border collaboration, the agreement encouraged the use of English to facilitate communication and academic exchange among students and scholars from diverse linguistic

backgrounds. As a result, English gained prominence as the preferred language of instruction in many European universities, reflecting the growing IHE and the increasing importance of English proficiency in both academic and professional spheres. This emphasis on EMI caused the number of EMI programs not only to skyrocket within Europe, but also to extend beyond to regions with colonial histories or with Anglophone influences, drawing the attention of educational stakeholders globally (Dafouz, 2017). EMI has significantly reshaped the teaching and learning environment in higher education institutions (HEI) worldwide.

In Asia, depending on national strategies, many governments have introduced initiatives to promote EMI in tertiary education. For example, in China, the Ministry of Education identifies EMI as one of the key policies to improve the quality of undergraduate education (Zhao & Dixon, 2017), speed up institutional internationalisation and enhance global competition for international students (Zhang, 2017; Zhou & Rose, 2022). While there are no official statistics on the number of EMI programs in China, research shows significant growth of EMI in prestigious universities as well as less famous institutions (Feng et al., 2017). In South Korea, as part of the national project to internationalise HE, the government provided financial support to institutions that implemented EMI (Kim et al., 2017). As a result, the proportion of EMI courses in universities increased two- to threefold between 2005 and 2010 (Kim, 2017). Additionally, this led to a significant increase in the number of international students, from fewer than 4,000 in 2000 to 160,000 in 2019 (Lee & Bailey, 2020). Similarly, in Japan, to internationalise higher education, attract international students, increase EMI programs, and enhance the competitiveness of local universities globally (Galloway et al., 2020), Japanese government funded several initiatives to promote EMI, including the Global 30 Project in 2009, the Go-Global Japan Project in 2012, and the Top Global University Projects in 2014 (Bradford, 2016). Consequently, in 2015, over one-third of Japan's universities offered undergraduate programs in EMI (Aizawa & McKinley, 2020). These examples of EMI policies implemented in some Asian countries show the increasing attention that governments pay to EMI as well as the crucial role it plays in HE.

While Hudzik (2011) underscores the importance of involving all stakeholders in transforming every aspect of tertiary institutions, Stohl (2007) highlights that staff engagement is a major challenge in institutions' efforts to internationalise, and

emphasises the need for active participation from faculty members. That said, it is important to note that faculty involvement in internationalisation is influenced by a variety of interconnected motivations. Research indicates that academic staff are driven by a desire to enhance the student learning experience and to prepare students as global citizens (Beatty, 2013; Niehaus & Williams, 2016). Furthermore, their interests and values significantly shape their decisions to participate in internationalisation activities (Beatty, 2013; Friesen, 2013). Additionally, the role of institutional characteristics cannot be understated in fostering faculty engagement. For instance, members at institutions that incorporate international activities into their academic reward systems are more likely to engage in internationalisation (Beatty, 2013; Friesen, 2013). This highlights the importance of institutional support and incentives in promoting faculty participation. Therefore, institutional commitment and the formal recognition of international endeavours are crucial for encouraging faculty to contribute to the internationalisation process.

A major aspect of IHE is internationalising the curriculum, which requires active participation from academic staff within their specific disciplines. Despite increased recognition of its significance, engaging faculty in internationalising the curriculum presents challenges due to diverse interpretations of its purpose and implementation (Leask, 2015). For instance, academics may be uninterested in curriculum internationalisation if they equate it solely with student mobility, seeing it as irrelevant to their duties (Bond, 2003). Engagement levels also vary significantly across different disciplines. For example, Clifford (2009) and Sawir (2011) find academics in "hard" and "soft" disciplines hold different instructional beliefs, which in turn affect their willingness to engage in the discourse of internationalisation. To effectively participate in internationalising the curriculum, therefore, faculty need to be "deeply engaged in a critique of traditional discipline perspectives as well as the origins of their personal values and their impact on their behaviour as teachers and academics" (Leask & Bridge, 2013, p. 7). Furthermore, it is imperative that institutions support academics in striving for wider inter- and intra-disciplinary collaboration so that they can internationalise the curriculum within their institutions (Hudzik, 2011).

Leask (2005) highlights four essential competencies for academics in internationalising curricula: expertise in their field within both local and global contexts, proficiency in

managing the learning environment, personal qualities like approachability and enthusiasm for teaching, and competence in intercultural learning. This last aspect involves reflecting on one's cultural assumptions, which is crucial for the "internationalisation of the academic Self" (Sanderson, 2008, p. 276). Such self-transformation is a gradual process, evolving before and through engagement with curriculum internationalisation practices.

Another area of faculty members' engagement in IHE is their involvement in research, including various activities and collaborations. For instance, participation in international research networks is a significant component (Knight, 2004; Teichler, 2004). Furthermore, publication by international scientific journals, whether through co-authorship with international peers or publication of their own research, is vital for academics' ability to foster a global academic presence (Coates et al., 2014; Dewey & Duff, 2009). Moreover, it is noteworthy that over three-quarters of research papers, and over 90% of natural and social scientific papers, are published in English (Montgomery, 2013), and that the world's top 50 journals are in English (Liu, 2017). Other activities, such as organising and participating in international academic events both domestically and abroad, are crucial for expanding academic networks and sharing knowledge (Dewey & Duff, 2009; Knight, 2004; Teichler, 2004). Similarly, collaboration with foreign professors in teaching and research roles is another effective approach to enhancing international perspectives within academic institutions (Coates et al., 2014; Knight, 2004).

Academics' active engagement in research, however, is not without challenges. At the institutional level, resistance to change stemming from deep-rooted values, norms and beliefs may hinder internationalisation efforts (Childress, 2009; Dewey & Duff, 2009). In addition, inadequate experience with internationalisation can lead to administrative policies that inadvertently discourage it in both teaching and research (Dewey & Duff, 2009; Teichler, 2004). At the individual level, a lack of knowledge about publication processes and the strategic importance of international publications can prevent researchers from taking full advantage of the opportunities provided by their institutions (Childress, 2009; Dewey & Duff, 2009). In addition, language barriers further complicate internationalisation efforts. The predominance of English in academic research requires researchers to adapt to different writing styles, which can be challenging for those whose

first language is not English (Choi et al., 2015; Rodrigues et al., 2012), potentially limiting their reach and impact on the global stage. Therefore, it is imperative for institutions to support faculty in overcoming these challenges through language training, collaborative partnerships, and access to resources.

1.2 Internationalisation of higher education and EMI programs in Vietnam universities

In Vietnam, IHE is often categorised into two phases: before and after the economic reform initiative of 1986. Prior to the reform in 1986, IHE in Vietnam was marked with the presence of foreign influences. During the 1,000 years of Chinese colonisation, Chinese characters were used as the only form of written language. French colonisers (1858-1945) then replaced Chinese with French, which was used alongside *Quốc Ngữ* (Vietnamese modern language) as the languages of instruction. Since Vietnam's independence from France in 1945, the government has consistently adopted Vietnamese as the official language of instruction. However, with the American occupation in the south (1960s and 1970s), English was widely used in Southern Vietnam until 1975. During this period, Northern Vietnam prioritised its educational, economic, military, and political ties with the former Soviet Union. A significant number of scholars and researchers received their education in Russia and other Soviet states while Russian remained the major foreign language at all levels of education until 1986. Since *Đổi mới* (the reform), foreign factors in VHE have manifested in various ways, including languages, education policies, institutional structures, governance, and curriculum, depending on the political agenda of the external force involved and the nature of the relationship between Vietnam and the particular foreign country (Hayden & Lam, 2007; Nguyen & Sloper, 1995; Welch, 2010).

Since the beginning of the millennium, the government has pursued IHE as one of its crucial strategies, with the Higher Education Reform Agenda 2005 (HERA 2005) laying out the framework to comprehensively and fundamentally reform the HE system in the 2006-2020 period. The initiative originated from the neoliberal reform agendas prescribed for Vietnam by the international bodies that influence Vietnam's economic and social development agenda. The initiative was also set out in the context of existing commercial frameworks such as the Vietnamese American Bilateral Trade Agreement, the ASEAN

Free Trade Area, and the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), in which education is treated as a tradable commodity (Tran & Marginson, 2018). By 2020, HERA 2005 was expected to make VHE highly competitive, comparable to regional standards, and approaching world standards (Government of Vietnam, 2005). This reform in HE towards internationalisation was instrumented in three areas: enhancing HE competitiveness and developing international integration strategies to meet international commitments; fostering internationalisation at home with EMI programs, attracting international students, learning from world advanced programs, reaching agreements on degree equivalences with international HEIs, encouraging joint programs, and conducting faculty exchange; and cross-border higher education with international branch campuses and cooperation between foreign and local universities (Tran & Marginson, 2018). The reform agenda is expected to lead to increased enrolments, improvement in teacher quality, commercialisation, capacity enhancement, governance reform, and internationalisation (Harman et al., 2010).

HERA 2005 envisages that higher education can correspond with the country's socio-economic development strategies and meet the demand for a highly skilled workforce and international economic integration. By 2020 Vietnam's higher education was expected to achieve high competitiveness, attain regional standards, and approach advanced world standards, including the establishment of a few world-class universities. HERA 2005 also aimed to increase the percentage of lecturers having doctoral degrees to at least 25% by 2010, and 35% by 2020, up from 18% in 2000 (Hayden & Thiep, 2010).

Among the reform agendas, strategies towards institutional autonomy have affected institutions significantly. The Law on Higher Education 2012 entitled Vietnamese public universities to make their own decisions on matters of "organisational structure, personnel, finance, curriculum, research, international cooperation and quality assurance" (Government of Vietnam, 2012, Article 32), which is unprecedented. On the one hand, this autonomy gives institutions an opportunity to realise their aspiration of becoming internationally competitive. On the other hand, concerns have been raised regarding social equity, educational values, and ethical issues, as well as the risk that public higher education might prioritise profit-making over its public service mission (Phan & Dang, 2020). As the process remains cumbersome, so far only 23 out of 171 public universities have attained autonomous status (World Bank, 2020). Another issue with institutional

autonomy is that without sufficient government support and guidance, institutional autonomy might be hampered by practices for which it is difficult to ensure accountability (London, 2010; Pham, 2012). Examples include lengthy bureaucratic procedures (Do, 2014; Tran, 2014), and a lack of enthusiasm and management capacity to undertake the task at the executive level (Dao, 2014; Ho, 2011).

In 2008, the Government of Vietnam promulgated the National Foreign Languages Project 2008-2020 (commonly known as NFL2020, Decree 1400, or Project 2020). The overarching goal of the policy is that:

> By the year 2020 most Vietnamese youth whoever graduate from vocational schools, colleges and universities gain the capacity to use a foreign language independently. This will enable them to be more confident in communication, and further their chance to study and work in an integrated and multi-cultural environment with variety of languages. This goal also makes language as an advantage for Vietnamese people, serving the cause of industrialisation and modernisation for the country (MOET, 2008).

Project 2020 is considered to be "the most notable language reform of the nation", but is viewed by many as an "ambitious" project (Bui & Nguyen, 2016, p. 366).

Project 2020 has significantly affected language education in Vietnam, driving educational change and innovation (Le, 2015). Key changes include starting English instruction in Grade 3 instead of Grade 6 and adopting a communicative teaching approach. This new policy aims to provide students with extensive English exposure at all levels of education. In the higher education sector, the government facilitates collaboration between VHEIs and foreign institutions to develop EMI-based programs, focusing on improving quality and advancing internationalisation. The original plan for local tertiary education programs included using English as the medium of instruction for the senior years in national, regional, and other key universities in Vietnam. The plan has led to the introduction of three types of EMI programs: joint programs (JPs), advanced programs (APs), and high-quality programs (HQPs), which are described in detail below.

Despite the government's ambition of using IHE as an initiative to raise the quality of education, thereby boosting overall socio-economic standards, in practice, internationalisation has not been integrated into the core mission of institutions; rather, it

has remained the grand goal (Tran & Marginson, 2018). This has resulted in contemporary Vietnam's HE sector being saddled with crises in governance, quality assurance, curriculum, research, and other issues (Tran et al., 2014). On November 16, 2016, Mr. Phung Xuan Nha, Minister of Education and Training, admitted that the National Foreign Language scheme for the 2008-2020 period had failed (Thùy Linh, 2016).

1.2.1 Advanced programs (APs)

Decision No. 1505/QĐ-TTg by the Vietnamese government introduced the "Advanced Programs in Vietnamese Universities for the period of 2008-2015" (Government of Vietnam, 2008). This initiative marked the "first comprehensive policy" on using English to teach various subjects in selected universities and programs (Tran, 2020, p. 162). These franchised courses are licensed from the world's top 200 universities, including those in the UK, the US, and Australia. The original curricula, assessments, teaching resources, methodologies, training, and management systems are adapted to meet the requirements of the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) (MOET, 2008). Instruction is provided by both local and international faculty, and students who complete these programs receive a local degree. These signature programs aim to elevate local universities to match regional and global education standards. To participate, local universities must meet various criteria related to students, faculty, partner universities, curriculum, materials, and infrastructure.

The implementation of these programs received significant financial support from MOET between 2005 and 2015: the government covered 60% of the costs, institutions funded 25%, and students contributed 15% through tuition fees (MOET, 2008). Since this period, institutions have secured their own financial resources, most of which come from tuition fees.

1.2.2 Joint programs (JPs)

Joint programs in Vietnamese universities are collaborative efforts between local institutions and international partners. The programs involve Vietnamese universities adopting the entire curriculum and teaching resources from their international counterparts. Students enrolled in joint programs either complete their four-year

undergraduate studies in Vietnam or spend several semesters at the partner institution's campus. In both cases they receive degrees from the partner institutions.

Table 1.1

Distribution of Joint Programs by Source Countries

Source country	Number of programs	Percentage of programs
UK	101	25%
USA	59	14%
France	53	13%
Australia	37	9%
South Korea	27	6.6%
Taiwan	18	4.4%
Malaysia	18	4.4%
New Zealand	16	4%
Belgium	10	2.5%
Germany	10	2.5%
China	10	2.5%
Others	49	12.1%
Total	**408**	**100%**

Source. Compiled by the author from MOET 2021

Once these joint programs were legalised by the government to facilitate the development of transnational education programs within VHEIs (Nguyen & Shillabeer, 2013), they increased significantly in number. Over half of the joint programs are from English-speaking countries (Table 1.1). The primary aim is to attract Vietnamese students to enrol in foreign-style tertiary programs offered domestically. This approach allows students to experience international education standards while studying in their home country.

1.2.3 High-quality programs (HQPs)

High-quality programs are domestically developed EMI courses that align with international teaching standards in terms of syllabus, content, and assessment, following the objectives of MOET's higher education curriculum frameworks (Nguyen et al., 2017). The programs are taught by local lecturers who possess post-graduate degrees in their fields and have high proficiency in English.

Introduced in the early 2000s, HQPs offer students an international-like education at more affordable tuition fees. Given autonomy by the government, HEIs have been developing HQPs as a strategic solution to enhance their budgets and reputations. HQPs have had

some achievements such as generating incomes and connections with foreign institutions; however, they have not contributed to quality improvement of HEIs (Nguyen et al., 2016). Recently, HQPs have been abolished by MOET, due to their misalignment with the Law on Higher Education (MOET, 2023). This decision, however, only affects the naming of these programs, rather than their actual implementation.

1.3 Context of the study

This research was conducted at Tower University (a pseudonym), a higher education institution in the north of Vietnam. Among VHEIs, Tower University is well-established with a history dating back to the 1960s, when it offered only business-related programs. The university's prominence surged from the mid-1980s with Vietnam's open-door policy, which allowed it to establish a global presence. Following HERA 2005, Tower University aimed for financial autonomy and academic excellence. In collaboration with foreign institutions, envisioning an international network fostering mobility, faculty development, and curriculum enhancement, it started to offer HQPs in EMI in 2006, followed by APs and JPs in 2008 and 2009, respectively. By 2023, Tower University offered 15 HQPs, three APs, and 10 JPs, which had been formed through global partnerships. With about 20,000 students and 850 employees as of 2023, Tower University gears its programs towards international markets.

Tower University's history is closely intertwined with Vietnam's economic reforms and its pursuit of international engagement. From its original mission of educating human resources for foreign trade, the university has undergone significant changes to adapt to the changing demands of Vietnamese society. With the implementation of the "open-door" policy in 1986, Vietnam aimed to boost exports, attract foreign investment, and expand diplomatic relations. This milestone in the nation's history led tertiary institutions to undergo significant transformation, shifting towards "marketisation, privatisation and massification of education, aimed at overcoming the inefficiencies of the education system and harnessing more potential investment in education to enhance human capital for the nation" (Tran & Marginson, 2018, p. 5). In accordance with this shift, Tower University chose to develop EMI programs by cooperating with foreign partner institutions, aiming at producing high-quality graduates proficient in foreign languages and skilled in international commerce, who would become valuable contributors to Vietnam's economic growth.

As part of its commitment to academic excellence, the university embarked on a journey of expansion and recognition. While retaining its expertise in business-related programs, the university expanded its academic offerings to include disciplines such as computer science, finance, laws, hospitality, banking, and foreign languages. This diversification of disciplines provided students with a wider range of educational opportunities, fostering interdisciplinary learning and equipping them with a comprehensive skill set to succeed in the globalised world. In 1993, the university established its second campus in a major city in southern Vietnam, broadening its reach and impact. In 2009, it opened a third campus in a robust coastal city in the north of Vietnam. Its commitment to quality education was recognised by MOET, who granted it permission to offer master's and doctoral programs in 1995 and 1998, respectively. This recognition further enhanced Tower University's reputation and solidified its position as a leading institution of higher education in Vietnam. In 2018, many of its programs were recognised by 56 foreign institutions in 16 countries (Tower University website).

In its outward-looking endeavour, Tower University had actively pursued international collaborations and established partnerships with 265 universities across 36 countries by 2018. These global networks facilitated student exchange programs, joint research initiatives, and the introduction of over 20 undergraduate programs delivered in EMI. The university's commitment to internationalisation was further strengthened through 64 exchange programs with tertiary institutions worldwide. In 2018, it hosted more than 800 international students and sent 300 local students to other countries (Tower University website). These initiatives not only provided students with invaluable international experiences but also nurtured cultural exchange and global citizenship.

With a vision to be recognised among the top 100 universities in the region by 2030, Tower University is implementing radical policy changes and embracing innovative educational practices. It aims to further enhance its academic offerings, expand its research capabilities, and foster an environment that promotes creativity and critical thinking. By adapting to contextual influences and responding to the challenges of globalisation, Tower University aims to provide an education that prepares students to navigate an interconnected and rapidly changing world.

In short, Tower University's transformation from a trade-focused institution to a multi-disciplinary university with a global outlook showcases its dedication to shaping

Vietnam's higher education sector. Through international collaborations, diversified academic offerings, and a focus on excellence, the university seeks to contribute to the nation's development while supporting the growth of global competencies among its academic staff and students (Tower University website).

1.4 Aims, rationales, and research questions

As mentioned earlier, while EMI has become prominent in internationalisation literature, much of this focus has been at the macro-level; that is, on policies governing EMI practice (Costa & Coleman, 2013; Dearden & Macaro, 2016; Hamid & Nguyen, 2016). Relatively less attention has been paid to operationalisation, especially to classroom practice. Among studies on EMI practice, fewer focus on lecturers' experience than on students' (Section 2.1.2). Yet, according to Priestley et al. (2015, p. 49), teacher agency is "the only sustainable way towards the maintenance of everything that is good in education and the improvement of that which needs improvement".

Increasingly recognised as a vital trait for educators, teacher agency empowers teachers to initiate meaningful changes within their professional and personal spheres, starting with their classroom practices (Nguyen & Bui, 2016; van der Heijden et al., 2018). This significance stems from teachers' ability to proactively adopt, adapt, or resist new policies and programs (Severance et al., 2018), thereby shaping the outcomes of reform efforts at both institutional and national levels (Tao & Gao, 2017).

In Vietnam, the rising standards of living resulting from economic development have boosted the demand for education in general, and for internationalised programs in particular (Tran & Marginson, 2018). The Vietnamese government considers IHE vital to developing human resources for the economy, and EMI instrumental in targeting internationalisation goals. Consequently, EMI programs have been proliferating despite the many issues the sector faces (Tran & Marginson, 2018; Vu & Burns, 2014). However, empirical research on EMI programs in Vietnam has been scarce, and studies on academics' enactment of agency in the changing environment even more so.

This research has sought to fill the gaps in the literature, with an emphasis on VHE context, where EMI education has induced variable changes to the whole HE sector. The research explored the lived experiences of academics engaged in EMI programs at a

VHEI to understand how they enact agency in the context of a changing educational environment. Additionally, it aimed to identify what role their agency plays in creating an effective teaching and learning environment in EMI programs. This investigation was to revealed factors that empower or constrain lecturers' enactment of agency, leading to practical implications.

The study was conducted at Tower University, one of Vietnam's most prestigious HEIs. Due to its majors in economics and business, the institution has been engaged with internationalisation from the early days. It was one of the 20 universities nationwide chosen by the government to pilot institutional autonomy. To date, it continues to play a leading role in this national initiative. In this context, understanding of academic agency is useful and necessary for informing policies and practice to ensure educational quality. By exploring academics' engagement with the teaching and learning environment where English is used as the medium of instruction, the research also sheds light on the interactions between the agents and the ecology in which they operate, thereby revealing what agency can offer as well as what promotes and constrains it.

To that end, the following research questions were asked:

Main research question: How is tertiary academic agency enacted in the teaching and learning environment of English medium instruction programs?

Sub-research questions:

1. What are tertiary academic perceptions of the teaching and learning environment of EMI programs?

2. What types of agency are manifested by EMI academics?

3. What are the cultural, structural, and material aspects that enhance or limit academic agency in EMI programs?

The next section describes the theoretical framework and methodology that were used to find answers to these research questions.

1.5 Theoretical framework and methodology

This research explores academics' agency from a socio-cultural perspective, which highlights the dynamics between personal capacities and contextual influences, emphasising its emergence through interactions with social, cultural, and institutional contexts. Investigating the engagement of academic actors with the EMI context, this study used Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) agency theory, which encompasses three dimensions: past, future, and present. Academics selectively drew upon their past experiences and integrated their expectations for the future, all of which were reflected in their present course of action.

Regarding agency as interactions between personal efforts, accessible resources, and contextual and structural elements (Biesta & Tedder, 2007), including public policy and institutional strategies, this study adopts an ecological approach to academic agency (Priestley et al., 2015). The ecological perspective suggests that agency is not inherently located within individual teachers, but emerges from their meaningful interactions within the educational and social environment. Consequently, policy decisions affecting teachers' daily roles can either support or obstruct their ability to exercise agency.

This research adopted the case study approach (Yin, 2014) due to its ability to capture comprehensive data and various contextual layers. The focal case was a Vietnamese university undergoing internationalisation. I used several methods, including document analysis, in-depth interviews, observation, and focus groups to collect data. The data analysis process involved coding interview transcripts into themes, employing deductive coding techniques (Patton, 2015). This analysis produced rich insights into the experiences of academics at the institution under investigation.

1.6 Thesis overview

Following this chapter, Chapter Two presents a background of research on teacher agency within the context of EMI teaching and learning environments. The chapter starts with a description of the EMI phenomenon, beginning by viewing various aspects of EMI from different angles. To provide a contextual setting for the research, the chapter then sketches a brief history of EMI development in Vietnam higher education, together with outstanding issues facing local educators. To connect with the key research focus of EMI

academics' agency, the review provides the definition of agency, and concludes with a summary of studies on teacher agency and EMI teaching and learning.

Chapter Three provides the theoretical framework for the current study, the ecological framework for teacher agency (Priestley et al., 2015). This framework, which is employed for both research design and data analysis, views agency as an emergent phenomenon, enacted by individual academics through the interplay of their capacities and the resources, affordances and constraints of the HE environment, with considerations of both the past and the future.

Chapter Four outlines the methodology employed in this qualitative study, focusing on exploring EMI lecturer agency in a Vietnamese university. Justifications for the use of the case study method, participant selection, data collection and analysis, strategies for rigour, the researcher's role, and ethical considerations are presented.

Chapter Five discusses the ecology of EMI education at Tower University, including policies for staff, students, curriculum, and pedagogy. The chapter also discusses managers' and students' perceptions of EMI and issues arising from EMI implementation.

Guided by the ecological approach proposed by Priestley et al. (2015), Chapter Six uncovers individual EMI lecturers' capabilities within complex social structures, emphasising the interplay between personal qualities and structural offerings. Their deep-seated beliefs about the role of English language in EMI, perceptions of students, and their roles as facilitators of learning heighten the complexity of their perspectives. Furthermore, their perceptions of EMI programs, aspirations, and the language they employ further enrich their practice.

Chapter Seven shifts the focus towards understanding the external factors that influence teacher agency in the study site. Teacher agency, a dynamic quality arising from the interplay between individual capacity and environmental conditions, is explored in relation to key themes including perceived difficulties, relationships, performativity, and professional learning communities.

Chapter Eight brings the findings together to answer the research questions, identifying the affordances and restrictions affecting pedagogical, relational, and reflexive agency. It

further analyses how personal capacities interact with cultural, structural, and material contexts, shaping the enactment of agency in EMI settings.

The last chapter provides a summary of the key findings, discusses the implications and significance of the study, acknowledges its limitations, and offers suggestions for future research directions. The thesis ends with concluding remarks.

Chapter 2 – Literature review: EMI teaching and learning environment and teacher agency

2.0 Introduction

The phenomenon of English medium instruction (EMI) has emerged as a significant global trend in higher education, reflecting broader socio-economic and political shifts towards globalisation. This literature review examines the concept of EMI, its research focus, and the critical role of teacher agency in its effective implementation. The first section introduces an overview of EMI as a global phenomenon, justifying a definition and rationale for its use in this study. It further reviews studies in EMI, encompassing the macro, meso and micro levels of implementation. The next part focuses on the development of EMI within the context of Vietnamese higher education (VHE). It traces the history of EMI in VHE, highlighting the unique challenges and issues encountered in its implementation. Moving to the concept of human agency, the chapter then presents various theoretical approaches to understanding agency, including sociological, social-cognitive, and socio-cultural perspectives. This section also defines agency, emphasising the necessity to investigate the phenomenon from the ecology perspective. The last part of the chapter synthesises studies on teacher agency in EMI teaching and learning, and examines how teacher agency intersects with language planning policies, teacher identity, and the factors that enable or constrain teacher agency in EMI settings.

2.1 EMI as a global phenomenon

2.1.1 EMI definition and justification for using the term in this study

As this study revolves around EMI teaching and learning environments, it is crucial to clearly define EMI and justify its application within the context of this study. Generally, as the name suggests, EMI is an educational environment in which the teaching and learning activities are implemented through the medium of the English language. However, this simple conceptualisation does not account for the fact that higher education (HE) is by no means "a monolithic and potentially homogeneous phenomenon" (Smit, 2018, p. 387). For example, EMI in an "expanding circle" country such as Vietnam differs from its implementation in "outer circle" nations such as India or Bangladesh (Kachru, 1992). Similarly, the linguistic backgrounds of students and teachers may also influence

the implementation of EMI. In some settings, the English language might be the lingua franca among linguistically diversified students and teachers (for example, as found by Dafouz et al., 2008; Doiz et al., 2011), while in others, it may be a foreign language for everyone (Başıbek et al., 2014; Byun et al., 2010; Nguyen et al., 2017). Next, EMI education can encompass various methods of language support: students receiving instruction in their first language alongside their EMI courses; students receiving supplementary English support courses; students enrolling in an intensive English program prior to their EMI courses; or students passing an English proficiency test before enrolling in their EMI course (Macaro, 2018). Therefore, what may be unquestionably called an EMI program in one institution may not be so in another; for example, the teaching of a business course for speakers of languages other than English in Australia and a similar course in Vietnam.

To shed light on this issue, several attempts have been made to define the phenomenon. Dearden (2014, p. 2) defines EMI as "the use of English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English", which includes programs to learn the English language. Murata and Iino (2018, p. 404) conceptualise EMI contexts as settings where "English is used as a lingua franca for content-learning/teaching among students and teachers from different linguacultural backgrounds", which arguably excludes settings where English is used by teachers and most students who share the same first language (L1), such as in Vietnamese higher education institutions (VHEIs). These contexts, which are the focus of this study, are common in non-native English-speaking countries. Dafouz and Smit (2016) introduce the concept of English Medium Education in Multilingual University Settings (EMEMUS), which recognises the presence of other languages in HE contexts while positioning English as the central language of instruction. Other scholars such as Humphreys (2017) and Fenton-Smith et al. (2017), addressing English language proficiency of international HE students, even include Australia as an EMI country, arguing that a substantial proportion of the Australian HE population consists of international students whose L1 is not English.

Ambiguities arise even from one of the most often cited definitions of EMI: "the use of the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not

English" (Macaro, 2018, p. 19). For example, the author acknowledges that the use of English can occur in many ways, including sole use, partial use, and code-switching (Macaro & Akıncıoğlu, 2018). In another case, the authors find it necessary to specify what they mean by "academic subjects" through giving examples, "such as engineering, business studies or medicine" (Macaro et al., 2020). However, one thing is obvious: Macaro's (2018) definition clearly excludes programs in Kachru's (1992) inner-circle countries but includes those in outer and expanding circles, thus encompassing a vast number of programs worldwide.

Even the labelling of EMI contains variations, such as "English as the medium of instruction" (Vinke, 1995), or "English as a medium of instruction" (Belhiah & Elhami, 2015). To make matters even more complicated, in some studies, the term "EMI" is used interchangeably with others such as content and language integrated learning (CLIL) or content-based instruction (CBI). For example, Floris (2014) describes EMI as the locally recognised educational approach of CLIL in Indonesian HE, and thus, uses the two terms interchangeably. Alternative phrases have also been proposed to denote the use of English as the medium of instruction, including "English-taught programs" (Wächter & Maiworm, 2008), "English as an academic language" (Bolton & Kuteeva, 2012), or as noted, "content and language integrated learning" (Dafouz et al., 2008) and "integrating content and language in higher education" (ICLHE) (Costa & Coleman, 2013).

To bring clarity to this study, the next section distinguishes between EMI and the other most often studied term, CLIL. The term "CLIL" was first coined by Marsh (2008, cited in Brown & Bradford, 2017) in the context of an emerging teaching approach in European countries after European Commission language policies promoted the notion of EU citizens having mastery of a native language plus two other EU-member languages. Appearing first in European secondary schools, CLIL is now spreading all over the world to all levels of education. In contrast to EMI, the language and subject contents are given equal weight. In CLIL, there is an assumption that the second language is predominantly used over the first language, and that the teachers are competent in the second language skills to teach the academic content. Unlike EMI, CLIL is more than an approach; instead, it is a widely accepted method of teaching.

EMI has, in contrast, been described as "an umbrella term for academic subjects taught through English" because it makes "no direct reference to the aim of improving students'

English" (Dearden & Macaro, 2016, p. 456). As such, EMI is an approach to teaching in English in which the focus is on subject-content mastery rather than explicit language learning aims (Brown & Bradford, 2017). In EMI, the content focus outweighs the language focus, with the assumption that students need to deal with an academic program in English rather than in their L1 (Baird, 2013). The exclusive focus of EMI on English and content mastery could risk neglecting broader language development goals, whereas CLIL's integration of language and content reflects a more balanced and versatile approach to multilingual education. (Table 2.1)

Table 2.1

EMI vs. CLIL - Adapted from Carrió-Pastor (2021)

	EMI	**CLIL**
Contextual origin	No	European ideal of plurilingual competence for EU citizens
Objectives	Content mastery	Dual focus on both content and language
Language specification	English	No additional language specification
Education levels	Tertiary	Mostly primary and secondary
Instructors	Content teachers or language teachers trained in content to teach the subjects	Content teachers trained in foreign language methodology to teach subjects
Materials	Designed by content teachers	Designed by content and language teachers
Assessment	Content acquisition	Content and language acquisition

Defining EMI proves difficult due to its varying interpretations across different contexts and observers (Airey, 2016). Consequently, local assumptions about the practical aspects of EMI, such as pedagogy, assessment, and language use, persist in practice. For this research, a study program is defined as EMI if: 1) English is one of the languages of teaching and learning activities; 2) English itself is not the learning objective; and 3)

English is not the first language of the majority of the population. The next sections will review EMI programs from the macro (national), meso (institutional), and micro (classroom) levels.

2.1.2 EMI at macro level: Development, policies and the global context

Over the past few decades, there has been a remarkable surge in the demand to elevate the English language proficiency of both current and prospective workers (Kirkpatrick, 2014). Hence, it is unsurprising that tertiary institutions are keen to diversify the array of courses and programs offered through EMI (Walkinshaw et al., 2017). As an illustration, nearly 28,000 courses are now conducted in English at universities outside the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada (Agnew & Neghina, 2021), while in 2007, over 400 European higher education institutions delivered 2,400 EMI programs (Doiz et al., 2012).

In the Asia-Pacific region, EMI has assumed a pivotal role in language policy and planning, owing to both regional and international endeavours. An example of a regional network is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN) University Network (AUN) founded in 1995 in response to the call for the Southeast Asian member countries to enhance the network of top universities in the region (ASEAN, 1992). In 2008, ASEAN set forth a plan to achieve greater regional harmonisation involving 6,500 HEIs and 12 million post-secondary students (Dang, 2015). Moreover, the 2012 APEC summit, consisting of 21 countries with a combined population of 2.8 billion, resolved to enhance academic staff and student mobility (APEC, 2015). Such international and regional agreements accelerate the momentum towards EMI (Kirkpatrick, 2014). Consequently, EMI is perceived not merely as a linguistic evolution but also as a geopolitical, economic, and ideological phenomenon with a significant effect on the broader university ecosystem (Madhavan Brochier, 2016, cited by Walkinshaw et al., 2017). It is obvious that EMI's expansion has quickened to the extent that it has been likened to an "unstoppable train" (Macaro, 2015, p. 7). The growth of EMI has outpaced comprehensive research scrutiny, particularly in such places where EMI implementation is still in its early stages, as in Vietnam.

A review of literature shows that in many countries where there is a rapid growth of EMI in their tertiary education, EMI is effected in a top-down manner (Dearden & Macaro,

2016; Hamid, Nguyen, et al., 2013; Nguyen, 2018). That means the decisions to initiate and implement EMI programs are mandated from the government level and passed to lower levels, without "thorough institutional stakeholder discussion" (Briggs et al., 2018, p. 674) and often without institutional "structured management" (Nguyen, 2018, p. 133), such as provision for sufficient resources (Hamid, Nguyen, et al., 2013). This may be due to the pressure to quickly meet the growing demand for EMI programs, and to the perception about their crucial role in "the internationalisation agenda and a string of highly funded government policies [that] followed to encourage expansion" (Galloway et al., 2020, p. 400). Obviously, there is a notable absence of a structured approach for institutions to involve faculty and students in determining what is needed in EMI, and when it is needed (Macaro et al., 2018). As a result, lecturers find themselves teaching in English even when they lack adequate preparation, leading to potential challenges in delivering quality education and facilitating student learning (Cho, 2012; Costa & Coleman, 2013). More seriously, attempts to enforce top-down policy such as language changes can encounter resistance (Ali & Hamid, 2018; Molino & Campagna, 2014; Zacharias, 2013).

The implementation of EMI on a global scale has brought forth various challenges and considerations that affect both lecturers and students. A recurring concern involves the English proficiency levels of both students and lecturers (Bradford, 2016). A parallel concern in EMI programs is the variations in students' command of English, which pose similar difficulties to lecturers in addition to language mastery (Wächter & Maiworm, 2014). Furthermore, the divergence between students' accustomed learning methods and the instructional approaches used in EMI classrooms presents a significant hurdle. This may happen in cases where students and EMI professors come from culturally different backgrounds. For example, a British student may be familiar with a teaching approach characterised by high interactivity. In contrast, Japanese university classrooms typically prioritise silent learning (King, 2013). This incongruity can hinder students' adaptability and engagement within the EMI environment, potentially affecting their academic performance. Consequently, as mentioned by King (2013), some Japanese professors feel the need to adapt their teaching methods to attune more closely to the interactive approach commonly found outside of Japan (Bradford, 2016).

Although EMI is frequently regarded as a tool for enhancing internationalisation within higher education, its implementation should not be narrowly construed as the sole means

to achieve this goal. Instead, EMI must be part of a broader, more inclusive plan that accounts for diverse institutional and cultural contexts (Hu et al., 2014; Knight, 2011). While EMI holds the potential to connect institutions globally, its dominance raises critical questions about linguistic equity and cultural preservation. The prioritisation of English often reinforces linguistic imperialism, where English gains at the expense of local languages and cultural identities (Hampson & McKinley, 2024; Phillipson, 2013; R'boul, 2022). This situation risks creating an academic environment in which English is not just a medium of instruction but also a marker of intellectual superiority (Pennycook, 2003), marginalising other linguistic traditions (Han & Dong, 2023).

Moreover, the adoption of EMI can have profound implications for the professional identities of professors and the social fabric of academic communities. Soren (2013) highlights how EMI reshapes faculty roles, potentially privileging those proficient in English while sidelining those who teach in the L1. Bradford (2016) expands on this by noting how EMI may exacerbate inequities among students and staff, as students with lower English proficiency often require additional support, and EMI faculty are perceived as more prestigious than their L1 counterparts. This stratification aligns with the critique of English's role in global education, where it is often imbued with cultural and ideological dominance that fosters inequalities within educational systems (Canagarajah, 2012; Galloway et al., 2017; Pennycook, 2017).

To mitigate these challenges, it is essential to foster inclusive strategies that promote linguistic diversity and equity. Canagarajah's (2012) notion of translingual practices offers a valuable perspective, advocating for a dynamic, flexible approach to language use that respects and integrates multilingual practices. Similarly, Simie and McKinley (2024, p. 17) advocate a "locally grounded and fexible forms of multilingual education" which respect "local forms of knowledge" in EMI contexts. Such strategies would not only reduce the risk of linguistic imperialism but also support a more inclusive academic environment. As Wilkinson (2013) suggests, developing supportive policies and fostering intercultural competence are critical to ensuring that EMI contributes meaningfully to academic excellence. By embracing a critical approach to EMI implementation, institutions can navigate the complexities of linguistic and cultural diversity, avoiding the pitfalls of English dominance while harnessing its potential to enrich academic experiences.

2.1.3 Teacher beliefs and institutional support of EMI

Recent studies have highlighted teachers' prevalent attitudes, both positive and negative, towards EMI education. On the one hand, EMI is underpinned by a multitude of positive convictions among educators. It is perceived as a gateway to internationalisation of higher education. For example, in a quantitative study conducted in the University of Copenhagen, Danish lecturers advocated for an increase in the number of EMI courses to attract non-Danish students, seeing English as an essential component of internationalisation (Jensen & Thøgersen 2011). Similarly, Earls (2016) demonstrated that at least in Germany, both lecturers and students perceived EMI as inevitable in the globalisation context, a sentiment echoed by business-school teachers in Korea (Byun et al., 2010). This belief is influenced by the perception of English as the predominant language of science and technology, motivating educators to opt for EMI, as teaching and learning resources are more readily available in English than in their native languages (Başıbek et al., 2014; Doiz et al., 2011; Hamid, Jahan, et al., 2013). In other words, lecturers believe in the prestige granted to English in a globalised world, which can help them develop university curricula and policies to promote the effectiveness of EMI education (Yuan et al., 2020). By providing access to internationally published materials in English (Zare-ee & Gholami, 2013), EMI facilitates seamless interaction with unlimited academic resources, and fosters intellectual exchange transcending geographical boundaries (Hamid, Jahan, et al., 2013), thus offering advantages in future employment, communication, and status (Byun et al., 2010; Hamid, Nguyen, et al., 2013; Jensen & Thøgersen 2011). In addition, some lecturers were motivated by more than just the practicality of or requirement for English proficiency, instead prioritising the intercultural understanding, insights from diverse cultures, and mental adaptability that English proficiency can promote (Earls, 2016).

However, dissenting voices suggest apprehensions and reservations among educators. In one case, lecturers saw their institution's enforcement of EMI as a violation of academic freedom. Because they were at the lower end of the institution's power structure, plus the institution's persistence in mandating EMI, they found it difficult to resist the mandate (Park, 2015, p. 77). In a Malaysian university, the negotiations of national and institutional language policies regarding EMI were articulated in written documents to sidestep concerns about the sensitivity of the language used for instruction (Ali, 2013).

In this study, language policy encounters resistance stemming from an incongruity in concepts of internationalisation, as educators adhere to what the author terms a "silent understanding" of internationalisation, diverging from the paradigm espoused by EMI proponents.

Perhaps lecturers' most common concern in EMI settings across various countries is their own and their students' language proficiency. This worry extends beyond mere inadequacy, and encompasses perceptions of English proficiency as a potential obstacle to accessing and benefiting from EMI programs (Bozdoğan & Karlıdağ, 2013; Doiz et al., 2011). From insufficient vocabulary knowledge (Başıbek et al., 2014; Dearden et al., 2016) to weak listening and writing skills (Rogier, 2012), these concerns amplify the challenges lecturers face in delivering content effectively within EMI contexts.

There is also a concern over lecturers' English proficiency. Dearden's (2014) survey revealed that a vast majority of informed observers across 54 countries noted a shortage of qualified teachers, with many attributing this shortage to linguistic inadequacies. Numerous studies echo this finding, with several reporting that lecturers themselves acknowledge having linguistic challenges. For instance, Italian university lecturers expressed concerns about the adequacy of their English proficiency and its potential impact on student comprehension and language learning accuracy (Guarda & Helm, 2016; Pulcini & Campagna, 2015). Similar issues were voiced by lecturers in various other regions, including Iraqi Kurdistan (Borg, 2016), Vietnam (Vu & Burns, 2014), and Denmark (Werther et al., 2014).

Despite these distinctive challenges in the EMI classrooms, due to the hasty implementation of EMI, many HEIs often fail to provide training to help EMI instructors effectively implement their courses (Lasagabaster, 2018). This means that in many places around the world, lecturers are engaged in EMI teaching without having been involved in EMI-related training (Macaro et al., 2020). This has resulted in a disconnection between institutional expectations and practical implementation (Aguilar & Rodríguez, 2012).

Existing research continues to demonstrate limited insights into attitudes regarding the support provided to EMI lecturers. While survey findings highlight language competence as a primary concern among EMI instructors (e.g., Byun et al., 2010), Ball and Lindsay (2013) argue that pedagogical skills hold greater significance in professional

development. This viewpoint is further corroborated in Farrell's (2020) study, which emphasises the central role of pedagogical skills in EMI professional growth. Similarly, in a survey covering 463 EMI lecturers of various content areas across different countries, Macaro et al. (2020, p. 152) find that EMI teaching "requires a greater range of competencies than merely having a threshold level of general English proficiency". Although the study does not specify which competencies are required of EMI teachers, the authors suggest a combination of content knowledge and knowledge in second language acquisition might suffice.

Initially focused on enhancing English language proficiency (Aguilar & Rodríguez, 2012; Wächter & Maiworm, 2014), recent training courses for EMI teachers have shifted their focus to cover pedagogical training, according to studies on professional development (PD) for EMI lecturers. This shift emphasises the growing recognition of an intertwined nature of language proficiency, disciplinary content, and literacy in EMI, highlighting the necessity of both linguistic and pedagogical training for effective instruction (Airey, 2020; Farrell, 2020; Macaro, 2019). This trend suggests that EMI content teachers need to pay due attention to the linguistic issues necessary to deliver their subject content effectively and successfully in the EMI classroom. Efforts to address these PD needs, such as successful development programs emphasising interdisciplinary collaboration (Banks, 2018; Dearden et al., 2016; Lu, 2022), greater engagement with students in English (Guarda & Helm, 2016), and PD through reflective practice (Farrell, 2020) have been observed. While consensus is lacking regarding the most effective type of PD programs for EMI lecturers, these courses nonetheless offer some platforms, which serve not only to introduce new EMI methodologies but also to facilitate reflective practice, allowing instructors to scrutinise their teaching approaches within the context of EMI (Beaumont, 2020).

2.1.4 EMI practices at classroom level

In their 2011 study, Thøgersen and Airey examined a lecturer's delivery speed in a course conducted in both English (L2) and Danish (L1). They found that while the instructor needed 22% more time to cover topics in the second language compared to the first, and his speech rate was 23% slower when teaching in English, there was no discernible decrease in the amount of content conveyed. Moreover, while lecturing in English, the instructor employed much repetition and adopted a formal, succinct style, rather than the

more rhetorical method noticed during Danish instruction. This suggests a subtle adjustment in lecturers' delivery styles in EMI environments, potentially accommodating learners' language proficiency needs without compromising the depth of content delivery. This is contrary to findings in a study on the teaching and learning strategies of lecturers and students in EMI programs at a Chinese university, in which Hu et al. (2014) report that EMI lecturers simplified the content and stayed close to textbook contents to cope with their language difficulties. This observation is also common in other studies such as Hamid, Nguyen, et al. (2013), Byun et al. (2010), Coleman (2005), and Kennedy (2011).

In a study investigating EMI teachers' use of language at a Chinese university setting, Zhang and Lo (2021) explore EMI teachers' use of interactive metadiscourse. The authors highlight the role of transition markers, frame markers, reminders and code glosses in aiding audiences' comprehension and evaluation of information. In their analysing of data from four EMI courses in two Chinese universities, Zhang and Lo find that while EMI teachers employ interactive metadiscourse for lecture organisation and knowledge connection, they often rely on a limited range of expressions, potentially hindering L2 learners' exposure to target language usage.

In EMI discourse, increasing attention has recently been paid to translanguaging, or "the ways in which bilingual students and teachers engage in complex and fluid discursive practices that include, at times, the home language practices of students in order to 'make sense' of teaching and learning, to communicate and appropriate subject knowledge, and to develop academic language practices" (García & Li, 2014, p. 112). The increasing acceptance of translanguaging as a pedagogical approach in educational settings represents a departure from deficit views of bilingual individuals and bilingualism, as noted by Lewis et al. (2012). Essentially, the practice of integrating languages in classrooms has given way to acknowledging students' and teachers' multilingual repertoires as valuable assets for learning. Numerous studies have explored the concept of translanguaging and its instructional benefits, including perception, practice, and impact on learning outcomes, in EMI contexts.

Recent studies have found that lecturers and students generally hold a positive view of translanguaging, considering it as appropriate and natural in the classroom environment (e.g., Kuteeva, 2020; Rahman & Singh, 2021; Ryu, 2019). Students recognise its usefulness in scaffolding their learning of complex concepts, aiding comprehension, and

alleviating emotional pressures, particularly for those with lower English proficiency (Luo & Yu, 2024). Furthermore, it allows students to express their ideas effectively and mobilise their language resources for learning content (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022). However, the effective implementation of translanguaging practices depends on various factors, including students' language proficiency, socio-cultural values attached to language use, and teachers' personal experiences with EMI teaching (Fang & Liu, 2020). Considering translanguaging to be a pedagogy, García and Li (2014, p. 92) suggest that teachers use it as a "scaffolding approach" to support their bilingual or multilingual students in accessing content and constructing new knowledge. In this vein, they propose three categories of strategies for effective translanguaging: attentiveness to meaning-making, use and design of classroom resources for translanguaging, and design of curriculum and classroom structures for translanguaging (García & Li, 2014, pp. 121-122).

In Asia, where English functions as a lingua franca in most EMI settings, "translanguaging practices are always present regardless of whether they are officially sanctioned or recognised" (Baker & Tsou, 2021, p. 183). Thus, translanguaging should be seen as "an integral part of academic disciplinary cultures and literacies in EMI" (Baker & Tsou, 2021, p. 188). The practice carries substantial pedagogical implications for EMI teaching and learning. However, further research is needed to explore the impact of pedagogical translanguaging on students' learning processes and to address concerns regarding language proficiency development and content learning in EMI settings.

2.2 EMI development in Vietnamese higher education (VHE)

EMI programs have emerged as a significant component of higher education in Vietnam, marking a transformative shift in higher education and corresponding to the nation's aspirations for socioeconomic advancement and international integration. The following section reviews literature on VHE EMI, with a focus on the ecology of the EMI teaching and learning environment.

2.2.1 Historical context of EMI and MOET's vision

The journey of VHE towards enveloping EMI in higher education is rooted in its historical trajectory and evolving socioeconomic conditions. Before World War II, English was not used in education in Vietnam (Wright, 2020). The post-World War II era

witnessed sporadic efforts to promote English language learning in southern Vietnam before experiencing a downturn in the aftermath of political transitions in 1975 (Bui & Nguyen, 2016). However, the advent of *Đổi Mới* (reform) in 1986 ushered in a new era of openness and economic reform, catalysing a resurgence of interest in English education as a gateway to global opportunities (Le Ha, 2008).

The government's strategic vision recognised the pivotal role of EMI in achieving multiple goals, ranging from enhancing educational quality and international competitiveness to fostering a skilled workforce capable of driving Vietnam's burgeoning economy (Pham, 2014). The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) led initiatives to integrate EMI into HEIs, mirroring global trends and aspiring to transform Vietnam into a hub of academic excellence in the region. Embracing the government's call for cooperation with other countries, collaborative endeavours between domestic universities and their foreign counterparts served as catalysts for the introduction of EMI programs, initially at the postgraduate level in the early 1990s and subsequently expanding to undergraduate programs.

The 2010s saw the rapid growth of international cooperation programs, following HERA 2005 and MOET's Decree on advanced programs (APs). As of 2021, VHE had over 450 international programs in operation, most of them EMI (Phùng & Phan, 2021). The adoption of EMI programs has significantly changed pedagogical practices. Rooted deeply in Confucianism and Taoism, Vietnamese education traditionally reveres teachers as infallible sources of knowledge, whereas students are positioned as passive recipients of knowledge (Tran et al., 2018). The aspirations for "a responsive, flexible, and learner-centred education" might thus be compromised by the pressure of the exam-driven curriculum (Tran et al., 2014, p. 106).

Recognising the limitations of the traditional approach, educational-policy documents advocate for a transformation towards learner-centred teaching methodologies, as evidenced by the emphasis on "learner-centred teaching", "individualised learning", "autonomous learning", and "critical thinking" (MOET, 2008). Thus, EMI is positioned as a remedy to the prevailing issue of passive learning, aiming for a spread from EMI programs to the entire HE sector, encompassing teaching methods, assessment, and curricular content (Tran et al., 2014; Tran et al., 2017). EMI academics are thus expected to transition from teacher-fronted to learner-centred approaches, employing interactive

classroom activities and modern facilities to foster communicative approaches, group-work, presentation, and critical-thinking skills among students (Tri & Moskovsky, 2019). This shift aligns with Western educational models, which prioritise student autonomy and active engagement in learning. For example, Wilkinson (2011) supports the efficacy of student-centred EMI curriculum design in enhancing both language proficiency and subject knowledge. Moreover, the integration of real-life working experiences through field trips, internships, and practice further enriches students' learning experiences, equipping them with practical skills and autonomy beyond the classroom (Tri & Moskovsky, 2019). Overall, the adoption of EMI in VHE signifies ministerial efforts at the policy level towards fostering a dynamic and student-centred learning environment, aimed at empowering learners to become proactive, autonomous, and proficient in both language and scholarly content.

2.2.2 Issues in EMI implementation in contemporary VHE

Similar to the situation elsewhere, the implementation of EMI in VHE is complicated by top-down policies, with incongruities between macro-level policy and institutional capabilities and implementation (Nguyen et al., 2017). For example, while developing foreign language proficiency, mainly English, has long been one of the main targets of national human capital development (Pham, 2014) and developing EMI programs at selected HEIs remains one of the targets of Project 2020, the requirements for English language proficiency at the institutional level are taken lightly for both lecturers and students. It is required that lecturers who wish to teach in EMI programs be able to use English, and/or have post-graduate degrees from universities in English-speaking countries (Vu & Burns, 2014). For students, the bar for English language proficiency is set low, with an inappropriate testing mechanism (Nguyen et al., 2017). These low requirements have challenged both lecturers and students in their performance in EMI programs (Nguyen, 2016; Vu & Burns, 2014). This disparity may be due to the lack of clearly articulated strategies and guidelines (Tri & Moskovsky, 2019), or to the poor involvement of multiple stakeholders at different levels in the policy-making process, whether it is institutional consultation in national policy-making, or lecturers' and students' engagement in institutional implementation of EMI programs (Nguyen et al., 2017; Tri & Moskovsky, 2019).

Second, the impact of internationalisation in Vietnam through EMI programs tends to be limited to a relatively small group of students and teachers (Nguyen et al., 2017; Tran et al., 2018; Tri & Moskovsky, 2019). EMI education is often selective, confined to specific fields such as business or STEM (Tran et al., 2018), thereby limiting opportunities to a small proportion of students. Consequently, inequities arise, with only a fraction of the student body gaining access to these programs. Discriminatory perceptions towards traditional Vietnamese medium instruction (VMI) education are evident, as EMI programs are often lauded as "advanced" or of "high quality", positioning them as the epitome of superior education. Conversely, VMI programs are frequently characterised as "mass education", connoting a normative or even subpar quality (Nguyen et al., 2016, p. 679). This stance aligns with previous research (Hu & Alsagoff, 2010; Manan et al., 2022; Tollefson & Tsui, 2014) that suggests a prevailing preference for EMI over L1 education. This fragmented distribution of opportunities results in the fact that the impacts of EMI programs remain localised rather than being pervasive across the entire student population.

Third, practical challenges further hinder equitable access to EMI programs. These encompass a shortage of competent teachers and learners, inadequate resources and support, as well as the inherent trade-offs between content and language within the curriculum, coupled with inappropriate methodologies (Hamid, Nguyen, et al., 2013; Le, 2012). Imported and modified curricula also remain problematic. The "mismatch between the content and aims of imported curricula and the cultural, linguistic, commercial and politico-economic context of Vietnam" (Nguyen et al., 2017, p. 43) has resulted in irrelevant contents for students who hope to join the local workforce and additional burden for lecturers who have had to modify their teaching materials to include local examples (Phan et al., 2019).

In addition, challenges in language, together with the lack of pedagogical support, have exacerbated the classroom teaching situation. Research has highlighted that English proficiency is one of the main challenges in implementing EMI programs (Nguyen et al., 2017; Vu & Burns, 2014). Nguyen et al. (2017) report that many VHEIs set low benchmarks for students' English language proficiency or use unsuitable testing mechanisms, leaving many EMI students struggling with their learning. The fact that English remains the foreign language for both students and lecturers makes it much more

difficult for students to comprehend the lectures. Therefore, one of the common strategies in EMI classrooms is code-switching or translanguaging. In their study, which involved interviews with 16 EMI lecturers, Vu and Burns (2014) report that L1 was employed as a teaching strategy to address language challenges. As for pedagogy, it should be noted that while EMI policies in Vietnam aspire to improve in English proficiency, the specific goals of these policies are not clearly conveyed to EMI lecturers. As a result, teachers in EMI programs lecture in diverse ways, influenced by their individual language abilities and understanding of the policy (Hamid et al., 2018; Tran & Nguyen, 2018). While students have struggled with lectures, reading materials, writing assignments, interaction with teachers, and in-class exchanges, academics have struggled with the mandate to raise students' English language competence in addition to teaching content (Nguyen et al., 2017). Consequently, students feel confused and stressed due to a large amount of unclear information and teachers feel unable to deliver lectures in English (Le, 2012).

Although these systemic deficiencies highlight the urgent need for comprehensive strategies aimed at enhancing equity and access to EMI programs at both the institutional and national levels, the implementation of EMI programs in VHE is not without success. For example, in their exploration of the experience of 20 pre-service teachers in a teacher-education program conducted in EMI, Dang et al. (2013) find that the EMI framework had a positive effect on shaping the future teachers' practice. For instance, the availability of teaching resources contributed to the facilitation of EMI. The study also shows that VHEIs have responded to internationalisation with the employment of overseas-trained lecturers, the special EMI framework and facilities supporting the teacher-education program, and the university's "adherence to regional and global standards systems" (Dang et al., 2013, p. 67). Overall, the authors conclude that EMI at VHEIs is not far from satisfactory, which adds another perspective to the studies mentioned above.

While most of the literature on EMI has focused on its implementation at the macro- and meso-levels, there has been insufficient emphasis on EMI instructors and EMI practice at the classroom level (Huang, 2015; Wächter & Maiworm, 2008). These educators, guided by their individual backgrounds, beliefs, values, and agency, are crucial in moulding students' experiences and outcomes in EMI learning environments. The following section will touch on this gap in the research, first specifying approaches to agency, then summarising research specifically on teacher agency in EMI education.

2.3 Human agency

Agency has been the focus of research in social science and humanities for a long time; however, it remains "a slippery and much contested term" (Priestley et al., 2015, p. 19) and has seldom inspired systematic analysis (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). In analysing human agency, theorists have moved their focus from habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) and routinised aspects (Giddens, 1984) to one-sided conceptions of agency such as goal seeking, purposivity, deliberation and judgment (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Generally, research in human agency falls into one of the three approaches, depending on the researchers' theoretical orientations (Table 2.2).

2.3.1 Social-science approach to agency

The social-science approach to human agency posits a consensus among sociologists regarding the sophisticated interconnection between individual agency and structural elements. This perspective emphasises that individuals' capacity to act is shaped and constrained by the social frameworks that envelop them. Scholars within this paradigm further underline the substantial influence of structural factors on individuals' decision-making processes and actions (Eteläpelto et al., 2013). Viewing agency as variables, scholars within this discourse diverge on the relative roles that structure and agency play in propelling social and educational reforms. This divergence prompts inquiries into whether agency exerts a greater influence than structure in driving these transformative changes.

Social-science literature regarding agency has been significantly influenced by the contributions of two prominent thinkers, Anthony Giddens and Margaret Archer, each offering their unique insights and theories on the nature and interpretation of agency. Giddens (1984) argues that human agency is contingent upon intentional actions, where individuals possess the capability and power to bring about specific outcomes through conscious decision-making. He distinguishes agentic actions from mere reactive responses by emphasising the role of intentionality, the capability to enact intentions, and the power to intervene in or evoke events.

The strengths of Giddens's concept lie in its emphasis on individual intentionality and conscious decision-making as fundamental to agentic action (Eteläpelto et al., 2013). By

focusing on the power of individuals to enact change and intervene in events, Giddens highlights the importance of human agency in shaping outcomes. The significance of Giddens's theory on this research is his idea that people need to be competent to realise their intentions. This capability comes from their knowledge of the field and their personal and professional backgrounds, thus highlighting the importance of experience. Their capacity enables them to make a difference to a pre-existing state of affairs or course of events (Giddens, 1984). This implies that agency of individual and collective actors can alter social or organisational structures gradually over time (Pantić, 2015).

However, Giddens's theory has faced criticism for its narrow focus on individual rational action, neglecting broader social influences (Eteläpelto et al., 2013). Critics argue that this limited perspective reduces human existence to individual agency, overlooking the intricate interplay between individual actions and societal structures (Archer, 2003). Additionally, the lack of clear analytical separation between the individual and the social domain has been cited as a weakness, as it oversimplifies the complexities of human behaviour within social contexts. Giddens's theory has also been strongly criticised by Emirbayer and Mische (1998) for its lack of a temporal dimension of agency; they instead propose expanding the temporal dimension of agency to encompass the past and the future as well as the present.

Archer's theory of agency emphasises the analytical separation of individual and societal properties and powers (Archer, 2000). This distinction allows for a nuanced understanding of their interaction and temporal dynamics. Central to Archer's theory is the concept of identity, which she divides into discursively produced social identity and an embodied sense of self. Unlike social identity, personal identity emerges from an internal conversation characterised by discernment, deliberation, and commitment to individual concerns. This internal dialogue serves as the primary interface between the social and the individual. Archer views agentic actions as intentional and goal-directed processes, emphasising the relational autonomy of the individual in self-exercise, with personal identity and temporality taken into account (Eteläpelto et al., 2013). While her notion of intentional agency shares similarities with Giddens's perspective, their views on ontology and the relationship between the individual and the social differ significantly.

2.3.2 Social-cognitive approach to agency

The second approach to agency stresses the psychosocial functioning of agency, views agency as capacity residing within individuals, and advocates an independent relationship between agency and structure such as the "capacity for autonomous action ... [independent] of the determining constraints of social structure" (Calhoun, 2002, cited by Biesta & Tedder, 2006, p. 136). Scholars in this school also describe agency as the capacity of actors to "critically shape their responses to problematic situations" (noted by Biesta & Tedder, 2006, p. 142). Similarly, Taylor (1977, cited by Edwards, 2005, p. 169) views agency as "the capacity to identify the goals at which one is directing one's action and to evaluate whether one had been successful".

The social-cognitive approach posits the concept of emergent interactive agency, wherein people "make causal contribution to their own motivation and action within a system of triadic reciprocal causation" (Bandura, 1989, p. 1175), by which the author means the mutual influence between environment, behaviour, and person. Bandura (2018) further elaborates on human agency, identifying forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness as key components. Acknowledging the drawbacks of solely emphasising individual agency, Bandura expands this theoretical framework to encompass three dimensions of human agency: individual, proxy, and collective. He argues that this diverse combination of agentic dimensions applies universally across cultures. Nonetheless, a critical concern arises regarding the potential to attribute blame for failures in policy implementation to individuals or specific groups (Priestley et al., 2015).

The common problem of social-cognitive conceptualisations of agency is the individualistic view that sees it as something people possess as a result of their individual attributes; thus, individuals may be deemed agentic solely by virtue of possessing agentic capabilities, even if they do not actively exercise agency (Priestley et al., 2015).

Table 2.2

Approaches to Agency

Aspect	Social-science Approach	Social-cognitive Approach	Socio-cultural Approach
Nature of agency	Agency is intentional and goal-directed but influenced by social structures; viewed as both individual and collective.	Agency is an individual's capacity to act independently of social constraints.	Agency emerges through interactions between individual capacity and socio-cultural contexts.
Focus	Interaction between individual agency and social structure.	Individual capacity, self-reflection, and independent action.	Quality of engagement of the actors with the environment.
Strengths	Highlights the role of intentionality and competence in enacting change.	Emphasises personal autonomy and self-motivation.	Recognises the temporal and situated nature of agency within specific contexts.
Criticisms	Overemphasises individual action; lacks a clear separation between individual and social factors.	Seen as overly individualistic, potentially blaming individuals for systemic failures.	May overemphasise social determinism where individuals are seen as passive carriers of social structures. Gives insufficient attention to power dynamics.
Educational implications	Focuses on how educators' intentional actions can reshape educational structures over time. Highlights the importance of competence and knowledge in enacting agency.	Useful for understanding personal goal-setting and reflective practices in teaching.	Educators shape and are shaped by their social, cultural, and institutional contexts. The interdependence of social structures and individual actions means teachers and learners can navigate and transform their educational experiences in ways that are meaningful to them.

2.3.3 Socio-cultural approach to agency

Socio-cultural approaches share the common belief that socio-cultural contexts play a significant role in influencing and shaping human activities (Eteläpelto et al., 2013). At its core, the social-cultural approach to teacher agency emphasises the dynamic interplay between individual capacities and contextual influences. Theorists in this approach stress the mediated nature of agency, highlighting how environmental factors and cultural instruments shape human beliefs, values and behaviours (Lasky, 2005). Within this

tradition, some scholars have aligned with pragmatism mainly on engagement. For example, Themane and Thobejane (2019) advocate for an ecological perspective, which views agency as a collaborative endeavour shaped by teamwork and community partnerships. This perspective challenges the traditional notion of agency as an individual attribute, instead highlighting its emergence through interactions with social, structural, and material conditions.

Building upon this foundation, Pantić (2017) and Wang et al. (2017) go further into the socio-cultural dynamics of agency, emphasising its embeddedness within contextual conditions. They argue that agency is not fixed, but rather temporal and situated, with individuals navigating their beliefs and values within specific contexts. Moreover, they highlight the reciprocal relationship between agency and context, wherein actors both shape and are shaped by their environments. Further contributing to this discourse, Heikonen et al. (2017) pinpoint the relational nature of teacher agency, particularly within professional interactions with students and the broader school community. They argue that agency extends beyond individual actions to encompass teachers' capacity to manage their learning environments intentionally and responsively, drawing upon resources within their context and engaging in continuous reflection.

Emirbayer and Mische (1998) expand upon Giddens's theory of structuration, stressing in particular the active role of individuals in shaping social structures. They redefine human agency as a dynamic process embedded within temporal social engagements. Their framework highlights three interrelated dimensions of agency: "iterative" – drawing from past experiences; "projective" – oriented towards future possibilities; and "practical-evaluative" – engaging with both past and future in the present moment. They argue that the temporal and relational nature of agency emerges through ongoing interactions within social contexts, influenced by symbolic interactionism and structuration theory. Their concept of the "temporality of agency" highlights the importance of understanding agency within the flow of time, involving individuals' capacity to envision future projects, revise actions iteratively, and evaluate their effectiveness. Moreover, they stress the relational aspect of agency, highlighting how it emerges through social encounters and negotiations that are shaped by power dynamics and structural constraints within the broader social context.

Following Emirbayer and Mische, existing research underlines the relational interaction between agency and structure and focuses on how agency is enacted through individuals' responses to structure (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Hopwood, 2010; Priestley et al., 2015). Moreover, individuals mediate their personal agency by "constructing their life courses through choices and actions" (Eteläpelto et al., 2013, p. 60) in their active engagement with the "ecological" circumstances (Priestley et al., 2015). In general, agency is about "the interplay between individual efforts, available resources, and contextual and structural factors" (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p. 137), including public policy and institutional strategies.

Collectively, these scholars offer a comprehensive perspective of teacher agency within the social-cultural framework. They highlight the collaborative, situated, and dynamic nature of agency, emphasising its emergence through interactions with social, cultural, and institutional contexts. By recognising the relational nature of agency and the contextual contingencies that influence its manifestation, this approach provides valuable insights for understanding and fostering teacher agency in diverse educational settings.

2.3.4 Definition of agency

This study employs Priestley et al.'s (2015) ecological approach to academics' agency in EMI environment. This approach adopts the definition of agency proposed by Emirbayer and Mische (1998), which was in turn developed from Mead's (cited in Emirbayer and Mische, 1998) concepts of time and of human consciousness. Moving beyond, Emirbayer and Mische are interested in "the internal structuring of agentic capabilities and their different constitutive relationship to action" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 969). They thus define agency as:

> *...the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments – the temporal-relational contexts of action – which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations.* (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 970, italics in the original)

This concept presents three elements of agency: iteration, projectivity, and practical evaluation, corresponding to three temporal orientations of agency towards the past,

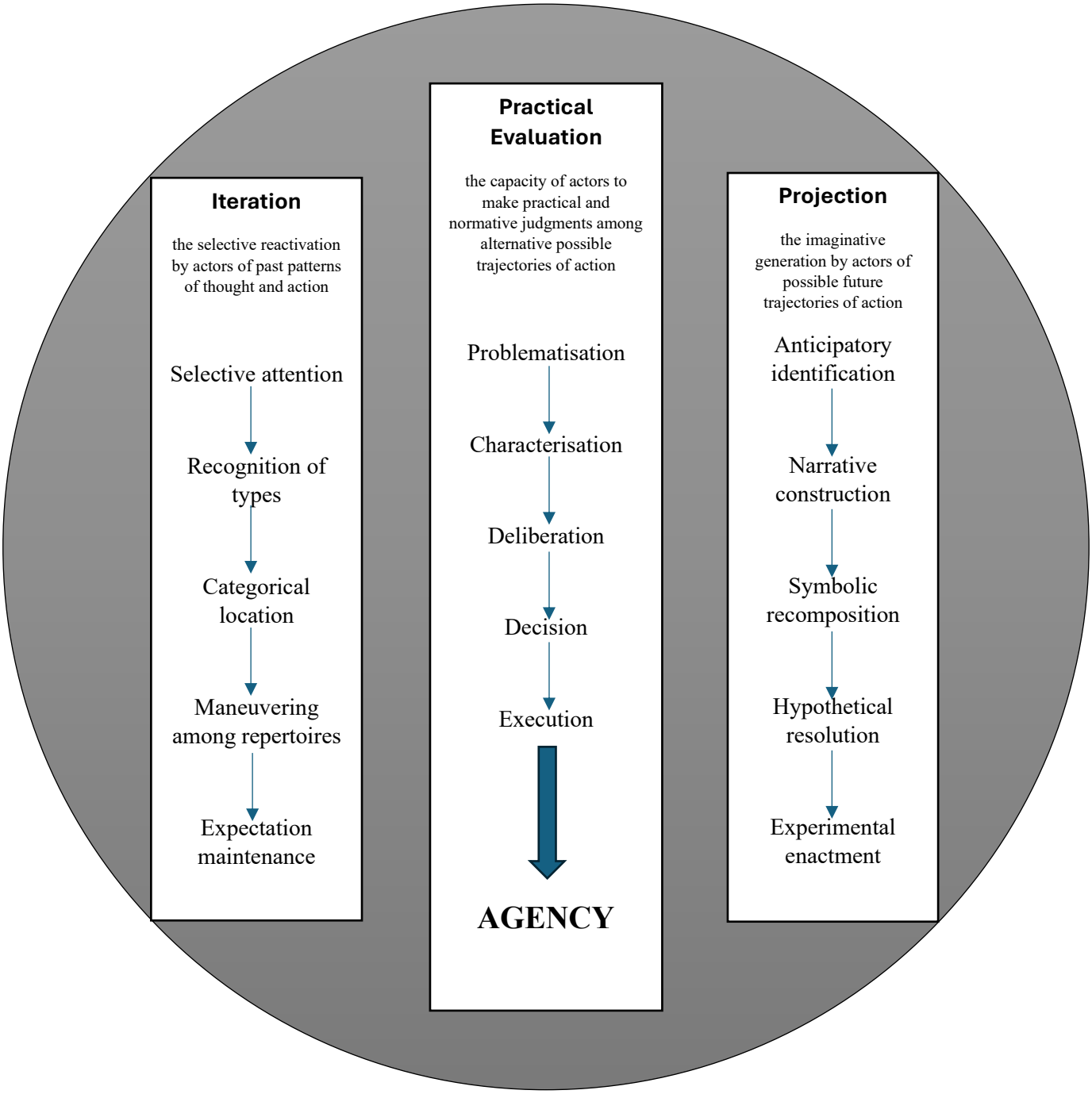
future and present (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 971) (Figure 2.1). Agency is informed by past behaviour and experience (iterative dimension), reflections about one's capabilities within given constraints and opportunities (practical-evaluative dimension), and orientations to the future (projective dimension; i.e., expression of future projects, goals, and intentions). These projections imply expectations that actions taken will be successful. Agency, therefore, is defined as the capacity of human actors to project alternative future possibilities, and to realise those possibilities within the context of current contingencies. Agency is realised by recalling, selecting, modifying and appropriately applying "the more or less tacit and taken-for-granted schemas of action that [individuals] have developed through past interactions" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 975).

The first of these dimensions, iteration, refers to "*the selective reactivation by actors of past patterns of thought and action, as routinely incorporated in practical activity, thereby giving stability and order to social universes and helping to sustain identities, interactions, and institutions over time"* (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 971, italics in the original). The iterative dimension of agency is formed by individual capacity, which is in turn formed by personal and professional backgrounds (Biesta et al., 2015). It should be noted here that the iterative dimension of agency is activated through the way people select and employ their past experiences, which is a result of their values and beliefs, and thus is always unique.

The second dimension of agency encompasses "*the imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories of action, in which received structures of thought and action may be creatively reconfigured in relation to actors' hopes, fears, and desires for the future"* (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 971, italics in the original). Within this projective dimension, agency extends beyond immediate actions to encompass anticipatory imagination. It involves the dynamic interplay between actors' subjective desires and external structures, wherein individuals navigate and renegotiate existing structures to sketch pathways in accordance with their aspirational visions. This conceptualisation stresses the transformative potential inherent in agency, as actors engage in forward-thinking endeavours to transcend conventional boundaries and catalyse innovative shifts in their educational praxis.

Figure 2.1

Chordal Triad Structure of Agency (Adapted from Emirbayer & Mische, 1998)



The third dimension of agency entails "*the capacity of actors to make practical and normative judgments among alternative possible trajectories of action, in response to the emerging demands, dilemmas, and ambiguities of presently evolving situations"* (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 971, italics in the original). This dimension encapsulates individuals' ability to engage in practical reasoning and normative assessments when confronted with the complex demands and uncertainties inherent in their current environments. It highlights the mutual interaction between agency and contextual dynamics, wherein actors exercise discernment and moral deliberation to chart courses of action in line with their values, address emerging challenges, and foster adaptive responses to evolving circumstances. In the current study, academics' experiences on EMI education are shown in their reflections on curriculum, teaching arrangements, and support from the institution and demonstrate their struggles to find a way ahead.

Drawing on Emirbayer and Mische's, Priestley et al.'s (2015) ecological approach positions agency as an emergent phenomenon rather than an innate capacity possessed by an individual. Positing that agency is "something that occurs or is achieved within continually shifting contexts over time", Priestley et al. (2015, p. 22) emphasise the importance of context, which differs between every instance of agency. This approach – that is, viewing agency as the interaction of individual capacity and environing conditions – asserts that "actors always act *by means* of their environment rather than simply in their environment", so that "the achievement of agency will always result from the interplay of individual efforts, available resources, and contextual and structural factors as they come together in particular and, in a sense, always unique situations" (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p. 137).

In the context of IHE and EMI, this conceptualisation of agency brings forward significant implications about the role of temporal-relational contexts. The achievement of agency within these settings is contingent upon the dynamic interaction between educators' efforts, institutional resources, and the broader socio-cultural and structural factors shaping education. Embracing this perspective implies the necessity of holistic approaches to educational development, wherein interventions such as teacher education should not only empower individual actors but also address systemic barriers and use available resources effectively. Moreover, it emphasises the importance of contextual sensitivity and adaptability in implementing EMI initiatives, acknowledging that the

success of such endeavours depends upon their alignment with the specific cultural, linguistic, and pedagogical contexts in which they unfold. Ultimately, fostering agency within the context of IHE and EMI necessitates an understanding of the complex and delicate interactions between actors and their environments.

2.4 Studies on teacher agency and EMI teaching and learning environment

2.4.1 EMI teacher agency from a language policy planning perspective

A review of literature on teacher agency from the perspective of language policy planning unveils an array of responses and strategies adopted by educators in their implementation of EMI policies. Within this discourse, a dichotomy emerges between teachers who passively adhere to official mandates, compromising their pedagogical approaches, and those who critically engage with and challenge such policies, demonstrating a reflexive stance towards language policies. For example, in a study conducted in Pakistan exploring how EMI lecturers perceive EMI policy, the compliant cohort predominantly adopted a "positivist, passive, and apolitical approach toward the policy" (Manan et al., 2022, p. 540), and aligned with prescribed directives without questioning their implications. The non-compliant, on the other hand, exhibited a critical reflexivity to navigate between languages, celebrating local linguistic diversity and making use of it as a pedagogical asset (Manan et al., 2022). This critical reflexivity hinges upon an awareness of the value of multilingual education and cultural diversity, underscoring the transformative potential of exposure to critical scholarship and sensitisation efforts (Manan et al., 2022). This regard for the importance of educators' perception of EMI policy is echoed in a study by Nguyen and Bui (2016) that explores how teacher agency is influenced by language policies in educational reform. In this study, a group of teachers in a remote area of Vietnam engaged in the interpretation, questioning, and adaptation of the existing English language policy by actively employing the potential of multilingualism as a valuable cultural and linguistic asset to enhance students' learning experiences. It is noteworthy that teacher participants in the studies in Pakistan and Vietnam had mainly majored in applied linguistics and English teaching, which partly explains their particular perceptions of EMI policies.

However, while these studies show that agency is subject to teacher's perceptions of policies, it is imperative to note that policy implementation shouldn't solely rely on teacher agency in terms of individual effort. This is especially true when agency is not an "exercise of freewill", but rather where teachers are compelled to take action if they aim to assist students in attaining policy objectives (Hamid & Nguyen, 2016, p. 36). In the worst case, it is common to observe educators either opposing policies outright or circumventing their intended outcomes, as documented by Ali and Hamid (2018) and Zacharias (2013).

Moreover, the phenomenon of teacher agency extends beyond compliance (Ali & Hamid, 2018; Nguyen, 2016), encompassing several forms, including resistance to policy mandates (Ali & Hamid, 2018; Zacharias, 2013) and accommodation and dedication (Ali & Hamid, 2018; Nguyen, 2016). In the context of EMI implementation, educators demonstrate varying degrees of agency, which are influenced by their disciplinary background, personal experiences, and contextual factors. In Zacharias's (2013) investigation of a language planning policy by the Indonesian government, teacher agency is seen in the deliberate actions taken by educators to confront and counteract the sense of powerlessness and negativity induced by the EMI policy. Teacher agency in this case is influenced by "the complex interplay between teachers' English competence, students' perceived English competence, and the lack of socialisation of the EMI policy" (Zacharias, 2013, p. 93).

Similarly, Ali et al. (2013) investigate the discrepancies between EMI policy goals and practical outcomes in Malaysian primary education, highlighting the policy challenges for teachers and students alike. Students' perceptions of language proficiency often align with idealised standards rather than functional competence, leading to an underestimation of their abilities. This discrepancy is exacerbated by policies prioritising communicative competence without clear definitions or contextual considerations (for example, using the target language for communicative purposes in academic, professional, or social settings), contributing to unrealistic expectations among students and educators. Obviously, this disconnection between macro-level policy planning and micro-level implementation highlights the need for effective communication and engagement between stakeholders. In the context of this study, some teachers made extra efforts and covered language in their content teaching in the interests

of students, which illustrates the transformative potential of agency in mitigating the impact of policy challenges on student learning outcomes.

Overall, while educators demonstrate resilience and creativity in navigating policy constraints, the extent to which they can exercise agency may be contingent upon institutional resources and support structures. This necessitates a holistic approach to exploring teacher agency that considers both individual initiatives and the relevant contexts in shaping educational practices and outcomes.

2.4.2 Teacher agency and teacher identity in EMI

In the literature on teacher agency within EMI education, teacher agency and teacher identity are deeply interwoven. The agentic teachers navigate their multiple identities, which shape their choices and enactments of EMI practices. In a study of 13 Taiwanese instructors in law and humanities programs, EMI lecturers embraced three distinct identities: "educators in global and local contexts, subject matter instructors, and EMI instructors" (Huang, 2019, p. 1183). They demonstrated agency in EMI classroom in different ways, depending on their perceived ideal teacher identity. Their efforts to embody this ideal role within the context of EMI education served as both an enabler and a constraint to their agency. In another study of STEM academics in an EMI program in China, the teachers encountered challenges in balancing these roles with being successful researchers. The institutional "discourses of research meritocracy and internationalism" further complicated their struggles, constraining their exploration of pedagogical approaches (Ou & Gu, 2024, p. 59).

Another identity that EMI instructors take up is that of "duty-bound multicultural educators", in addition to being "translanguagers who orchestrate different languages and meaning-making resources", which together with the roles of content teachers and L2 teachers, place them in a dilemma (Xiong et al., 2024, p. 472). Similarly, analysing the impact of experience on EMI teacher identity, Dafouz (2018) finds that younger teachers have a more international professional identity, enabling them to accelerate their academic advancement. In contrast, in an ethnographic study that examines the emotional experiences of content teachers in Nepal, Sah (2023) shows that the challenge arising from their limited English proficiency triggers negative emotions, which, in turn, enable lecturers to employ agency to adapt to their linguistic limitations. In this case, the

identification of ideal teacher identities influences teachers' beliefs and pedagogical strategies in a different way.

The commonality among these studies is that the imagined or ideal identity (or identities) of instructors in EMI education strongly influence their exercise of agency, either enabling or limiting it. In addition, teachers' translanguaging strategies showcase the primacy of teachers' identity as multilingual users in problematic situations. Therefore, teacher identity emerges as a critical factor shaping agency within EMI practices. Ultimately, educators' perceptions of EMI crucially guide their agency, highlighting the complex interplay between identity, institutional demands, and pedagogical practices in EMI settings.

2.4.3 Teacher agency – enabling and constraining factors in EMI

The studies reviewed thus far commonly view teacher agency as an individual capacity, the strength of which depends not only on factors such as the actors' own perceptions of learning and teaching (Dang et al., 2024; Xiong et al., 2024) and their capacities (Ali & Hamid, 2018; Heikonen et al., 2017; Nguyen et al., 2017; Nguyen, 2016), but also on structural (Hamid & Nguyen, 2016; Shahab, 2013), cultural (Manan et al., 2022; Sah, 2023; Xiong et al., 2024), and material (Shahab, 2013; Zacharias, 2013) factors.

On the one hand, enabling factors such as multilingual pedagogies and affirming teacher identities empower teachers to navigate EMI contexts effectively. Teachers demonstrate agency by using multilingualism as a pedagogical resource, as they challenge normative assumptions through "celebratory multilingualism", which is defined as "the use and recognition of local multilingualism as a valuable pedagogical resource" (Manan et al., 2022, p. 530). This enables them to recognise and use local languages to support student learning, despite challenges posed by EMI policies. By embracing multilingual pedagogies, teachers not only enhance students' linguistic repertoires but also validate diverse cultural identities (Dafouz, 2018; Manan et al., 2022; Xiong et al., 2024).

The agentic teachers also traverse multiplex identities, influencing their decisions and implementation of practices. Recognising and affirming preferred teacher identities empowers instructors to maintain their commitments to EMI, fostering a sense of agency in educational practices (Huang, 2019; Ou & Gu, 2024; Xiong et al., 2024). Teacher

identity serves as a driving force behind agency in EMI contexts, influencing pedagogical approaches and instructional decisions. When teachers feel supported in embracing their professional identities, they are more likely to engage authentically with EMI practices, contributing to positive student outcomes and institutional success (Dang et al., 2024).

On the other hand, constraining factors such as institutional discourses, policy implementation challenges, and limited support inhibit teachers' autonomy and agency. Institutional discourses such as research meritocracy and internationalism (Ou & Gu, 2024) constrain teacher agency by undermining motivation to invest in teacher identity and pedagogical skills. Balancing roles amidst institutional pressures limits teachers' autonomy and empowerment in EMI contexts. Moreover, policy mandates regarding EMI may not always align with teachers' beliefs and practices, leading to "policy dumping" (Hamid & Nguyen, 2016, p. 26), where educators are burdened with implementing policies without adequate support or resources. This restricts teachers' agency in responding to diverse linguistic and cultural needs. Policy implementation challenges highlight the disconnect between top-down mandates and on-the-ground realities in EMI classrooms. In such situations, teachers may struggle to reconcile policy directives with pedagogical best practices, leading to frustration and disengagement (Ali & Hamid, 2018; Manan et al., 2022; Sah, 2023). Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts to bridge policy gaps and empower teachers as active agents of change.

Finally, teachers may also face challenges due to limited institutional support for professional development and skill enhancement. This lack of support hinders teachers' capacity to navigate EMI contexts effectively, particularly in addressing language proficiency and pedagogical needs. Institutional support structures play a crucial role in fostering teacher agency and professional growth in EMI settings. Adequate resources, training programs, and ongoing mentorship opportunities enable teachers to develop the skills and competencies necessary for effective EMI instruction.

2.5 Summary

Although there is no agreement on the role of teacher agency in the success of EMI programs, most scholars do agree that it is a major driver of change in response to diverse school and classroom environments (Edwards, 2005). Specifically, teacher relational agency is co-produced in the social interactions between teachers, situated in the context

for action (Biesta et al., 2015; Edwards, 2005; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). This agency manifests in various ways, allowing teachers to adapt classroom practices to their contexts, conventions and school culture (van der Heijden et al., 2018). It is obvious that numerous factors influence the dynamics of teacher decision-making, leading to multiple responses to any contextual opportunity.

The issue of how teachers' agency, which is "something that is achieved in and through concrete contexts-for-action" (Priestley et al., 2015, p. 34), may be enacted or limited has been captured to some extent in the EMI literature. Current studies, however, tend to focus on separate aspects of the EMI ecology that shape the configuration of teacher agency. Nevertheless, how the agency of teachers, a professional group working in quite distinctive professional contexts, interrelates to the reconstruction of the teaching and learning environment is crucial for understanding of the transforming the educational milieu within the contemporary context of international education.

Building on previous research and addressing gaps in the literature, this study explored the multiple dimensions of teacher agency and their potential to both advance and hinder efforts for educational change. Specifically, the research examined how teachers' agentic orientations towards emerging teaching and learning contexts are composed of routine, projective, and judgemental dimensions, where past, present, and future interact, as detailed in the following chapters.

Chapter 3 – Theoretical framework

3.0 Introduction

Following the last chapter's rationale for the socio-cultural approach to teacher agency, this chapter explores the theoretical foundation of this study, using the ecological model for teacher agency formulated by Priestley et al. (2015). Through this framework, the study examines the interplay of multiple factors that either promote or inhibit teacher agency (Figure 3.1). This chapter introduces the framework and justifies its application to the current study.

3.1 Context of the ecological model for teacher agency

Biesta and Tedder (2007), in a longitudinal study investigating learning in the life-course, introduced the ecological approach that focuses on "the ways in which agency is achieved in transaction with a particular context-for-action, within a particular 'ecology'" (p. 137). Drawing on Emirbayer and Mische (1998), the authors present the ecological conception of agency-as-achievement as an analytical tool to explore teacher agency. Based on this, and within the context of the implementation of Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence, Priestley, Biesta, Tedder and Robinson developed the ecological model to analyse how various factors interact to either support or restrict teacher agency.

The Curriculum for Excellence, designed for Scottish students aged three to 18 and in place in Scotland education since 2010, prioritises four key aspects of learning: fostering successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, and effective contributors. Unlike previous curricula focusing on specific outcomes and content, this approach aims to encourage broader competencies and values, with an emphasis on learner-centred education. Similar shifts towards prioritising general competencies over detailed knowledge specifications have been observed by Priestley and others in various countries, highlighting trends such as promoting student agency and collaborative partnerships, and reducing rigid educational prescription. However, the distinctive focus on learners and learning in the Curriculum for Excellence has been criticised for the general lack of theoretical rigour in its structure (Priestley et al., 2015) and its failure to address educational questions regarding the content and purpose of learning, a trend identified by Biesta and Tedder (2007) as "learnification". In addition, while the new curriculum

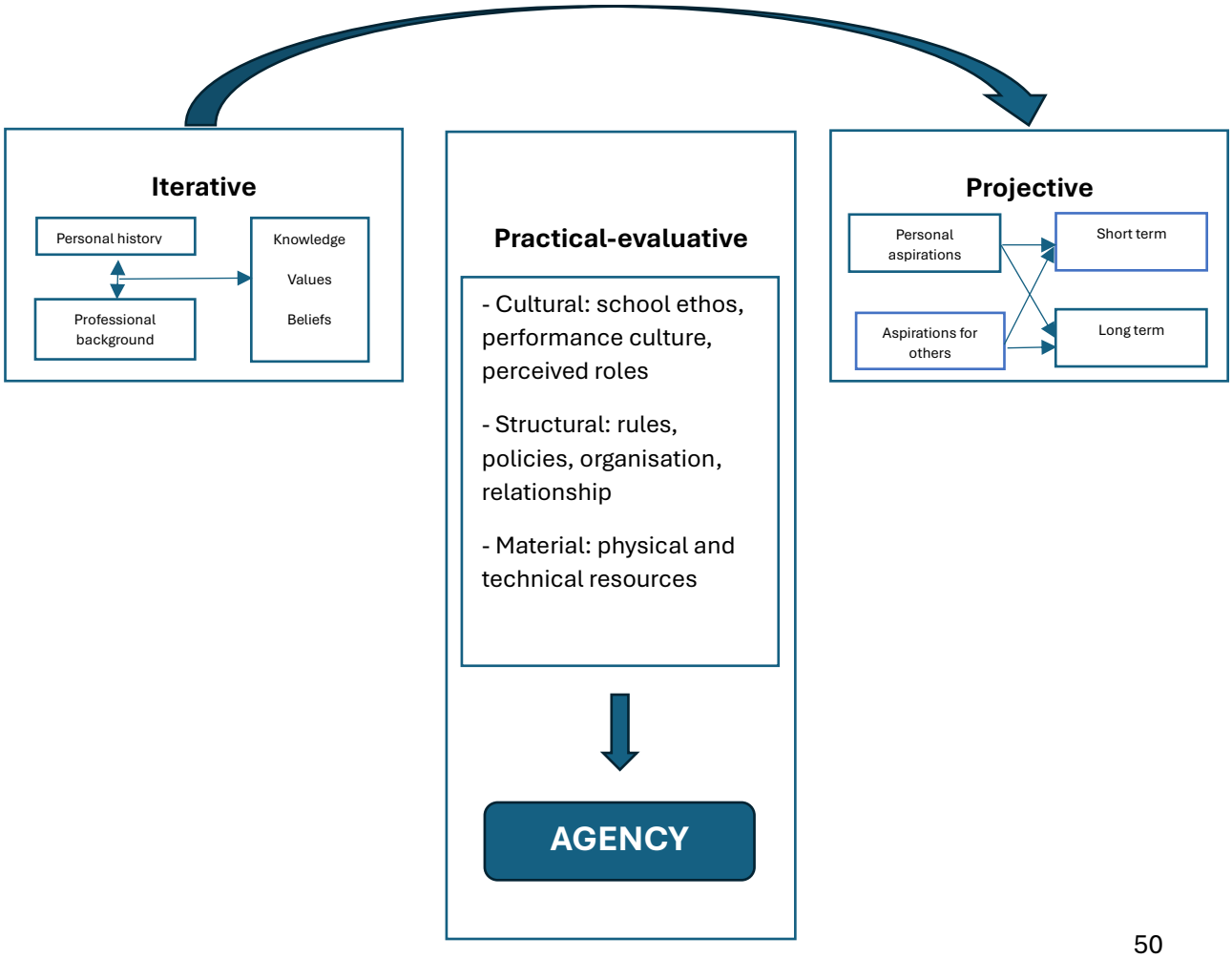
promotes the role of teachers as agents of change, it fails to address the structural and cultural factors that could either limit or facilitate teacher agency (Priestley et al., 2015).

3.2 Ecological model for teacher agency

As mentioned in Chapter 2, existing research that uses a social-cultural approach to agency focuses on the relational interaction between the agent and structure and on how agency is enacted through individuals' response to structure (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Hopwood, 2010; Priestley et al., 2015). Moreover, individuals mediate their personal agency by "constructing their life courses through choices and actions" (Eteläpelto et al., 2013, p. 60), as they actively engage with their ecological circumstances. In general, agency is about "the interplay between individual efforts, available resources, and contextual and structural factors" (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p. 137), including public policy and institutional strategies.

Figure 3.1

Ecological Model for Agency (Adapted from Priestley et al., 2015)



The current study employs this ecological model to understand how academics in EMI programs enact agency in their practice. This approach sees agency as an *"emergent phenomenon"* (Priestley et al., 2015, p. 19, italics in the original), which can be achieved by individual students through the interplay of their capacities and the resources, affordances, and constraints of the HE environment. This ecological conceptualisation of agency emphasises the importance of both individual capacity and contextual dimensions in shaping agency and views the achievement of agency as a temporal relational process (Priestley et al., 2015).

The ecological model of agency consists of three dimensions: the past or iterative dimensions, the present or practical-evaluative dimension, and the future or projective dimension (Figure 3.1); these will be discussed in the following section.

3.2.1 Iterative dimension

The iterative dimension entails "the selective reactivation by actors of past patterns of thought and action" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 971). Drawing on this definition, in this dimension, Priestley et al. (2015) distinguish between the broader life trajectories of teachers and their specific professional journeys, covering their educational background and accumulated teaching experiences.

Priestley and his colleagues observe a strong presence of the iterative dimension in their study of the robust professional knowledge and skills of teachers, despite the teachers' facing challenges from social, cultural, or material constraints. While analysing the role of personal capacity in facilitating agency, the authors believe that some teachers' modest expression of systematic professional discourse on teaching and education could limit their ability to participate in curriculum development and critically engage with policies. In this regard, the study reveals age and generation effects on teachers' discourses, with more experienced teachers having access to critical discourses, while less experienced potentially depending more on policy discourse due to limited exposure to diverse contexts and practices. Developing systematic professional discourses, which the authors claim is crucial for enhancing teacher agency, takes time.

In addition to professional knowledge, the iterational dimension includes personal life histories, which are significant sources for teachers' beliefs and values. The distinctive

life experiences of teachers with similar professional backgrounds result in unique expressions of agency. Thus, teacher education should support teachers in exploring the relationship between their professional and personal knowledge, beliefs, and values, as part of developing their professional capacity and enhancing their ability to evaluate and enact their roles effectively.

3.2.2 Projective dimension

The projective dimension is defined as "*the imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories of action, in which received structures of thought and action may be creatively reconfigured in relation to actors' hopes, fears, and desires for the future"* (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 971, italics in the original).

The projective dimension of teacher agency, according to Priestley et al. (2015), encompasses both short-term and long-term goals. These aspirations can be positively oriented towards teachers' development and well-being, and can either align with or run counter to policy intentions. They may stem from deeply held values and beliefs or be more narrowly instrumental, aiming to maintain classroom order or adhere to institutional expectations. Regardless of their nature, these aspirations are largely shaped by teachers' past experiences, which influence their decision-making and approach to their profession.

In exploring the Curriculum for Excellence, Priestley et al. (2015) observed that teachers' actions and thoughts were often guided by short-term goals focused on supporting student engagement and ensuring a conducive learning environment. This reliance on past experiences and attention to specific pedagogical contexts aligns with the stages of teacher expertise outlined by Berliner (2004), where teachers gradually transition from following prescribed rules to more intuitive decision-making.

However, Priestley et al.'s (2015) study also reveals a lack of long-term contemplation on the purpose and meaning of education among teachers. While educational discourse often emphasises learning processes, Priestley and colleagues stressed the importance of considering broader educational aims, echoing Biesta's (2015) qualification, socialisation, and subjectification as purposes of education. Instead of dictating specific objectives, Biesta advocates for educators to contemplate these purposes and evaluate

how well the identified objectives align with the methods and practices employed in the classroom.

Furthermore, the importance of teachers establishing personal long-term goals, beyond their professional aspirations, has been highlighted. These personal purposes, as discussed in the work of Frankl and Damon (cited by Leijen et al., 2019), involve a commitment to meaningful goals that affect not only the self but also extend to the world beyond. It is obvious that there is a difference between teachers' aspirations for themselves, their students, and education in general, each affecting the achievement of agency in a distinctive way. Therefore, I suggest that the projective dimension include two elements: aspirations for themselves and for others, both involving long-term as well as short-term aspects. Encouraging teachers to articulate and integrate long-term purposes both for themselves and for their students is essential for fostering a sense of fulfilment and confidence in their work.

3.2.3 Practical-evaluative dimension

The practical-evaluative dimension entails *"the capacity of actors to make practical and normative judgments among alternative possible trajectories of action, in response to the emerging demands, dilemmas, and ambiguities of presently evolving situations"* (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 971, italics in the original). This dimension is concerned with the present where agency, influenced by both experience and aspirations, can be acted out. In the here and now, all structural, cultural, and material conditions play roles as enablers, constraints, or resources in the manifestation of agency. Within the interactions of these elements, the actor considers alternatives that are derived from the iterational and projective dimensions and makes decisions about their practice.

Within the practical-evaluative aspect of the model, structural conditions include rules and policies at both national and institutional levels, the institutional organisation, and relationships within and beyond the institution, among others. Cultural conditions consist of the institution's ethos, the performance-driven culture, as well as the institution's and society's perceptions of the agent's role. Materials comprise both physical and technological affordances.

Teaching is often described as a profession filled with uncertainty, emotional dynamics, and situated complexities (Day, 2012; Wilkins, 2011). Teachers regularly confront challenging decisions that can sometimes conflict with their professional goals, and often under time constraints that limit reflection and collaboration. As a result, elements in the practical-evaluative dimension significantly shape teacher agency, either facilitating or hindering their actions based on available resources and perceived risks.

In Scotland, for instance, there are documented tensions between a new curriculum aimed at empowering teachers and quality improvement initiatives focused on inspections and attainment measures. While the former encourages teacher autonomy, the latter has been found to undermine it (Priestley et al., 2015). This tension underscores the complex relationship between policy directives and teacher autonomy within the practical-evaluative dimension.

Moreover, the organisational structure of schools plays a vital role in shaping teacher agency. Priestley and his colleagues suggest that schools with effective structures fostering horizontal relationships are better equipped to adapt to new policies, in contrast to schools with hierarchical structures. The former, characterised by strong trust-building connections and broad ties extending beyond the school, facilitate meaningful engagement with new policies and access to external expertise. This emphasises the significance of relational structures in mediating teacher agency within the practical-evaluative dimension. Despite possessing significant experience and aspirations, teachers may find it challenging to implement changes within the practical-evaluative dimension. The intricate dynamics of the educational settings, coupled with organisational structures and policy pressures, can impede teachers' exercise of agency.

In summary, the attainment of agency always occurs within specific and tangible contexts under which the agent, first, makes judgements about what is realistically achievable and feasible in a given scenario, and second, assesses both the pertinent issues and the potential courses of action within that particular context. The realisation of agency within a specific context does not solely rely on the individual but also on the resources available in that situation. The practical-evaluative dimension of teacher agency is a crucial component of the ecological model. It showcases the complex interplay between contextual factors, policy mandates, organisational dynamics, and teacher capacity. By exploring these complexities, researchers can better understand how individual teachers

manoeuvre the intricate pathways of their professional milieu, revealing nuanced strategies and contextual adaptations that empower them to navigate challenges, assert their expertise, and ultimately cultivate agency within their educational practice.

3.3 Rationales for adopting the ecological model for teacher agency

The choice of Priestley et al.'s (2015) framework was influenced by my perspective on knowledge, my personal background, and the nature of the research question. Scholars believe that how a researcher sees the world and how knowledge is produced are shaped by the researcher's epistemological and ontological dispositions. These dispositions greatly influence the choice of theoretical foundation in qualitative research (Collins & Stockton, 2018). Within this case study, the student researcher viewed insights from lecturers as crucial knowledge, complementing scientific understandings of EMI education. Additionally, my firsthand experience as an EMI lecturer further supported the adoption of this framework.

Moreover, the context of the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence is similar to the implementation of EMI in VHE in this study. First, the Curriculum for Excellence views teachers as agents of change, but overlooks the structural and cultural issues that could either hinder or enhance teacher agency (Priestley et al., 2015). Similarly, in the context of VHE's EMI, educators are mandated with delivering English-based instruction to enhance students' language proficiency and global competitiveness, often amidst insufficient support and resources to address language barriers and pedagogical challenges (Dang et al., 2013; Le, 2012; Vu & Burns, 2014). Moreover, the dual goals of internationalisation and the promotion of multilingualism in Vietnamese education create a tension for policy implementors. While their work often involves promoting English as a medium of instruction and encouraging the adoption of international curricula and standards, this emphasis on internationalisation might clash with the promotion of multilingualism, which seeks to preserve and valorise the linguistic diversity within Vietnam (Tran & Nguyen, 2018). The tension between policy and implementation in the two contexts suggests that the same framework can be applied to analyse teacher agency in this study.

A number of studies, such as Li and De Costa (2019) and Leijen et al. (2019), have used the ecological model to investigate teachers' achievement of agency. Some of them use

the framework without adjustment; others opt to modify it. For example, Leijen et al.'s (2019) work elaborates on the ecological framework and details how different types of reflection could be employed to improve the circumstances conducive to attaining teacher agency. The paper enhances the ecological model of teacher agency by incorporating additional aspects to the existing dimensions. The modifications include integrating personal and professional knowledge, beliefs and values into professional competence, emphasising the iterative dimension. This is only an analytical reconfiguration of the dimension, however. The projective dimension includes professional and personal long-term as well as short-term purposes. This recategorisation, however, does not seem logical, as professional short-term purpose is a category in its own right, as will be shown in this current study. Additionally, Leijen and colleagues (2019) propose further elaboration of the practical-evaluative dimension using Blömeke et al.'s PID model, which emphasises the continuum of competence formation through perception, interpretation, and decision-making in instructional settings (Blömeke et al., 2015). While the model acknowledges the complexity of decision-making processes, it may not fully account for the unique linguistic and pedagogical challenges inherent in EMI environments. Teachers in EMI settings often need to navigate language barriers, cultural differences, and diverse student needs, which may require more strategic and context-specific approaches to decision-making.

3.4 Operationalising the ecological model for teacher agency in this case study

3.4.1 The design phase

During the design phase, I employed the ecological model to guide my data collection strategy and inform the selection of participants. To gain insights into the structural level, I collected documents such as educational policies and curriculum guidelines. These documents provided understandings into the formal structures and expectations that shape teachers' roles within their educational contexts. By analysing these documents, I gained an understanding of the national and institutional frameworks within which EMI lecturers operate.

To explore the organisational context, in addition to exploring the institution's documents related to EMI programs, I conducted interviews with faculty leaders and program

managers. These interviews aimed to capture perspectives on organisational culture, leadership practices, and support mechanisms for teacher agency. By engaging with managers, I gained insights into the strategies and initiatives implemented at the organisational level to regulate lecturers' work. Similarly, interviews with lecturer participants provided theoretical insights and research-based perspectives on the extent to which academics enacted agency. By drawing on these academics' backgrounds, aspirations, and practice, I enriched the understanding of the dynamics that shaped their practice.

Finally, I conducted focus-group interviews with students to gain their perspectives on teaching and learning. These interviews provided insights into the student experience and the impact of teacher agency on student engagement and achievement. By integrating student perspectives, I ensured a more comprehensive understanding of lecturers' practices, offering an alternative viewpoint derived directly from the students' experiences.

3.4.2 Data analysis phase

In the data analysis phase, I continued to apply the ecological model to generate insights and identify patterns that informed my understanding of teacher agency. Drawing on the model, I conducted thematic analysis of documents, interview transcripts, and observational data. At the individual level, I explored themes related to teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions regarding EMI. By triangulating multiple sources of data, I gained a deeper understanding of the individual factors influencing the participants' manifestations of agentic acts. Moving to the interpersonal level, I examined themes related to collaboration, communication, and social networks within each department and in the institution as a whole. By mapping the flow of information and resources, I identified key influencers that play a critical role in shaping teacher agency. At the organisational level, I analysed themes related to school policies, practices, and organisational culture. This included exploring themes such as leadership support, resource allocation, and professional learning opportunities, identifying enablers and constraints to teacher agency. In general, the multifaceted dynamics influencing teacher agency can be effectively addressed by systematically applying the ecological model throughout the design and data analysis phases, thus providing insight into the interconnected layers of influence on academics' agency.

3.5 Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the ecological model for teacher agency. It began by contextualising the model within Scottish educational reform. The key elements of the model were then explored: the iterative dimension emphasises the significance of experience; the projective dimension focuses on aspirations for the teachers themselves and for students and education in general; and the practical-evaluative dimension stresses the importance of temporal relational contexts. The rationales for adopting the ecological model include my epistemology, and the alignment between the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence and the ecological conditions in VHE. The chapter also examines previous studies that have applied the model, noting a scarcity in studies focusing on EMI. Finally, the operationalisation of the ecological model within the current study is outlined, encompassing both the design phase and the data analysis stage.

Chapter 4 – Research methodology

4.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a rationale for the methodological choices that have shaped this exploration of how academics at a tertiary education institution navigated the English medium instruction (EMI) environment. The chapter starts by justifying the choice of a qualitative approach and the case study design. It then presents details of the research site and participant sampling, followed by data collection instruments and procedures, and data analysis. The chapter ends with considerations of ethical issues and the researcher's role in the research.

4.1 The qualitative approach

This study explores academics' agency within higher education through the lens of the social-constructivist philosophical paradigm. This paradigm offers a profound reflection on the nature of reality, or ontology, by embracing the idea that "realities exist in the form of multiple mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific, dependent for their form and content in the persons who hold them" (Guba, 1990, p. 27). Thus, reality is not a singular, objective truth but a complex web of multiple constructions that are shaped by social and experiential factors, deeply intertwined with the specificities of the individuals who hold them (Guba, 1990). In this view, reality is an amalgamation of perceptions, each contingent upon the unique perspectives of those who perceive it. Given the inherent subjectivity in individuals' perceptions of "their world", there exists a pursuit to comprehend the world in which they live and work (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Epistemologically, the constructivist paradigm suggests that knowledge is not a mere accumulation of facts, but a dynamic process of meaning-making. Knowledge emerges through the active engagement of individuals with their environment, enriched by social interactions and cultural, historical, and social contexts (Lincoln et al., 2011). Constructivists argue that individuals make sense of their surroundings through subjective interpretations that are influenced by contexts. Researchers embracing this view seek to understand how people construct their own meanings, emphasising the importance of context and the participants' perspectives. Rather than imposing predefined theories, they

aim to inductively develop theories or patterns of meaning based on the data collected from participants. This approach values open-ended questioning and acknowledges that the researcher's own background influences their interpretation of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Thus, in my endeavour to grasp and interpret the participants' understandings of the EMI milieu, I recognise that knowledge is not a fixed entity but rather a dynamic process shaped by multiple perspectives and interpretations. Furthermore, social constructivism acknowledges the researcher's role as an active participant in the research process, wherein their own background shapes their interpretations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As my background is shaped by factors like class, gender, and culture (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013), I am mindful of what influenced me in the context of this research. My experiences as an EMI lecturer allowed me to see the complex interplay between my role as an educator and the diverse perspectives of students and colleagues. Additionally, my EMI background informed my research, while familiarity with language instruction and cross-cultural communication enriched my approach. This constructivist perspective guided my exploration of EMI experiences, valuing interactions, personal contexts, and prior education as integral components of the research endeavour.

In the constructivist paradigm, the importance of studying phenomena within their natural contexts is paramount. This perspective is rooted in the belief that reality is socially constructed and that "truth or meaning comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). Constructivism suggests that phenomena are not fixed, objective entities but are understood differently by different people, depending on their personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, and social contexts (Lincoln et al., 2011). Thus, by examining things in their natural environments, researchers can observe and interpret how individuals make sense of their experiences in real-world settings. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of how context influences meaning-making and how individuals' interpretations of their world are shaped by the complex interplay of social, cultural, and historical factors (Crotty, 1998). Through immersion in these natural settings, constructivist researchers can better grasp the richness and diversity of meanings ascribed to experiences, leading to a more insightful understanding of the phenomena under study. Ultimately, the goal of such

research is to uncover the "participants' views of the situation" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 10).

In this case, my curiosity revolved around comprehending how tertiary academics perceive their experiences in EMI teaching, how they shape their personal realities, and the significance they attach to their experiences (Merriam, 1998). As I tried to look for the "complexity of views" (Merriam, 1998, p. 8), I relied on the participants' viewpoints to illuminate the question of how knowledge is constructed. To this end, I explored academics' experiences in their own worlds – that is, the EMI teaching and learning environment in the studied case – to interpret the participants' agency. By developing a holistic narrative that incorporates "the historical and cultural settings of the participants" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 10) into the findings, I aimed to gain insight into the participants' subjective understandings of their worlds.

The key concept of my study is teacher agency, which involves both "*intentionality,* the capacity to formulate possibilities for action, active consideration of such possibilities and the exercise of choice", and "the causative properties of contextual factors – social and material structures and cultural forms that influence human behaviour" (Priestley et al., 2015, pp. 23, italics in the original). In this sense, agency is seen as an emergent phenomenon, dependent on various interrelated factors, of which individual capacity and intentionality to act are in accordance with individuals' own values, beliefs, goals, and knowledge within their situated teaching contexts (Lasky, 2005; Pappa et al., 2017; Toom et al., 2015). From this perspective, I believe that the nature of the research problem suggests that it needs to employ the qualitative approach, which is investigative and holistic in nature (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The qualitative approach was selected for several reasons. First, the central research question reflects that this research is concerned with how agency is being undertaken in EMI rather than with identifying trends in the field. Creswell and Creswell (2018) argue that qualitative research is best suited to exploring a research problem in which the variables are not known and to developing a detailed understanding of a central phenomenon. As teacher agency is undoubtedly complex and has not been adequately addressed in the literature, this research problem requires both an exploration and an understanding of the process of teaching and learning in an IHE context. Second, academics' experiences are best analysed through their subjective interpretation of

meanings so that the researcher can rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Because the voices of participants in qualitative studies are heard directly (Creswell & Clark, 2006), it is possible to obtain a deep understanding of not only their practices but also the reasons underlying various aspects of such practices. Finally, social constructivism also acknowledges the importance of personal, cultural, and historical elements that influence participants' subjective meanings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018); this supports literature on teachers' agency that emphasises the role of life experiences and contextual factors in influencing their present.

4.2 Case study design

A study's methodological choice, as advocated by Flyvbjerg (2006), should be aligned with the research questions and the inquiry's context. Yin (2014) outlines three conditions for justifying a case study: exploratory questions, contemporaneity, and non-manipulable behaviours. The current study satisfies all three conditions, as it explores how academic staff exercise agency in the EMI environment, addresses the contemporary phenomenon of teacher agency in Vietnamese higher education, and operates within an HEI where the researcher lacks control over academic and administrative processes.

Furthermore, the purpose of a qualitative case study is not just to descriptively mirror reality but to offer deeper insights and understandings, and to develop theories that explain and even predict outcomes, according to Richards and Morse (2013). This approach, which investigates the "how" and "why" of events (Anderson, 2001, p.153), while concentrating on the process, rather than just the outcomes, has a "unique and distinctive contribution to make to educational research" (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 390). Therefore, this study went beyond data recording to interpreting collected information, drawing inferences, and forming hypotheses about the events in question (Yin, 2014).

The use of the case study method in the investigation of EMI lecturers' agency was further justified based on established research principles, including "boundedness or singularity, in-depth study, multiple perspectives or triangulation, particularity, contextualisation, and interpretation" (Duff, 2008, p. 23). Creswell and Creswell (2018, p. 15) define the case study as "an exploration of a 'bounded system' or a case (or multiple cases) over time", employing extensive data collection from multiple information sources to enrich

contextual understanding. Merriam and Tisdell (2016, p. 37) similarly characterise the qualitative case study as “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system”, focusing on a specific, limited case that is studied in detail to understand its unique characteristics and broader implications.

In short, Yin’s (2014) definition of case study as an empirical inquiry into a contemporary phenomenon within its real-world context finds a strong resonance with the objectives of this research. Given that EMI remains a contemporary, real-world phenomenon deeply embedded in cultural and social contexts, the case study approach is particularly well-suited to this investigation, allowing for a thorough exploration of the complexities and subtleties of EMI lecturer agency. By focusing on the real-world context of EMI in a VHEI, the qualitative case study method is ideal for providing a comprehensive examination of teacher agency in this educational context. This approach not only complies with but also enhances the ability to achieve the research’s objectives, making it the most appropriate methodological choice.

4.3 Selection of research case and participants

4.3.1 Selection of the research case

As the study aims to explore academic agency in EMI programs in a Vietnamese university, I deliberately chose Tower University (a pseudonym) for the study for several reasons. First, it is important that the chosen site must be accessible for the researcher. Accessibility is determined based on the researcher’s network at the research site as well as the willingness of the potential participants – that is, their voluntary consent – to take part in the study. This criterion, in fact, played a decisive role in the selection of the research site, because without accessibility, an institution cannot be a potential, informative research case. Second, and more importantly, this institution stood out as a rich case for the study. In line with the 2006-2020 HERA, Tower University pursued both financial independence and academic excellence. Partnering with international institutions to create a global network for mobility, faculty development, and curriculum improvement, the university began offering high-quality EMI programs in 2006, followed by APs in 2008 and JPs in 2009. By 2023, Tower University provided 15 HQPs, three APs, and 10 JPs, established through global collaborations, demonstrating its dedication to academic excellence.

As a case study is an exploration of a "bounded system" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), after selecting Tower University as the research case, it became essential to define the focus and establish the boundary of the study. As discussed earlier, the study aimed to explore the lived experience of tertiary academics in EMI programs. Thus, the boundary of the case was limited to teaching and learning experience relating to EMI programs at Tower University. This focus allowed for an in-depth examination of the specific challenges and opportunities that arose in this unique academic environment and how academic staff navigated the context of EMI education and enacted agency.

4.3.2 Selection of participants

This study employed purposeful sampling, which empowered the researcher to identify and select information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2015). A mix of three commonly used strategies for purposeful participant selection was used: criterion-based selection (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010), the snowball/chain/network sampling approach, and convenience sampling (Patton, 2015).

Table 4.1

Purposeful Sampling Strategies (Adapted from Patton, 2015)

Strategies	Purposes
Criterion sampling	Samples were selected based on pre-determined criteria.
Snowball sampling	Samples were selected based on recommendations of other participants who knew what cases were information-rich.
Convenience sampling	Samples were selected based on availability.

As suggested by Patton (2015), the first step in the recruitment process was to identify the purpose or objective of the study. Next, the criterion-based technique was used to ensure an adequate number of eligible participants for interviews. As the purpose of the study was to explore the lived experience of EMI lecturers, participant recruitment was based on whether potential participants were directly engaged in EMI at the studied case and if they were willing to share their experience. The snowball strategy – where participants identify others in similar contexts who might be willing to participate (Patton, 2015) – was then applied in the selection of academic participants, with the initial

contacts, who were faculty heads or vice heads, suggesting other academics with experience in EMI teaching. This sampling method allowed for an immediate platform upon which rapport with a potential participant could be established (O'Connor, 2004). Not all the contacted individuals agreed to participate in the study; therefore, convenience sampling – identifying potential participants based on availability – was also employed. The potential participants were contacted through emails, text messages and telephone to inform them of the research, answer any queries they might have, obtain their agreement, and arrange a date and time for the interviews.

The research sub-questions revealed that the study needed to recruit a pool of informants that included lecturers, managers, and students. Lecturers, as key agents in implementing EMI, provided first-hand insights into their experiences, challenges, and decision-making processes. Students, who were directly affected by EMI practices, could share how teacher agency influenced their learning experiences. Moreover, since the study was conducted within a distinct institutional setting, it was important to engage with program leaders and management staff who oversaw EMI programs to understand the institutional motivations and policies. However, these individuals were not the primary focus of the research. Their contributions only served to enhance the understanding of the experiences of the central participant group – EMI academics. This diverse participant pool ensured a well-rounded understanding of teacher agency in the EMI context.

Academic participants

The academic participants of the study included 14 lecturers from five faculties (Table 4.2). Two of them were from the Faculty of Business English, teaching both English for specific purposes and content subjects in this faculty and other faculties within the university. As the nature of this study was to interpret rather than to generalise, it was the variety of the participant profiles, rather than their typicality, that was deemed important. Considerations of teachers' age, gender, qualifications and background, as well as their availability, access to their class for observation, and their enthusiasm to offer rich information were significant. The lecturers participating in this study had from one to 14 years' experience in EMI; four had less than five years' experience in teaching in general. Twelve were teaching in both VMI and EMI programs; two were teaching both EMI content subjects and English language skills. Three of the lecturers held master's degrees and 11 had doctoral degrees conferred either locally or by overseas institutions. Among

the 14 academic participants, one was on her leave while the other two refused to give access to their classes due to personal reasons; thus, 11 class observations were conducted. The list of academic participants, the codes assigned for each of them, and their respective experience are included in Appendix 6.

Table 4.2

Summary of Lecturer Participants

Total	Gender		Faculty				
	F	M	Institute of Economics and International Business	International Economics	Business Administration	Finance and Banking	Business English
14	12	2	3	5	2	2	2

The total number of lecturer participants was 14, which led to theoretical saturation as Fusch and Ness (2015) posit. These scholars assert that the numbers of interviews will depend on the point at which theoretical saturation is reached; that is when additional interviews are unlikely to yield new themes during thematic analysis.

In general, the participants in my sample included a diverse range of attributes, including both male and female academics with varying levels of experience in EMI teaching. They were engaged in teaching different courses across year levels, spanning from first-year to final-year students, and were affiliated with various faculties. As a result, the selection of academic participants for the study was characterised by a deliberate and purposeful sampling approach, capturing the complex diversity of the studied case.

Management participants

As mentioned above, this study sought to explore how academics enacted agency within a specific EMI context. To gain a comprehensive understanding, it was essential not only to gather data from lecturer participants but also to explore the institutional context through interviews with management staff. The selection of management level participants for this study was based on whether they were directly involved in EMI, and willing to participate in the study. From this perspective, the selected management participants included two deans, two vice deans, and two managers of EMI programs who were in charge of both the management and academic aspects of their respective

programs. It should be noted that all six management participants in this study had over 10 years' experience each in EMI programs, with dual teaching-managing roles. The list of management participants and the codes assigned for each of them is included in Appendix 6.

Table 4.3

Summary of Management Participants

Total	Gender		Management roles	
	F	M	Deans/vice deans	Program managers
6	5	1	4	2

Student participants

The study recruited 48 students across five EMI programs to volunteer in focus-group (FG) discussions. Student participants were invited after each observed class through criterion-based, convenience and snowball sampling (Patton, 2015). The criteria for selecting the first few students were those who were willing to join and available for group discussions. Another point to consider when selecting potential participants was their level of activity in the class; choosing active participants would ensure their dynamic contribution in group discussions. These students in turn suggested some additional classmates. This was to make sure that the student participants were comfortable in sharing their ideas in the discussions.

The student group was considered to represent a broad spectrum of perspectives, as it included both male and female students, from various faculties (Table 4.4). The recruitment of a diverse array of students offered a breadth of viewpoints concerning the advancement of EMI programs (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Table 4.4

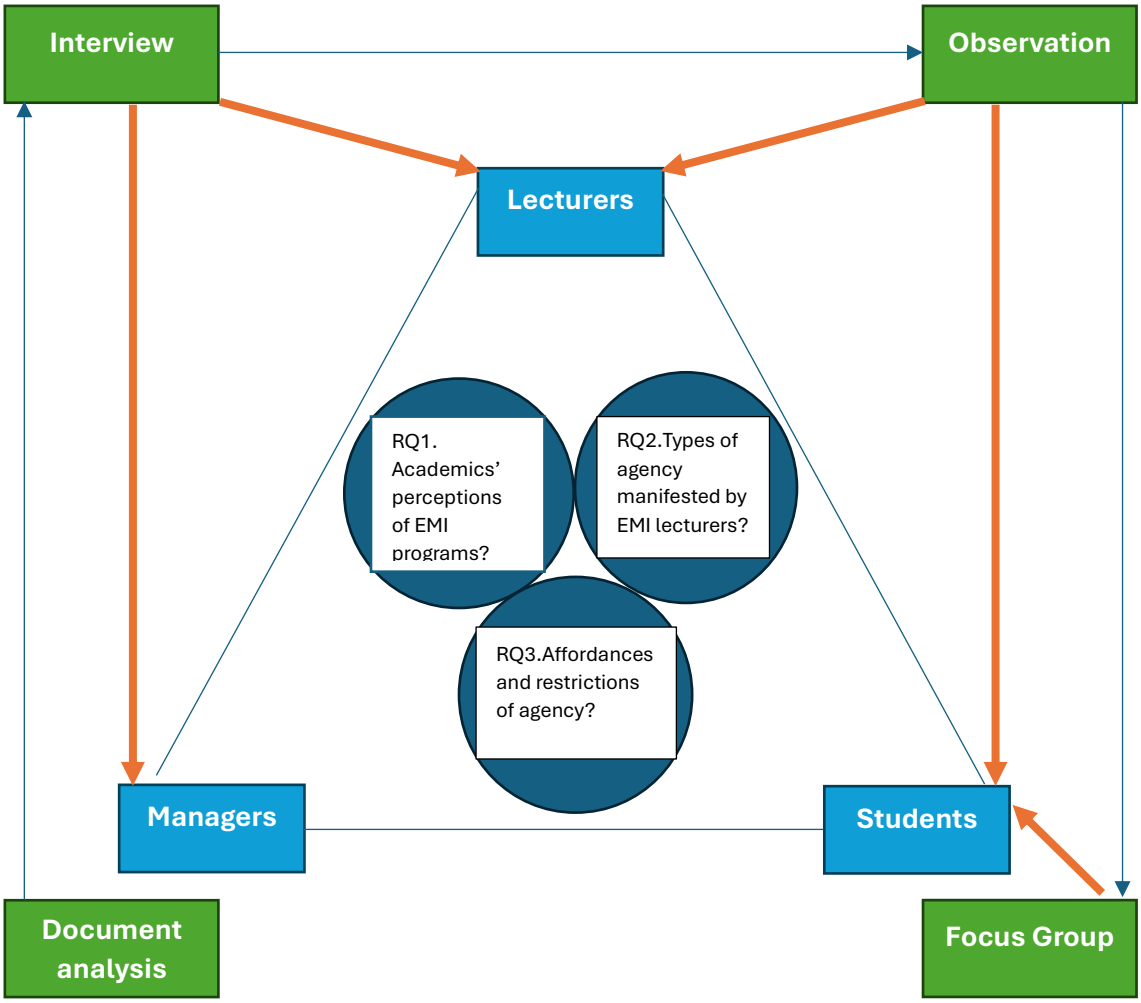
Summary of Student Participants

Total	Gender		Year level			Faculty				
	F	M	1	2	3	Institute of Economics and International Business	International Economics	Business Administration	Finance and Banking	Business English
48	31	17	10	24	14	13	9	12	8	6

4.4 Data collection methods and procedure

Figure 4.1

Data Collection Process



The strategy throughout data collection was to start by searching for documents related to EMI education from both national and institutional levels, followed by interviewing heads of faculties that provided EMI courses, who had, due to their experience, a broad insight into the EMI learning and teaching environment. With the support of these leaders, the researcher approached academics with experience in EMI education. Interviews with the lecturers were followed by observations of their classes and subsequent focus-group interviews with their corresponding students. All interviews and observations were held within a period of 10 months. (Figure 4.1)

4.4.1 Collecting documents

In qualitative research, records encompassing both public and private information collected by researchers about a specific location or study participants hold significant value (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). One objective of this study revolves around the examination of the roles of academics within EMI programs. To achieve this, I identified and examined a variety of existing policy documents associated with EMI programs and tertiary educators as primary data sources. These included documents such as governmental regulations and legislation in Vietnam, resolutions, decisions, and guidelines pertinent to the reform of higher education, along with documents addressing foreign language instruction and EMI programs within Vietnamese universities. The data was published in Vietnamese and collected from the online portals of the Vietnamese Government and MOET. These documents played a foundational role in comprehending the context within which educators operate. The subsequent stages of interviews and observation covered topics referring to these policies.

For the EMI programs at the research site, existing documents, such as curricula, websites, and brochures, were analysed for more specific insights into of how the EMI programs were being implemented and how the institution communicated about EMI programs to its staff and students.

4.4.2 Semi-structured interviews

The data collection process for the study on lecturer agency involved conducting semi-structured interviews with 14 academic participants and six managers. Within the domain of qualitative research, semi-structured interviews offer a valuable tool for gathering

insights into participants' experiences and interpretations. This method is particularly fitting when researchers aim to comprehend the viewpoints, values, beliefs, or decision-making processes of specific groups of stakeholders (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These interviews were particularly suitable for exploring the complex concept of agency, as they prompted thoughtful and comprehensive responses about participants' lived experiences. The semi-structured format facilitated "in-depth probing while permitting the interviewer to keep the interview within the parameters traced out by the aim of the study" (Berg, 2007, p. 39). Additionally, the conversational nature of these interviews nurtured a rapport between the researcher and the participants, an essential aspect when investigating lived experiences. Finally, the semi-structured interviews allowed for relationship- and trust-building between the researcher and the researched, which is vital for research into lived experience of the participants. These proved to be very effective in the data collection process, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. With those obvious advantages, semi-structured interviewing has been popular in many recent studies regarding agency (Hopwood, 2010; Marginson, 2014; Phan et al., 2019; Tran & Vu, 2018).

Semi-structured interviews are characterised by a set of guiding questions, allowing interviewers flexibility to pursue additional lines of inquiry and follow-up on participants' responses (Hatch, 2002). This approach entails relinquishing some control to participants, thereby gaining insight into their experiences from their perspectives (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). This fluidity requires open-ended and inviting questions, accompanied by the interviewer's "emotional attentiveness and engagement" (Riessman, 2008, p. 24). Therefore, an interview protocol was developed for each group of informants, with leading questions and probes based on a framework suggested by Nguyen (2016).

As I was interested in understanding whether and how teachers enacted agency in their professional activities, I used open-ended questions to probe for information on teachers' lived experiences in EMI programs. The working definition of agency in this study highlights three elements: iteration, projection, and practical evaluation, corresponding to three temporal orientations towards the past, future, and present, respectively (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Thus, interviews with deans and program managers included open-ended questions on the implementation of EMI programs in the faculty, requirements and supports for staff and students. Interviews with academics centred around participants' backgrounds, experiences, and aspirations. Initial questions focused on their backgrounds

and motivations for engaging in EMI programs. The subsequent questions elicited responses about challenges faced and the strategies devised to overcome them. The concluding questions explored participants' aspirations and how they related to EMI education. (Appendices 1 and 2 contain the interview protocols.)

All interviews with academics were conducted online, via a secured Zoom platform, and ranged from 35 to 90 minutes. Both audio and video recordings were obtained, but only the audio recordings were used for research purposes.

4.4.3 Classroom observations

Classroom observations constituted the third data collection method in this study. After conducting interviews with the lecturers, I proceeded to request permission for access to their classes. Once their consents were secured, I scheduled observation dates and times through email correspondence. Following mutual agreement on the date and time, I sent a reminder a day in advance to account for any potential schedule changes.

Given the study's fundamental aim to explore real-life practices within the institution, observations were considered essential for capturing critical insights, including dimensions of classroom interactions between academics and students, and specifically focusing on teaching strategies employed by teachers and the resulting student learning dynamics. The goal of observation was to acquire first-hand information in a natural and open-ended manner (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach involved observing the unfolding actions and events without imposing pre-determined categories or classifications (Punch, 2014). In social research, observation "is the production of public knowledge (empirical and theoretical) about specific issues" (Foster, 2006, p. 58) because "not all knowledge is...articulable, recountable or constructable" (Mason, 2002, p. 85).

Observation strategies encompass roles of both participant and non-participant observers, depending on the study's objectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, observation was believed to yield crucial insights into classroom interactions between academics and students, particularly pertaining to teaching strategies and pedagogies. Adopting the role of a non-participant observer, I sat in the back of the class and took notes of remarkable events. Without active participation, I aimed to grasp how these academics navigated the EMI environment and interacted with students during lectures.

Throughout the observation process, meticulous attention was directed towards multiple dimensions of classroom activities, including academics' introduction and delivery of lecture content, provision of explanations and examples, guidance for student group work, giving feedback, management of classroom situations, and use of the Vietnamese language. (Appendix 4 contains Observation protocol.)

Observation was executed through field notetaking rather than video recording, taking into account students' potential discomfort with the presence of a camera. Field notes gathered during observation sessions were deemed sufficient supplementary material for facilitating interviews with academics and focus-group discussions with students.

Each lecturer was observed once. Three observations were conducted online, during the pandemic lockdowns. Most observations happened earlier during the course of study to avoid exams and assessment. During each on-site observation session, the researcher arrived well before the class began, taking a seat at the back of the classroom, which often accommodated 60-90 students.

4.4.4 Focus groups with students

In addition to data collected from document analysis, semi-structured interviews with management and academics, and class observations, I carried out focus-group discussions with student participants to investigate EMI students' perspectives regarding various issues in the learning environment. This approach allowed me to gain insights into teachers' practices from the vantage point of their students, thereby enhancing my comprehension of issues identified during class observation. Breen (2006) highlights the value of focus groups when research questions require participants to share and compare their experiences, particularly to explore matters of shared significance. In alignment with this rationale, my aim was to encourage students to share their encounters with the specific lecturer observed earlier, thereby revealing their perceptions of the lecturer's strategies and their efficacy in fostering the desired learning environment. Additionally, I aimed to discern the students' expectations for the EMI programs and to uncover any disparities between these expectations and the classroom reality.

The use of the focus-group interview method with student participants took into account that students might possess insights and critical viewpoints on teaching and learning

practices that were less in-depth than those of the teaching and managing staff. Nevertheless, recognising the importance of understanding the impact of academic agency within the educational setting, I considered students' viewpoints valuable. Moreover, acknowledging potential hesitance among students to provide evaluations of their ongoing programs, particularly among Vietnamese students, the focus-group interview method was chosen to encourage open expression, and allow participants to share their thoughts, and build on one another's responses to generate richer research data (Fontana & Frey, 1994). This approach also aligns with the assertion that focus-group interviews enable expansion and clarification (Marshall & Rossman, 2011), as well as the use of "collective experience of group brainstorming" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 144). Finally, I believe that focus groups provide participants with a rewarding learning experience of their own.

The topics and questions for discussion included the participants' prior knowledge of EMI programs, their aspirations, and especially their practices in the programs. These topics and questions for discussion were informed by the research questions and class-observation notes (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Mason, 2002). To foster unbiased responses, I intentionally framed the interview questions with terms like "good" and "less good", avoiding labelling teachers as popular or unpopular during the discussions. This approach aimed to prompt students to reflect on their classroom experiences and evaluate the efficacy of teachers' instructional strategies. (Appendix 3 contains focus group discussion protocol.)

Considering the number of student participants in each focus group, I found that smaller groups of three to six members were conducive to productive discussions, as they encouraged active participation and generated diverse ideas within a specified timeframe (Masadeh, 2012). Overall, the study's sample included 48 students in 11 focus-group discussions, each lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. These groups were deemed to represent a diversity of perspectives, since the participants were both male and female, in different year levels, and from a wide range of study majors. The list of students participating in focus groups is included in Appendix 6.

In short, the study employed multiple data collection methods, including document analysis, in-depth interviews, class observations, and focus groups with a diversity of participant groups including managing staff, academics, and students. To maintain the

variety of data sources, special attention was paid to ensuring a diversity of participant backgrounds such as gender, age, length of service, and academic discipline. Therefore, the multiple perspectives obtained from different participant groups would contribute to ascertaining the validity of the inferences derived from multiple data sources.

4.5 Challenges during data collection

Collecting data for this study revealed some issues. First, recruiting participants during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic presented a myriad of challenges that significantly impeded the research process. The abrupt shift to online learning replacing in-person interactions at the research site added complexity to the recruitment strategy. As physical gatherings became rare, potential participants were grappling with the adjustment to virtual environments, resulting in a general sense of uncertainty and reluctance. This widespread discomfort translated into disrupted correspondence, making it exceedingly difficult to establish a reliable channel of communication with prospective participants. The prevailing anxieties surrounding health and the unfamiliarity of remote engagement understandably diverted attention away from research involvement. In the end, most of my contacts with participants in this study occurred via online platforms.

It is worth mentioning that one of the first discussion groups consisted of first-year students who had never been to the campus before, due to the pandemic lockdowns. The fact that they had solely engaged with teachers and peers via online platforms could lead to certain limitations to the quality of the focus groups. Their lack of physical presence on campus might hinder their ability to provide comprehensive insights into the physical environment, facilities, and campus culture. Additionally, the restriction of their interactions to online mode might skew their perspectives on academic engagement, social dynamics, and extracurricular activities. Their limited in-person interactions could also influence their capacity to offer profound views on interpersonal relationships and collaborative learning. Furthermore, their absence from routine campus life might lead to gaps in their understanding of what had hitherto been everyday occurrences and common student behaviours. Despite the valuable insights their unique pandemic experiences could yield, the researcher was mindful that careful consideration should be given to ensure a diverse range of interviewees to provide a well-rounded depiction of EMI students' experience. Therefore, the other focus-group participants were those who had experienced in both online and on-site learning.

Similarly, gaining permission to observe academics in their classroom environments for research purposes was fraught with challenges. My initial procedure was to interview managers, then observe academics in their EMI classes, conduct interviews with them, and finally, conclude with focus groups involving students from the relevant classes. However, when I approached potential academic participants about this process, many of them refused to take part in the study. Their reluctance could have been due to several reasons. First, academics might have been concerned about their teaching methods being scrutinised, potentially leading to unfavourable evaluations or misinterpretation of their pedagogical approaches. Additionally, they may have felt that the presence of an observer might disrupt the natural flow of the class, making it difficult for teachers to maintain their regular teaching style and environment. Lastly, there could be concerns about the privacy of both the instructors and the students, particularly in the context of sensitive discussions or personal anecdotes shared during the class.

To address these challenges and create a research process more conducive to yielding rich insights, an alternative approach involving interviews, observation, and group discussions was adopted. By initiating the research process with interviews, the researcher could establish rapport with the participating lecturers, providing a platform for them to openly express their concerns, expectations, and reservations. This step also fostered a sense of collaboration, enhancing the likelihood that they would participate in subsequent observations. Finally, the research process culminated with focus-group discussions involving students. This revised methodology not only respected the concerns of the participants but also fostered a collaborative environment where insights could be shared, and participants could feel engaged in the research process. Placing the emphasis on the insights gained from interviews, rather than from observation, could result in a more comprehensive view of the academic experience. Overall, this adapted approach respected the privacy and concerns of academic participants while providing valuable data for scholarly inquiry (Figure 4.1 shows the data collection process).

4.6 Data analysis

Data analysis entails the process of arriving at a meaningful understanding from collected information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Within qualitative research, it involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting participants' verbal expressions based on the researcher's observations and reading. In this study, the journey of data analysis started

at the same time as data collection, as the researcher commenced the investigation with a defined focus on lecturers' experience in EMI ecology. The recursive and dynamic process involved obtaining insights, impressions, and tentative hypotheses, facilitating a continuous cycle of refinement and reformulation of questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The research data took various forms: government publications, institutional documents, class-observation notes, and transcripts of interviews and focus-group discussions. These data sources collectively offered a comprehensive view of the complex conditions of EMI program implementation within VHEIs. Since the data was so copious that it might pose challenges for the researcher (Huang, 2003), this study employed data reduction and thematic analysis. Cohen et al. (2018, p. 643) define data reduction as "distilling from the complexity of the findings the key points of the phenomenon in question, reducing complexity without violating it, catching the essence of the issue or the situation". In this respect, my study relied heavily on the research questions and the conceptual framework to determine the relevant data on which to focus.

The fundamental aspect of the analysis process involves the process of coding, defined as "a way of indexing or categorizing the text in order to establish a framework of thematic ideas about it" (Gibbs, 2007, p. 38). Coding serves as the critical link between collecting data and extracting meaningful insights from it (Charmaz, 2001). To begin the analysis, data segments relevant to the research questions were identified and labelled as free nodes. These nodes acted as the foundation for categorisation and theme development. This iterative process allowed for the creation of thematic structures that encapsulated the intricacies of the EMI program implementation and the participants' experiences.

Data can be coded using inductive, deductive, or hybrid approaches. Inductive coding is the identification of patterns, themes, and categories within the data set. In inductive coding, the researcher embarks on the coding process with an open mind, giving rise to the term "open coding". Conversely, deductive coding involves encoding data according to an existing pre-established framework (Gibbs, 2007; Patton, 2015). In deductive coding, the researcher possesses predefined categories or concepts, which might stem from existing research literature, prior studies, subjects covered in interview sessions, and the researcher's intuitive insights into the situation. The two methods of coding are not

mutually exclusive, as the researcher can dynamically switch between them throughout the analytical process (Gibbs, 2007).

The key concepts of this study derive from the research questions, the ecological framework for teacher agency, and the underlying aspects of teacher agency as described by Priestley et al. (2015) (Chapter 3). Using these theoretical foundations, this study employed a deductive coding approach for data analysis, aligning the data with pre-determined themes related to the three dimensions of agency: iterative, projective, and practical-evaluative.

To enhance methodological rigour and clarity, the study adopted Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework for thematic analysis: (1) familiarising with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. During the transcription process, informal coding was initiated, and transcripts were read multiple times to ensure familiarity with the data. The qualitative data analysis software NVivo was employed for systematic coding, which facilitated organising and managing codes across the dataset.

While deductive coding provided a structured starting point, the researcher remained open to inductive insights that emerged during analysis. For example, contextual conditions influencing EMI policy implementation emerged as a new theme, enriching the understanding of the phenomenon. This iterative process corresponds to Braun and Clarke's (2006) recommendation to balance pre-established theoretical frameworks with the flexibility to accommodate latent patterns within the data.

Throughout the analysis, the researcher engaged in a two-cycle coding approach, similar to the method proposed by Saldaña (2013). The first cycle involved assigning labels to data segments, forming a foundational inventory of topics for further categorisation in the second cycle. The second cycle probed deeper, grouping categories into patterns, themes, or constructs. This process resonates with Miles et al.'s (2019) approach, which emphasises weaving descriptions, participants' words, and interpretations into a coherent narrative. The dynamic and recursive nature of this approach allowed profound insights to emerge.

Theme generation in this study followed a reflexive and iterative process, integrating creativity and critical reflection to ensure coherence and depth. Initial codes were grouped

into meaningful categories, forming potential themes such as “Lecturers’ capacities”, which included backgrounds and beliefs, and “EMI programs”, encompassing perspectives of different groups of participants on various aspects such as curriculum and pedagogy. Drawing from Braun and Clarke’s (2019) emphasis on reflexivity, the process recognised the researcher’s active role in interpreting the data, viewing subjectivity as a resource rather than a limitation. Refinement involved critically questioning the alignment and central organising concepts of themes, merging or discarding elements where necessary, and ensuring the framework captured the complex interplay of lecturers’ capacities and contextual factors in EMI environments. This reflexive engagement fostered nuanced and contextually situated insights, moving beyond rigid procedures to a creative and meaningful thematic narrative. (The coding scheme is provided in Appendix 5.)

To ensure the rigour and trustworthiness of the study, multiple strategies were implemented. Triangulation was achieved by employing various data collection methods, including document analysis, class observations, interviews, and focus-group discussions with diverse participant groups. Regular peer debriefing sessions ensured critical engagement with research methodology, analysis, and interpretations. Moreover, prolonged engagement in the research site fostered rapport and depth of understanding, while detailed descriptions facilitated transferability to other contexts.

In conclusion, the data analysis process in this study was a systematic and comprehensive endeavour that synthesised diverse data sources to illuminate the complexities of EMI program implementation at Tower University. The use of multiple strategies for ensuring trustworthiness further bolstered the credibility of the study’s findings. This rigorous and well-structured data analysis process laid the foundation for a robust understanding of the complexities of EMI programs in the VHE context.

4.7 The researcher’s role

The researcher holds significant importance within this study, necessitating careful consideration of their position. Acknowledging that my own background inevitably influenced my interpretations, I assumed a deliberate stance that recognised how my interpretations stemmed from my personal, cultural, and historical experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This positioning represents “a cluster of rights and duties to perform

certain actions with a certain significance as acts" that may also include "prohibitions or denials of access to some of the local repertoire of meaningful acts" (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003, p. 5). In the context of this study, my position as a former teacher of EMI programs within Tower University proved advantageous in comprehending the participants' shared experiences. My role as an "insider" established a foundation for building rapport and extracting authentic data, as I could establish a relatable connection with participants (Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002). This positioning fostered a comfortable atmosphere, leading to an effective rapport between me as the researcher and the participants. However, despite my efforts to clarify the research purposes with the participants, this closeness may have also led some participants to tailor their expressions, either by emphasising issues they believed aligned with my perspective or by withholding criticisms to other colleagues and the management. For instance, a management participant expressed strong concerns about a recent ministerial regulation on EMI programs, hoping I could assist in conveying these concerns to higher-level management. This potential influence was taken into consideration in the analysis and interpretation of the data in this study.

This familiarity also raises the prospect of biases from both sides, whereby I might inadvertently bring my own experiences and viewpoints into the interview and data analysis processes, potentially obscuring participants' authentic voices. Concurrently, interviewees might withhold information they would have disclosed to a researcher with a different cultural and social background. For example, participants often avoided providing detailed descriptions of specific situations or elaborating on particular social or professional contexts, assuming that I would inherently understand their intended meanings. Asselin (2003) contends that when researchers operate within their own setting and share peer status with the study group, making assumptions about cultural dynamics can become a tendency. For instance, in this study, some participants employed phrases like "as you already understand what it's like" or "you know what I mean".

However, positioning myself as a former teacher at the same institution introduced potential power imbalances in interactions with student participants. To mitigate this effect, I deliberately selected student participants who were not my former students. This was feasible as I had resigned several years prior to the study, minimising any "insider" bias in data collection and interpretation. In essence, my prior role as an EMI lecturer

contributed to fostering participant comfort in sharing their experiences during interviews, but simultaneously raised concerns about potential impacts on data quality. My role in this study indicated a delicate interplay between making use of my insider status and maintaining the integrity of data collection and interpretation.

When analysing the interview data, my experience as an EMI lecturer enabled me to interpret participants' accounts from their lecturer perspective. It allowed me to appreciate the intricate decision-making processes in Vietnam's educational context, which intertwine academic considerations with cultural and relational factors. It also provided valuable insights into the diverse career aspirations of the participants, such as the differing ambitions of Lecturers 4 and 5 compared to those of Lecturers 13 and 14, as presented in Chapter 6.

Finally, engaging with the study deepened my understanding of my roles and values as an EMI educator in educational innovation efforts in Vietnam – insights that were not clear to me at the outset of my research. As Reinharz (1997) suggests, researchers not only bring their identities into the field but also transform through the research process. My evolving identities have undoubtedly shaped this study, while simultaneously being reshaped by the experiences and reflections it has offered.

4.8 Ethical considerations

This study was undertaken within the framework of the Australian National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007), incorporating an awareness of Vietnam's distinct educational and cultural nuances. Upon securing candidature approval, ethical clearance was subsequently obtained from Victoria University's Human Research Ethics Committee, bearing the reference number HRE20-098. Ethical approval was similarly sought from the relevant Vietnamese institution.

The participant recruitment and data collection processes were carefully executed in accordance with Victoria University's Research Integrity Policy and Procedures. The steps were chosen to ensure that participants were well informed, gained a sufficient grasp of the project's nature, and engaged on a voluntary basis.

In the context of qualitative research employing interviews and observations, maintaining confidentiality and privacy emerges as a pivotal ethical concern. To that end, a

foundational premise was established whereby the participants were provided with assurance that their information would be protected by the researcher. This commitment fostered an environment of openness, enabling participants to share their experiences. As a practical measure, pseudonyms were employed for both individuals and the institution under study, ensuring anonymity. Notably, during interviews, any names mentioned by participants were intentionally withheld to further safeguard their privacy. These precautions effectively shielded the participants while affording the researcher valuable insights.

Furthermore, the participants were informed about their right to withdraw from the study at any time or request the omission of specific information. Given the unique context of this study, in that it encompassed academics and students within the same institution, and this was subject to potential power dynamics, utmost attention was devoted to maintaining the participants' anonymity and confidentiality. This approach was deemed essential in cultivating an environment wherein management staff, academics and students could wholeheartedly express their thoughts and experiences.

From the outset of data collection, potential participants were equipped with comprehensive details about the researcher's background and the study itself, as delineated in the participation information sheets. Data collection was started only after participants possessed a comprehensive understanding of the research, as evidenced by their signatures on the Consent Form. Data obtained within this study remains confidential, exclusively employed for this research and not for any other intent.

4.9 Summary

This chapter has provided justifications for the qualitative case study. It has also discussed methodological issues regarding the selection of the case, sampling, data collection instruments and data analysis, and explained how I applied the principles of ethical research. Chapters 5-7 will present the research findings.

Chapter 5 – Findings: EMI Implementation in Tower University

5.0 Introduction

In recent years, the adoption of English medium instruction (EMI) in higher education institutions has gained momentum as universities strive to prepare students for a globalised world. Tower University, recognised for its commitment to academic excellence, stands out as a rich case to understand the intricate dynamics that shape EMI implementation and to serve as a critical foundation for understanding how lecturers enact agency within the specific context of EMI implementation. By employing the ecological framework of teacher agency (Priestley et al., 2015), this chapter not only examines the institutional policies mandating EMI practices but also explores the relevant perspectives held by management and students. This analysis sets the stage for analysing how these contextual conditions influence the way lecturers navigate, resist, and shape their teaching practices, which will be further explored in the subsequent findings chapters.

5.1 EMI programs at Tower University

To enhance the quality of higher education in Vietnam, the government implemented the Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA) in 2005 (Chapter 1). Tower University, as an institution directly influenced by these reforms, underwent significant changes, particularly in terms of institutional autonomy. In 2006, the university was chosen as one of five higher education institutions (HEIs) in Vietnam to participate in a pilot project for financial autonomy. This program involved reducing government funding for higher education while simultaneously relaxing the tuition-fee cap (Government of Vietnam, 2006). Tower University faced the challenge of becoming more financially independent while simultaneously meeting the requirements for internationalisation and improving quality education. To address these challenges, it made a strategic decision to introduce EMI programs and establish partnerships with foreign institutions. These programs resulted not only from the direction of the government, but also from the market needs analysed "through surveys with various stakeholders, including employers, partner institutions, students (both current and graduated), staff and other relevant parties" (Interview, Manager 2). Thus, the establishment of EMI programs was a proactive measure to meet the autonomy requirements and to cater to the demands of the labour

market. By adopting EMI, the university aimed to align with international standards and attract a more diverse student body. Collaborating with foreign institutions allowed Tower University to develop a variety of EMI programs, enabling students to acquire language proficiency and gain exposure to global perspectives. These initiatives aligned with the university's objectives for institutional growth and development in an evolving educational context.

s of 2023, the university had three advanced programs (APs), six high-quality programs (HQPs), 10 joint programs (JPs), and nine career-oriented and international development programs (Table 5.1). While HQPs and career-oriented programs are locally developed with reference to both local and foreign programs, JPs and APs are imported from foreign HEI partners. Graduates from JPs are awarded foreign degrees, while those from HQPs, career-oriented programs, and APs receive local degrees. Because they are similarly structured, HQPs and career-oriented programs will be referred to together as HQPs hereafter. These EMI programs have input from partner HEIs in terms of curriculum, materials and assessment. Generally, these programs mimic those of foreign HEIs in many aspects, including knowledge content, course structure, and course delivery (Phan et al., 2019).

Table 5.1

Types of EMI Programs in Tower University (Nguyen, 2018)

Sources of programs	Program nature	Degree conferred	Program nomenclatures in Vietnamese HE
Foreign programs	In cooperation with foreign partner HEIs	Local degree	Advanced programs
		Foreign degree	Joint programs
Domestic programs	Locally developed with reference to foreign programs	Local degree	High-quality programs

5.1.1 Program objectives

EMI programs at Tower University have been used as a strategic tool towards internationalisation of higher education, with a range of objectives that respond to the need of various stakeholders. At the institutional level, the primary goal is to facilitate

internationalisation of the curriculum, strengthening international collaboration, enhancing staff and student mobility, and boosting institutional reputation at the local, regional and international levels. For academics and administrators, EMI programs are considered an efficient tool to raise training and research capacity. Additionally, these programs help retain domestic students who would otherwise seek education abroad, thus benefiting the institution and the local education system (Brown, 2014).

Data from interviews with six managers at Tower University shows that for students, EMI programs aim at "train[ing] high-quality human resources capable of using English in solving professional tasks, having specialised expertise, and being independent and creative in problem-solving" (Interview, Manager 6). This objective was considered "especially successful" and "far exceeding expectations" (Interview, Manager 1), as "surveys have shown that all graduates have jobs, mostly in their specialised fields, and are highly regarded by their employers for their expertise, language proficiency, and professional work style" (Interview, Manager 6).

Moreover, the objectives of EMI programs extend beyond the immediate benefits for students and institutions. They aim to attract international students, enhancing diversity within the student body and fostering a multicultural learning environment. Also, these programs contribute to improving the overall institutional infrastructure, supporting the development of quality education programs that are nationally competitive (Interview, Managers 1 and 5). By adopting EMI programs, Tower University hoped to achieve benefits for all stakeholders, thereby achieving its ultimate goal of internationalisation.

5.1.2 Policies on staff

To qualify for teaching positions in EMI programs, lecturers need to meet two specific conditions. First, they need to possess relevant teaching experience in their respective subjects. This requirement ensures that lecturers have expertise in their fields, enabling them to deliver high-quality lectures. Second, lecturers must have graduated from overseas institutions, in accordance with the MOET's regulations. As the number of EMI programs increased, the shortage of academic staff forced the institution to relax the second condition by allowing domestic graduates who meet foreign language requirements to teach in EMI programs.

During the first few years of implementing APs, foreign lecturers from overseas institutions were invited to teach most of the subjects, while Vietnamese lecturers worked as teaching assistants. After some years, these local staff were able to replace some foreign professors to teach in relevant subjects, and the institution hoped that it would gradually be able to independently staff its APs, due to the high cost involved in recruiting foreign academics, and the ready availability of the local teaching staff (Interview, Managers 1 and 5).

The language proficiency requirement for lecturers in EMI programs is relatively flexible. As long as the lecturers have graduated from an overseas institution, they are considered to have adequate English proficiency to teach in EMI programs. In certain instances, lecturers may also satisfy this requirement by holding an English-proficiency certificate such as IELTS. This approach was confirmed by several managers during interviews: "[lecturers] need to meet either requirements: graduated from a foreign country or had an English-proficiency certificate" (Interview, Manager 1). Manager 5 further emphasised that "foreign qualifications can replace all types of certificates like IELTS; there's no need to have those" (Interview, Manager 5).

This policy has remained unchanged since the institution started its EMI programs, emphasising its commitment to maintaining consistent standards. Nevertheless, specific instances have arisen involving lecturers who obtained their degrees from non-English-speaking countries, such as Lecturers 3 and 8. In delivering lessons in English, these instructors encountered greater challenges compared to their colleagues. Even within the cohort of educators who pursued their education in Anglophone countries, language-related concerns persisted (Section 7.2).

Tower University used financial rewards as one way to engage academics in EMI programs, with lecturers teaching in EMI programs receiving higher remuneration than those teaching in standard programs. For example, those teaching HQP classes were compensated at a rate three times higher, and those teaching in APs seven times higher. As a result,

> …for those who have English proficiency, it is natural that they do not want to teach in Vietnamese. They only want to teach English classes, putting in the same effort. So, if we want to talk about engagement, I don't think it's an issue here

> because compared to the significant difference in payment for HQPs or APs, it is much higher than the standard programs. (Interview, Manager 1)

From the institution's perspective, this remuneration scheme creates a significant incentive for lecturers to participate in EMI programs, assuring their engagement and commitment, and improving staff retention, as lecturers are motivated by the prospect of higher compensation and recognition (Interviews, Managers 1, 2, and 5). However, the same is not true for all the faculties within the institution. For example, Manager 3 in the Faculty of Business English expressed her concerns about staff retainment, because academics often wanted to relocate to other faculties after their overseas training (Section 7.7).

In general, the staff policy in EMI programs encompasses qualification requirements, English language proficiency expectations, and remuneration. By setting specific qualification criteria, ensuring adequate language proficiency, and offering attractive remuneration packages, the institution hopes to maintain the quality of their EMI programs and retain skilled lecturers.

5.1.3 Policies on students

Policies on student intake at Tower University reveal some issues. Since 2015, tertiary institutions in Vietnam have had up to 20 ways to admit students to their bachelor programs. This complicated system, which had been intended to give "higher education institutions autonomy in deciding their intake methods and responsibility in admission" (Vietnam Education Law 2015), has caused a great deal of discomfort for students and society as a whole (Trần, 2022).

Tower University has used six methods of intake for all student cohorts in recent years. The intake requirements for EMI programs are distinctive among different program types, with APs being the most demanding and JPs the most lenient. APs and HQPs share similar intake requirements, which primarily entail the evaluation of students' study reports or the results of their national graduation exams, along with the submission of a valid language certificate. The language proficiency criterion for APs is set at a minimum equivalence to an IELTS band score of 6.5, ensuring a baseline level of competency. JPs, on the other hand, exhibit different intake benchmarks. While the benchmark for standard

programs remains a key consideration, students falling slightly below this benchmark, yet surpassing the minimum thresholds set by the MOET, can still be admitted to JPs if they pledge to fulfil the English language requirements. The same leniency is applied to HQPs, where students who do not meet the minimum English language proficiency requirement may still gain admission if they make a commitment to fulfil the requirement within one year. Thus, "there used to be a situation where 10 students who applied for the high-quality programs were all admitted" (Interview, Lecturer 6).

If the institution had provided adequate support and resources, such as remedial language programs and tutoring to students with low English proficiency, the lenient intake policy could not have harmed academic quality. However, in the absence of such support, the teaching staff, program managers and students are left with many difficulties (as detailed in the next section). For example, when talking about students' language ability, Lecturer 12, who taught statistics to second-year students, admitted that "if I had to correct some reports produced by students, I'd have to rewrite them all" (Interview, Lecturer 12). That means in many cases, students' English proficiency falls below par.

Not much had been done to fix the issue. At the faculty level, although faculties had some language support for students, the main responsibility for language improvement remained with the students, as Lecturer 6 admitted,

> My department has something specifically designed for the first year, but it's just teaching for about five sessions. It is the faculty's teachers [content lecturers] who teach them the writing style, how to study in English, listen to English, and academic writing in English. (Interview, Lecturer 6)

This minimal support led to "two possible scenarios for students with poor English proficiency: first, some may request to transfer from HQP class to standard class…. Second, students must take initiative to find ways to improve English skills by themselves" (Interview, Lecturer 6). In the worst-case scenario, "some students who were in high-quality classes had to transfer to standard classes after one semester because they could not follow the lectures" (Interview, Lecturer 14). In both cases, the responsibility for improving language skills was placed on the students.

It is obvious that the lenient intake policy, which the institution employed to attract students to EMI programs, resulted in a situation that neither the students nor the

institution wanted. Moreover, this flexibility inadvertently fostered unnecessary competition among faculties within the same university. As one participant commented: "When taking in students for high-quality programs, we make every effort to promote ourselves, even compete with other faculties within the university" (Interview, Lecturer 7). The excessive leniency in admission persisted until auditing and accreditation requirements forced the institution to change.

In short, the institution's policy on student intake allowed some room for flexibility. While some efforts were made at faculty level to support students in their English language proficiency, the overall responsibility for English improvement fell on the students themselves. This shifting of accountability suggests that the intake policy might be motivated by factors beyond the desire to offer quality education. Financial considerations or competitive motivations could possibly underpin this approach. This parallels the situation observed in Japan, where the EMI student intake at the undergraduate level appeared to be "a means of branding" (Ota & Horiuchi, 2018, p. 128). In the long run, this compromise in quality can lead to reputational damage and diminished educational outcomes.

5.1.4 Policy on curriculum

Tower University adopted different approaches to develop curriculum in its three EMI programs. Each type of program has its unique curriculum development process, which caters to specific objectives and requirements.

In 2008, Tower University was one of the five universities approved by MOET to offer bachelor's degrees in APs. MOET's AP project aimed to "develop some disciplines, faculties, and universities in Vietnam toward regional and international standards…. By 2020 there will be some Vietnamese universities in the list of 200 best universities in the world" (Government of Vietnam, 2008). The university's APs adopted curricula from partner universities, with slight modifications made to disciplinary units such as using textbooks from different publishers and applying different assessment methods. This approach, guided by the MOET, aimed to quickly enhance the quality of education (Phan & Tran, 2015). As education plays a crucial role in nation-building (McBurnie, 2000), the curriculum was also tailored to incorporate national values and ethics; thus APs include mandatory courses such as Marxist-Leninist philosophy, Ho Chi Minh ideology, and

military training, which are taught in Vietnamese, as they are considered vital to developing well-rounded graduates (Duong, 2009). However, with the increased autonomy granted to Tower University over time, especially after the state funding for APs was discontinued in 2016, the curriculum has been gradually revised to allocate more space for disciplinary units, reducing the number of courses taught in Vietnamese. This modification allows AP students to study more subjects in their chosen fields and benefit more from the imported curriculum. However, AP students are not as free as their counterparts in other programs in terms of subject selection. For all AP programs, the subjects for each semester are pre-determined by the faculties rather than selected by the students. This is because the institution still depends on its overseas partner institutions for staffing. Foreign professors can only teach their courses intensively within a short time, e.g., a fortnight, which causes some restrictions in subject selection.

HQPs at Tower University take a different approach to curriculum development. Some faculties with HQPs have modified the AP curriculum to suit their specific needs, while others have developed their own, usually based on the established standard programs. The curricula are developed by partially translating the VMI syllabi and incorporating elements from foreign institutions, particularly those from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. While this process may ensure that the curricula meet the program objectives, it also presents some difficulties for the syllabus designers, as discussed by one lecturer who was involved in the compilation of the course from its earlier days:

> The syllabus for [name of subject] in Vietnam is slightly different from that in the UK because the Vietnamese syllabus is based on the Russian program. I remember it being the Russian program, as the professors who developed it at the [name of subject] department studied in Russia. They incorporated Russian contents into the Vietnamese syllabus. (Interview, Lecturer 12)

This process enables HQPs to adapt the curriculum according to the local requirements while adhering to international standards. The goal is to provide students with a comprehensive education that combines local and global perspectives. By developing their own curricula or modifying existing ones, HQPs have ensured that students receive a high-quality education tailored to their specific fields of study. However, this

combination in curriculum development has posed some challenges for both academics and students, which will be discussed in the sections below.

In addition to APs and HQPs, Tower University introduced JPs in 2009 as a means to diversify educational opportunities, build institutional capacity, and increase student mobility. JPs are transnational programs jointly offered by Tower University and foreign partners, for example, Bedfordshire University (UK), New Brunswick University (Canada), and Macquarie University (Australia). Unlike the curricula for APs and HQPs, those for JPs are entirely imported from the foreign partner universities, without the presence of the subjects in VMI discussed above. These programs provide students with a unique and immersive international educational experience. By partnering with reputable international institutions, Tower University ensures that students enrolled in JPs have access to world-class curriculum and expertise, enabling them to develop a comprehensive understanding of their chosen fields while experiencing different educational approaches.

To summarise, Tower University employs different strategies for curriculum development in its EMI programs. While APs and JPs import curriculum from foreign institutions, with minor, if any, modifications, HQPs either modify the imported curriculum or develop their own. While MOET prescribes the method of curriculum import as a means to quickly enhance the quality of education, with AP models spreading values to other programs, this study's interview with Manager 5 from the Faculty of Banking and Finance shows that this is not always the case:

> The backwash contribution of HQP and AP to VMI programs may not be significant. This is because each program in my faculty follows a different direction, so there is no added value in the sense that if we have a program provided in both VMI and EMI, the contribution of that EMI program to the VMI one would be clearer. Instead, the pressure to change the programs comes from the internal factors of the programs themselves and of the market, rather than the fact that we have an additional external program or not. (Interview, Manager 5)

This manager's comments emphasise the intricate relationship between different program directions and their potential impact. The focus on internal factors and market demands as drivers of program adjustments reflects the institution's pragmatic approach to

curriculum development and responsiveness. This finding resonates with those of other researchers such as Tran et al. (2018, p.73) who claim that "the impacts [of imported programs] are still fragmented and on a small scale rather than spreading to other 'regular' programmes". Also, it can be claimed that educational motivations in implementing EMI programs may be of less importance than other motivations, such as economic considerations or demands to increase diversity. This finding is similar to that in other studies, for example, Hamid, Nguyen, et al. (2013), and Wilkinson (2013).

5.1.5 Accreditation of programs

From the perspective of Tower University's leadership, accredited programs serve as a quality stamp on the institution's education service. Thus, since 2018, Tower University has had many of its VMI programs accredited by an independent body assigned by the MOET, and its EMI programs accredited by the ASEAN University Network (AUN-QA). By 2022, seven bachelor's degree programs in EMI had been accredited by AUN-QA (Interview, Manager 1).

As part of meeting accreditation standards, lecturers must strictly adhere to the subject outline frameworks, ensuring that each lesson progresses with the detailed guidelines provided. From the perspective of management, this requirement is discouraging to lecturers. Manager 1 commented: "If we strictly adhere to those guidelines [syllabus framework], they are detailed and meticulous to each lesson, but they take away the creativity of the teachers…. Previously, lecturers could apply a variety of methods that were considered creative" (Interview, Manager 1). Moreover, to ensure that lecturers strictly follow the approved syllabi, the institution's testing and quality-assurance centre sent their staff to check the classes at random. This process resulted in exasperation from the managers as well as lecturers (Interview, Manager 1).

Looking through the lens of agency theory, Tower University's policies on student intakes and curriculum present a culture of performativity, which encompasses an audit-driven culture, employing diverse targets to assess educators and institutions through quantitative data. It involves interventionist regulatory methods and relies on a market-oriented setting for audits and inspections, reinforcing disciplinary authority (Wilkins, 2011). Performativity, in a sense, presents a restriction in the EMI ecology as it underestimates academics' refusal to "…collude with the victim mentality which

relinquishes initiative, self-belief and a sense of agency" (Galton & MacBeath, 2008, cited in Wilkins, 2011). This issue will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

5.1.6 Policy on pedagogy

Pedagogy policy at Tower University is notable for its adoption of Western pedagogy, exemplified by its deliberate recruitment of academics with international education and teaching experience. This strategic choice stemmed from the institution's expectation that these instructors would bring their familiarity with Western teaching methods to its local setting, thereby aligning teaching approaches with the program's objectives. This shift toward Western pedagogical principles is clearly observed in the university's transition from a conventional lecturer-centric style to an engaging student-centred methodology. The implementation of interactive teaching techniques serves to foster critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and the cultivation of independent learning, as elaborated in the following comment:

> Teachers can apply many creative methods that we appreciate; for example, dividing students into groups to work on case studies, then discussing, or encouraging students to participate in more in-class exchanges. And for some theoretical parts, students are required to read at home. We see that approach, which actually originated from teachers in [name of the Western partner institution], as very effective. (Interview, Manager 1)

Implementing Western educational methodology is in line with the "opening to the world" and "learning from the world" principles of Vietnamese education development (Tran & Marginson, 2018, p. 60). These principles, which constitute a cognitive framework for learning, have shaped the perspective of the academics to consider that a good pedagogy is one that conforms to those of the Global North in terms of quality standards (Phan, 2019).

However, some scholars (Ali, 2013; Shohamy, 2013) have highlighted the lack of a comprehensive and standardised policy on pedagogy for EMI programs. The absence of clear guidelines can lead to inconsistencies in teaching methods across different institutions, which might affect the overall quality of education. Without a specific guiding pedagogy in EMI, academics might default to traditional teaching methods that

were used in VMI (this is discussed further in Section 5.2 on students' feedback). This could limit the effectiveness of EMI and hinder students' language proficiency and ability to engage with the subject contents fully. This result has been observed in contexts such as Malaysia, where insufficient support for language and pedagogy hampers the achievement of language improvement goals (Ali, 2013). Moreover, the integration of foreign teaching styles highlights an ideological shift towards valuing Western pedagogical models over local approaches. This raises questions about inclusivity and the incorporation of local teaching values. On the other hand, some scholars view the absence of rigid policies as an opportunity for universities to innovate and adapt pedagogical approaches that suit the specific needs of their EMI programs and students. Flexibility can allow educators to experiment with a blend of traditional and modern teaching methods.

In addition, an analysis of EMI syllabi showed that content delivery was prioritised over students' English language proficiency development. This preference was also mentioned by one of the manager participants:

> …even the Rector sometimes says: the important thing is that students understand the lecture, that is the content. If you [lecturers] speak English all the time and the students don't understand, then it's a big problem; so it's entirely possible to alternate between English and Vietnamese. (Interview, Manager 1)

The neglect of language target in EMI policy is similar to that found in Airey's (2012) study of 10 physics lecturers in four Swedish universities. In this study, both English and Swedish were used for teaching and learning. However, as English language proficiency was not mentioned as the targeted learning outcome of any programs, none of the participants identified language improvement as part of their teaching responsibilities. This tendency is also reinforced by the assumption that students will naturally improve their English language proficiency through EMI, without explicit language attention from educators. However, students' language development requires more intentional focus within the EMI classroom (Cots, 2013).

Another point to note is the use of the Vietnamese language in teaching. When asked about the necessity to use English throughout the lesson, Manager 5 confirmed:

> Lectures delivered 100% in English are not necessarily a good thing because there are times when certain things, e.g., terminologies in Vietnamese, really need to be taught in Vietnamese for better understanding.… There are certain words that do not have a direct equivalence in Vietnamese, then we're compelled to switch to Vietnamese to understand what they correspond to in English. (Interview, Manager 5)

These executives believed that using Vietnamese strategically in such cases can enhance comprehension and facilitate learning for students, which serve as the ultimate goals of education.

However, Manager 2 stressed that the use of English in all the lectures is a requirement, which "is specified in institutional documents". The absence of official regulations on language use was obviously causing the management to understand the rule in different ways, ultimately, leading to difficulties in classroom practice.

5.2 Students' perceptions of EMI programs

Students' perceptions of EMI can provide insights into both affordances and constraints in the teaching and learning environment. Affordances are opportunities for agency achievement that are made possible by the environment, while constraints are circumstances that limit the degree of choice. By taking students' perspectives into account, research can shed light on how lecturers assessed the available opportunities for effective learning and identify potential limitations that might hinder optimal learning experiences.

5.2.1 Students' objectives in EMI

Focus-group discussions with EMI students showed that students' primary motives for joining EMI programs revolved around three points: internationalised education and English immersion, further studies and career advancement, and personalised education.

Internationalised education and English immersion

Most of the students interviewed shared that they joined the program for an internationalised education and for an English immersion environment. This motivation

is driven by various factors associated with the benefits of studying in English. One prominent factor is that EMI education will provide them with access to rich resources compared with standard programs. One student appreciated the practice-based nature of materials in English textbooks: "…in my view, the foreign textbooks tend to be more practical and less theoretical compared to the domestic ones. They are not overly burdened with theory" (FG7, Student 4). Another student highlighted the advantage of abundant English resources: "There is an abundance of English resources available online, and they are constantly updated, whereas Vietnamese resources are quite limited. This makes self-study a much smoother process for me" (FG7, Student 3). These participants believed that the knowledge gained from materials in English would be more applicable and easier to absorb. Consequently, they trusted that EMI materials would provide them with a more comprehensive and practical understanding of their subject matter.

Another critical aspect of their choice was the belief that EMI programs would significantly improve their English language skills. Students were convinced that studying in an English-speaking environment would enhance their language proficiency and better equip them for future academic and professional opportunities: "I see this HQP as a great opportunity to improve my speaking abilities and express my thoughts more confidently with others" (FG12, Student 3).

They felt that exposure to English lectures, discussions, and course materials would enable them to interact more extensively with the language, thus fostering their communication and comprehension abilities. However, the effect of exposure to English language on proficiency improvement is inconclusive, as little research has been done using objective tests rather than self-reporting in this area (Macaro et al., 2018).

Participants also recognised the importance of English in their fields of study. They believed that studying specialised concepts and terminology in English would provide them with a competitive edge in dynamic areas like economics and finance. One student highlighted the value of mastering subject-specific knowledge in English to pursue international career opportunities, stating, "If I plan to work overseas in the future, having a strong foundation of subject-specific knowledge in English is essential" (FG2, Student 1). Another participant shared how his proficiency in English influenced his choice of program, explaining, "I chose this program because at high school, I specialised in

English, and I thought doing this program would allow me to continue using English and give me a competitive advantage" (FG6, Student 2).

Participants expected that their enhanced English language competence would facilitate effective communication and understanding of complex concepts in a global context. This perception is consistent with studies emphasising the projected benefits of EMI, for example, that English proficiency achieved through EMI will increase the chances for graduates to secure better positions in the labour market (Tamtam et al., 2012).

Further studies and career advancement

The second prevalent reason for students to choose EMI programs is the aspirations for further studies and career advancement. This motivation is underpinned by the recognition of the long-term benefits that studying in English offers in terms of academic pursuits and professional growth, as one student confessed: "I want to study abroad, so the ability of my brain to think in both languages is advantageous for me, especially for my future study abroad plans" (FG2, Student 4). Another first year HQP student said:

> The program in Financial and Banking Management at the university offers a syllabus aligned with the ACCA [Association of Chartered Certified Accountants] and CFA [Chartered Financial Analyst] subjects. I chose this program to gain additional knowledge and prepare myself for pursuing certification like ACCA and CFA in the future. This way, I can enhance my qualifications and provide support for my career development. (FG2, Student 3)

The participants' aspirations for career advancement drove their decision to choose the high-quality EMI program. They recognised the importance of English language proficiency in dynamic industries such as finance, economics, and international trade. By studying in English, they aimed to develop strong language skills, which they perceived as invaluable assets for their career prospects in multicultural workplaces. Research by Doiz et al. (2014) supports this perception: the authors found that a combination of specialised knowledge in English and practical language skills enhances students' employability and opens up global job opportunities.

Furthermore, participants envisioned their academic journey as a steppingstone towards becoming international citizens. Many envisioned their future with multicultural

interactions, which obviously started with their EMI courses. One student expressed a desire to use their English proficiency across various aspects of life:

> I want to utilise my English skills in various aspects of life. For instance, I hope to use it for studying abroad or traveling to European countries. Moreover, I can expand my knowledge through online sources, most of which are in English. I believe that having a good grasp of English is highly essential in these scenarios. (FG6, Student 3)

Another participant emphasised the role of EMI courses in preparing for international professional environments:

> If I want to participate in foreign training courses or work in foreign companies and corporations, I believe that studying this program will provide me with a better English language foundation to participate in those training courses effectively. (FG7, Student 3)

Similarly, one student highlighted the career advantages of early exposure to specialised English terminology:

> When I have the opportunity to study my specialised field in English, it will be incredibly beneficial for my future career. I won't need to constantly refer to dictionaries or translate technical terms while working. Instead, I will be directly exposed to these terms and become familiar with them from my first year of university. This exposure and familiarity will be highly advantageous for me. (FG12, Student 4)

The exposure to English-taught courses instrumentally enables students to think in both languages, a skill that proves advantageous when adapting to international educational environments. This bilingual competency would set them apart from their peers and equip them for success in international academic and professional settings.

Personalised education

The third compelling reason that the students in this study gave for choosing EMI programs was the promise of a personalised education that would align with their specific academic interests and career aspirations. This objective was perceived as distinctive, as

it allowed students to tailor their educational experience to suit their individual goals. One primary factor contributing to this decision was the opportunity to focus on core subjects of their chosen field. One student who was doing a double major degree elaborated on the motivation behind integrating language studies with another discipline:

> The reason that I chose to study in English is because I am an English-specialised student and have a strong passion for languages. Initially, I considered focusing solely on language studies, but later, I switched to economics. However, I still wanted to incorporate English into my academic pursuits because I genuinely enjoy studying languages. I believe that if I continue to study economics solely in Vietnamese, it might not fully suit my true passion, which is language learning. Therefore, I decided to combine my passion for languages with my interest in economics and pursue both simultaneously. (FG2, Student 3)

Another student highlighted the appeal of the program being delivered in English:

> …the main reason I chose the HQP is that I have a passion for languages and a decent understanding of English. When I heard that the high-quality program would be taught in English, I saw it as an opportunity, to some extent, which led to my decision. Moreover, when the knowledge related to economics is taught in English, I feel this language carries more profound meanings. (FG8, Student 4)

For the English-specialised students in this study, combining their passion for languages with their academic interests was a driving factor in their choice to study in EMI programs. They felt that this blending of interests enhanced their overall academic experience and matched their long-term aspirations. However, a lack of focus on language learning and a far-from-individualised design in EMI programs, as detailed in later parts of this study, cast doubts on whether they could obtain this goal (Section 6.3 discusses this issue further).

Among the focus groups, some students had already learned in standard programs and realised the benefits of doing APs as having a lighter workload and more focus on their majors. One student expressed a keen interest in the AP:

> I found the AP intriguing because it includes materials from foreign countries, which really caught my interest. When I tried registering for the course, I got

> accepted, and I realised that studying with materials from abroad was quite easy to understand, and the amount of knowledge conveyed was not as lengthy as the local curriculum in Vietnamese. I also noticed that the standard program I took had a heavier workload compared to the advanced program. (FG9, Student 2)

Another participant reflected on her transition from the standard program:

> When I was studying in the standard program, I found some of the Vietnamese terms a bit difficult to understand. However, when I switched to studying in English with [Dr. Gregory] Mankiw's [principles of macroeconomics], I felt that it was easier to comprehend and that became one of the most important and preferred choices for me. Studying in English with a class setup similar to high school made me feel more comfortable. I could focus more on learning without the worry of registering for credits and other administrative matters. (FG9, Student 4)

From the second excerpt, the favouritism that the institution showed to AP students – in this case, the pre-determined subject selection – was an advantage of those programs. In standard programs, students always had difficulties selecting subjects for the coming semester due to technical and administrative issues. The AP students in this study regarded the requirement to study pre-set subjects as a benefit, despite the fact that it deprived them of the freedom to select their preferred subjects, as discussed above.

Students also expressed reservations about enrolling in programs that required additional subjects not directly relevant to their future careers. In this regard, some students favoured HQPs over APs because the former did not contain subjects that they considered irrelevant to their major, such as psychology or American literature. This has curricular implications for program designers to better align the programs with students' academic interests and career goals, which may involve creating specialised tracks within EMI programs, allowing students to focus on subjects that are most pertinent to their chosen fields.

In conclusion, the principal motivations for students opting to join EMI programs centred around three key factors: seeking an internationalised education and English immersion environment, envisioning opportunities for further studies and career advancement, and pursuing personalised education. These drivers can motivate EMI program designers to

provide diverse, language-enhanced learning experiences, and point to the need for curricular flexibility and relevance to meet the evolving needs of students in a globalised world.

5.2.2 Students' perception about lecturers and their teaching in EMI programs

Positive feedback

This section reports the findings of the exploration of students' positive perception of their lecturers' teaching practices. Analysis of focus group discussions revealed three themes: the practicality of the lessons, the clarity of instruction, and an engaging approach to connecting with students.

One recurring theme in the focus-group discussions with EMI students was the appreciation for the practicality of lessons delivered by their lecturers. Participants commended lecturers for incorporating real-life examples and practical exercises into their lessons:

> I enjoy the teacher's use of real-life examples and stories to connect with the lesson. It seems like the teacher links the concepts learned in class to practical situations, like balancing studying and relationships, and visualises them using graphs. This approach makes the content more interesting and related, and it helps me retain the knowledge better. (FG4, Student 3)

Another participant highlighted the importance of integrating theory with applications:

> The teaching method that I like the most is when the lecturers not only present the theory but also provide case studies and practical examples based on that theory. For me, I prefer learning based on real-life applications. If I only study the theory, I find it challenging to understand, and I won't know how to apply that theory in real-life situations. So, when the lecturers use examples and teach us that way, I feel that I grasp the lessons much more easily. Additionally, it helps me understand how to apply the knowledge correctly. (FG11, Student 4)

Another student reflected on the value of practical exercises in the learning process:

> I believe that going to university is a way of self-directed learning, and when it comes to theoretical knowledge, we can read textbooks, which are quite reliable. However, when it comes to exercises, sometimes they are different from what we learned in theory. The lecturer gives us some time to work on the exercises, discuss with each other, and whenever we encounter difficulties, he promptly comes to help and explain, which is really beneficial for us. It also helps us understand better. (FG6, Student 4)

Finally, one participant expressed enthusiasm for case studies in lectures:

> I think my favourite part is when we have case studies, and then the lecturer explains those cases. I like it because it's relevant to us, and it's quite easy to understand. The lecturer points out precisely where the issues are and links our lesson with the cases effectively. (FG11, Student 6)

These students appreciated the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world scenarios through practical exercises and assignments. This approach enables them to bridge the gap between theory and practice, enhancing their understanding of the subject matter. The positive response to this teaching style aligns with the constructivist learning theory, which posits that learning is more effective when students actively construct knowledge through meaningful experiences (Piaget, 1929).

The second area of positive feedback highlighted by students in this study pertained to the clarity of instruction provided by their lecturers in three key aspects: being organised with outlines, using clear language, and incorporating visual aids.

Students highly valued lecturers who demonstrated organisational skills through well-structured outlines for each lesson. A clear and coherent outline at the beginning of a lecture helped students anticipate the flow of information and grasp the overall structure of the topic being discussed:

> I like [Lecturer 4] partly because right from the beginning of the course, she provided us with a very detailed outline for each session, specifying what we should do at home and what will be covered in each class. While I have seen outlines in other courses, some of them only mentioned the general topics or subjects to be studied. But [Lecturer 4's] outline is very specific, clear, and

> organised. It shows that she is someone who pays attention to details and demands accuracy. (FG3, Student 3)

Similarly, a structured lesson with pre-provided materials was helpful for students:

> I find that [Lecturer 6] is someone who organises and plans the duration of each class very clearly. We usually spend 70% of the time on theoretical learning and 30% on practical applications or case studies. This approach makes it easier for us to prepare for the next class and review the materials effectively. Second, I appreciate the learning materials provided by [Lecturer 6] before the classes. He sends us all the necessary learning materials, which means we don't have to search for additional resources. It's very convenient. (FG5, Student 4)

Lecturers who effectively organised their lectures allowed students to follow the logical progression of concepts, smoothly connecting one idea to the next. Without such a clear outline and subject objective, students, especially those in their first year of the program, would find it hard to comprehend, as will be shown in the next part of negative feedback.

Another crucial aspect of clarity of instruction was lecturers' use of clear and accessible language:

> In the lessons taught by [Lecturer 12], my favourite part is when she lectures at a fairly slow pace, allowing me to keep up with the progress of her teaching. After covering each topic, she pauses to make sure no one has any questions before moving on to the next part of the lecture. Despite the subject being about calculations, she explains it slowly and in an easily understandable manner. (FG10, Student 4)

Students appreciated lecturers who could convey complex concepts in simple terms without compromising the academic depth of the content. Another issue was the way lecturers dealt with the structure of the curriculum where students struggled:

> Since our current year has undergone changes in the curriculum, and we no longer have to study econometrics; she made it clear from the beginning that she understood our situation. She assured us that when covering topics related to the knowledge we missed, she would go through them again to help us catch up as

> quickly as possible. If we still don't understand, she will provide additional materials for us to study, and she is always ready to support us not only during class but also outside of class. This makes me feel very reassured and confident in my learning. I know there will always be someone to support and help me whenever I need it. (FG11, Student 4)

The students felt that the integration of visual aids was yet another significant aspect contributing to the clarity of instruction in EMI programs. Visual aids, such as PowerPoint presentations, charts, graphs, and multimedia elements, served as powerful tools to reinforce key concepts and facilitate understanding:

> Another aspect that I noticed and really liked is [Lecturer 1's] slides. They are among the most colourful slides I have seen since the beginning of the semester. When we study with those slides, they are very engaging and captivating. Usually, teachers focus on the content and neglect the design of the slides, as long as the information is complete. But with [Lecturer 1's] slides, they look beautiful and eye-catching, ensuring that every slide projected is relevant and attracts everyone's attention. It's definitely a plus point because it helps students understand the material better. (FG1, Student 4)

Effective lecturers strategically used visual aids to summarise information, highlight essential points, and emphasise key takeaways. However, as reported by the same student, many lecturers often ignored this technique.

The third area of positive feedback highlighted by students in this study pertained to lecturers' ability to engage them actively in the learning process. This aspect of teaching encompassed two key sub-themes: encouraging active participation and teaching with a sense of humour.

Students highly valued lecturers who fostered a classroom environment that encouraged active participation. This approach involved incorporating various interactive teaching methods that went beyond the traditional lecture format. By actively involving students in the learning process, lecturers stimulated critical thinking, collaboration, and idea-sharing among peers:

> In the recent class, I really liked the part where the teacher asked us questions to encourage interaction. That was my favourite part because it was the time when I could speak up. During the rest of the class, the teacher usually did most of the talking, so for me, the interactive portion is what I enjoy the most in each lesson. It applies to all the classes, not just the ones with that particular teacher. (FG1, Student 6)

Student participants also valued the importance of interactive elements in lectures:

> I think the part when the lecturer lets us play quiz games is like a means to strengthen the bond between the teacher and students. It makes the class more engaging and enjoyable, and it creates a sense of connection that makes us feel that the learning experience is more fun and interesting. (FG2, Student 5)

Moreover, lecturers who facilitated question-and-answer sessions effectively encouraged students to voice their queries and seek clarification on difficult concepts (Chuang, 2015; Sun et al., 2023). This open communication allowed students to actively participate in the learning process and contributed to a more inclusive and interactive classroom environment.

In addition to encouraging active participation, students recognised lecturers' use of humour as a powerful tool to connect with them and create an enjoyable learning environment. Lecturers who infused their lectures with appropriate humour effectively alleviated the often-stressful academic atmosphere and positively influenced students' emotional experience during the learning process, as one student noted:

> [Lecturer 6] is humorous. I find it interesting how he uses examples from economic theories and applies them to real-life situations like love or career. These stories and analogies are relatable to students, making it easier for them to connect with the subject matter. (FG5, Student 4).

Another participant highly appreciated their lecturer's sense of humour:

> He is humorous; there are moments when he quickly switches from theory to funny examples. It's like he doesn't need to pause or take a breath, so students

> need to be attentive to understand that he's joking, not being serious. (FG5, Student 4)

This finding resonates with other studies (for example, Askildson, 2005; Schmitz, 2002). However, this technique was not always effective in EMI classes, as will be shown later in this study. Therefore, it is essential that lecturers be mindful of the appropriateness and relevance of humour within the context of the subject matter and the heterogeneity of the student body.

Negative feedback

Despite EMI students' positive feedback about their lecturers, they also had some negative comments related to three main themes: one-way lecturing, language proficiency and communication effectiveness, and inadequate learning support and resources.

One significant concern voiced by the student participants pertained to the traditional one-way lecturing approach employed by some lecturers in EMI programs. This theme highlighted issues related to limited interaction and engagement during class sessions. For example, when asked about things that they liked the least during class, a second-year HQP student of business administration said:

> I understand that discussing this might make some teachers feel upset; it is when lecturers deliver the lecture, but I have some reasons for bringing up this issue about the way lectures are delivered. First of all, many teachers include a lot of text on their slides, which makes it challenging for us to keep up. Secondly, some lectures are quite lengthy, and we have to sit for a long time. (FG10, Student 4)

Answering the same question, another student commented:

> The least effective aspect is probably the way some teachers deliver their lectures. They tend to cover a lot of content all at once, and they speak quite rapidly. When they present a series of information all at once and in such a fast manner, I personally find it challenging to absorb all that knowledge immediately. It feels overwhelming, and I struggle to keep up with the load of information. (FG6, Student 4)

These students expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of student interactions during lectures, stating that the lectures often felt like one-sided conversations (Airey et al., 2015; Tri & Moskovsky, 2019). The absence of opportunities for questions, discussions, and peer-to-peer engagement hindered their active participation and inhibited the exchange of ideas. Consequently, this passive learning environment lowered students' motivation (Tri & Moskovsky, 2019).

Another way that discouraged students' motivation was when lecturers "only present[ed] theories or read the theoretical part for us to copy without providing any examples" (FG10, Student 4). This way of lecturing forced students to resort to rote learning, just memorising the content without understanding. Clearly, this abstract presentation of theory did not satisfy the students in this study, who were more familiar with interactive teaching and learning that took a student-centred approach.

Lecturers' language proficiency and communication effectiveness emerged as another theme of negative feedback from the students in this study. In focus-group interviews, students highlighted concerns about lecturers' English language skills, which affected their ability to comprehend and engage with the course content effectively:

> Some teachers have a quite heavy accent, which makes it even more challenging for us to comprehend when they speak in English. For me personally, it feels like listening to a different language. I have to make an effort to understand what the teachers are saying and then piece together the meaning. This process takes quite a bit of time, which makes it harder for me to grasp the content efficiently. (FG1, Student 2)

The following case is even worse:

> The teacher…spoke in a challenging-to-understand English accent. To the extent that she didn't use Vietnamese anymore, I found it nearly impossible to grasp the content of that course. I felt like I was lost throughout the entire semester. I had to cram the night before each exam, and sometimes I had to rely on my friends to explain almost everything to me before the exams so that I could attempt them. (FG10, Student 5)

Though this problem was not common in my data, it still indicated a difficulty in EMI programs, as reported elsewhere (Nguyen et al., 2017; Vu & Burns, 2014). Speaking speed was sometimes a challenge for students in EMI classes. One student shared their struggle with fast-paced lectures, saying,

> There's only one thing that can be a bit challenging at times, and that's when the lecturer speaks too fast. Sometimes, even a brief distraction of one or two seconds can make me miss a part of what the lecturer said. (FG5, Student 3)

Another participant pointed out the difficulty arising from teachers' communication skills, expressing,

> Some teachers have difficulty communicating in English, making it challenging for us to understand. I hope that the teachers can engage in more exchanges and improve their English language skills so that they can deliver the lectures in a way that is easier for us to comprehend. (FG2, Student 5)

Students also suggested ways to improve this situation, such as using the Vietnamese language to explain jargon, or slowing down when explaining complicated concepts, or using examples or visual aids to support their teaching, as discussed in the next section.

Some students expressed dissatisfaction with the level of learning support and resources provided in the EMI classes. Three main areas emerged under this category: lack of materials provided before each class, absence of topic-specific vocabulary support, and insufficient use of visual aids. One student noted:

> Teachers don't often provide us with enough reading materials before each lecture. As a result, when we attend the lecture, we approach it with the mindset that it is an entirely new topic. I believe it would be better if we had some basic understanding of the lecture content before participating in the class, as it would allow us to contribute more actively to the discussion. (FG10, Student 4)

The difficulty faced by these students has also been documented in a Dutch environment in which even though instructors typically have advanced English skills, they still struggle to offer intricate clarifications of subject-specific materials (Wilkinson, 2005).

Moreover, students in the current study found it challenging to grasp complex topics due to the lack of explanations or clarifications on subject-specific vocabulary:

> When I first studied Introduction to Law, I didn't have much prior knowledge about laws. As the lectures started directly with complex legal concepts and terms, it was extremely challenging for me to grasp. We lacked the background knowledge. (FG10, Student 3)

Finally, students emphasised the importance of visual aids, such as charts, graphs, diagrams, or multimedia content, in enhancing their learning experience and reinforcing key concepts: "The slides used in the lectures also feel a bit boring. If the lecturer could include more images or videos to illustrate the concepts, it would make the lectures more engaging and less monotonous" (FG4, Student 4). This is because: "Many teachers include a lot of text on their slides, which makes it challenging for us to keep up" (FG1, Student 4). These problematic areas added to the existing issues related to language production by non-native English speaking lecturers in EMI reported in other studies such as Thøgersen and Airey (2011) and Vinke (1998).

In short, students provided negative feedback in three main areas concerning their experience in EMI programs: teachers cover vast amounts of content rapidly, leaving students feeling overwhelmed and challenged to absorb the information. Language proficiency and communication effectiveness also posed issues, especially when instructors spoke in challenging-to-understand accents, hindering students' comprehension. Additionally, inadequate learning support and resources created barriers to effective learning. Addressing these concerns through interactive teaching methods, improved language delivery, and enhanced learning resources may lead to a more engaging and enriching educational environment for students.

5.3 Issues arising from EMI implementation

The data in this study shows that Tower University communicates its EMI objectives effectively to its students, reflecting a commitment to international collaboration, mobility, and enhanced academic capabilities. However, data analysis also reveals some issues that can impede the realisation of these objectives.

First, language proficiency requirement for EMI lecturers has led to inconsistent teaching quality, mainly due to varying language skills. In most cases, EMI lecturers graduating from English-speaking countries have met the necessary conditions for EMI teaching; however, others who graduated from universities in overseas non-Anglophone countries should not be considered fully qualified. In-depth interviews with lecturers revealed that those from non-English-speaking backgrounds faced significant difficulties lecturing in English. Even among those who had studied in English-language universities, many admitted that their experience as graduate students did not guarantee confidence in lecturing in English. Although the small scale of this study limits the generalisability of this finding, it indicates that additional policy measures are needed to maintain teaching quality at Tower University.

Second, students are mainly responsible for their own English language improvement, with very little support from the institutions. Data from individual interviews with academics and focus groups with students showed that students' language proficiency varied greatly, causing difficulties for both lecturers and students. This issue has been reported in various studies of EMI. For example, Zumor (2019), in a quantitative study on challenge faced by 264 Saudi students studying computer science, engineering, and medicine, found that using EMI caused anxiety, frustration, tension, fear, embarrassment, and ultimately, poor educational outcome. Similar findings are available regarding other countries such as Spain (Doiz et al., 2011), the UAE (Rogier, 2012), and Korea (Choi, 2013; Kim & Shin, 2014). The students in the current study were expected to independently seek out resources, practice, and immerse themselves in English, without substantial guidance or structured support from the institution. This approach can pose challenges, especially for those who lack the means to access external language-learning opportunities.

The lack of institutional support can hinder students' progress in various ways. Without tailored language programs or effective strategies integrated into the curriculum, students might struggle to identify the most suitable methods for language enhancement. Furthermore, limited access to language support restricts students' ability to receive targeted guidance and constructive feedback. The absence of a comprehensive support structure might also deter some students from actively pursuing language development, resulting in missed opportunities for personal and academic development. In the worst

case, they might be compelled to quit the EMI program, which is often considered a failure.

The difficulties encountered by these students probably stemmed from insufficient planning and a lack of institutional strategies in the execution of EMI policy. The unsatisfactory experiences for students might also be influenced by structural barriers and limited resources, as also noted by Nguyen (2016). Thus, the adoption of EMI appeared to have potentially undermined educational quality.

Third, imported and modified curricula presented some challenges for the students in this study. They faced hurdles in comprehending content that might not integrate well with their academic or linguistic capabilities. In addition, they might encounter a mismatch between the content's assumptions about prior knowledge and their actual understanding. This discrepancy could lead to frustration, disengagement, or even academic setbacks. Additionally, the teaching methods prescribed by imported curricula might not be well-suited to the local classroom environment, further complicating the teaching-learning process. Differences between the use of logic in foreign and local textbooks is one such problem. This issue will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Finally, Tower University's adoption of Western pedagogical principles within its EMI programs signifies a deliberate effort to align with global educational standards. However, the absence of a clear EMI pedagogy policy poses challenges that need to be addressed for optimal learning outcomes. One significant issue is the need to balance effective content delivery with explicit attention to students' English language proficiency. Without structured pedagogical support and training, lecturers may struggle to integrate language development into their teaching practices. Additionally, the lack of clear guidelines on language use in the classroom can lead to inconsistencies in the application of EMI. For instance, the absence of policies specifying when it is appropriate to switch to the students' L1 may result in excessive reliance on it, potentially undermining the development of English language skills and professional communication competencies.

5.4 Summary

Drawing on the ecological framework of teacher agency, this chapter has analysed the educational contexts in which EMI academics conduct their profession. In general, Tower University's efforts to implement EMI reflect a clear intention to foster international collaboration, mobility, and enhanced academic capabilities. However, the data reveals significant barriers that must be addressed to fully realise these objectives. First, inconsistency in teaching quality due to varying language proficiency among EMI lecturers is a critical concern. Second, the responsibility placed on students to improve their English language skills with minimal institutional support is another challenge for students. Third, the use of imported and modified curricula introduces additional complexities, which can result in disengagement and academic setbacks. Finally, while Tower University's adoption of Western pedagogy aims to meet global educational standards, the absence of a clear EMI pedagogy policy hinders effective implementation. Together, these factors may act either as affordances or as hindrances to lecturers' achievement of agency, as will be analysed in the next chapters.

Chapter 6 – Findings: Capacities of the EMI lecturers

6.0 Introduction

Within the ever-changing nature of higher education, EMI has risen as a transformative force, transcending linguistic and cultural boundaries. At the heart of this transformative process are the EMI lecturers, who find themselves at the intersection of language, culture, and academic content. Their roles extend beyond traditional teaching, requiring a delicate balance of linguistic proficiency, cultural sensitivity, and pedagogical expertise. These educators embody multiple capacities that are shaped by their past experiences, oriented towards future possibilities, and actively played out in the present.

As the demand for EMI programs continues to grow worldwide, understanding the multiple capacities of EMI lecturers becomes paramount. This chapter thus seeks to uncover their agency within the context of EMI education, guided by the ecological approach proposed by Priestley et al. (2015). This agency theory provides a framework to comprehend how individuals operate within complex social structures, emphasising the interplay between personal capacities and structural offerings.

Within the agency theory framework, three dimensions – iterative, projective, and practical-evaluative – are important to understand how the EMI lecturers in this study navigated their roles. The iterative dimension explores how past experiences with EMI education influenced their current teaching practices, forming an integral part of their agency achievement. The projective dimension involves envisioning and projecting potential future outcomes and goals, driven by their beliefs regarding the effectiveness of EMI as an educational approach. The practical-evaluative dimension encompasses ongoing assessment and reflection on actions and outcomes, enabling EMI lecturers to make real-time adjustments to their pedagogical strategies.

To understand the capacities of the EMI lecturers in this study, this chapter starts by examining their personal and professional backgrounds, beliefs, and perceptions of EMI programs. It shows how family influences, institutional conditions, and deeply held beliefs shaped their agency, highlighting the complexity of their perspectives. The chapter also contrasts the aspirations of experienced and less experienced lecturers, considering

the balance between immediate needs and long-term goals. Finally, it examines the language used by lecturers, emphasising how discourse reflected their experiences and influenced their agency in EMI education.

6.1 Profiles of the EMI lecturers

6.1.1 Personal backgrounds

This section explores the life journey of two EMI lecturers with a focus on the profound impact of traditional cultural norms and family expectations on their career choices and agency. The differences between how they began in the profession led to different perspectives and practices.

Lecturer 7's route to EMI teaching was not predetermined, but rather the result of a series of influences originating in her family background. In the early stages of her academic journey, she found herself at a crossroads. She had the option of pursuing teacher education in foreign languages, a field that would have enhanced her English skills and led to a career in education. However, her father believed that if she studied international trade, she would not only acquire English proficiency but also gain specialised knowledge, making her a more competitive job candidate. This belief was grounded in the traditional thinking that anyone with schooling experience can become a teacher (Whitbeck, 2009). Following her graduation with a degree in international trade, she applied for different types of positions. As her mother viewed teaching as a suitable profession for women, believing it to be a less demanding career choice than others, she was further convinced of the decision to become an academic. Traditional notions about professions thus affected her career decisions. However, upon entering the teaching profession, her mother's portrayal of teaching as an easy and undemanding job proved to be an oversimplification. As she embarked on her teaching career, she encountered the challenges and complexities associated with the profession, such as late-night grading and the workload of an educator. These experiences provided her with an insider's understanding of the teaching profession and the need for continuous learning and adaptation. This iterative aspect of her journey also shaped her practice in EMI teaching. On the one hand, she continually sought ways to improve her lectures and actively engage students in the subject. On the other hand, she assumed responsibility for finding ways to encourage students' learning habits, an attempt she perceived as not yet successful.

In contrast to Lecturer 7, Lecturer 4 had maintained a strong desire to become an educator. Her career path started with teaching English at various language centres and culminated in her application to the Business English faculty as a strategic step toward her dreamed-of position as an EMI lecturer:

> Initially, I wanted to enter content subject departments, but at that time, I had just completed my master's degree, so it was hard. Then I noticed that the Business English faculty was recruiting, and since they required an IELTS score in addition to the master's degree, everything seemed to match my qualifications. I shifted my focus. Honestly, I hadn't planned on it initially. (Interview, Lecturer 4)

It should be noted that the Business English faculty at Tower University provides bachelor's degrees in the English language with a major in Business English. Students in this faculty are trained in English language skills, language theories, and business subjects in English. Applicants for teaching positions in this faculty are required to have either language- or business-related backgrounds. While those with backgrounds in business can teach classes in language skills, those majoring in the English language can only teach language skill subjects, which is considered a disadvantage in their applications.

For Lecturer 4, who graduated with a degree in economics from Tower University, her academic background should have supported her agency in the EMI profession. Her experience in the current department was more restrictive, however (Section 7.7 discusses these restrictions). For example, staff mobility was rather limiting, and the requirements to become a lecturer were perceived to be procedural only: "…at the beginning [of employment], we had to complete those steps. There was some mock teaching in the faculty, but it was more about completing paperwork" (Interview, Lecturer 4). As a result, she planned to pursue further studies not for personal academic growth but only instrumentally, to meet the institutional requirements.

These divergent narratives reflect how personal backgrounds shaped educators' paths to EMI teaching, consequently affecting their achievement of agency.

6.1.2 Professional backgrounds

The data clearly differentiates two groups of EMI lecturers: one with extensive backgrounds in both teaching and learning in English and the other with more limited

experiences. Their accounts, analysed through the lens of Priestley et al.'s (2015) agency theory, uncovered how their journey through EMI influenced their achievement of agency.

Several experienced lecturers shared their stories of building EMI programs from the ground up. They applied their academic backgrounds and EMI expertise to design programs that effectively combined subject matter with English language instruction. One lecturer described his difficulties in compiling teaching materials for a new EMI course:

> In terms of materials, back then, I mostly prepared international standard documents for those subjects. I also consulted some references because at that time, our school didn't have any standard materials in English for those subjects. So, I was the first one to teach, which meant I had to decide how to teach in terms of the stream and how to use which materials.… I came up with the idea where I utilised our legal system and the content within it. The insurance part, in particular, was simply a combination of our institution's Vietnamese syllabus, but to keep it updated, I relied on the law and translated those sections into English to create content for the insurance portion within the syllabus framework. (Interview, Lecturer 2)

Another lecturer recounted a similar experience but noted having considerably less time for preparation:

> Teaching in the HQP was a bit sudden for me, quite surprising indeed. After I completed the overseas course, the manager said that now the university was implementing it this way, so there would be a need for lecturers. At that time, I started looking for statistical materials in English, because the characteristic of the HQP was almost like a program taught in Vietnamese, but in English. It was not like an AP, which imports a foreign syllabus. So, I had to select the contents that fit the program, what was currently being taught to the students in VMI. (Interview, Lecturer 12)

Having navigated the lived experiences of studying in an English-dominated environment, the lecturers in this study developed strategies and methodologies that catered to the diverse needs of their students. Drawing on their hands-on experiences in EMI classrooms, they understood the challenges and opportunities presented by this mode

of instruction, allowing them to design programs that maximised their students' learning outcomes.

However, amidst their achievements, it became evident that the commencement of EMI programs was far from smooth sailing. The institutional context in which these programs were introduced often presented formidable challenges. The need for resource allocation, their own and their students' language proficiency, and the alignment of faculty and administrative support were just a few of the hurdles these educators faced. The rough and tough beginnings of the programs provided both affordances and constraints for their agency, which will be further discussed in the next chapter.

Some participants, on the other hand, did not possess as much experience in EMI teaching. While three lecturers had entered academia less than three years before, others had already been involved in VMI, transferring to EMI a couple of years before participating in this study. As the former had very fresh experience of in-service training such as working as teaching assistants or being observed in their first few classes, it is no wonder that the faculty culture had a different impact on them compared to their more experienced colleagues. For example, the more experienced participants could choose their preferred subjects to teach, as revealed by Lecturer 13:

> The biggest change in my teaching is actually not the way I teach. I don't think it's the teaching method, but it's the change to my preferences, meaning I choose subjects that lean towards mathematics. I really like math, so for Finance, I choose subjects that focus on math and financial valuation. When I teach those subjects, I don't have to talk too much, but I give them a lot of hands-on practice. (Interview, Lecturer 13)

In contrast, the novices had to follow the faculties' assignment: "For new teachers like me, the senior faculty members encourage us to teach these [language] skills to gain more experience" (Interview, Lecturer 4). Another young lecturer was assigned with a few EMI classes to teach: "We have very few classes, but many faculty members, so we have to divide the job among us. Each of us just teaches small parts" (Interview, Lecturer 10).

For those who had recently embarked on their academic careers, the relative novelty of working in academia and EMI teaching could either serve as a catalyst for growth or pose initial challenges. The absence of deeply ingrained teaching habits might afford them the

flexibility to adapt quickly to EMI's demands and to experiment with innovative teaching methods, whereas those who had recently made the switch from VMI to EMI brought with them an established set of teaching practices rooted in their prior instructional context. This transition period represented a pivotal stage in their professional journeys, where they were tasked with reorienting their pedagogical approaches to align with EMI principles. Their agency might be shaped by the need to unlearn certain habits while concurrently developing new strategies tailored to the EMI environment.

In essence, these participants' relatively limited EMI experience offered them a rather narrow view of what they could or could not do. Their backgrounds, whether characterised by newness to academia or transitions from VMI, disclose the need for ongoing professional development and adaptation. Their agency may evolve as they gain more exposure to EMI teaching, enabling them to refine their strategies and better meet the linguistic and academic needs of their students.

These narratives from EMI lecturers shed light on the dynamic interplay between academic background, teaching preferences and agency. As backgrounds shape beliefs, which in turn affect the achievement of agency (Priestley et al., 2015), their educational backgrounds, including the progress of their own schooling experiences and training, are likely to have influenced their pedagogical choices and approaches (Darling-Hammond, 2017). These educators not only navigated EMI challenges but also actively contributed to the growth and enhancement of EMI programs. Their agency-driven approach to teaching fostered a unique educational environment where subject matter expertise seamlessly integrated with English language proficiency.

6.1.3 Lecturers' engagement with the curriculum

As mentioned earlier, Lecturer 2, possessing extensive educational knowledge and professional experience in EMI, aimed for an elevated level of higher education that would be both standardised and individualised. This aspiration fuelled his deep involvement in curriculum development. As he had been involved in EMI programs from their inception and tasked with designing the syllabus for a course in logistics, his EMI experience (iterative aspects), oriented to a standardised and individualised curriculum (projective dimension), all played out in the practicalities of the present. He thus employed all available resources to craft a syllabus that, in his estimation, met both

international benchmarks and local content requirements. He thus achieved agency in curriculum development.

Although they had similar educational and professional background to Lecturer 2, Lecturers 6 and 7 were engaged with the curriculum in a different way. Lecturer 6, with a desire to extend economic education and economic thinking to students from school level, offered more insightful lessons. In the Intermediate Macroeconomics class that was observed in this study, to explain the term "abundance", the teacher started with an example of new graduates joining the labour market, which was deemed to relate closely with this group of third-year students. He then moved to the more traditional economic examples of "supply abundance". The use of a local example closely related to students' interest to illustrate an economic concept clearly engaged his students. The earlier interview with this participant showed that he often employed localisation of examples as a technique to engage students, for example, the use of Big C (a local supermarket chain) instead of Costco. However, in general, Lecturer 6 believed that Western economic knowledge, which is taught universally, was the norm, and thus expended no effort to modify the teaching contents provided in the textbook, except for these context-based examples.

Similarly, Lecturer 7's observed class showed a great deal of interactions and a dynamic atmosphere. Driven by the conventional notion of fostering a conducive learning environment through relaxation, she adopted the role of a cheerleader as well as an instructor. She alternated her activities every three to four minutes throughout the observed session. For example, she frequently interrupted the lecture with probing questions, encouraging students to engage with the materials through various avenues of participation. Whether prompting them to collaborate in pairs, small groups, or individually, she created an environment where every student's voice held significance, while she moved between groups of students constantly. A signature rhetorical strategy that she employed was the use of open-ended questions such as "Why can I say…? Can you explain …?" This prompt served as a catalyst for deeper comprehension and sparked animated discussions among students, including those at the back of the classroom.

In recognition of student apathy towards reading materials, Lecturer 7 strategically placed emphasis on content vocabulary, aiming to bridge the gap between abstract concepts and tangible understanding. In some notable instances of her lecture on "supply and demand

movements", she intervened to refine students' use of vocabulary, guiding them towards precision and clarity:

> Student: The curve change[s]
>
> Lecturer 7: It shifts. (Observation 7, Lecturer 7)
>
> Lecturer 7: You say "rotate", I'd say "rotate clockwise or counter-clockwise". Please repeat after me.
>
> Students [in unison]: Rotate clockwise/counter-clockwise. (Observation 7, Lecturer 7)

Lecturer 13 was engaged in curriculum in yet another way. Since joining EMI programs in their early days, she had teaching experience with various student cohorts. Her first JP class consisted of students with low English proficiency. Having recognised students' difficulties in understanding lectures in English, she took the initiative to adapt the syllabus, shifting its focus towards a more practical orientation to better align with the students' capabilities. This strategy proved to be effective as her students felt more comfortable having hands-on experience.

All in all, the participants' pathways in the EMI profession were crafted by both their personal and professional backgrounds. While personal backgrounds grounded their beliefs about education, their professional experiences led to the development of content knowledge and pedagogical skills. Together, these experiences provided them with choices through which to navigate and adapt to the unique challenges and opportunities.

6.2 Lecturers' beliefs

Priestley et al.'s (2015) agency theory provides a valuable framework for understanding how individuals act within social structures. The theory focuses on the interplay between structure and agency, emphasising that individuals' actions and choices are shaped by both their personal agency and the constraints of their social environment. Applying this theory to the context of EMI allowed me to analyse how lecturers' beliefs about the role of English, about students and about their roles shape their achievement of agency within the higher education setting.

6.2.1 Beliefs that "English is essential, but I'm not a teacher of English"

The participants in this project generally had a very positive perspective about the role of English language in EMI programs. Their beliefs included the idea that language is a tool to achieve content knowledge and that lecturers should be flexible in language use.

First, while acknowledging the importance of English proficiency, the participants emphasised that it should not overshadow the primary focus on the quality of teaching and students understanding of the content. One lecturer explained her approach to assessment:

> Typically, I mark [students' papers] based on the content because my subject is a content one, not English. So, I mostly assess based on content rather than paying excessive attention to grammar errors. If the idea is clear, I give them points, and I don't pay attention to grammar mistakes. (Interview, Lecturer 1)

Another lecturer reflected on students' critiques of a colleague's language skills, emphasising the value of expertise over linguistic perfection:

> They [some students] told me that this teacher's English is like this and that, and then I said that this teacher is very good in terms of expertise. However, they still insisted that her English isn't good. Well, in that case, I said, "Oh my, she teaches THE subject, not English. If you study abroad, you'll also encounter teachers like that, meaning they may not speak perfectly, but their expertise in their field is excellent." (Interview, Lecturer 13)

Most participants indicated that they thought content delivery and student understanding are paramount. Some even mentioned that they were not English teachers, or that some students could have better English proficiency than they did, and thus they were not responsible for students' language improvement. However, class observations showed that some lecturers did pay attention to vocabulary learning (Section 6.1.3).

Second, some participants believed in the need for flexibility in language use in the classroom, particularly for students who might be struggling with English. One lecturer described offering students the choice of language during discussions:

> When teaching HQP and AP classes, I still provide an option for students. I emphasise to them that they need to understand the content. If there's anything they find difficult to express in English, we can discuss it in Vietnamese, but I encourage them to strive for the highest frequency of communication in English. (Interview, Lecturer 2)

Another participant observed how using L1 could help hesitant students participate more actively:

> When I use Vietnamese, those students who were hesitant to speak start to ask me questions, especially those whose English is not strong. They tend to lag behind the class. However, when I deliberately switch to Vietnamese towards the end of the class, they become more willing to speak, ask questions, and engage with me. (Interview, Lecturer 13)

One lecturer, however, highlighted the advantages of using English in her lectures:

> I feel like using English with me has its advantages. Because sometimes, my subject can be quite dry. Teaching in Vietnamese might bore the students, but when I use English, I'm quite confident in my English skills, and sometimes it becomes a way to attract students. It's not always about the content itself. They hear the English language and the way I use it, and I feel like they can learn something about the language, which is somewhat successful in its own way. (Interview, Lecturer 9)

Apparently, being able to teach in English placed these lecturers in a prestigious position not only to their students, but also to their colleagues (this is also discussed in Section 6.2.3). However, the priority participants gave to understanding content and their flexible use of languages revealed a paradox in that they simultaneously believed that English is essential but should primarily serve as a means to effectively teach the content subject matter. As one participant put it, "English is essential, but I'm not a teacher of English" (Interview, Lecturer 1).

6.2.2 Beliefs about students

Participating lecturers believed that EMI students in general were high achievers, with both content knowledge and language proficiency at high levels: “In our advanced program, the students are always the best in the school. They are just exceptional; they even surpass teachers like me in terms of language proficiency” (Lecturer 2). Not only in language proficiency, “high-quality students have a very different vibe compared to standard students. I think, yes, they are quite different. They have more modern thinking. I also feel that they are more sophisticated, more ‘stylish’ than standard students” (Interview, Lecturer 7). These convictions, stemming from both their personal experiences within the EMI environments and the awareness of the higher benchmarks for EMI intakes set by the institution, result in their practice:

> I also prepare as much as I can, but some students are very talented, and they either ask excellent questions or bring up entirely new and challenging issues. Sometimes, I need more time to further research and provide a response. (Interview, Lecturer 8)

The participants were also convinced that students are motivated by rewards and personal benefits; thus, by providing benefit-bearing activities, teachers could enhance interactions and sustain student engagement. For instance, one lecturer explained her approach:

> I will give them a task at the beginning of the class, which means I will require them to have read it beforehand, and then they will answer those questions. So, if they score high, they will get a bonus point, for example, and I see that the students are quite enthusiastic about that. (Interview, Lecturer 5)

Another lecturer added: “I’ve discovered that students feel more motivated when a task they do brings them benefits” (Interview, Lecturer 2). Therefore, these lecturers designed a complicated bonus marking system to encourage students’ interactions and engagement. This finding signifies the importance of tapping into students’ motivations to foster engagement in the classroom. The use of benefit-bearing activities, as highlighted by the participants, appears to be an effective strategy in incentivising students to take ownership of their learning.

While these beliefs formed the iterative dimension of agency, they also drove lecturers' forward-looking orientations, as characterised by their aspirations for the future. For example, when asked about his expectations with EMI, Lecturer 6 hoped that economics education could be popularly promoted among high-school students so that they could have decent knowledge in the field. The synergy of these iterative and projective dimensions is manifested in the practical present. For example, Lecturer 6 inspired his students by relating microeconomics knowledge with students' real-life objectives, which his students highly appreciated. By drawing from a repertoire of experiences and clearly shaped orientations, this academic accordingly adjusted his teaching strategies, striving for increased interactions to sustain student engagement.

In contrast, participants also believed in the heterogeneity of student cohorts, especially their varying levels of study skills and their attitudes towards studying. For example, one participant said: "What I am least satisfied with is that students nowadays are often too lazy to read" (Interview, Lecturer 7). Another teacher commented: "When they gather in four or five for group work, they often start chatting aimlessly instead of focusing on the task at hand. At such times, I think group activities become less effective" (Interview, Lecturer 14). Moreover, "the students have varying levels, and even their cognitive abilities differ from one another" (Interview, Lecturer 9).

This deficit view about students had been shaped by the participants' extensive experience in EMI education, encompassing instruction across diverse student cohorts. Specifically, they noted that students in joint programs tended to exhibit the lowest levels of these skills, followed by HQP students, while advanced program students typically demonstrated the highest capabilities. This distinction can be attributed to the differences in intake policies, which are structured in ascending order of academic demands, corresponding to the respective programs. This belief, which shaped the iterative dimension, led lecturers to tailor their teaching practices. They implemented strategies ranging from reducing the depth and breadth of course content for the less proficient groups to rephrasing and simplifying sentence structures, as well as providing concise summaries in Vietnamese (Section 8.2.1 discusses pedagogical agency). These adjustments were made to ensure that students with varying skill levels could effectively grasp and engage with the academic materials.

These perceptions of the diversity of the student body show a tension in lecturers' beliefs. On the one hand, some lecturers held high expectations for EMI students and saw them as academically strong and motivated individuals. On the other, lecturers also recognised the diversity in study skills, such as reading proficiency, and vocabulary levels among their students. This recognition partly resulted from the relaxation of regulations on student intakes (Section 5.1.3 discusses student intake policies). Consequently, lecturers felt compelled to assume the role of facilitators in promoting student learning, seeking innovative approaches to stimulate increased reading (Lecturer 7) and peer interaction in English (Lecturer 5). Balancing these two aspects, where educators take an active role in shaping learning experiences while also encouraging independent learners, remains an ongoing challenge in the education setting.

In short, it can be claimed that the lecturers' beliefs about EMI students were complex and sometimes contradictory. They acknowledged the potential for excellence among their students while also recognising the need for differentiated instruction to cater to various skill levels. This complexity indicates that lecturers may exercise agency by striving to strike a balance between their protective stance, high expectations, and the recognition of student diversity.

6.2.3 Beliefs about their roles

Lecturers as facilitators of learning

A recurring theme among the EMI lecturers interviewed for this study was their perception of their role as facilitators of learning. Many of these educators saw themselves not as the traditional knowledge providers but as guides who empower students to actively engage with the subject matter. This could be done in several ways. For example, some lecturers took on a networking role to connect their students not only within the student body but also beyond:

> I want to create connections and foster creativity. Through connecting with students, I always provide them with more activities in English, even just a bit more, to enhance creativity and strengthen the connections between students and instructors, as well as connecting students with the business world, also, to access richer learning resources. (Interview, Lecturer 3)

They encouraged collaboration among students, creating a close-knit learning community:

> I manage the programs in a vertical direction, meaning that if I specialise in teaching this subject in APs, I will figure out how to make the connections between the upper and lower classes. That's another task besides teaching. (Interview, Lecturer 2)

This lecturer pioneered a mentoring program in which the senior students helped the junior students in both academic and administrative tasks.

Additionally, EMI lecturers often used their own networks to bring in guest speakers or organise field visits, enriching the learning experience. This role also extended to helping students build professional networks, as noted by one participant: "I also want to connect them with the businesses that I know so that they have better job opportunities, worthy of their potential" (Interview, Lecturer 1).

By inviting guest speakers from industry or organising field trips, these lecturers helped to expose their students to the practical aspects of their field of study. They felt that this hands-on approach helped students see the relevance of their academic learning to their future careers, motivating them to engage more deeply with the materials.

EMI lecturers also played a crucial role in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical applications. This involved designing curricula and learning activities that enable students to apply what they had learned to real-world contexts:

> After teaching for 10 years and gaining practical work experience, I have been involved in numerous research projects across various fields. In the past, when I was teaching, I was relatively inexperienced and only familiar with a few areas. I heavily relied on textbooks and lecture slides for guidance. However, now, while the basis remains the same, I feel more enthusiastic when teaching. I can connect each small part to various topics and research areas and analyse them from different angles. I use these tools to apply and make a significant difference in my teaching approach. (Interview, Lecturer 11)

By including case studies, simulations, or practical projects in their courses, these lecturers encouraged students to apply theoretical concepts to actual situations, enhancing knowledge and engagement.

In short, by viewing themselves as facilitators of learning, these lecturers took initiatives to adapt their pedagogical strategies. They employed student-centred strategies to foster a deeper understanding of the content. This approach allowed them to better adjust their teaching methods to the diverse needs and abilities of their student body, a crucial aspect of EMI education.

Taking on more responsibilities to engage students

Another notable finding was the lecturers' belief about their additional responsibilities for enhancing student engagement. These educators adopted various roles, including caregiver, cheerleader, and inspirer, all of which affected teaching and learning.

In their role as caregivers, some EMI lecturers assumed responsibility for the holistic well-being of their students beyond the traditional boundaries of academic instruction to include attending to students' emotional and psychological needs. For instance, Lecturer 13 recounted her challenges in dealing with students with mental health issues, describing her efforts as treating them "like my own children", which she acknowledged as her "fundamental weakness".

Some other participants mentioned their role as cheerleaders in the classroom, dedicated to motivating and encouraging students throughout their lecture:

> I don't like monologues; I prefer interactions with students, and I find it enjoyable. That's why I welcome any questions or answers, even if they're wrong, as long as everyone is engaged and interested. It isn't like traditional learning. It feels more like a conversation. I don't like putting pressure on students either; I want them to feel comfortable while learning, so they enjoy the process and have fun. (Interview, Lecturer 8)

Another lecturer participant expected that: "When I tell a story, they [the students] must be very excited and happy, and they will react enthusiastically" (Interview, Lecturer 7). The participants felt that the underlying motive behind their role was to boost students'

self-esteem and motivation, fostering a positive learning environment. This role embodies relational agency emerging from the interplay of personal capacities and offerings of the environment in which they work (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002; Priestley et al., 2015), as shown by the way the educators adapted their practices to engage students.

Moreover, beyond teaching and facilitating learning, some participants found it essential to inspire their students by helping them to connect their academic pursuits to personal aspirations. Thus, Lecturers 5, 6, and 12 shared stories and real-world examples that demonstrated how certain skills could unlock doors to exciting opportunities. This, as confirmed by their students in focus groups, inspired them to see the relevance of their education and to aspire to excellence.

It is interesting that some participants considered that their EMI teaching role to be superior and prestigious. One lecturer recounted an instance:

> My colleagues sometimes ask, “Teaching high-quality? Oh, teaching high-quality, huh?” It seems like somewhere people think that to be teaching in high-quality, you must be a good teacher, you must be skilled, and you must be reputable. (Interview, Lecturer 11)

Another young academic took pride in his EMI lecturer position:

> Luckily when I got the master’s degree from overseas, I was assigned to teach by the subject team leader; it was beyond my subjective intention. I could not tell them to let me teach an EMI class, but they looked at my teaching qualities, my qualifications, and my English proficiency as well. (Interview, Lecturer 6)

The socio-cultural agency concept highlights how the educators drew upon cultural and societal values to shape their professional identities and roles. In the context of EMI, lecturers may align their self-perception with the cultural narrative that English proficiency is a valuable skill in today’s globalised world. By positioning themselves as experts in content subjects delivered in English language, the educators contributed to the prestige of their institutions and, by extension, their own professional status.

However, it is noteworthy that within this group of EMI lecturers, the role of lecturers as English language teachers often remained in the background. Indeed, only two lecturers

(Lecturers 4 and 5) acknowledged their dual roles, but they were teaching both Business English and content subjects in English. It seems that in this EMI setting, the educators underestimated the importance of language and effective communication.

Finally, it should be noted that while the participants were enthusiastic about their roles as facilitators of learning, they also expressed concerns related to non-academic responsibilities:

> The most time-consuming task for me is catering to each student's individual needs.... During the semester, they [students] often encounter many issues. For example, a student might have problems with course registration and need me to request the academic department to change their class. The most recent request was from a student who said, "Teacher, my name is not on the graduation list." ...So, I primarily handle cases like these throughout the year, and they keep coming up constantly. (Interview, Lecturer 7)

While these lecturers adapted to these systemic demands, they also expressed worries about the possible effects on the quality of their teaching. For example, the same lecturer admitted that being a lecturer was not an "undemanding" job, as her mother had anticipated.

6.3 Lecturers' perceptions about EMI

Teachers' perceptions about EMI programs play a pivotal role in shaping their agency across the iterative, projective, and practical-evaluative dimensions. The iterative dimension, that is, how past experiences with EMI education influence how teachers approach their teaching practices, make decisions, and respond to various classroom situations. The projective dimension involves envisioning and projecting possible future outcomes and goals. Perceptions about the effectiveness of EMI as an educational approach may lead teachers to project a successful learning environment, resulting in greater commitment and effort in implementing pedagogical strategies. The practical-evaluative dimension, the ongoing judgement of actions and outcomes, is evident in the critical evaluation of their teaching practices and possible adjustments based on feedback and results. Teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of EMI in meeting students' learning objectives can influence their decisions to modify instructional methods, adopt

new strategies, or seek professional development opportunities to improve their practice. In this context, the following section will provide insights into how lecturer participants viewed the EMI ecology from three aspects: program objectives, national and institutional policy, and pedagogy.

6.3.1 Program objectives

In any educational reform, the role of lecturers as agents of change is paramount (Priestley et al., 2015). They are the driving force behind the implementation of policies that shape the learning environment and influence students' future. To understand the role that the lecturers in this study played in the transition to EMI education, it becomes imperative to understand their perceptions and alignment with the objectives set by policy-makers. The interrogation of academics' interviews resulted in three key aspects: EMI objectives for students, for the institution, and for the academics themselves.

First, when asked about the objectives of EMI programs, many lecturers unhesitatingly mentioned those for students, the most important subject of any educational plan. From their perspective, the primary target of EMI is to prepare students for the changing world while providing them with enhanced opportunities for their future. Admitting adaptability as one requirement for global citizens, Lecturer 2 was confident that EMI students at Tower University were already global citizens, while Lecturer 10 was less so, stating that "though they [the students] will not be able to reach the same level as students from foreign or developed country, [they] still strive to get as close as possible to the global standard of well-rounded and globally minded students". However, the lecturers agreed that "the challenge lies in how [students] can adapt to the dynamic environment. In simple terms in Vietnamese, it's like saying they can thrive anywhere" (Interview, Lecturer 2). Other participants also agreed that if they could equip students with a global mindset and aligning them with international standards, the students would be well prepared for a world that is increasingly interconnected, where having an international perspective is becoming essential for success.

The educators asserted that EMI programs would open up numerous opportunities for students in the future, such as study abroad, further progress in higher education, or a good job. One participant justified his perception as follows:

> …because it's in English, when they study abroad, they can confidently show their bachelor's degree in international economics program, and if they continue to pursue a master's degree in international economics or any program related to economics, other universities will readily admit them. They have used all the materials and syllabus in English, making it quite easy for them to map their previous studies. (Interview, Lecturer 6)

Another lecturer was firm that:

> …having a degree showing that they used English in their academic studies will facilitate their transition to studying abroad for a master's degree… they will also have a better grasp of the subject matter in English, making it easier for them to pursue further studies in English medium programs. (Interview, Lecturer 9)

These lecturers were confident that such prospects were feasible because they believed that there was an obvious connection between students' mastery of English, which resulted from their exposure to the language in the EMI programs, and their future success.

Interestingly, many lecturers mentioned the obvious connection between exposure to the EMI environment and the mastery of the language and content knowledge. However, there is not yet any confirmation of this connection in the literature (Macaro et al., 2018) unless educators are equipped not only with subject expertise but also with the skills to scaffold language development effectively. In addition, curricula should be built in a way that is both academically rigorous and culturally diverse.

Second, lecturers' comments on EMI objectives for the institution mainly focused on internationalisation:

> The ultimate goal of these programs is...if we aim for the furthest, I believe it's not just one goal, and I think there are two parallel objectives, which will be excellent if both are achieved: one is standardisation, and the other is individualisation. (Interview, Lecturer 2)

In this lecturer's opinion, the institution's involvement in international accreditation was one step to standardisation and to consistency and quality. However, the institution had

barely begun to address the second aim, individualisation of programs, which acknowledged the importance of catering to students' unique needs and aspirations. Lecturer 2, who besides his teaching position, also served on the faculty's training board, was deeply engaged in curriculum development. This might lead to his broad understanding of the program objectives, which may result in relevant improvements in teaching practice.

Another lecturer was more straightforward about the internationalisation target: "As for the university itself, it must also align with international standards. This means having programs and syllabi that are compatible or have a high level of exchangeability with other schools" (Interview, Lecturer 8). These participants were certain about what the institution was looking forward to; that is, to obtain "the general goal of international integration, reaching certain level of knowledge, and meeting the demand of ever-changing labour market" (Interview, Lecturer 8).

Another aim the interviewees mentioned was diversification for competitiveness. They felt that in response to compelling demands of the education market, the institution needed to offer EMI programs "to compete with other schools that also offer EMI programs. If they have English-language programs, then our school must have them too" (Interview, Lecturer 9). This aim highlights the evolving nature of the education market. By understanding the necessity to remain on par with other schools providing similar offerings, the participants acknowledged that the institution is driven by the need to stay relevant and competitive.

Lecturers 7, 9, and 14 acknowledged that EMI programs also have a financial motive. Given that the higher education sector in Vietnam had been crowded with many players, it was not difficult for academics to perceive a prevailing sense of competition both among and within academic institutions. This competitive atmosphere was highlighted earlier, where even different faculties within Tower University competed to draw a greater number of students. It went to the extent of permitting enrolled students to switch from one faculty to another, a practice that was against official regulations. The focus on the financial aspect also led to the proliferation of lucrative programs, named VMI high-quality programs, for those who fell under the benchmarks. In this case, the name HQP had been misused for purposes other than educational quality.

Finally, it is noteworthy that among the 14 academics interviewed, seven agreed that the main EMI objective for lecturers was to improve their academic capabilities:

> For lecturers, the objective of these programs is to elevate their capabilities, ranging from research-related issues to teaching methodologies and language proficiency. If you desire to teach this program at an international level and to meet international standards, you must also become a global citizen. (Interview, Lecturer 12)

This is because of the increased requirements in academia:

> Teachers are also required to strive to meet international standards. For instance, in the past, we might have only focused on teaching, but now we have to both teach and conduct research, just like at universities abroad. (Interview, Lecturer 8)

To ensure the success and effectiveness of an education program, it is essential to involve teachers in the objective-setting process. The data clearly shows that these lecturers understood that the EMI objectives empowered them to become global citizens, enhance their expertise, and embrace international academic standards, ultimately benefiting both the educators and the students they teach. Teachers' expertise, experience, and insights are invaluable in designing programs that are relevant, effective, and responsive to the needs of students and the educational context. This finding closely mirrors results of earlier studies, in which academics had positive motivations for implementing EMI (Hu et al., 2014; Jensen & Thøgersen 2011). Moreover, when teachers are more engaged in policy development, they are more likely to actively support and advocate for the successful implementation of the policies, as, ultimately, academics are the change agents of new educational policies (Priestley et al., 2012).

6.3.2 Policies and procedures

Lecturers' understanding of their institution's language policy is important in interpreting their exercise of agency in the ecology of EMI teaching and learning. When lecturers' perception of policy converges with policy-makers' intentions, they can play a crucial role in creating a conducive learning environment that promotes English language immersion, fosters language proficiency among students, and aligns with the institution's

broader educational objectives. Moreover, lecturers' understandings of the language policy allow them to adapt their teaching strategies and instructional materials accordingly, ensuring their consistent application in teaching and assessment. Analysis of the data in this study showed that the participants based their understanding of language policy on their assumption of the existence of such a regulation.

Several lecturers claimed that there are institutional documents explicitly stating that English be the medium of communication in all classes. For example, a young teacher noted: "According to the regulations of the high-quality and advanced programs, this [using Vietnamese] is not allowed and it is required that both teachers and students in the class communicate with each other in English" (Interview, Lecturer 14). Another participant with more experience in EMI was certain that "the principle is to use English one hundred percent" (Interview, Lecturer 9). Their understanding of the university's regulation was justified as follows:

> Because the principle is that we are constructing everything according to international standards, the nearest standard that we are heading towards is the AUN [ASEAN University Network] standard. It is evident that if we build the programs according to international standards, everything must be internationalised. (Interview, Lecturer 2)

However, a search in the institutional regulations showed no documentation of an English-only rule. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, some executives in the institution also disregarded even the theoretical existence of such a regulation. Therefore, it can only be assumed that it is a *de facto* policy; that is, that the existence of a requirement for English-only instruction is merely a common understanding.

Other participants, on the other hand, assumed that: "Everyone should speak English without the need for explicit instructions" (Interview, Lecturer 10), and were sure that: "We all firmly adhere to the clear idea that we must speak English all the time" (Interview, Lecturer 3). This assumption led to confusing situations:

> In the first class, I spoke 100% in English, not uttering a single word in Vietnamese. However, after conversing with others, I realised it wasn't necessary to be so strict. So, during casual conversations, I sometimes use Vietnamese; but otherwise, I still try to speak 100% in English. If someone doesn't understand, I

> continue explaining in English until they do, without resorting to Vietnamese. (Interview, Lecturer 1)

Another lecturer, who had only started teaching in EMI one year before the interview, was not certain about the rule: "As for the regulations, I don't think there are any strict rules in terms of requirements, but I will teach everything in English. But personally, I think all the teachers speak English" (Interview, Lecturer 3). She was sure that while there might not be explicit written rules, the prevailing practice was to encourage English as the primary language in the classrooms.

It was obvious from the above analysis that the English-only rule existed as a *de facto* policy within the institution. While allowing for some flexibility, this may present some potential problems. First, the fact that the language policy is not explicitly stated can lead to ambiguity and confusion among students and teachers. Without clear guidelines, individuals may be uncertain about the language expectations and might not fully grasp the importance of adhering to the use of a specific language. Second, in the absence of a formal policy, language use might vary significantly among different instructors or classrooms. In classroom observations, there was a variety of approaches to language usage. Some instructors wholeheartedly adhered to the principle of using English without exception. However, others found a balance between encouraging the use of English and addressing students' needs. In two other cases, the lecturers delivered lengthy explanations in Vietnamese. This inconsistency can create uneven learning experiences for students and hinder their language development, as they may not receive consistent exposure to the target language. Finally, without a clear language policy, students may resort to using their L1 during classroom interactions, as claimed, for example, by Lecturers 1 and 2. This can hinder the students' English language proficiency as they miss out on opportunities for immersive language learning.

Lecturers' perception of policy on student intakes

One common theme from interviews with academics in Tower University is that the intake policy was extremely flexible, and that the entrance exams were problematic, causing problems such as inequity between EMI and VMI programs.

Some academic participants claimed that the intake policy at Tower University was too flexible, admitting students who fell below the benchmarks:

> There are entry requirements, but different departments, including mine, may sometimes have variations in how they evaluate students' English proficiency. In my department, as I work in admissions, I know that the faculty members set a specific threshold for English proficiency. However, in cases where some students fall below that threshold, the faculty still admit and encourage them by saying that they can improve their English skills in the future. (Interview, Lecturer 7)

The situation where "a student fails to meet the criteria for the advanced program or their English score is not sufficient, they may still be allowed to study" was attributed to the fact that "the university needs them" (Interview, Lecturer 11).

The perceived excessive flexibility in the intake policy at Tower University, where students falling below benchmarks are still admitted, was particularly evident in lecturers' comments about JPs, which serve as a significant source of revenue for the institution. Students applying to JPs only need to show evidence of English proficiency of the equivalent of 5.0 IELTS equivalent and pass the threshold mark of the national graduation exam, which is often much lower than those required in standard programs. For example, in the 2023 intake, the lowest acceptable mark for JPs was 23.5 out of 30, whereas the standard programs required at least 26 and up to 28.5/30. This raises questions about the education quality of which Tower University has always been proud.

The issue may become even worse when there are also problems with school reports. Over the years, university intakes in Vietnam have become diversified, with approximately 20 different methods to consider student admission. Notably, student intakes in EMI programs primarily rely on criteria such as school reports rather than the results of national graduation exams. This has raised concerns among stakeholders as school reports may not be directly comparable across different geographic regions (Anh, 2023). The consequences of such a flexible policy on intakes could include potential discrepancies in academic standards, unequal opportunities for students, and possible challenges in maintaining consistent academic rigour across programs.

Even when admission depends on a student's performance on the national exams, it is not without problems, as one lecturer confessed: "Some students also confide in me that when they prepared for the exam, they mostly crammed on selective content from textbooks.

They only studied specific content, like outlines or certain materials to prepare for the English exam" (Interview, Lecturer 5).

It should also be noted that the national graduate examination for the English language only includes grammar, vocabulary, and reading components. Writing is barely covered, while speaking and listening are not tested. This situation results in sizeable differences in students' English proficiency, which in turn negatively affects both teaching and learning quality.

Finally, the problematic intake procedure seems to perpetuate inequity between EMI and standard programs. Over recent years, the EMI admission process has relied heavily on IELTS scores and high academic standards for prospective students. As a consequence, many of the admitted students possess impressive academic records and outstanding English proficiency. However, this trend suggests a potential issue of socio-economic disparity, as mentioned by one lecturer: "…with such high academic records, I believe most of these students come from affluent families because only those with financial means can afford to receive the necessary education to achieve such high scores" (Interview, Lecturer 13). According to this teacher, academic performance alone is not enough to secure admission to the APs and HQPs. The admission policy can thus unintentionally create barriers for talented individuals from less privileged backgrounds who cannot secure the extra instruction needed. Moreover, financial constraints may prevent exceptional students from pursuing education opportunities in EMI programs, thus reinforcing the division between VMI for the masses and EMI for the elite (Wilkinson, 2013). This issue has been discussed in other studies, such as Nguyen et al. (2018) and Nguyen et al. (2014). Without sufficient consideration of this inequity, such divisions could become more pronounced in the imminent future, as seen in the context of Bangladesh (Hamid & Jahan, 2015).

Lecturers' perceptions of the recent ministerial policy on detailed subject outlines

The curriculum frameworks set by the MOET in Vietnam serve as comprehensive guidelines for the curriculum and instructional content in various educational programs across the country (MOET – Thông tư 17/2021-TT/BGDDT). The detailed outlines are integral components of the framework, providing a clear roadmap for designing, implementing, and evaluating educational programs in various subject areas. Developed

by educators within the institution, the outlines delineate specific learning objectives, core competencies, and key contents to be covered in the whole course of study. Accreditation bodies assess educational programs and institutional capacities based on their adherence to these guidelines.

The implementation of detailed outlines since 2018 has generated mixed reactions among participating lecturers. Interview data showed that their reactions fell into three types: positive, reluctant, and indifferent. First, many of the lecturers interviewed agreed that these outlines are necessary and beneficial for their teaching practices. One participant acknowledged the flexibility of the requirement:

> I think that when it comes to constructing the outlines, we have to do them anyway. Then, we should still allow teachers a certain degree of flexibility. In that, we outlined the general and specific content that they must cover. You need to ensure that you provide me with an overview of the content and the detailed topics that you will teach. However, you can also expand on it, and it's not forbidden. In other words, you cannot omit any essential content while teaching. (Interview, Lecturer 12)

Another lecturer valued the standardising purpose of the outlines, stressing: "I support the idea of creating the detailed outlines because they serve the standardisation purpose. If we don't have a core to follow and use that as a standard, we won't know what to base our teaching on" (Interview, Lecturer 2). These lecturers found the outlines to be valuable guidelines, providing a structured framework for their courses. They appreciated the standardisation brought about by the requirement, feeling that it helps ensure that important content is covered consistently across different classes and teachers. They acknowledged that there is still room for flexibility, allowing them to adjust based on specific class dynamics or updated information, and noted that following the outlined structure helps them keep track of progress and maintain a sense of coherence throughout the course, yet still balance between adhering to the guidelines and catering to the unique needs of their students.

In contrast, other lecturers expressed their concerns about the potential drawbacks of these detailed outlines. They argued that being overly rigid with the syllabus can be troublesome, particularly when trying to cover a vast amount of content in a limited time:

> Sometimes during the teaching process, I may not cover everything or may come across certain topics that I find more interesting and want to delve deeper into because I want the students to have a better understanding. However, I still feel constrained by the syllabus, and this limitation sometimes restricts the scope of my ideas. There are moments when I want to teach a certain part in a particular way, but due to limited time, I can't follow the desired approach. (Interview, Lecturer 4)

Another lecturer in the same faculty expressed the similar difficulty:

> It can be restricting to follow the syllabus strictly. There's a desire to have more flexibility to adjust the pace and allocate time for other engaging activities. As an educator, you want to create an interactive learning environment, not just have students passively listen. (Interview, Lecturer 5)

These teachers believed that the real learning experience lies in exploring topics deeply and engaging students through creative activities, rather than merely sticking to the predefined schedule**.** They felt that there should be more room for spontaneity and personalisation in their teaching methods. They emphasised the importance of inspiring critical thinking and encouraging students to delve into subjects beyond the boundaries set by the syllabus; thus, they worried that adhering too strictly to the outlined structure might hinder their ability to adapt and respond to the dynamic learning needs of their students. Reacting in the same vein but more moderately when judging the effectiveness of the policy, Lecturer 12 said:

> The detailed syllabus serves as a guideline, almost like a mandatory roadmap for teachers to ensure the content is covered. It is necessary, and I don't see any issues with it. However, from the perspective of those involved in teaching, or if I were in a managerial position, I would still allow a certain level of flexibility for the instructors. I would encourage them to find the most effective ways to deliver the content. So, while the syllabus is important, I would also prioritise ensuring that the teachers have a certain degree of flexibility in how they convey the material most efficiently. (Interview, Lecturer 12)

Interestingly, one participant (Lecturer 11) seemed indifferent to following the outlined structure. She appeared to view the syllabus as a basic guideline but was less concerned

about adhering to it meticulously, instead prioritising the learning outcomes and experiences for the students. This approach may be based on the belief that being excessively bound by the syllabus could stifle creativity and hinder opportunities for more engaging and innovative teaching methods.

In conclusion, MOET's requirement to adhere to mandated guidelines sparked a variety of responses among the lecturers. While some viewed the policy as necessary for standardisation and organisation, others expressed concerns about potential limitations and the need for more flexibility. This difference in lecturers' perceptions about policy may result from their different perceptions of the policy's broader implications, or from a lack of effective communication between management and teachers. However, it can also result from the different experiences and various levels of engagement with the curriculum. Understanding these local actors' different responses to policies can shed light on how they enacted agency in their teaching practice; this will be discussed in later chapters of the thesis.

6.3.3 Lecturers' perceptions of pedagogy – VMI and EMI pedagogies

Lecturers' perceptions of pedagogy are vital as they directly affect the quality of their teaching (Philipp, 2007, cited in Patricia et al., 2014). By understanding how teachers view their teaching strategies, researchers can gain valuable insights into their teaching practices, challenges, and preferences, thus offering insights into relevant policy implications.

Data from interviews with lecturers in this study showed that when asked if they changed their pedagogy in EMI classes, academics provided two opposite opinions: while some claimed that there were no significant differences between EMI and VMI pedagogies, others believed they are indeed distinct. Within the group of participants who believed VMI and EMI pedagogies are not different, Lecturer 1 was firm: "I still use the same teaching style and methods; there's nothing different." Nevertheless, she added: "There are some topics where I used one example in my Vietnamese class, and in the English class I changed it to another example, but it's just for fun and not very significant." It is obvious that she did not necessarily have a clear purpose for the use of different examples to illustrate a theoretical point in her lessons in the International Investment course.

Furthermore, Lecturer 2, who drew from his own experiences studying abroad when he taught Logistics, emphasised the importance of fostering interactive learning environments in both VMI and EMI settings. He believed that discussions and active engagement in both contexts were effective methods, irrespective of the language of instruction.

For these lecturers, the difference between the two pedagogies only lay in the context-familiar examples they provided, as further confirmed in the following extract by a lecturer teaching Macroeconomics:

> In foreign textbooks, they might use examples like hamburgers, so I make some adjustments…. I connect their policies, say those of the Federal Reserve in the U.S., to the State Bank's policies in Vietnam, adding a bit of Vietnamese context to it. (Interview, Lecturer 6)

For this lecturer, the only difference between teaching in VMI and EMI classes was to change hamburgers into the local name of the food. The time and effort he spent localising the contents was one of the demanding aspects of teaching in EMI. Therefore, he believed that no EMI specific training was needed. Training, if any, "should only focus on improving foreign language skills of lecturers" (Interview, Lecturer 6).

Overall, participants who perceived little difference in pedagogy between VMI and EMI believed that teaching approaches could remain consistent across L1 and L2, and that the key to effective teaching lay in maintaining an engaging and interactive learning environment. Their decisions about pedagogy may have come from their own experience studying abroad, which they had already applied in their teaching practices in both VMI and EMI classes. In fact, the general teaching approach at Tower University has changed much from traditional lecturing to a more student-centred style. This transition may result from the institution's recent recruitment policy, which prioritises lecturer candidates with overseas degrees.

In contrast, many other participants firmly believed that the pedagogies used in VMI and EMI are different, reasoning that teaching in English required more attention to detail and other elements to keep students engaged:

> Comparing teaching in Vietnamese with teaching in English, they are undoubtedly very different. When using the same language as students', it's easier to have mutual understanding and clarify concepts. However, when teaching in English, I have to be more detailed and provide more examples and exercises. I have to write more on the board, and I have to invest extra effort in making everything clear and explicit. Writing more, explaining more, and giving detailed examples are essential to ensure that the students understand the content thoroughly. (Interview, Lecturer 8)

Without this skill, lecturers might be in a situation like the following:

> [In my first class] I was frightened of not knowing how to express myself well because I didn't know how to teach in English. For instance, when I teach in Vietnamese, I often use humorous stories to keep the students engaged and show them that finance is closely related to everyday life. That's my way of delivering the content. However, when I tried to tell those funny stories in English, they didn't understand, and it made me worried. (Interview, Lecturer 13)

As a lecturer with prior experience in teaching subjects in Vietnamese, plus the knowledge that her first groups of EMI students were not of high English proficiency, Lecturer 13 was still ambivalent as there was no guidance or training about how to teach in EMI classes. That most of the lecturers in this study also experienced this difficulty raises questions about the communication of policy to the policy enactors, training in pedagogy, and academics' readiness to teach in the new environment.

However, for the following lecturer, who was new to teaching in EMI, the requirements of the job were clearer:

> As lecturers, there are two main requirements: first, a strong foundation of knowledge related to the subject we are teaching, second, proficiency in English, especially speaking and presentation skills, as we stand on the lectern. For instance, normal conversation may involve speaking a bit faster or using casual language, but now it's not just about using the correct words; we also have to adjust our speaking speed, speak clearly, and deliver the lecture in a methodical way. The goal is to ensure that the students can understand. It's not necessary to use overly difficult or highly academic language; using simple words is enough

> to make sure they grasp the fundamental concepts of the lesson. (Interview, Lecturer 14)

For this participant, teaching in EMI programs clearly required skills other than those required in VMI. Using English as the medium of instruction necessitates incorporating more interactive components, such as questions, scenarios, exercises, and examples, to ensure effective learning. Another lecturer agreed, asserting that employing these elements in the lesson was essential:

> Apart from knowledge, I believe that there needs to be interaction between the teachers and students. If we walk into a class with only a stream of information from beginning to end, it could become boring. Therefore, it's essential to incorporate something like small stories or anecdotes, either related to the lesson or not, but ideally with some connection to the topic. Delivering these interactions in a way that makes students feel at ease can be even more challenging than preparing the content itself. (Interview, Lecturer 7)

In contrast to Lecturer 6, who believed that modifying examples to suit the local contexts was the second most important requirement after being fluent in English, this lecturer, who taught Microeconomics, asserted: "When I am required, or rather compelled, to teach in English, I will need to figure out how to transform it [subject knowledge] into my own knowledge so that I can share it with the students effectively." Her effort in interacting with students served one goal: "to make students feel that this subject is worth studying". For these lecturers, engaging students in the EMI lesson seemed to be the most important task of all. This perception might come from their understanding of the challenges students face when learning in a second language.

Upon closer examination, it appears that the essence of the subjects might indeed play a role in influencing the different teaching styles, albeit in combination with other factors. Subjects that involve language-intensive tasks, such as Financial Statement Analysis and International Economics, may require a higher level of language proficiency and specific vocabulary usage. Subjects like Corporate Finance and Microeconomics often deal with real-life scenarios, decision-making processes, and case studies. In an EMI setting, instructors might emphasise practical applications and discussions to help students comprehend complex financial concepts or economic theories in the context of the global

business environment. This approach may differ from VMI, where students might focus more on understanding localised scenarios and applications. In contrast, subjects with intricate quantitative analyses, such as Statistics and Macroeconomics may require similar pedagogical strategies between VMI and EMI, as students need to grasp the mathematical concepts and data interpretation. Visual aids, technology tools, and interactive activities might be used more extensively for these subjects in both EMI and VMI lessons. This finding resonates with other studies, for example, Clifford (2009) and Sawir (2011). However, as data about different EMI subjects was inadequate, this issue needs further investigation to reach any conclusion about the impacts of EMI within various disciplines.

In summary, interviews with lecturers revealed contrasting perspectives on the pedagogy in EMI classes. While some academics saw no significant differences between EMI and non-EMI pedagogies, others believed they were distinct, emphasising the potential impact of the English language on teaching approaches. This disparity highlights the complexity of EMI implementation in higher education and calls for further research to understand underlying factors and inform evidence-based practices for successful EMI programs.

6.4 Lecturers' reflections on their practice

Reflective teaching practices played a crucial role in the participating lecturers' professional growth and the enhancement of their teaching effectiveness. Through continuous evaluation, learning, and adaptation, teachers strove to create a dynamic and engaging learning environment that catered to the diverse needs of their students. This reflective process involved their commitment to continuous learning, adaptation, and the intrinsic value they derived from their teaching profession.

The first overarching theme revolves around lecturers' continuous learning, where educators actively looked for opportunities to improve themselves and their teaching. Some lecturers with much EMI experience recognised the importance of continuous learning and adaptation, staying abreast of new tools and technologies to enhance their teaching methods:

> …this year, I'm mentoring someone who is a teaching assistant. I guide them, and they asked, "When will I be free from preparing lessons?" I just told them that I've been doing this for 16 years, and I still prepare lessons. It means, actually, I

> think it might be because my subject requires a significant update, so I don't think preparing lessons is difficult. It also combines with research; when I do research, it serves the lesson.… It's not that terrible. I also enjoy it, but I'm still preparing lessons until now. (Interview, Lecturer 13)

Similarly, another lecturer expressed the strong need for staying up to date:

> As it continues to develop and introduces new tools, I have to keep learning…. So if we continue to teach, we still have to continue learning updates, information, techniques of those tools to teach. (Interview, Lecturer 11)

She was even willing to fund her professional development activities:

> …if we need it [the training course], we have to pay for it ourselves, although our school does have support. However, there are regulations to follow, it's not like someone can just attend a course and then bring the receipt back to get reimbursed, it's not like that. There's a procedure: the course has to start, then there's a document, an application has to be prepared, submitted, and then everything has to be reviewed to see if it's reasonable or not. For example, there are many cases like when I attended a course that the university approved, but after completing it, I felt it wasn't sufficient. I learned something but didn't feel confident enough to teach students. Now if I want to teach students, I need to know more, so I have to pay for additional courses myself. (Interview, Lecturer 11)

The last comment shows the lecturer's efforts towards self-improvement, despite cumbersome administrative requirements. Reflecting on their practices and challenges, the lecturers remained committed to advancing their knowledge and skills. For all these lecturers, the need for continuous learning was the most important of all educational demands and personal growth ambitions. This reflective approach allowed these educators to assess their practices, respond to student needs, and create a more effective learning environment.

The educators in this study were also concerned with student reactions and feedback to identify areas for improvement, ensuring that the learning experience would remain effective. They adjusted their lecture structures, incorporated interactive activities, and reflected on language use to enhance communication with students. The following

comments by an experienced lecturer show that her constant reflections and concern with students' engagement resulted in continual revamping of her lecturing:

> Sometimes, I come up with an example that I think is good, but when I discuss it with students, they don't respond, or they respond more slowly than I expect. For example, I think when I tell a story, they should be very excited, very cheerful, they will react very enthusiastically, but there's a pause and then they don't react until later. I think maybe it's because either my language isn't sufficient or my way of expressing it isn't clear enough for them to understand; so after that, I also adjust, meaning between teaching in Vietnamese and English, I can't just directly translate everything from Vietnamese; I have to adjust certain things. For example, I can say something in Vietnamese but not in English, or I have to find a similar expression in English because I can't just directly translate from Vietnamese. I think this also requires time, experience, and experimentation to figure out what I should do in these situations. (Interview, Lecturer 7)

The effort she spent was much more than the institution's expectations:

> In my lectures, it's not just about lecturing entirely. I will have to mix in a lot of things, and if this course is too different, then I have to think about what additional activities I can include to make students interested.… I feel like I have to innovate myself through different teaching courses. Although for students, they may perceive similar difficulties, whether it's language-related or knowledge-related, but I think for myself, I have to change. Yes, I consider that as my effort. It's truly an effort because nobody requires me to change completely. People just say that I should be punctual in class, follow the schedule, and, for example, the feedback from students over the years from the quality assurance department doesn't contain too much negative feedback, so that's okay. I think maybe for the assigned tasks, that might be enough, but I personally feel that I have to do more than that. (Interview, Lecturer 7)

This constant reflection on practice remained the core concern of this lecturer, prompting her to continuously innovate her lessons, incorporating new elements to every lecture. It reflects a proactive stance toward staying current in her field, showcasing a dedication to providing students with the most relevant and effective educational experiences.

The final theme centres on the immense value and satisfaction that educators found in their teaching profession. One lecturer reflected on the mutual learning experience in his classroom:

> In my first English class, my students were from an AP. At first, I felt a bit tense, but later on, I started to think, "Why not see this as an opportunity to develop myself?" Since they were already very capable, I needed to find ways to engage them in discussions, debates, and dialogues, which in turn, I also learn from. It's not just their learning from me. (Interview, Lecturer 2)

Another teacher valued the personal fulfillment derived from teaching, beyond monetary compensation:

> At least, I still feel that my teaching brings value. If it's just about monthly income, then I feel like I don't have value, then it probably wouldn't be enough for me to pursue this profession. But I feel that my labour has value, and I'm satisfied with that. (Interview, Lecturer 7)

Beyond financial incentives, the teachers expressed a deep sense of fulfilment derived from the value they contributed to students' learning journeys. This theme underscores the passion and dedication teachers brought to their roles, emphasising that the joy of teaching extended beyond monetary compensation. It highlights the importance of recognising and appreciating the rewards of teaching, fostering a positive and motivated teaching community.

In summary, being reflective was a fundamental part of these lecturers' teaching practice, enhancing their professional growth and teaching effectiveness. By engaging in continuous learning, adaptation, and self-reflection, the lecturers created a dynamic and student-centred learning environment that catered to the diverse needs of their students. Through reflective teaching practices, these educators empowered themselves to evolve, innovate, and ultimately achieve agency in their profession.

6.5 Lecturers' aspirations

The participants in this project showed diverse aspirations for the future. In general, while the less experienced focused mainly on short-term or day-to-day planning, many experienced EMI lecturers held far-reaching ambitions for both the advancement of

transformative and empowering higher education and their own ongoing professional development.

One lecturer shared his hope that EMI programs would help students:

> …have a more strategic mindset… [so that] they can survive in environments where the change is even the most… [They should] have a very clear and beneficial direction, not just for themselves but also for the individuals employing them. And even further, it benefits society as a whole. (Interview, Lecturer 2)

Another lecturer expressed similar views:

> When I was the homegroup teacher for a class, I was very satisfied. By the third year, they all had jobs…and they said they could apply what they had learned. Yes, I was thrilled; there's nothing more satisfying than that. (Interview, Lecturer 13)

It is obvious from the participants' comments that they passionately advocated the transformative power of higher education, emphasising its role in nurturing strategic thinking, adaptability, and valuable contributions to both individuals and society.

In contrast, another teacher was more practical about how higher education could help students achieve such goals by bridging the gap between theory and real-world applications: "If we aim for a training approach that combines practical experience, then we should consider increasing the ratio of it" (Interview, Lecturer 3); or by coordinating efforts between secondary and tertiary education:

> I really hope that it means not just waiting until you study economics at university, but like in other countries, they've been studying it since high school, A-levels, or in developed countries, they teach these kinds of knowledge like supply and demand at the high school level...common knowledge, that's common knowledge, right? It's knowledge that if you are thrown into the job market right now, you need to know to survive. Like you need to know that one plus one equals two, for example. (Interview, Lecturer 6)

These comments indicate the transformative potential of education, with the lecturers emphasising the development of practical skills, broader perspectives, and foundational

knowledge from an early stage, ultimately contributing to the betterment of individuals and society.

Another theme arising from the lecturers' long-term aspirations was their desire for on-going career development. Many of them wanted to do research in their field to support their career pathway:

> My future plan is to become an associate professor, because I also prefer doing research. I feel like I'm gradually passing on that energy, knowledge, and experience to younger faculty members. (Interview, Lecturer 11)

These participants acknowledged the importance of doing research in their profession, which revealed a transition from the teaching-focus tradition of this institution:

> There are many young lecturers who are genuinely passionate about research. They express their desire to do research rather than to teach, dedicating only a limited amount of time to teaching. The time they spend on research is a conscious choice they make. They recognise that research brings significant added value, and it allows them to assert themselves. (Interview, Lecturer 7)

However, for some lecturers, the need to do pursue a post-graduate degree was just the fulfilment of an administrative procedure:

> Doing a Ph.D. in economics, I think, is just a part of legitimising my future profile, kind of to facilitate me in signing contracts and such, rather than something that has a significant impact. (Interview, Lecturer 4)

The data unmistakeably reveals a dichotomy in the motivations and aspirations of the lecturers. Some participants explicitly strove for personal growth and professional enhancement, showing their firm commitment to their occupation. Therefore, they strategically built up the positions that would not only uplift themselves but also benefit the teaching profession. They viewed their role as a conduit for personal and professional development that would have a lasting impact on their students and the academic community at large. Others appeared to approach their responsibilities with a markedly different perspective, predominantly one embodying instrumental motivations. This was revealed by their strategic fulfilment of institutional requirements. For instance, Lecturer

4's disposition reveals this instrumental approach to teaching, seemingly driven by the necessity to accomplish the formalities mandated by the institution. Upon further analysis, the difference in purposes may be underpinned by the intricacies of prevailing faculty cultures, which will be discussed in Chapter 8 of this study.

The participants also spoke of short-term aspirations. Besides the hope for technology-enhanced teaching, some lecturers centred their concerns around everyday tasks. For example, Lecturer 5 shared a personal goal: "Personally, I really want to continue learning and improving in two aspects. Firstly, I want to enhance my knowledge in the subjects I teach. Secondly, I want to explore various activities that I can apply in my classes, whether they are skill-based or content-based" (Interview, Lecturer 5). Another raised the need for more frequent teaching opportunities to maintain effectiveness: "With our subject, I think everyone shares the common desire to have more classes to teach. Because if we skip a semester, it's clear that there will be a gap, and it may take more than one semester to get back on track. It's not very effective" (Interview, Lecturer 10). Additionally, there were hopes for resource improvements and professional development: "[I hope] some of the course materials will be imported entirely from abroad, and textbooks will be purchased under copyright agreements", and "Participating in these [training] courses may include scientific knowledge or, for example, the possibility of taking additional certifications related to finance in line with one's career profile" (Interview, Lecturer 14).

These comments suggest that a substantial portion of the participants' actions and decision-making processes were notably influenced by short-term aspirations geared towards the preservation of what can be deemed a "normal desirable state" (Priestley et al., 2015, p. 52), which encompassed a set of circumstances and conditions that these academics perceived as conducive to their immediate professional well-being and comfort. This inclination towards the short-term is reflective of a broader trend in their professional discourse, which, when examined closely, exhibits a prevailing instrumental nature. This might manifest as a focus on securing stable positions, adhering to institutional norms, and meeting immediate professional needs. In this context, it is important to note that while such short-term objectives are not inherently negative, they can potentially detract from more profound and transformative pursuits. A preoccupation with the status quo can inadvertently lead to complacency and inhibit the pursuit of

longer-term goals that may involve pedagogical innovation, professional growth, and broader contributions to the field of education.

In short, the data suggests contrasting trends among these academics: the more experienced EMI lecturers held far-reaching ambitions for the students, for themselves and for the program, while the less experienced mainly focused on the short-term or day-to-day planning. This raises important questions about the balance between immediate professional needs and the pursuit of more profound, long-term contributions to the field of education, and highlights the differences in discourses between the two groups, which will be the focus of the next section.

6.6 Lecturers' discourses

This section focuses on the language that academic participants used to talk about their profession. Such language holds immense significance, serving as the cognitive scaffolding upon which educators construct their ideas (Priestley et al., 2015) and achieve agency (Biesta et al., 2016). The types of discourses lecturers used came from their personal biographies, but also from the wider educational discourse shared among colleagues within the institution.

An obvious observation in this study is the dominance of policy-related language among those who had limited exposure to EMI pedagogy. For instance, Lecturer 3 had graduated in a non-English-speaking country and transferred from VMI to EMI a year before the interview. For her, "the final objective of EMI programs is to complete what I was assigned to do, on time, as scheduled". She was more concerned with the here and now of her teaching, trying to fulfil everyday tasks. Because she struggled at the start of her work in EMI due to her own lack of English proficiency, it can be claimed that her situated linguistic capital shaped by past experiences constrained her, as it provided less affordances for her, and consequently she trusted it less (Williams, 2016; Williams, 2020).

In the same vein, Lecturer 4, struggling with both the English language and content matters, was also concerned with the accomplishment of everyday tasks. For her, the objectives of EMI were: "to effectively absorb the body of knowledge in English. This entails, for instance, understanding through examples, comprehending when discussing those topics, and reading with comprehension in those subject areas" (Interview, Lecturer

4). Lecturer 5, with less than two years in academia, expressed the same idea: “The objective of EMI is for students to be able to use English in their area. Same for lecturers, plus to be able to write articles in English” (Interview, Lecturer 5).

For these individuals who were grappling with the requirements of EMI, policy-driven language became their primary discourse. Their responses highlight how their limited exposure to EMI gave them a narrow window, where adherence to policy guidelines became their dominant discourse. Therefore, when responding to the question of how the new subject outline framework influenced her teaching, Lecturer 5 said:

> In the outline, there’s a section where it specifies which chapters will be taught in sessions one, two, and three. In more detail, it outlines what we will do on each specific day. In reality, I don’t consider it inflexible if we stick to teaching just one chapter on a given day. The challenge arises because, typically, we have to cover a range of topics in a single session. As I’ve mentioned before, the time needed to thoroughly cover the content of a chapter can consume the entire class. However, I also believe that it’s essential to engage students in activities beyond mere listening and asking questions. (Interview, Lecturer 5)

Her practical evaluation of either adhering to the scheduled lecture or being able to provide an interactive class ended up in her using a one-way lecturing style. For these novices, the instrumental nature of their professional discourse becomes apparent in their strategic approach to their academic roles. This strategic mindset often translates into actions that are calculated to achieve specific outcomes, such as securing tenure, achieving career stability, or fulfilling institutional requirements. While instrumental thinking can be a pragmatic response to the demands of academia, it is essential to acknowledge that it could diminish the chances for them to exercise their agency, as it restricts their ability to envision alternative possibilities and deprives them of the vocabulary needed to critically engage with policy matters (Priestley et al., 2015).

It is obvious that the new policy requiring lecturers to teach in strict compliance with the framework affected those who had newly started their profession more than their more experienced colleagues. For example, one participant claimed that:

> I support the idea of creating the detailed outlines because they serve the standardisation purpose. If we don’t have a core to follow and use that as a

> standard, we won't know what to base our teaching on. When we have the core, a syllabus based on it becomes one of the first fundamental standards for a subject. Without a core syllabus as one of the first standards for a course, the quality of that course depends heavily on the individual lecturer. Clearly, creating a curriculum that relies on the personal skills of an individual is not meeting the program's standards. However, when we have a well-defined syllabus, it outlines what teachers should cover. These topics are explained in the materials, and as long as the teacher meets those standards, it works. (Interview, Lecturer 2)

Lecturer 2, with more experience in both EMI teaching and course designing, undoubtedly had more articulated ways to discuss policy issues. His linguistic range incorporated the language of his academic fields, reflecting years of expertise and engagement. In other words, he showed a notable inclination towards professional discourse. Remarkably, his engagement with policy was relatively relaxed, in the same way as Lecturer 1's, who recognised the importance of English proficiency but ultimately prioritised the paramount significance of teaching quality:

> Gradually, I've come to realise that this [being able to lecture in English] is no longer of paramount importance because English is just a tool, a language, after all. The most crucial issue remains the quality of teaching, the content of the lessons, and the manner in which we convey knowledge to the students. (Interview, Lecturer 1)

Similarly, Lecturer 6 responded to the question about his most significant accomplishments by citing his effort to inspire his students to think in economics terms. He believed that this newfound economic acumen would be transferrable to their educational journeys, particularly in the context of offsetting the costs associated with pursuing a degree. Furthermore, he emphasised that the most substantial achievement in his teaching approach "doesn't come from certificates or commendations but rather in instilling inspiration within [his] students. This orientation serves as a valuable guide for first-year students, delineating what they need to learn, absorb, and ultimately achieve during their four-year tenure at the institution" (Interview, Lecturer 6).

What might have caused these different discourses? First, it is likely to be rooted in their individual experiences. Lecturers 1, 2, and 6 each possessed over a decade of experience

teaching in an EMI environment, whereas the other group had significantly less exposure. Within the former group, the data clearly reflected the initial challenges faced by most participants when commencing their EMI teaching journeys over 10 years ago. For instance, Lecturer 2 grappled with the task of creating course materials from the ground up, while Lecturer 1 had to find her own way to deal with the language issue. She turned to resources like YouTube and diligently rehearsed her lectures, only to discover that using English exclusively was not a strict requirement. These initial struggles, however, contributed to their growing confidence over time, a sentiment echoed by Lecturers 7 and 9.

Another possible reason may be that due to their age, they had experienced different educational systems: the older lecturers went through the traditional higher education before the advent of EMI programs and overseas postgraduate studies in English-speaking countries. Their rich backgrounds thus gave them more resources to which to refer. For example, Lecturer 2 could draw from his own academic repertoire:

> My doctoral topic is related to supply chain linkages, in the context of Asia, I happened to discover that the socio-cultural aspects of Asian countries significantly influence how people collaborate in business, even in developed nations that are deeply engaged in globalisation processes. Nevertheless, there are still unique aspects that I've noticed. Clearly, I no longer set the goal for my students to become global citizens because, for students, especially those in APs, it is no longer a challenging objective. Instead, I have to think about how they can adapt to a dynamic environment. (Interview, Lecturer 2)

The rich experience that Lecturer 2 and other study participants had clearly gave them access to a bigger picture, from which they could build up their discourses. In turn, these formed their professional biographies, or iterative dimension of agency.

In contrast, the interview with a young academic, who had only been teaching for two years struck me because despite her inexperience, the way she talked about her job was systematic and professional:

> Six months [from recruitment], we began preparing for the trial teaching sessions in front of the department, our youth union as well as our subject division. Basically, I think that after having six months to practise and refine our teaching

> style and standing in front of a class, it [lecturing] won't be too difficult.
>
> Most of our colleagues will also create favourable conditions for us since we are young lecturers, allowing us to gain as much classroom experience as possible for further improvement.
>
> As for plan, and I think I will start considering pursuing a Ph.D. in order to, in general, enhance my research capabilities. (Interview, Lecturer 14)

Despite her limited experience, this young academic displayed a commendable level of professionalism, dedication, and commitment to her teaching career, emphasising the importance of preparation and continuous improvement. Furthermore, her aspiration to pursue a doctoral degree for the purpose of enhancing her research capabilities showed her commitment to academic excellence and long-term career development. What distinguishes her comments from those of other younger study participants might lie in their academic environment. Albeit in the same institution, they were working in different faculties. Lecturers 4 and 5 came from a faculty with stricter rules about professional development and staff mobility and a looser sense of networking. This structural context may have influenced their discourse and perspectives on career development, potentially leading to varying levels of emphasis in their practice. This issue will be further discussed as either affordances for or restrictions to the achievement of agency in the next chapter.

The above analysis has shown that participants in this study used different types of discourse to talk about their profession. That some participants employed more elaborate language than others can be attributed to their experience in EMI programs, which formed the iterative dimension of agency. Apart from their own backgrounds, the difference in language use may also have come from the specific ecologies in which they practised. Their discursive differences not only allowed them to project different futures but also gave them the chance to evaluate the present in different ways. In other words, those with a more professional discourse had richer resources with which to act, as it enabled them to critique their ongoing circumstances and provided them with an alternative perspective that empowered them to more closely align their behaviour with their personal values and beliefs (Priestley et al., 2015).

6.7 Summary

In short, the above analysis developed a picture of the EMI lecturers in the changing landscape of higher education. Their capacity, a product of past experiences and future aspirations, was scrutinised through the iterative, projective, and practical-evaluative dimensions of the agency theory framework. Exploring their personal and professional backgrounds reveals the influence of family and institutional contexts on their journeys into EMI teaching; these narratives in turn illuminate the interplay between personal agency and external constraints. Moreover, the participants' deep-seated beliefs about the role of the English language in EMI, their perceptions of students, and their evolving roles as facilitators of learning heighten the complexity of their perspectives. Furthermore, their perceptions of EMI programs, aspirations, and the language they employ further enrich their capacities. In essence, the EMI lecturers possess multiple capacities, which have enabled them to adapt, envision, evaluate, and navigate the developing EMI ecology. The interactions of such capacities within their respective academic environments would determine whether they could achieve agency. This will be further analysed in the following chapters.

Chapter 7 – Findings: Resources and structure at Tower University

7.0 Introduction

In the previous chapters, I have discussed the overall setting in which this research was conducted and described the EMI lecturers and their capacities. In this chapter, I will move the focus to the resources and structure of the EMI ecology, which are proved to play a critical role in shaping lecturers' agency.

This chapter begins with an analysis of the cultural and material conditions of the EMI education context at Tower University, including the mandate of language of instruction, which I would argue inhibited participants' agency. Language proficiency, the second factor under scrutiny, emerged as a critical determinant influencing the participants' professional journey, shaping their achievement of agency within the educational setting. Next, the chapter moves to an exploration of the material conditions at Tower University, seeking to illuminate conditions that both enabled and hindered the participants. Material conditions ranging from infrastructural facilities to access to educational resources, either facilitated or impeded their progress. In the final section of the chapter, I will analyse structural conditions, including performativity, networking, professional learning communities, and staff engagement to see how they affected the participants' achievement of agency.

7.1 The imposition of English language and the resulting logical complexities

The data reveals a dynamic interplay between the language of instruction, cognitive processes, and pedagogical decisions made by EMI lecturers. This interplay is shaped by both the requirement to adopt English as the medium of instruction and the profound differences in the logical structures of English and Vietnamese, which created significant challenges for both educators and students.

The mandate to enforce English as the medium of instruction compelled the lecturers to adjust their teaching strategies to resonate with English conventions, even when such conventions conflicted with their native language logic. For example, one lecturer noted:

> When I switched to teaching in English, my teaching in Vietnamese was also influenced a bit because my way of thinking in English is somewhat different from that in Vietnamese, because English and Vietnamese are different. In Vietnamese, I can often bring in a little bit of this, a little bit of that, and then I'll gather them together. What I mean is, in a sense, the topic sentence can be placed at the end, allowing me to open up something, but when teaching in English like that, honestly, it has its difficulties in terms of language. (Interview, Lecturer 6)

This observation highlights how the prioritisation of the English language influenced not just the language of instruction but also the underlying thought processes. The differences between English's linear, topic-sentence-first structure and the indirect, circular logic of an Oriental language such as Vietnamese (Kaplan, 1966) required the lecturers to adopt and navigate multiple logical frameworks. This navigation often created cognitive dissonance, as lecturers were forced to reconcile their established teaching methods with the rhetorical and structural demands of English.

At the same time, the lecturers recognised the impact of logical differences on their students. Trained in the Vietnamese school system, which relies heavily on inductive reasoning, students are familiar with and skilled in "reaching an answer" when "being given the data". However, they would be perplexed when asked to explain an issue, or to qualify it, or give their opinion (Lecturer 11). This observation underscores the need for teachers to act as mediators, helping students navigate the distinct cognitive and rhetorical demands of the two languages.

The differences in logical structures between English and Vietnamese extend beyond language and into subject content. Some student participants in this study also mentioned finding it challenging when faced with both ways of thinking. It affected not only students' proficiency in English language and comprehension of subject contents but also their ability to tackle exams that require navigating between the logics of English and Vietnamese textbooks. In the following excerpt, one student highlighted the conflict in logic between the two languages, especially when exam questions were translated from Vietnamese textbooks into English:

> In English, people often rely on the content of English textbooks, visual aids, or real-life logic to demonstrate formulas. In Vietnamese textbooks, mathematical formulas are used to prove what we are learning, so when we do exercises in

> English, we use real-life logic, but in exams, we have to use mathematical logic, causing confusion. (FG 2, Student 1)

The fact that students struggled to adjust their assignments with the expected English conventions showcases the profound impact of logical disparities on content learning, which also adds an additional layer of complexity for the participants, requiring them to navigate between different logical frameworks based on the language of instruction. Teachers needed a certain level of flexibility to navigate through the lessons, which implies a professional development need for EMI lecturers.

In short, the difficulties stemming from the English language mandate in EMI programs and the resulting complexities affect both educators and students. The challenges that manifest in the language of instruction, cognitive processes, and pedagogical decisions highlight the need for flexible approaches to address these disparities and enhance learning outcomes in bilingual and multi-lingual educational settings.

7.2 Lecturers' English language proficiency

The language proficiency of lecturers plays a pivotal role in shaping the educational experience of students, and the challenges posed by non-mastery of English can be significant. The data from interviews, focus groups, and class observations provides valuable insights into the repercussions of such challenges on both lecturers and students.

7.2.1 Students struggling to grasp knowledge

One recurring theme in the focus group was students' claims about certain lecturers' English proficiency. Students asserted that when lecturers struggled with English, students faced a barrier to comprehending the course material. Many students in focus groups expressed a similar concern:

> Some teachers have quite heavy accents, so when we listen in English, for me personally, it's like I was listening to another language. I have to both try to listen to what the teachers are saying and try to think about how those words fit together to make sense. It takes quite a bit of extra time for me to understand the lesson. (FG 2, Student 2)

> I found the lecturer's speech in class very difficult to understand. After a while, it became really impossible to comprehend. Because to try and understand the lesson is partly recalling, and then trying to understand what the teacher is saying. Her pronunciation is not clear. And so on and so forth, it becomes difficult. (FG 9, Student 3)

Some lecturers acknowledged having received this feedback from their students. For example, Lecturer 1 commented: "I hear that there are cases where some students claim that English proficiency of certain lecturers is not very good, so students are unable to grasp the knowledge" (Interview, Lecturer 1).

Two distinct situations emerged as a result of lecturers' language deficiency. The first involves teachers having to repeat lectures. In one of the EMI classes observed, the lecturer had to spend 33% of the class time repeating parts of the lesson (Observation 2, Lecturer 2); in another, it was 25% (Observation 4, Lecturer 4). The second, perhaps more concerning situation involved students gradually disengaging from the lesson due to a lack of comprehension:

> As a result, people don't want to, like me – I feel that many of my peers don't want to listen anymore because it becomes incomprehensible, like losing a part or even the entire content of the lecture. We study that subject with materials entirely taken from slides and the book. (FG 9, Student 3)

Another student shared a negative experience about language barriers in class: "She spoke English in a rather difficult-to-understand accent, and even to the extent that she no longer speaks Vietnamese, it's almost like I didn't understand the entire subject that I was studying" (FG12, Student 5). Some students even expressed a desire for the lecturers to speak their shared L1, suggesting a potential disconnect between the language of instruction and students' grasp of the content.

Interestingly, there were variations among classes. While some students reported challenges in understanding lectures delivered in English, others, as noted in one interview, managed to follow along despite the language barrier. This divergence prompts further exploration into the factors contributing to students' varying experiences within the same university.

7.2.2 Lecturers struggling to communicate

The interviews with teacher participants shed light on the struggles faced by lecturers for whom English is not their first language. For instance, one lecturer from a natural sciences background highlighted the historical emphasis on reading and writing in his academic journey, with speaking skills considered secondary. This background, albeit coupled with a one-year master's program in England, still resulted in difficulties and pressure:

> I studied at a university in Vietnam. I used to be a student in group A [majoring in natural sciences], not in group D [majoring in languages and social sciences]. So back then, when doing a master's degree, the emphasis on personal communication skills was not considered crucial. Even though they claimed to use methods such as group work and certain interactions, fundamentally, pursuing a master's degree still leaned towards [the result that] who read more would have a better chance of getting a higher grade. Communication was prioritised after reading and writing. Therefore, even after completing my master's degree in England, which lasted only one year, despite my efforts to engage, my language skills did not naturally improve. That's why I felt the pressure was truly significant starting with AP classes from the beginning. (Interview, Lecturer 2)

As a result of their lack of confidence in speaking, lecturers described the meticulous preparation required for EMI courses. Lecturer 3, a novice in EMI education, recalled her first lesson when she had to read extensively, review content, and memorise every sentence:

> It was quite stressful. I had to write each sentence, each word, and plan what I wanted to say, then memorised it. It means not memorising each sentence or word individually but figuring out how to make students understand the point. In other words, when I speak, I had to understand the point myself so that students can grasp it. (Interview, Lecturer 3)

> Back when I started teaching, to be honest, it was just last year, I had to think ahead, and there were times when I felt quite stressed. Sometimes, when students asked me questions, I was afraid I wouldn't fully understand them. (Interview, Lecturer 3)

With little support from the institution, most EMI lecturers experienced a lot of difficulties:

> I think the first classes were very challenging because, in reality, the language aspect is a barrier not only for the teacher but also for the students. Now, how to turn that barrier into a tool for teacher-student communication and understanding the lesson, that's not easy. I felt a lot of pressure. For example, especially in the first few classes, I hadn't taught HQP before, nor this subject in English before, so preparing the lesson naturally took time. (Interview, Lecturer 7)

That the lecturers' struggles with language proficiency, even for those who had pursued a degree in an English-speaking country, highlights the ongoing nature of language development. The need for repeated lectures in both English and Vietnamese demonstrates the lecturer's commitment to ensuring effective communication with students. The additional effort required, including extensive preparation, memorisation, and continuous practice, illustrates the lecturers' dedication to overcoming language barriers in delivering specialised contents.

7.2.3 Building confidence

Confidence emerged as a recurring theme in the interviews. Lecturers, including those who had studied abroad, expressed reservations about their English proficiency. The journey to mastery was depicted as a gradual process, with one lecturer admitting that true comfort in expressing academic concepts in English only came after multiple EMI courses. The initial nervousness and lack of confidence dissipated over time through continuous practice and refinement. One lecturer described her journey from uncertainty to spontaneity: "But now, I don't need that preparation anymore. For example, now I can ask students anything, inquire about what they like, or discuss any topic that comes up right away" (Interview, Lecturer 3). Another lecturer reflected on how familiarity with language structures developed over time:

> In the first few sessions, I used to prepare in that way, but now, I only focus on preparing key points because I'm already familiar with the structures of these sentences. For instance, sentences involving transitions or shifts in ideas, how to smoothly move from one point to another, or the sentences used in communication

> with students – all these are in English, and they require a slightly different approach. (Interview, Lecturer 5)

For Lecturer 12, the gradual improvement and positive student feedback served as key indicators of growth:

> In the second year of teaching, I felt that things were going quite well. The feedback from students also improved. It's true that the first time was a bit stumbling, but as time goes on, I've become more accustomed to it. With more experience and knowledge, things are getting better. (Interview, Lecturer 12)

The interviews refer to the lecturers' evolving confidence in English proficiency, acknowledging the ongoing process of mastering academic language. Furthermore, they show lecturers' perception that perfection in English remains elusive. However, the interviews also emphasise the universality of language challenges for EMI lecturers whose first language is not English.

In conclusion, the interview data presents a good understanding of EMI lecturers' language proficiency, highlighting both student challenges and lecturer efforts to address language barriers. It is obvious from the data that the levels of proficiency in English, more than anything else, made these lecturers confident or not in their lecturing, and that proficiency only came as a result of their own practice, rather than of any professional development activities or institutional support. The problematic conditions (such as teaching in a second language and the lack of professional development) forced these lecturers to be creative and deliberative in their profession, thus, achieving high levels of agency (Priestley et al., 2015).

7.3 Material resources

7.3.1 Inadequate materials

Working in their profession in EMI brought both material affordances and restrictions to academic participants in their achievement (or non-achievement) of agency. The infusion of funds from EMI programs and the institutional autonomy policy have led to improved material conditions. This financial source has translated into tangible benefits, enhancing the overall academic environment. According to Manager 1, improved infrastructure and

updated facilities have become the norm, creating a more conducive atmosphere for teaching and learning:

> Students in these programs are paying higher tuition fees compared to the standard. Therefore, the demand for facilities and technical infrastructure for their classrooms is also high. There is a need to change the school's facilities to make them more appealing to serve the specific needs of these students. If students were paying less, there would be no demand for changes in the facilities: the desks and chairs would remain wobbly, and the rooms moldy.... When there are improvements in the facilities, standard students also benefit to some extent. (Interview, Manager 1)

For lecturers, facilities in EMI classrooms obviously supported smoother teaching experiences:

> It's really good to have a separate [internet] line specifically for high-quality classes, for example, separate internet lines for classrooms on the 6th and 7th floors exclusively for high-quality classes, instead of sharing the school-wide network. (Interview, Lecturer 6)

While there may have been an upgrade in facilities, the superficial improvements have failed to address deeper issues. Outdated teaching materials and limited access to online resources persist, leaving lecturers with doubts about the efficacy of their lessons:

> In the current program, I find another difficulty related to learning materials. For example, teachers often integrate one or two textbooks into their teaching, but these books don't usually come with additional support materials for teachers…when preparing for a class, I might have slides together with textbooks. These slides, in accordance with the textbook, are simple, and I need to edit them. I might add notes or include additional content that I want. It might even have a test bank. However, the test bank may be outdated. For instance, if the current version is 7, but the test bank is from version 4, it may contain outdated information. (Interview, Lecturer 4)

In addition to the shortage of textbooks, there was also a lack of technical devices:

> For my subject, using a computer is necessary, and for exams, we have to use a computer lab. Currently, when taking exams, [students] still have to bring their own laptops, and that is the first difficulty, related to the infrastructure. (Interview, Lecturer 12)

The outdated teaching materials and limited access to online resources left educators in this study with doubts about the effectiveness of their lessons and hampered their ability to deliver up-to-date and engaging content. Furthermore, limited internet access diminished the scope for creative lessons, discouraging lecturers from exploring innovative teaching methods.

7.3.2 Class size

While EMI classes tend to be smaller than standard classes, they still fall on the larger side, posing challenges for both lecturers and students. Interviews and observation data revealed that large class sizes hindered lecturers' ability to foster fostering meaningful interactions with students. The observed EMI classes often ranged from 60 to 90 students. Some classes were in small rooms with basic equipment such as a computer, screen, and white board, most with wi-fi, but without a strong enough signal for students to connect with it. The crowded classes were justified as follows:

> The class size depends on whether [the institution] can recruit enough students, but the university has to consider the cost, so if there are enough students, they will [split them into smaller classes]. Therefore, there are some high-quality classes with 80-90 students, without splitting them, because splitting into two classes requires two teachers, given the rate paid to teachers in high-quality classes…. (Interview, Lecturer 6)

With such large classes, diversity in the student body was a real problem:

> The students have different levels, even differences in their cognitive abilities, but I don't take it seriously. Because of this, together with the crowdedness, when I assign exercises to them, some of them are very enthusiastic. I grade the ones they do, and that's it. I don't have much time to check the rest to see how much they've understood. (Interview, Lecturer 9)

This limitation not only resulted in attention being focused only on a select group of students and an inability to cater to individual needs, but also in fewer activities. In one of the classes observed, teacher talk accounted for 84% of the time, leaving only a tiny amount of time (5%) for interactions (Observation 4, Lecturer 4). In yet another class, teacher talk even mounted to 89% (Observation 2, Lecturer 2). The reason is obvious:

> Creating conditions for teachers means experiencing what is called implementing teaching methods that are learner-centred and innovative. Just imagine, with a class of 90 students, it is difficult to carry out activities such as flipped classrooms, group work, and extremely challenging role-playing situations. It's too difficult with a class of 90. I can do it for this group of students, but afterward, I feel that implementing these activities takes a lot of time and effort. So, naturally, I stopped doing it. (Interview, Lecturer 6)

The constrained access to resources and the prevalence of large class sizes presented clear challenges for EMI lecturers. Consequently, this restricted their pedagogical strategies, thereby limiting the array of alternatives that should ideally be at their disposal.

7.3.3 Equity issue between VMI and EMI

Despite the above issues in EMI classes, students in these programs still enjoyed better conditions compared to their counterparts in standard programs. A notable disparity emerged between EMI and standard classes in terms of learning conditions and resources, as EMI lecturers prioritised practical learning opportunities that connect students to industry:

> In English classes [EMI classes], I always want the students to have more practical experiences because in high-quality programs, I want them to gain practical knowledge and benefits. Therefore, in English classes, I usually invite business representatives, meaning that every time there is always an industry connection. (Interview, Lecturer 3)

EMI students also received more personalised academic support:

> The high-quality program students at our university have an additional advantage when each student is usually assigned, either individually or in groups of three to

> four, a mentor from the department who takes care of them. (Interview, Lecturer 11)

This support was absent in VMI classes:

> In standard classes, for instance, the approach towards individual students often revolves around simple matters, such as attendance checks and reminders to attend classes. However, in high-quality programs, the story is different. With smaller classes, there is a more personal approach. For example, in my case, you might notice that the feedback is more detailed, and the focus is not solely on basic aspects like attendance. In high-quality programs, there may be a recognition that some students, perhaps due to poorer understanding or other reasons, could benefit from additional support. Some teachers might provide extra guidance or allocate extra time after class, say, around 15 to 20 minutes after the end of the session, to help these students. (Interview, Lecturer 6)

This creates an inequitable educational environment, raising questions about fairness and inclusivity within the university. Moreover, one lecturer (Lecturer 13) even suggested that students in standard classes were perceived as more academically able but possibly coming from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In conclusion, EMI programs at Tower University present a complex ecology of both affordances and restrictions. The improved material conditions resulting from financial support and increased tuition fees have benefited the academic environment. However, challenges such as large class sizes, outdated teaching resources, and limited internet access persist, affecting the overall quality of education. Moreover, addressing the disparities is crucial to ensuring that all students, regardless of the instructional medium, have access to high-quality education.

7.4 Performativity

Performativity in the educational context, according to Wilkins (2011), comprises three interconnected elements: the audit/target culture, an emphasis on interventionist regulatory mechanisms, and the presence of a market environment to facilitate auditing and inspection, reinforcing disciplinary sanctions. In this study, interview data conducted with educators and administrators reveals the complex impact of performance-driven

culture on the teaching and learning environment, as well as on lecturers' achievement of agency.

7.4.1 The target-driven culture

Performance at Tower University, as elsewhere, is increasingly shaped by measurable outcomes, turning education into a territory where achievements are oversimplified into checkboxes and lecturers' merits are gauged through the results of student surveys. This long-held tradition of outcome-driven performance leaves an indelible mark on lecturers' sense of accomplishment and contributes to the pervasive phenomenon of mark inflation.

In assessing students' study, some lecturers were so concerned with their students' test results, as in the following example:

> I find something difficult.… In every class, I encounter a similar problem. When I teach, I interact with students, then I give them exercises. The students do them and answer my questions very quickly and well. I think everything is fine. However, when it comes to exams, their scores are very low. Yes, indeed, I find it difficult, and I don't know how to handle it. (Interview, Lecturer 10)

Her concern led to situations where she adjusted that exam questions to a less demanding level:

> I think it might be because my exam questions were too difficult. However, in the next class, where I co-taught with another colleague and split the class into two groups, we discussed and adjusted a lot when preparing the exam questions. The questions were much more reasonable compared to my previous exams, and the topics were quite basic without requiring extensive reasoning. However, the final results still turned out to be poor. So, I am really puzzled. I don't understand why. In class, the students interacted well, but during the exam, their performance was not as expected, even though I tried to make the questions easier. (Interview, Lecturer 10)

This participant's focus was mainly drawn to her students' test scores. For others, the test results alone would speak for themselves. In the following comment, another participant,

though identifying the disengagement of students in class, felt content with her students' test results:

> Classes are quite crowded. When I assign homework, some students are very enthusiastic. For those who complete it, I grade that one, and that's it. I don't have much time to check the rest to see how much they've understood. However, when it comes to Vietnamese students, most of them perform well in exams. I don't understand why. In class, they may not say much or show whether they are good or bad, but when it comes to exams, they usually do well. There are a few who are not doing well at all, but overall, it's okay. (Interview, Lecturer 9)

It is obvious that the pressure of performing well – the practical-evaluative dimension – forced these lecturers to negotiate and compromise their educational goals.

Students' learning was not the only thing influenced by the performative culture. Academics' professional performance was also under pressure. Novices who were in the probational stage with trial lecturing were often more focused on paperwork than on pedagogy:

> In general, during the initial stage, we often had a few trial lectures, sometimes in front of the department. However, those sessions tend to be more paperwork-oriented…typically lasted about 45 minutes, but covered a specific topic that I chose in advance to teach to my colleagues. The interaction was not like that with students. (Interview, Lecturer 4)

It should be noted that at Tower University, academic staff members' tenure is often determined through an administrative procedure: the employee completes a self-assessment report, which is often very formulaic and superficial; then teaches a sample lecture to the panel, often consisting of management and youth league and labour union representatives. This checkbox culture obviously left an impact on the participants' perception of the academic profession. For Lecturer 4, the pursuit of a PhD, or doing other professional development activities, was not an academic endeavour but a strategic move to legitimise her resumé for future academic tenure. Similarly, for Lecturer 5, scientific research conducted in English, a by-product of her teaching EMI courses, was only another box to tick, with articles written in English carrying greater prestige and weight than those in Vietnamese.

When asked about their biggest achievement thus far, many lecturer participants immediately mentioned their certificates of achievement which were awarded annually by the institution (Lecturer 6, Lecturer 2), or the number of peer-reviewed articles they had published (Lecturer 11). In these cases, it was clear that "success in academic life [is] shaped increasingly by performative targets that emphasise 'outputs' and encourage a culture of continuous selfcomparison with peers" (Macfarlane, 2016, p. 48). Thus, the performativity culture in this scenario, as described by Manager 1, is akin to an "industrial or mass production line", often leaving little room for creativity or genuine autonomy.

Lecturers' performance judged through student surveys

Throughout the institution, control over teacher performance is substantially exercised through student surveys. The dual control mechanism by two different administrative offices involving mid-course surveys and end-of-course evaluations creates a palpable pressure on lecturers:

> In content subject departments or institutes like ours, we can't control it [teaching quality] directly. However, we exercise control in a completely objective manner through a set of questions. After a lecturer finishes teaching a course, we require students to evaluate the lecturer. Of course, in the evaluation form, there are considerations for language and communication style. Based on student feedback, if a lecturer receives consistently poor evaluations, they may not be invited to teach again, and someone else may be chosen. Naturally, if a lecturer recognises their weaknesses from the feedback, they should strive to improve. If improvement isn't achieved, they may not be allowed to continue teaching. (Interview, Manager 1)

To uphold academic quality, the institution implemented a monitoring system for teaching performance: "There are two control mechanisms to ensure that if any teachers receive low ratings, warnings will be sent to the head of the department" (Interview, Manager 5). Answering the question whether the surveys create pressure on lecturers, the manager confirmed: "I think the pressure is necessary. There's pressure, but still not adequate" (Interview, Manager 5).

From the lecturers' point of view, what the institution needs from lecturers seems to be checking all the boxes:

> People only mention that I get to class on time, follow the schedule, and, for example, feedback from students over the years in the quality assurance department doesn't contain too many negative comments, so it's considered okay. I think with the assigned tasks, perhaps that's enough. However, I feel that I should do more on my own initiative. (Interview, Lecturer 7)

The over-reliance on student surveys, together with an outcome focus, as mentioned above, may have some consequences on teacher agency as well as on the overall teaching and learning environment. For example, it can result in mark inflation, as one participant commented:

> Nowadays, 60-70% of graduates achieve a distinction academic record…. Sometimes, high distinction may constitute around 50%, but these achievements may only be figures. True academic excellence, in terms of rigorous and disciplined study, is more important. When around 60-70% of students graduate with distinction, this is only relative. (Interview, Lecturer 6)

Mark inflation, a prevalent trend not only in Vietnam but elsewhere (Fisher, 2023), sees a significant percentage of graduates achieving excellent academic records. This may result from lecturers' efforts to simplify exam questions, as mentioned by Lecturer 10 earlier, or from lecturers' attempts to please their students for better survey results. For whatever reason, this raises questions about the true nature of academic performance, challenging the prevailing norms of outcome-driven education.

In conclusion, the importance of target-driven performance in Tower University puts immense pressure on lecturers to conform to predetermined checkboxes, navigate student surveys, and grapple with the challenges of mark inflation. The situation calls for an evidence-based understanding of academic excellence beyond superficial achievements, urging a re-evaluation of the performance metrics that govern modern higher education in Vietnam.

7.4.2 Interventionist regulatory mechanisms

Higher education at Tower University is strongly affected by "interventionist regulatory mechanisms" (Wilkins, 2011, p. 391), as shown through external regulations and internal inspections.

External regulation – strictures imposed by the prescribed frameworks

The influence of external regulatory mechanisms on higher education at Tower University was evident in participants' comments on the stringent adherence to prescribed frameworks during curriculum revisions and accreditation:

> [Accreditation for] the standard programs is an assessment based on the standards of the Ministry of Education and Training. As for programs in English, we are currently assessed according to AUN's [ASEAN University Network] standards. The two differ in approaches. This means that the criteria sets are different, including the criteria and the evaluation method: one side is evidence-based, and the other is rule-based, with distinctions. In reality, for AUN, their assessment goal is to suggest improvements based on their philosophy, which is a bit unique. It aims at enabling learners to self-study and achieve lifelong learning and out-of-school learning. They always strive for that goal, that philosophy. On the other hand, the Vietnamese approach tends to focus more on ensuring compliance with regulations and standards. So, those two philosophies seem to be directed towards different goals. AUN's leans more towards liberation, while MOET's insists on adhering to rules. (Interview, Manager 5)

Compliance with accreditation standards required lecturers to adhere to the prescribed syllabus, which affected different lecturers in different ways. For Lecturer 4, the structured framework challenged her teaching styles:

> …sometimes as I go through the content, I don't cover everything. There are certain topics that I find more interesting, and I want to go deeper into them because I want students to understand more thoroughly. However, I'm still constrained by that [the framework], and sometimes it limits my creative ideas. When I teach that part, I want it to follow a different approach, but due to limited time, I can't always adhere to my desired method. (Interview, Lecturer 4)

The requirement also restricted instructors' flexibility:

> The detailed syllabus serves as a guideline, almost like a mandatory roadmap for teachers to ensure that the content is covered. It is necessary, and I don't see any issues with it. However, from the perspective of those involved in teaching, or if

> I were in a managerial position, I would still allow a certain level of flexibility for the instructors. I would encourage them to find the most effective ways to deliver the content. So, while the syllabus is important, I would also prioritise ensuring that the teachers have a certain degree of flexibility in how they convey the material most efficiently. (Interview, Lecturer 12)

The different levels of regulation's influence on lecturers seem to depend on their experience. While the novices seemed to exhibit a stricter level of adherence, their more experienced counterparts perceived it in a more relaxed way. However, both manager and lecturer participants described the workload created by adhering to the framework as overwhelming. For example, Lecturer 7 admitted: "…the training program, detailed curriculum, and accompanying evidence, such as students' exam papers, grade sheets, and more, all need to be thoroughly checked. It can be quite exhausting" (Interview, Lecturer 7). A manager observed:

> …teachers have a lot of responsibilities, and even the time for scientific research is almost completely taken up. Administrative tasks and incidents take up their time. Just imagine, conducting program evaluations every year, the school does it every year. Burying their heads in writing evaluations and preparing for evaluations, where would they find time for scientific research? It's tough. Considering the amount of time teachers work in a week. I'm sure it's more than 40 hours. (Interview, Manager 1)

Participants noted that not only do the curriculum frameworks increase the workload, but they also restrict lecturers in several ways. One manager expressed concern about how rigid structures imposed by the MOET hindered lecturers' creativity and responsiveness:

> Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C, they have specific lectures as well as their own teaching methods, as long as they meet the desired outcomes, that's considered the creativity of the lecturers. It seems better to us. But the form provided by the Ministry of Education and Training takes that away, because both the lecturer and the students have to keep up with those lectures. (Interview, Manager 4)

Another manager noted that strict adherence to requirements could limit teachers' flexibility and innovation:

> Now we have detailed 15 sessions like that, in case there's any student who is meticulous, so if a teacher deviates a bit, the student will question, "This is your outline. Where are you now?" So, if she deviates a bit, students will have opinions.... The teacher is stuck. In the end, I see that we are all binding ourselves in such a way. Nowadays, teachers don't need to come up with new methods. Everything is in the outline. Even if they want to think, thinking will mean deviating from the syllabus, and that's considered wrong-doing. (Interview, Manager 1)

Another change in teachers' autonomy that the new rule, in effect since 2018, has brought about is that in the past, teachers were free to choose the exam format suitable for the student cohorts. However, contemporary practices demand strict conformity to the Ministry's guidelines. The imposition of a standardised curriculum inhibits the flexibility to tailor teaching methods, forcing instructors to adhere to a predetermined structure. The external regulations extended beyond the classroom, to meticulously examine training programs, detailed contents, and supporting evidence such as students' exam papers and grade sheets during biennial accreditations.

Internal inspections – the watchful eye of Quality Assurance Centre

Internal inspections add an additional layer of scrutiny to lecturers' performance. The Quality Assurance Centre, responsible for randomly checking classes against syllabi, becomes a potent force in maintaining teaching standards:

> The Quality Assurance Centre…randomly checks syllabi. When they enforce it strictly, and it's certain that they will do that, then it becomes problematic: "What is this teacher doing? Today is the fifth lesson, but she has only had two lectures. She keeps rambling about something. Even though it's the fifth session, her teaching is still at this stage." So, they will immediately cross it as an error. (Interview, Manager 1)

When inspections are executed with strict adherence, any deviation from the expected syllabus or teaching standards becomes immediately apparent. The Quality Assurance Centre's watchful eye extends beyond content to the pacing, which is deemed to indicate the quality of lectures. Instances of insufficient teaching sessions or deviations from approved methodologies can result in marked errors for the lecturer, potentially affecting

their annual performance assessment. The enforcement of these inspections becomes a determining factor for a lecturer's professional fate.

The combination of external regulations and internal inspections creates a rigid environment where educators must circumnavigate meticulously prescribed frameworks while also withstanding the scrutiny of internal inspectors. The delicate balance between adherence to standards and the need for pedagogical innovation remains a constant challenge at Tower University.

7.4.3 The influence of market demand on student intake policies and pedagogical approaches

The performative culture at Tower University emerges as a mechanism that responds to market demand, shaping both student intake policies and the pedagogical strategies employed by educators. This response, driven by the necessity to meet market needs, has tangible effects on the benchmark for student intakes, student behaviour, and the increased workload for lecturers.

Initially, the response to market demand led, as discussed above, to lowered benchmarks for student intakes, creating challenges for lecturers and potentially compromising education quality. The admission process was not solely focused on admitting high-quality students, but on allowing some who fell below the benchmark to enter the EMI programs, thus creating a situation like this:

> In those early cohorts, the students tended to be a bit nasty. They were nasty in the sense that they were somewhat disobedient. They might not attend classes regularly, come to class whenever they liked, listen only if they felt like it, and ignore it if they didn't. This compromise, while meeting basic admission requirements, resulted in a cohort of students exhibiting disruptive behaviour. (Interview, Lecturer 11)

Participants noted that such students felt they were specially treated by the institution, so they could behave as if the rules did not apply to them. In another case, the need to meet market demands even modified student policies:

> …because they [students] pay more money, why don't we have a better policy? Because if we take good care of them, the department will recruit more high-quality students the following year. If the department recruits more, it will have better finances. At that time, I was in charge of the department's finances, so I was very conscious of the need to generate funds for the department. I believe that by taking care of them, we can enhance our reputation and attract more students. (Interview, Lecturer 13)

Higher tuition fees for EMI programs elevated expectations, necessitating higher standards compared to other programs:

> They [the Training Management Office] consistently collect and prioritise feedback, and it seems that feedback from HQPs is more valued than from standard programs because they're paying higher tuition. The factors significant to instructors of the HQPs are their high pay rates and the pressure of feedback from students in these programs. Therefore, what can be accomplished in a regular program should be at a level two to three times higher in a high-quality program. (Interview, Lecturer 6)

The heightened attention paid to EMI classes added an additional layer of pressure on instructors. On the one hand, they had to strictly follow the prescribed syllabus, which reportedly reduced their creativity and autonomy. On the other, they needed to ensure agreeable results from student surveys. This proved to be a hard task as the initial batches of students, not meeting intake requirements, displayed disobedience, irregular attendance, and a lack of engagement with coursework. Lecturers found themselves pressured to individually address students who struggled with assignments due to inconsistent attendance. More recently, as the class size has expanded and the quality of incoming students has improved, the students' behaviour and self-discipline have improved. However, the institution's motives in EMI programs have also become even more finance-driven, as expressed by an experienced instructor:

> This financial approach, though aimed at attracting EMI students and enhancing the institution's reputation, underlines the impact of market-driven decisions on program development. Financial considerations, especially related to tuition fees and program profitability, contribute to an increased workload for lecturers. The

> shift from remuneration based on program costs and profits to a standard salary structure impacts program viability. The termination of programs with ineffective cost-benefit results became a strategic move, reflecting the financial target of program sustainability. (Interview, Lecturer 13)

In this market-driven context, the instructors were required to undertake practical judgements pertaining to different choices. This evaluative process involved a careful examination of the inherent advantages and disadvantages associated with various options, affecting their decision-making in pedagogy. Consequently, the practical evaluations within the performativity culture inhibited participants in their achievement of professional agency.

7.5 Networking

7.5.1 External networking

From connections in EMI courses, both the institution and its lecturers could expand their networks to outside the university, which benefited them professionally. As one manager pointed out:

> It [lecturing in EMI programs] has the potential to enhance the networking of the faculty. Because it is conducted in English, it leads to the necessity of exchanges, collaboration, and top-up programs. These English programs will expand the faculty's networking and give rise to student mobility, eventually leading to staff mobility. In the future, it will be advantageous for the faculty. (Interview, Manager 5)

A lecturer described how interactions with visiting professors led to meaningful exchanges and valuable learning opportunities:

> I have the opportunity to learn from and collaborate with [foreign] professors. Occasionally, professors visit Vietnam to teach for a period, providing me with the chance to engage and learn from them. For instance, we once had a French professor teaching in our programs. When he initiated a research project, we were invited to participate, affording us valuable learning experiences. Subsequently, with the support of the professor's funding, we could attend conferences, opening up additional opportunities for us to expand our knowledge, even internationally.

> Participating in international conferences allowed me to glean insights from colleagues in other countries. I believe the opportunity here lies in the potential for exchange, collaboration, and, with a high-quality program, a smoother educational experience. (Interview, Lecturer 11)

Another lecturer showcased a collective approach to academic endeavours:

> I'm writing more at this time to encourage my peers to write. My faculty has ex-staff who study and live abroad. They want to coordinate with me because they want to access data from Vietnam, which I can absolutely support. So, we write together as I want to write and also want to take advantage of the overseas workforce. We can also support each other. We have several project work groups like that. This year we've received three projects. (Interview, Lecturer 13)

These participants, with experience in EMI, and aspirations of advancing in their profession, found the EMI environment promising and rewarding. Doing their jobs in EMI created extended networks outside the school, which would otherwise undoubtedly not have been available. The connections not only benefited the lecturers, but also brought about changes in the EMI programs:

> There is a finance program with Niels Brock, which is a Danish school, where I could get involved in a very significant way. At that time, because I, in the end, for many reasons, it was about connecting, working a lot with the program director. Initially, I didn't know she was the program director, so when I worked a lot, she found that my idea was right. So, she, meaning she changed much of the course design. Because we were preparing a lot for the CFA [Chartered Financial Analyst] exams, we wanted students to benefit from this program in this exam, so when she changed that, we also felt respected and very satisfied. (Interview, Lecturer 13)

The necessity to expand their network arose not only from the participants' engagement in the programs, but also from the practical and evaluative judgements within their practice. For example, one lecturer, with relatively brief experience in both EMI and the teaching profession, felt the need to update her knowledge with the current trends, as she was aware that her limited exposure to the specialised areas might not be sufficient for delivering effective lectures: "I hang out more to meet my friends who are working in

businesses to talk to them so that I can acquire more practical knowledge and incorporate it into my lectures" (Interview, Lecturer 14). Her educational background in EMI, together with her future trajectory of being able to teach at overseas institutions, pursuing a PhD, and enhancing her research capabilities, gave her a variety of alternatives to navigate, thus enabling her to achieve agency.

Another participant with more experience in EMI took advantage of her network in a different way. She mentioned her use of connection with external experts to expose her students to real-world practice:

> In recent years, I have almost always invited guest speakers to my classes to guide and share their experiences with students, and the practical applications they present are highly appreciated by the students. Whether it's someone with a unique perspective or an expert in a specific field, students find it very engaging. (Interview, Lecturer 12)

For all these participants, EMI is an environment conducive to external relationships, initially opening up opportunities for themselves, and ultimately bettering the whole education sector.

7.5.2 Internal networking

EMI affected academics' professional development in different ways, depending on the different communication styles of each faculty. Of the seven lecturers who mentioned support from internal networking within the institution, five highlighted a proactive approach to the challenges of the EMI environment:

> I had to ask those who had gone through it before me – how they approached it, what the students' attitudes were, and how the information was conveyed to them. I did some preliminary investigation to have a basic understanding and envision how it was likely to follow a certain route. (Interview, Lecturer 10)

Another novice used the same approach: "Since we are young lecturers, they [senior colleagues] give us opportunities to be in the class as much as possible to gain experience through direct interactions" (Interview, Lecturer 14).

This was possible with the support of senior lecturers, who exhibited a culture of openness and sharing among colleagues:

> As a predecessor, I am open with others. Anything related to the effectiveness of our collective work should not be kept secret, as we should change our mindset to shift towards working more collaboratively in a team rather than individually. (Interview, Lecturer 2)

This collaborative mindset was different from that of the participants from another faculty. The following two lecturers, with more restricted networks, focused on subject-specific exchanges, particularly in activities related to routine issues:

> Regarding the subject teaching group, we have professional activities, exchanging ideas such as which test banks to use, how to assess, under which format, and discussing questions with the teachers who teach that subject. If we encounter challenging questions in the textbook that seem to require discussion, we exchange ideas with each other. (Interview, Lecturer 4)

Lecturer 4's professional collaborations were done post hoc to solve issues arising rather than proactively as in the case of Lecturer 2. Moreover, in this faculty, there was an obvious shortage of exchange, as admitted by a younger lecturer: "I really want to ask, especially from experienced teachers because I don't have much experience yet" (Interview, Lecturer 5). This need went unattended despite the management's effort to organise various training activities:

> Every year, there are numerous workshops and training sessions organised not only by the university but also by the faculty and even by the union.… Before the new academic year begins, the faculty head organises and plans what courses and skills will be necessary, such as teaching methods…. (Interview, Manager 4)

Limited connections also restricted the lecturers from having broader perspectives on education. Rather, they focused on the here and now of everyday practice to fulfil the tasks of teaching. This suggests a more localised approach to networking within the school community; such an approach might also result from the communication style within this faculty, which was often top-down and unidirectional: "Sometimes, I receive

information from the dean. She informs the entire faculty that there is currently a workshop…. Anyone interested can participate" (Interview, Lecture 5).

There seemed to be very limited opportunity for dialogue. As a result, this novice teacher had unaddressed needs for advice and for observing classes taught by more experienced colleagues:

> Whenever I finish teaching, I feel that I still need to improve to make my lectures less boring, or to make it more varied, or to think of more examples for students. So, I want to observe more classes, even for subjects that I have already observed. I still want to observe more. (Interview, Lecture 5)

The communication style, together with the fact that the scope of peer observation of teaching in this faculty seemed to fulfil the administrative procedure rather than serving the professional needs of novice lecturers, obviously left this young lecturer with doubts about her job. This differed from other faculties, where senior management were more approachable and supportive of staff:

> In our faculty, we usually adjust the course outlines based on the suggestions of the lecturers teaching that course. During the teaching process, the teachers combine various textbooks and materials, and we discuss in the team before drafting documents. As for the curriculum, the faculty, usually led by the management, holds meetings with all the lecturers involved in the entire program, as well as most of the lecturers who are heads of divisions. In these meetings, those responsible for developing the curriculum discuss and present trends. For instance, this year, there were many revisions to courses related to innovation and creative changes, such as introducing creativity and innovation. (Interview, Lecturer 3)

Multi-directional communication in this faculty became the standard:

> During the teaching process, there are two types of feedback. Firstly, there is feedback from students; secondly, feedback from lecturers. In the case of feedback from lecturers, the institute's management will hold meetings with relevant parties and propose necessary changes accordingly. (Interview, Lecturer 3)

Therefore, the lecturers felt supported:

> I'm still in the process of preparing quite a lot. I told [name of manager] that I need to take it slowly. The institute has a lot of tasks, but I prefer to teach only one subject in each teaching period. If I have to teach two or three subjects, please let me do it gradually. Hopefully, there will come a time when I can teach two subjects at the same time without any issues. I hope I will get used to it and not feel stressed anymore. (Interview, Lecturer 3)

In this faculty, where communication was reciprocal, staff could more easily speak about their needs, which could then be addressed by colleagues and management. This benefited not only the staff but also their students, who gained from both a culture of sharing and the formation of network bonds.

7.5.3 Sustaining network bonding for students

The benefits of networking among lecturers extended to their students. The lecturers who could access extended networks realised their networking aspirations, fostering bonds with and among students. One lecturer who had benefited from networking expressed:

> For EMI classes, I want to create connections and creativity. By connecting with students, I always provide a bit more activities, a little more, to enhance creativity and foster connections between students and teachers, as well as connecting students with businesses and accessing richer sources of learning materials. (Interview, Lecturer 3)

Another participant shared his experience of building connections among the students:

> I have just experimented with a program for the HQP Logistics and Supply Chain Management, connecting these courses by having students of the previous cohort immediately connect with the subsequent cohorts through a mentoring program. That means, right from the start, my task is to let the students know that after the first year, when they enter the second year, they will have to mentor the first-year students. (Interview, Lecturer 2)

The connection went beyond the institution, reaching the industry, when the lecturers "…want to connect [the students] with the businesses I know so that they have better job opportunities, worthy of their potential" (Interview, Lecturer 1).

These lecturers with an extensive network not only realised their networking aspirations but also fostered strong connections within student communities. Moreover, the wealth of experience from their initiatives demonstrates the agency lecturers had in shaping students' educational experiences and future career paths. By strategically incorporating their networks into EMI programs, these educators acted out relational agency to exemplify the transformative impact of experience on fostering student success.

7.6 Professional learning communities

Networking among EMI lecturers also sustained professional learning communities (PLCs), through which participants geared their collaborative learning activities towards the shared goals of EMI education. Interview data examined through the lens of the ecological approach to teacher agency (Priestley et al., 2015) showed that the structural conditions of the PLCs contributed significantly to the achievement of agency.

First, most of the participants actively engaged in reflective dialogues, a crucial aspect of PLC (Tam, 2015), especially during the initial stage of EMI teaching. Mentioning the struggles in the early days when an EMI course was shared among three lecturers, Lecturer 10 said:

> I always had to ask those who had taught before me, the two people who had taught before me, about how they conducted their classes, how the students responded, and how they had communicated with the students. Did I need to pay attention to anything? I would research in advance so that I could have a preliminary understanding and imagine how it would follow a certain trend. (Interview, Lecturer 10)

The multi-directional reflections were gathered so that the course syllabus could be adjusted:

> In my subject teaching group, we usually adjust the course outline based on the suggestions of the lecturers teaching that course. During the teaching process, the

> teachers combine various textbooks and materials, and we discuss in the department before drafting proposals. As for the curriculum, the institute, usually led by the institute's leadership, holds meetings with all the lecturers involved in the entire program, as well as almost all the lecturers who are heads of divisions. (Interview, Lecturer 3)

Multilateral communication was also welcomed by management, who emphasised that reflective dialogue provided a platform for teachers to voice their insights, share experiences, and collectively navigate challenges. In addition, the communication resulted in support for staff development:

> When teachers agree to teach in these programs, they need to realise that they must enhance their professional knowledge and find ways to do so. The pressure from the program forces teachers to improve themselves. Of course, the university will provide some support for this change. Teachers may want to make improvements, but they might lack the funds to invest in their own professional development. The university can play a role in supporting them in this regard. (Interview, Manager 1)

This structural support nurtured teacher agency by encouraging educators to critically reflect on their practices, fostering a sense of ownership and authority over their professional growth.

The data also shows the "deprivatisation of practice" (Tam, 2015, p. 24) through collaborative efforts and a willingness to share information:

> We also had to ask for the experience from her [a senior lecturer] when we first started teaching. We inquired about how she implemented things like the structure of the lesson because it might be somewhat different from the Vietnamese language program. (Interview, Lecturer 10)

The collaboration was especially useful for novice lecturers:

> In the preparation process, I was fortunate to have support from [name of a colleague]. I don't know if you know her, but having her support means I could

> refer to her work and attend her lectures. So, it's very beneficial for me to learn from her. (Interview, Lecturer 3)

These sharing and learning-by-doing activities also extended to observations of one another's classes with the aim of receiving and giving feedback. This created a community of practice where teaching experiences were shared openly. It not only enhanced the quality of instruction but also contributed to the academics' collective professional growth of academics. As they actively participated in each other's teaching processes, they exercised agency in seeking feedback, refining their instructional approaches, and contributing to a collaborative learning environment.

The collaborative activities embedded in Tower University's PLC structure also fostered a mutually supportive ecology for teacher agency. Seeking guidance from senior colleagues, sharing experiences within subject teaching groups, and learning from those with more teaching experience exemplify a collaborative approach to professional development:

> It's true that in scientific work, you have to do it scientifically, not randomly. If you plan it scientifically, meaning allocate time and form groups reasonably, it runs extremely smoothly. I think currently, our groups are running quite well. We've completed two, and there's one more to go…. I'm just focusing on the area where I'm quite proficient, and I enjoy doing it. I break it down into smaller parts. In the past, the chief investigator used to do research and work on everything. The project leader used to oversee everything, but the truth is, does our capability really cover everything? As for me, I match each person with a specific area, and that's when it runs smoothly. Otherwise, I wouldn't have time to teach. (Interview, Lecturer 13)

The lens of the ecological approach to teacher agency (Priestley et al., 2015) provides an insight into Lecturer 13's practice. Her past experience in tertiary education (iterative element), together with her aspirations of shifting towards researching (projection) helped her make evaluations and judgements about her present practice, facilitating her in achieving agency.

This collaborative nature of PLC not only enhanced individual ownership of teaching practices but also contributed to a collective sense of purpose (Tam, 2015), which

provides a framework for educators to align their efforts toward common goals, contributing to the achievement of agency in collectively steering the educational mission of the university. The PLC also solidified the bonds within the academic community, fostering a supportive environment where educators were motivated to contribute actively to the advancement of the curriculum.

7.7 Employee engagement

7.7.1 Job satisfaction

Several themes emerged from the interviews with lecturer participants regarding their job satisfaction. First, interactions and connections with students emerged as the most common source of job satisfaction:

> The quality students in the HQPs create a more positive atmosphere compared to standard programs. As I mentioned earlier, academic performance of these students is excellent. Personally, I enjoy establishing connections with students, envisioning collaborative projects in the future. Simply put, I want to connect them with businesses; I want to provide them with better job opportunities that align with their potential. In case of any issues, I hope to maintain connections with them, and I also desire to foster these connections while teaching high-quality classes. Teaching such classes, and interacting with high-quality students, is something I find enjoyable and look forward to. (Interview, Lecturer 1)

Another lecturer expressed the joy from vibrant interactions and shared excitement during the session:

> I love the activity where students and I work on coding together. Both learners and teacher write codes and I see their excitement when they are successfully doing that. The interaction is vibrant, and it's rewarding to witness the students' enthusiasm. Their questions and achievements add a dynamic element to the class. Seeing the smart students achieving results similar to mine creates a sense of excitement during the session. (Interview, Lecturer 11)

As these participants saw EMI objectives as creating opportunities for graduates, seeing students' ability to engage in debates and witnessing their enthusiasm contributed to an

interactive classroom environment and heightened their job satisfaction. Moreover, the establishment and maintenance of connections with students, and extending them beyond the classroom, were highly valued. The ability to support students in practical challenges and receive expressions of gratitude over time added depth to job satisfaction.

Several participants found satisfaction in the perceived impact of their teaching on students' lives. Whether through supervising EMI students or guiding standard classes, the ability to contribute meaningfully to students' academic and professional journeys was a common thread. In the following excerpts from an economics lecturer, the participant viewed his ability to inspire his students as his biggest professional achievement:

> I have inspired the students with a story about economic thinking. They realised that this subject is not dry or dull; it is practical and applicable to everyday life. Often, they unconsciously act according to the economic principles. If they understand that their actions are influenced by factors such as XYZ, they can consciously apply economic thinking to their decision-making. (Interview, Lecturer 6)

> Through my storytelling and integration of experiences, the most significant achievement is not the certificates or accolades. Instead, it is the inspiration for the students. It provides a solid direction for first-year students, guiding them on what they need to learn and absorb over the four years at the university. (Interview, Lecturer 6)

Despite the common sources of job satisfaction, participants with different work experience also expressed diverse perspectives on the rewards they derived from their job. Some lecturers articulated broader, more far-reaching goals, emphasising their commitment to research, international collaboration, and contributing to the academic community. Others were content with the fulfilment of daily tasks, deriving satisfaction from the routine execution of teaching duties and the positive interactions with students.

Some lecturers with extensive goals obtained their emotional rewards in witnessing students successfully applying learned skills in real-world scenarios. Others achieved a sense of fulfilment from their ability to contribute meaningfully to the academic community:

> One of the things I take great pride in is having students whom I probably taught over a decade ago, but they still maintain connections both with me and with the lecturers from their previous courses. When they face practical challenges or when I need someone from outside to support school activities, they are always willing and supportive. That's what brings me the most joy. (Interview, Lecturer 2)

And to pursue research and engage in international collaborations:

> Currently, on a personal level, I am still making efforts to further strengthen my research portfolio. This includes new research projects and scientific papers. Last year, I had one paper; and this year, another in Scopus Q2 was just published yesterday. (Interview, Lecturer 3)

The opportunity to mentor EMI students, create positive learning environments, and establish connections with industry partners contributed significantly to job satisfaction. The demanding nature of the teaching in EMI and the necessary collaboration with businesses aligned with these lecturers' broader aspirations, enhancing their sense of agency and satisfaction.

In contrast, some lecturers found satisfaction in the routine execution of teaching tasks. Despite the heavy workload, they discovered enjoyment in the day-to-day interactions with students and the process of guiding them through assignments. The structure of the courses, emphasising practical challenges and interactive teaching styles, contributed to their sense of fulfilment:

> The part that I find most satisfying is when they have to present their assignments. In every course, I require students to complete an assignment, and I feel gratified seeing how creatively and skilfully they apply various methods to visualise data. These modern skills they demonstrate are commendable. I guide them in analysing data and encourage deeper exploration, and it's rewarding to see how beneficial and useful their analytical work is. (Interview, Lecturer 12)

The interactive parts of the lesson benefited both the students and the lecturers:

> What I really enjoy is the students' presentations. Because presentations require students to dive deep into a topic, and both the lecturer and students can engage

> in debates. Asking questions helps both parties gain a better understanding. For instance, when students present topics I might not have encountered before, such as unique case studies, it's intriguing. I can ask questions, and we can mutually enhance our knowledge. I believe that alongside delivering knowledge, the role of a lecturer is also about learning from students. (Interview, Lecturer 14)

It is worth noting that the participants who felt rewarded with the completion of routine tasks had less experience in EMI education. As mentioned above, this group of participants were concerned more with the here and now of their EMI profession than with a broader view of education. Understandably, their job satisfaction was closely tied to the successful execution of assignments and positive feedback from students. The prescribed activities mandated by the detailed course outlines contributed to a relaxing and enjoyable learning experience. The ability to see tangible results in students' creative applications of learned skills during competitions further enhanced their satisfaction.

Overall, lecturers in this study expressed diverse perspectives on their roles and aspirations, and on the rewards they derived from their teaching experiences. Some lecturers articulated broader, more far-reaching goals, emphasising their commitment to research, international collaboration, and contributing to the academic community. Others focused on the fulfilment of daily tasks, deriving satisfaction from the routine execution of teaching duties and positive interactions with students.

7.7.2 Dissatisfaction

Despite the participants' dedication to their profession, there were instances when they encountered challenges that left them dissatisfied. Some participants expressed frustration when faced with a breakdown in communication, particularly when students failed to respond to questions. This lack of engagement not only affected the lecturer's motivation but also suggested a potential uninterest among the students, hindering the learning process:

> For third- or fourth-year students who are already working, they have various other concerns. So, sometimes they are tired, for example, and not paying much attention to the lectures, which also makes me lose enthusiasm. Those are the times when I feel a bit discouraged. (Interview, Lecturer 8)

As mentioned earlier, some lecturers assumed the role of a cheer leader in the classroom; thus, they felt disheartened when they failed to maintain students' interest in the subject matter: "I feel least satisfied when I realise that my words are not enough to maintain their enthusiasm for a certain content" (Interview, Lecturer 12). This sense of discouragement reflects the lecturers' desire for active participation and interaction within the classroom. The lecturers associated this feeling with a potential breakdown in communication or understanding between themselves and the students.

Some lecturers also experienced significant dissatisfaction when teaching complex topics in EMI classes due to language barriers. These barriers made it challenging for students to comprehend the lessons, which in turn frustrated the lecturers despite their efforts to simplify explanations:

> The least satisfaction comes when the subject reaches the section on computational models that students don't understand. Because that part, taught in English, is actually quite challenging for the students. I try to make them understand, but making it more understandable is a struggle. As I mentioned, my English is not perfect, like an 8 or 9 points [IELTS band 8 or 9]. (Interview, Lecturer 6)

When they compared with teaching the same content in L1:

> It [lecturing in Vietnamese] might be a bit more understandable; it can be easier to grasp. If not, teaching topics with numerous models and formulas, that part, if I feel that the class is not understanding, and even after explaining two or three times, the students still seem puzzled, that's the part I find unsatisfactory. (Interview, Lecturer 6)

Switching to lecturing in Vietnamese was seen as a potential solution to enhance students' understanding, offering a more accessible medium for conveying complex ideas. This revealed the low level of English proficiency from both the lecturers and the students, or the shortage of subject-related vocabulary on the students' part. However, the language-related obstacle might also come from students' lack of preparedness, as many of them did not read well enough. In fact, some lecturers grappled with students' reluctance to read, which represented a key source of their dissatisfaction. Despite having employed various methods, including requesting handwritten summaries, one lecturer observed a

lack of effectiveness in her effort. Encouraging students to read in advance becomes a persistent challenge, lowering the quality of the lesson and the lecturer's sense of satisfaction:

> What I am least satisfied with is that students nowadays are too lazy to read. They are lazy to read, and actually, I have tried various ways, e.g., to request them to write summaries, even specifying that they should be handwritten instead of being typed. However, I find that the effectiveness of making them read or enjoy reading is not high. Yeah, I mean, I want them to have read beforehand, to have some specific knowledge, because if they haven't read anything and just listen to me lecture for the first time, I don't think they fully understand my points. So, I still feel that I haven't found a way to make students realise the importance of reading or enjoy reading actively to prepare for the course. That's something I haven't been able to achieve. (Interview, Lecturer 7)

The lecturer emphasised the importance of students' preparing in advance to enhance their comprehension during lectures, illustrating a persistent challenge in promoting proactive reading habits. This also points to the importance of subject-specific vocabulary necessary for students to understand the lessons.

In short, lecturers' dissatisfaction mainly came from limited success in the teaching experience due to low English language proficiency not only of students but also of lecturers. Addressing these challenges is crucial for fostering a positive and engaging learning environment.

7.7.3 Staff retainment

The privilege of teaching in EMI was widely acknowledged among academic participants, driven by the allure of higher pay and enhanced professional opportunities:

> I think this [being able to teach EMI classes] is a bit personal. Later, I found out that it's because the pay is higher, so it's a favour from the superiors to the subordinates, a favour from one department to an individual... meaning, you just do your job, and when assigned a task, you just go and do it. Then I realised that it's a form of favouritism, so even when busy, I dare not refuse. Because besides

> the money, it also expresses a specific and unique form of favouritism, which makes it difficult to decline. (Interview, Lecturer 13)

However, the perception was not uniform across all faculties. For example, in a faculty where staff taught both English language subjects and content subjects, EMI teaching was an obvious task. Academic staff in this faculty did not teach content subjects in Vietnamese. Recruitment requirement in this faculty was less demanding than in other faculties; for example, candidates were only required to complete a master's degree rather than a doctorate before applying. The challenge of staff retention was particularly evident in this faculty, where managers expressed concern in answering the question of whether there were any difficulties in encouraging or retaining staff: "Yes, there are, and some instructors do become demotivated.… With such heavy administrative tasks, instructors complain, and there have been instances of instructors quitting jobs" (Interview, Manager 3). The difficulty was confirmed by another manager: "Regarding management, the real difficulty remains in human resources. It's challenging to find the right people who fit well with the team and then to retain them" (Interview, Manager 4).

In contrast, other faculties see teaching in English as a significant incentive, with higher remuneration rates, particularly for APs, as the following managers made very clear:

> When you teach in English, the remuneration is significantly higher. The pay is three times higher in high-quality classes. As for advanced English programs, it's like seven times, something like that, very distant. So, those who are proficient in English, of course, they don't want to teach in Vietnamese. They just want to teach classes in English, putting in the same effort. Therefore, if we want to talk about engagement, I don't think it's an issue here because compared to the salary difference of high-quality or advanced programs, it's much higher than the standard program. (Interview, Manager 1)

In seeking explanations for the different situations in staffing, it is imperative to consider the culture of the workplace, as well as the motives of lecturers in each faculty. Different faculty cultures may lead to different situations in staff retention. As mentioned above, communication styles differed in different faculties: multi-directional in some, unidirectional in others. Another difference lay in the professional development strategies

of each workplace. In one faculty, as management struggled with staff shortages, they placed a restriction on permitting staff to attend long-term training:

> The plan, first of all, is that I don't allow any instructors to go abroad, whether there's COVID or not, they can't go until those other instructors return – must have a sufficient number of them. Even when the Human Resources department questions it, I'd say, "Then we'll have to accept it, otherwise HR manage that for me." Secondly, once they go, it must be in their relevant field to be approved; otherwise, if it's not in their field, I won't approve it. Once they go, they must commit. The rest involves having a roadmap for sending instructors for training abroad.… It means if 10 colleagues want to go, I can't let all of them go at once. There must be a balance between those going and those returning before I can allow more to go. Also, recruitment is not easy because it's an open market. (Interview, Manager 3)

The justification for restrictions on instructors traveling abroad, based on the necessity of maintaining adequate staffing levels, is understandable. However, the strict adherence to approval criteria, particularly those linked to the instructor's field, and the insistence on post-training commitment, reflect a cautious approach. This prompts consideration of the potential long-term ramifications for the faculty's competitiveness and adaptability within an ever-changing academic environment.

Another reason for the staffing issue may also be linked to lecturers' desired career pathway. As mentioned above, Lecturer 4 joined her faculty to later move to another where English was not taught as a subject. She was firm in following her pathway to become an EMI lecturer. In contrast, Lecturer 7, initially uncertain about pursuing a career in lecturing, had since become dedicated to her job, demonstrating a shift in career commitment over time. This raises questions about the importance of working conditions and organisational culture in shaping and influencing the career trajectories of academic staff.

Moreover, using remuneration as incentives for staff may create financial strain on the organisation, ultimately burdening student families. In addition, an overemphasis on remuneration as one of the main incentives may foster a competitive environment among employees, potentially leading to unhealthy workplace dynamics, which, in turn, could

compromise team collaboration and the sense of shared goals. Furthermore, relying solely on remuneration might result in short-term motivation. Once financial needs are met, employees may seek additional factors, such as career growth opportunities, a positive work culture, or job flexibility, to maintain long-term engagement. If not implemented fairly, a remuneration-based incentive system can lead to perceptions of inequity among employees. Consequently, discrepancies in pay may create dissatisfaction and lower morale.

In conclusion, the complex nature of staff engagement within Tower University reveals dynamics influenced by a variety of factors. The consideration of teaching the English language as potentially less prestigious than teaching other subjects adds another layer to the discussion. Additionally, the divergent career aspirations among lecturers, exemplified by varied commitments and trajectories, highlight the need for a thorough understanding of individual motivations. Moreover, the observed incongruencies in human resources policies across faculties raise critical questions about the consistency and fairness of organisational practices. This lack of uniformity may contribute to potential challenges, affecting the faculty's ability to attract and retain employees effectively. Together with the complexities of staff retention, it becomes imperative for the institution to foster an environment that aligns with the diverse aspirations of their academic staff, ensuring a harmonious balance between organisational goals and individual career trajectories.

7.8 Summary

The chapter points out the multiple resources offered to and challenges faced by educators due to cultural, material and structural conditions at Tower University. Interview data emphasises the crucial role of English proficiency, which was mainly derived from personal practice rather than institutional support, in EMI lecturers' confidence. Next, despite financial gains from EMI programs, which have improved material conditions at Tower University, persistent issues like large class sizes, outdated teaching materials, and limited resources hinder educational quality. Therefore, addressing these disparities is essential for ensuring equitable high-quality education. Furthermore, the restrictive environment created by the performance-driven culture forced the educators to balance adherence to standards with pedagogical innovation, thereby challenging their professional agency. In addition, lecturers with extensive networks demonstrated

relational agency by significantly shaping students' educational experiences and career paths through the integration of their networks into EMI programs. Similarly, PLCs fostered individual and collective ownership of teaching practices, enhancing the academic community's cohesion and motivation towards curriculum advancement. Lastly, the complex conditions of staff engagement at Tower University, influenced by the perceived prestige of teaching in English, diverse career aspirations, and inconsistent human resources policies, uncover the need for a better understanding of faculty motivations. This highlights the importance of aligning institutional practices with the diverse aspirations of academic staff to ensure effective faculty retention and satisfaction. All in all, these conditions lay out the contextual challenges and opportunities that interact with individual capacities to result in lecturers' achievement of agency. How the lecturer participants enacted agency to various extents will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 8 – Discussion

8.0 Introduction

This case study has investigated academics' achievement of agency in EMI programs at a higher education institution (HEI) in Vietnam. Data was collected from national and institutional documents, observations, semi-structured interviews with six management-level staff and 14 content lecturers engaging in three types of EMI programs at the institution – advanced programs (APs), high-quality programs (HQPs), and joint programs (JPs) – and focus-group interviews with 48 students in those programs. Drawing upon the analysis presented in preceding chapters, which concerns the personal capacities of the lecturers as well as contextual factors, this chapter synthesises the findings to address the key research question that guides the study: *How is tertiary academic agency enacted in the teaching and learning environment of English medium instruction programs?*

It further addresses three sub-questions:

1. *What are tertiary academic perceptions of the teaching and learning environment of EMI programs?*
2. *What types of agency are manifested by EMI academics?*
3. *What are the cultural, structural, and material aspects that enhance or limit academics' agency in EMI programs?*

As mentioned in Section 4.6, data analysis was based on pre-determined themes suggested by the research questions and the theoretical framework; the analysis was also open to new themes emerging from the data. Consequently, this chapter is structured according to the main themes: academic perceptions of the EMI teaching and learning environment, academics' agency, and conditions that either facilitate or inhibit their achievement of agency.

8.1 Sub-research question 1: What are tertiary academic perceptions of the teaching and learning environment of EMI programs?

Participants in this project presented a complex array of beliefs and perceptions that shaped their aspirations and experiences. In general, they were positive about EMI, citing

its potential to provide up-to-date subject knowledge, enhance English proficiency, and generate opportunities for both lecturers and students. These perceptions resonated with the policy discourse on EMI education, which emphasises the significant role of EMI in boosting higher education quality (Brown, 2014). However, the participants' diverse perspectives ranging from the perceived role of English as a tool merely for content delivery to the challenges of implementing EMI pedagogy and navigating their own multiple roles, highlight tensions in EMI implementation. These tensions not only question the efficacy of current EMI policies but also uncover the potential disconnect between policy intentions and practical realities.

Six out of seven of the EMI lecturers believed that English is essential but should primarily serve as a means to teach the content subjects. At Tower University, these subjects are mainly business-related such as micro/macroeconomics, statistics, and international business. Five out of seven explicitly resisted taking on the responsibility of teaching the English language despite the national and institutional goals of raising English language proficiency for EMI graduates. This reluctance raises questions about EMI implementation and has far-reaching consequences for both students and the educational system. First, when EMI lecturers do not actively engage in English language teaching, communication difficulties emerge within the classroom. Students who are hindered by language barriers may struggle to comprehend the content. This, in turn, can significantly impede their overall academic performance. Second, EMI lecturers possess a unique opportunity to nurture their students' language skills alongside imparting subject knowledge. Refusing to embrace language instruction results in missed opportunities for students to improve their English proficiency, potentially handicapping their future prospects (Aguilar, 2017).

This observation reveals a prevalent perception that "academics are often considered 'superior' to English Language teachers" (Dearden, 2018, p. 330). At the research site, this belief may come from the institutional discourse, which barely touches language teaching roles for EMI lecturers (Chapter 5). It might also derive from the misconception that mere immersion in an English-speaking environment will naturally enhance students' language proficiency (Macaro et al., 2018). Nevertheless, an observation in this study shows that despite the frequent refusal of an English teaching role, one lecturer did teach the English language (Section 6.2.1). Her focus on vocabulary drill and attempts to draw

students' attention to the subject specific terms confirmed Dearden's assertion that "all teachers are language teachers" (2018, p. 330). It is a reminder that language is present in all aspects of education, regardless of the subject matter, and that the importance of language and effective communication should not be underestimated in any teaching context. Thus, the reluctance of EMI lecturers to address language skills may lead to inequalities in access to quality education, as students with weaker English proficiency might find themselves at a disadvantage, while those with higher proficiency reap disproportionate benefits from EMI courses. Finally, while institutional documents clearly indicate that graduates from EMI programs should aim to achieve an English proficiency of at least C1 equivalent, this goal has not been effectively incorporated into EMI implementation. This disconnect may stem from a lack of training or support for lecturers, or from institutional priorities that focus more on content delivery than on language development. After all, the reluctance among EMI lecturers to assume the role of English teachers (see also Moncada-Comas & Block, 2019) may hinder students' attainment of MOET's target of improving English proficiency among graduates.

Second, the study reveals a common belief that EMI pedagogy is not much different from first language pedagogy. While some participants perceived that VMI and EMI approaches are similar in all aspects but the medium of instruction, others mentioned the difference in logics and the necessity for localised content knowledge in EMI; for instance, giving local rather than foreign examples, or providing subject-specific terms in the local language. The latter group emphasised the importance of contextualising the instructional materials to align with the local culture and language, ensuring that the material is relevant to and accessible for students within their specific context, given that a majority of EMI graduates would enter the local job market. In both cases, this lack of concerns about EMI pedagogy stems not only from what Francomacaro (2011, p. 67) describes as being "unaware of the linguistic implications of their teaching and of their students", but also from the current scholarship that places little importance on EMI pedagogy, as evidenced by the scarcity of relevant research (Macaro et al., 2018). Among the few studies on EMI pedagogy, it has been suggested that content instructors should re-evaluate their methodological approaches (Ball & Lindsay, 2013), and student-centred teaching might be effective (Wilkinson, 2013). After all, EMI education is more than merely converting spoken or visual information into English (Hoare 2003, cited in (Macaro et al., 2018). It requires a more holistic approach that addresses both the content

and the broader learning experience, thereby stressing the importance of thoughtful planning and adaptation to ensure meaningful and effective education.

Research on EMI programs consistently emphasises the need for lecturers to be proficient in both language and content knowledge. To become an efficient EMI educator requires a combination of language proficiency, subject expertise, and pedagogical skills (Shohamy, 2013); otherwise teaching can lead to superficial content understanding if lecturers lack sufficient English proficiency (Vu & Burns, 2014). However, more research is needed to arrive at a conclusive impact of EMI on education quality. In a systematic review of 25 studies about the language and content outcomes of CLIL and EMI, Graham et al. (2018) report mixed effects for content-based instructions (CBI) compared to non-CBI classrooms. In this review, CBI encompasses both CLIL and EMI at all levels of education. Similarly, in a study conducted to discover the best practices that foster key content and language skills for HEIs following bilingual programs, Hernandez-Nanclares and Jimenez-Munoz (2017) find similar grades in both control and experimental groups, but a notable gap in higher bands in favour of students taught in their first language.

Third, lecturers in this project possessed various beliefs about their roles in EMI education. Besides the traditional roles of knowledge providers and learning facilitators, they took on various other roles such as cheerleaders or caregivers. As a result, tension and burnout became prevalent, hindering their ability to achieve agency. While these lecturers adapted to the demands of their institutions, they also voiced concerns about the potential negative impact on the quality of their teaching. Balancing non-academic responsibilities with teaching can lead to burnout and decreased job satisfaction, potentially affecting teachers' ability to effectively facilitate learning (Kulal et al., 2023). These additional duties are also generally perceived as sources of job-related stress (Awang et al., 2021). The extra responsibilities can be seen as constraints on teachers' agency, limiting the time and energy they can devote to their primary role as facilitators of learning. Their focus on task fulfilment, addressing immediate issues rather than considering long-term goals, has the potential to erode their sense of agency. Consequently, EMI lecturers may find themselves increasingly burdened with the demands of the present, which, in turn, can impede their ability to envision and pursue broader improvements in their teaching. This narrowing of agency can create a cycle where educators feel trapped in a constant struggle to keep up with their day-to-day

responsibilities, leaving little room for innovation or long-term educational enhancements.

Finally, most lecturers' perceptions about EMI policy generally resonate with the policy discourse on EMI education, especially on the significant role of EMI in boosting the quality of higher education. Yet, the EMI literature reflects uncertainty regarding the impact of immersion in an English-speaking environment on language proficiency (Macaro et al., 2018), while imported and modified curricula would present some challenges for both academics and students (Tran et al., 2018). Additionally, although lecturers in this study commonly viewed EMI students as high achievers, the reality was that students exhibited a diverse spectrum of abilities, presenting challenges such as language issues and differing attitudes towards learning. This shows that lecturers might have a superficial understanding of policies or that policies are accepted unquestionably. In both cases, lecturers are not "in the flow of unproblematic trajectories", as those "who feel creative and deliberative" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 1008) in such contexts "may not be achieving high levels of agency, as they simply go with the flow" (Priestley et al., 2015, p. 26). In this context, lecturers who could adeptly navigate these challenges and tailor their pedagogical approaches were more likely to attain agency.

On the other hand, the fact that some participants had different understandings of EMI policies, such as those regarding medium of instruction, on student intakes and on pedagogies also shows their disconnection from the policy-making process. This finding also confirms claims in the existing literature that top-down policies might easily lead to differing interpretations and assumptions (Cho, 2012; Dearden & Macaro, 2016). García and Menken (2010) suggest that there is a need to change the focus of language planning and policy. Instead of the traditional top-down approach, where government or official bodies dictate policies to educators, these scholars advocate for a bottom-up approach, in which educators play a proactive role in implementing policies through their own practices, thereby influencing the direction of language planning and policy. Moreover, EMI lecturers' engagement with institutional policies directly affects their agency within the educational context. Lecturers who actively participate in policy discussions and implementation are more likely to advocate for effective EMI practices and contribute to the success of EMI programs. Conversely, those who feel detached from policy decisions may experience limitations in their agency.

Together, these issues highlight a disjunction between policy and practice that may undermine the effectiveness of EMI education in improving educational outcomes and language proficiency. This dissonance risks undermining both the educational outcomes for students and the well-being of lecturers, ultimately challenging the overarching goal of enhancing higher education quality through EMI. To ensure the success and effectiveness of an education program, it is essential to involve teachers in the policy-making process. Teachers' expertise, experience, and insights are invaluable in designing programs that are relevant, effective, and responsive to the needs of students and the educational context. Collaboration between educators and program developers fosters a sense of ownership and commitment, ultimately leading to better outcomes for both teachers and students.

8.2 Sub-research question 2: What types of agency are manifested by EMI academics?

This section examines the different expressions of teacher agency among the participating lecturers: pedagogical, relational, and reflexive agency. Each type of agency reflects different dimensions of educators' capabilities, decision-making, and ambitions within their teaching contexts (Table 8.1). The analysis demonstrated how lecturers' experiences and beliefs shaped their agency, revealing how pedagogical, relational, and reflexive agency collectively influenced the teaching quality and professional advancement at the research site.

8.2.1 Pedagogical agency

Participating lecturers exhibited pedagogical agency at different levels, depending on varying contextual conditions. For some participants, pedagogical agency was more restricted than for others. Despite these participants' possessing rich professional backgrounds and ambitious plans for EMI education, at the time of this research, there was tension between their projection and practical-evaluative decisions, with the latter being influenced by structural conditions. Because they were compelled to work within the institution's performativity culture, their manoeuvrability was constrained by the need to fulfil certain procedural steps, for example, strictly adhering to the subject frameworks, or stepping up the career ladder. As a result, in some cases, a vast majority of the class time was dedicated to one-way lecturing, with a significant portion conducted in L1. This

switch to L1 rather than using English or employing translanguaging was likely due to the students' limited proficiency in English, as evidenced by their reliance on L1 for all interactions with the lecturers. This practice is not reflected in the interview data, which showed that the lecturer participants strongly supported the assumed English-only policy in EMI education and valued interactive teaching, viewing them both as means to align Vietnamese higher education with regional and international standards.

Although the tension between these lecturers' aspirations and their practical decisions is evident, considering it to constitute the difference between policy rhetoric and practice may be an oversimplification. Rather, it is the contextual conditions that influenced the participants to make judgements about their practice (practical-evaluative aspect). In one case, the institution's market-driven approach to student intake, its attainment culture, and students' English proficiency all constrained the lecturers in achieving agency. Similarly, in another case, the one-way communication style in the faculty, together with the common culture of the institution, affected their decision-making. It became apparent that in these instances, pedagogical agency, contingent upon the dynamic engagement with the educational environment (Priestley et al., 2015), was potentially more influenced by structural conditions than by individual capacities.

In contrast, other participants attained strong pedagogical agency despite having similar educational and professional backgrounds. Their dynamic pedagogical approach fostered a heightened level of student engagement, resulting in a rich and interactive learning experience. For example, by recognising the importance of engaging students through relatable examples and contextually relevant contents, lecturers fostered a deeper connection between the subject matter and the students' experience. Believing in the universal applicability of Western knowledge and aspiring for the popularisation of such knowledge to younger students, they incorporated examples relevant to students' future working lives, thus inspiring their motivation and interest in learning. The same technique of contextualising content knowledge is reported in a study that explores how local curriculum adjustments in Australia and Vietnam affect students' ability to autonomously develop into proficient and culturally aware professionals and citizens (Phan et al., 2019). However, the authors found that despite lecturers' efforts to integrate local examples, the endeavour proved inadequate due to the prevalent Western orientation of the majority of textbooks. Consequently, students perceived a disconnect between the international

literature and the local realities of the Vietnamese economy. Therefore, although contextualising and localising content seem to engage students in the lesson, acquisition of thorough content knowledge might not be successful if only this strategy were employed in the EMI classroom.

Similarly, other lecturers constantly alternated teaching methods to encourage students' studying habits and maintain their engagement. Recognising the importance of creating a relaxing learning environment for students in EMI programs, they also took on the role of cheerleaders to motivate and engage students. Some lecturers aligned their teaching approach with personal strengths and preferences, opting for a practically oriented approach to suit students' capabilities; this reflects a sense of curriculum ownership and responsiveness to immediate classroom needs. Their emphasis on diversity in teaching approaches reflects an understanding of the varied learning styles and needs of students. This form of active involvement in EMI teaching, characterised by teachers exerting considerable effort to assist students in learning content through English, is likewise documented in other studies. For instance, Ali and Hamid (2018) examined teachers' accommodation agency, where content lecturers made positive attempts such as code-switching to L1, speaking slowly, using simple words and checking comprehension to ensure that the students learned the content. In a 2013 study, Zacharia found teachers' negotiating agency as the result of a complex interplay of contextual factors, including teachers' and students' limited English proficiency. The commonality among these lecturers was their commitment to ongoing reflection and refinement of their pedagogical methods. By continuously evaluating and adapting their approach, they reframed EMI policies; that is, examining policies, interpreting what they are expected to do, but deciding to implement them in their own ways to ensure relevance and effectiveness in facilitating student learning (Petrovic & Kuntz, 2013).

It should be noted that at the beginning of their EMI career, these participants had a similar understanding of policies and expectations about students (iterative dimension). They assumed that the English-only policy should be strictly observed and that EMI students were of high calibre. They then had difficulties in engaging the students (practical dimension). Some groups of students possessed better English proficiency, as they were from high-quality or advanced programs, whereas others were from a joint program, and thus, as mentioned before, enjoyed more relaxed entry requirements in

terms of both English proficiency and academic ability. Although the lecturers had similar challenges regarding their students' abilities, some had more resources to achieve agency. Their agency not only resulted from their experience (iterative aspect), but also from their belief in educational equity. For example, the deliberate choice to teach a less proficient class (evaluative aspect) reflects the projective dimension of agency, where they proactively addressed equity concerns by tailoring instruction to meet the diverse needs of the students. Considering these findings through the framework proposed by Priestley et al. (2015), it can be argued that some lecturers attained agency by actively assessing and interpreting both cultural and structural contexts, and subsequently operating within these confines. This is similar to "bounded agency", which is achieved when one shows a "steady increase of experienced as well as exploited space over time" (Oolbekkink-Marchand et al., 2017, p. 44). Conversely, some other lecturers interpreted these contextual factors but primarily based their actions on their individual pedagogical beliefs, thus achieving what Vähäsantanen et al. (2009) describe as "extensive agency", with teachers acting according to their professional inclinations and objectives. This finding is also echoed in other studies such as those by Montgomery and De Costa (2024) and Pappa et al. (2017), who conceptualise pedagogical agency as the ability of educators to actively exert influence over various facets of their teaching practice within the classroom context. In these studies, teachers exhibited agency when they made their choice in the selection and use of teaching materials, implementation of instructional strategies, management of classroom dynamics, fulfilment of teaching role responsibilities, and decision-making aimed at fostering student learning, engagement, and academic achievement. At its core, teacher pedagogical agency emphasises educators' autonomy and authority to negotiate and integrate innovative ideas into their teaching, make informed decisions about instructional approaches, and continually develop their professional practice (Eteläpelto et al., 2015). Crucially, it entails educators' perception of control over the choices they make in their teaching endeavours.

8.2.2 Relational agency

Edwards (2005), from an activity theory perspective, defined relational agency as "a capacity to work with others to expand the object that one is working on and trying to transform by recognising and accessing the resources that others bring to bear as they interpret and respond to the object" (p. 172). Based on this definition, this section explores

how EMI lecturer participants in this project exercised relational agency and influenced the quality of education and professional advancement within the research site.

First, networking and fostering relationships were identified as pivotal factors in effecting positive changes in education quality and professional growth at the research site. Participants who brought external experts into their classes exemplified how collaborative efforts enriched teaching practices and professional development opportunities. Moreover, external networks, facilitated exchanges, collaborations, and international connections cultivated through engagements in EMI programs offered diverse professional development opportunities for the participants. For instance, participation in international research projects, interactions with visiting professors, and access to funding for conferences expanded the participants' knowledge base and global perspectives (Dewey & Duff, 2009; Teichler, 2004).

In addition to external networks, the study highlights the importance of internal networking. Proactive engagement with senior colleagues and collaborative initiatives among faculty members facilitated knowledge sharing, mentorship, and collective problem-solving. Consequently, the culture of openness and collaboration promoted by senior lecturers empowered novice educators to navigate the challenges of the EMI environment and enhance their teaching effectiveness.

This study shows that the achievement of relational agency differed among the participants, with those having more experience and being in a community with a multi-directional communication style obviously achieving strong sense of agency. The impact of personal background on individuals' achievement of relational agency is obvious: lecturers staying longer in the profession had more chance to extend their connections, either within the institution or outside. However, when comparing those with similar experience in EMI, it can be observed that novice EMI lecturers in faculties where the management was more open to changes had more motivation to extend their network, whereas their counterparts in more hierarchical faculties had much less. This has an implication for in-service training not only for EMI lecturers, but also for EMI management.

This finding is similar to recent research by Montgomery and De Costa (2024) that examined the importance of networking and collaboration in enhancing educational

practice. Their study found that making the best use of resources can contribute to the holistic development of educators and promote innovation in pedagogical approaches. The current study's finding also aligns with those of an analytical study conducted by Klein (2022) that highlights the transformative potential of cross-disciplinary collaborations in fostering educational innovation, and of a mixed-method study by Pantić et al. (2024) that points to the critical role of professional collaboration, which in turn facilitates relational agency as educators connect with others to access resources and knowledge within their educational environment.

Finally, when relational agency is nurtured within educational institutions, it catalyses transformative changes, such as the emergence of new courses and disciplines at Tower University. The recent integration of emerging fields like computer and data sciences into its traditional business curricula exemplified how relational agency shapes institutional evolution. Educators, empowered by collaborative networks and supportive leadership, spearhead initiatives to adapt curricular offerings to meet evolving societal needs and technological advancements. This finding concurs with other studies such as the research by Fullan (2001), which emphasises that relationships serve as a driving force behind institutional change and innovation in education.

In short, this study suggests that relational agency emerges as a potent catalyst for advancing education quality and fostering professional development. Through networking, supportive leadership, and collaborative endeavours, educators can use collective resources to effect transformative changes within educational institutions.

8.2.3 Reflexive agency

Reflective practice has long been regarded as essential for growth and improvement in education, and self-reflection has been identified as "the most distinctive human characteristic" (Bandura, 1986, p. 21). In this study, participants demonstrated a shift from reflection on their practice to reflexive agency, marking a transition towards more proactive and transformative engagement with their professional roles. This trend is similar to Schön's (1983) distinction between reflection *in action*, involving the use of personal knowledge during decision-making, and reflection *on action*, which occurs after an experience to construct knowledge from practical experiences.

The move towards reflexive agency represents a shift from passive reflective practice to a deeper level of self-awareness and critical engagement. For instance, reflection in action was exemplified when some lecturers adjusted their teaching methods based on classroom dynamics and feedback, or incorporated practical elements like group discussions and hands-on exercises. Embracing reflexive agency, they scrutinised their beliefs, monitored student engagement, and adapted strategies to evolving needs. For instance, one lecturer initially believed in the traditional role of lecturers. However, after reflecting on her students' feedback and monitoring their engagement, she noticed a lack of participation and understanding. In response, she embraced a more interactive approach, incorporating various activities and multiple resources into her lessons. Similarly, as technology became increasingly integrated into education, another lecturer incorporated online learning platforms and interactive multimedia resources to supplement traditional classroom instruction, thus helping students overcome language barriers. Additionally, these lecturers regularly updated their course materials to reflect current events and trends relevant to the students' fields of study. For these lecturers, the change in their beliefs about teacher's role (from traditional role of knowledge provider and caregiver to learning facilitators) underscored their reflexive agency.

Educators exercising reflexive agency prioritised continuous professional development, actively seeking opportunities to enhance teaching effectiveness and language proficiency. They met regularly to discuss their teaching experiences, share successful strategies, and analyse challenges encountered in the classroom. Through collaborative reflection and peer feedback, they collectively identified areas for improvement and experimented with innovative teaching approaches to enhance student learning outcomes. Seamlessly integrating professional growth into their practice, they set an example of life-long learning for their students, thus underscoring the transition from reflective to reflexive practice.

This transition was not uniform among EMI lecturer participants, however. Looking through the lens of the ecological framework for agency, it is obvious that those with powerful motivations for education (projective aspect) that extended beyond immediate instructional goals and encompassed broader visions for the transformative potential of education were driven by a desire to enact meaningful changes in their educational contexts. In essence, long-term aspirations acted as an enabler for the development of

reflexive agency by instilling a sense of purpose and direction in the participants' professional endeavours. These aspirations imbued the lecturers with the resilience and determination to navigate the challenges of their practice, knowing that their efforts were aligned with their overarching educational aspirations. On the other hand, those who limited themselves to short-term goals or who faced pressure to adhere strictly to standards may have found it challenging to deviate from established practices. Additionally, systemic barriers such as limited resources, large class sizes, or administrative demands may have hindered their ability to prioritise reflective practice and innovation in their teaching. In such cases, transitioning to reflexive agency would require not only individual motivation but also structural changes within the educational context to foster a culture of continuous learning and adaptation.

In the same vein, professional discourse played a complementary role in nurturing reflexive agency among the participants. Participating in systematic professional discourse empowered participants to critically reflect on their assumptions and practices, encouraging them to question taken-for-granted beliefs and explore innovative strategies. By engaging in systematic professional discourse, these educators were prompted to re-evaluate their own perspectives and consider new alternatives for action. In this way, professional discourse enabled reflexive inquiry, prompting educators to engage in ongoing self-assessment and evaluation of alternatives (Biesta et al., 2016).

This confirms findings in the literature (Biesta et al., 2015; Leijen et al., 2019; Priestley et al., 2015), according to which the lack of professional discourse restricts teachers' ability to shape the curriculum, as they are unable to participate in critical discussions about educational policy. Nonetheless, while the current study does not identify age-related discrepancies in participants' discourse, it does highlight variations linked primarily to diverse levels of experience, particularly in the context of EMI education. Therefore, it is essential to recognise the importance of tailored professional development programs for educators at different career stages.

Reflexive agency in this study aligns with Tran and Vu's (2018) concept of agency for becoming, as it reveals the transformative dimension inherent in agency. Tran and Vu's study elucidates agency's capacity to reshape the "space of possibles" (Bourdieu, 1993, cited in Tran and Vu, 2018, p. 183) within international education, while the current study reveals a parallel transition to effect meaningful change in their internationalised

educational context among participants, indicating a proactive and transformative approach to their professional roles. Crucially, the findings signify the pivotal role of intentionality and decision-making in shaping agency dynamics.

Table 8.1

The Interplay between Personal Capacities and Ecological Elements

Agency	Affordances		Constraints	
	Individual elements	Ecological elements	Individual elements	Ecological elements
Pedagogical agency	Aspirations Professional experiences Beliefs	Multi-directional communications		Students' English proficiency Performativity Administrative procedures One-way communications
Relational agency	Professional experiences	Networking Relationships Multi-directional communications		One-way communications
Reflexive agency	Professional experiences Aspirations Professional discourse	Professional learning communities		Rules and regulations Limited material resources

8.3 Sub-research question 3: What are the cultural, structural, and material aspects that enhance or limit academics' agency in EMI programs?

Findings from this research show that agency achievement is dependent on both personal capacities and the contextual conditions in which teachers practise. While capacities, formed through the lecturers' backgrounds and beliefs, played an important role in forming agency, environmental factors such as institutional culture also significantly influenced how agency was expressed and enacted. That these factors either facilitated or constrained individual lecturers' ability to exercise their agency in unique ways highlights the complex interplay between individual attributes and the broader institutional environment.

Personal capacities come mainly from iterative and projective dimensions. Iterative aspects – specifically, personal and professional background – can have a great impact on the achievement of agency as individuals form their beliefs (Biesta et al., 2015; Priestley et al., 2015). The study participants with rich experience in education in general, and EMI education in particular, often possessed rich repertoires, and thus, had many alternatives to choose from. Teachers obtain agency when they can select from various options in a given scenario and decide which option best aligns with the broader objectives of their professional practice. Conversely, their agency is hindered when their choices are constrained (Priestley et al., 2015). In this study, their rich background also offered participants the grounds to judge the alternatives, thus, making better practical-evaluative decisions, because the educational backgrounds of individuals, including their schooling journeys and professional training, signify an ongoing adaptation process that can shape their decisions and methods in teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2017). This has implications for in-service teacher training, as the practice of today will become the experience for future teachers.

Similarly, personal capacities were also formed by the lecturers' aspirations, which included their desires about the future of their students, themselves and EMI education. The desires of some appeared to be predominantly instrumental, focused on the fulfilment of institutional requirements. Others explicitly aspired to engender personal growth and professional enhancement together with the overall flourishing of education. The latter, driven by a fervent commitment to their profession, sought to cultivate a strategic mindset and adaptive capabilities that would not only bring benefit to them individually but also elevate the teaching profession.

Differences in aspirations may be underpinned by the prevailing faculty culture and the intricacies of the academic environment. In cases where educators pursued personal growth and broader professional benefits, their assertions often aligned with an environment characterised by supportive and open-minded line managers. These mentors and supervisors fostered an atmosphere conducive to staff mobility, innovation, and continuous improvement. In contrast, in instances where the managerial support for staff mobility and the encouragement of a transformative teaching culture were absent, the teaching profession appeared to be reduced to a series of procedural checkboxes; thus, achievement of agency was more limited. This finding confirms claims in the literature

that supportive leadership has a positive impact on teacher effectiveness, as the latter, including job satisfaction, team working, organisational commitment and student quality (Sirisookslip et al., 2015) often results in positive aspirations for their career, such as seeking professional development opportunities, advancing in their field, or making meaningful contributions to education (Somprach et al., 2017).

Another component that comes into play in teachers' achievement of agency is their professional discourse, the language "teachers utilise to talk about, give meaning to and think about their actions and about the practices they act in" (Priestley et al., 2015, p. 59). It is obvious from the data that the more experienced participants, exhibiting a notable propensity towards professional discourse, had more articulated ways to talk about the future of EMI programs. Their linguistic repertoire was richly imbued with the language of their respective academic fields, reflecting their years of expertise and engagement with the subject matter. Notably, their engagement with policy was marked by a more relaxed stance; i.e., they were more open to interpreting and adapting the policies to fit their unique teaching contexts. This flexibility allowed them to tailor their approaches in ways that better aligned with their students' needs and their own pedagogical beliefs. In contrast, such systematic professional discourse was almost absent from those with less experience in education. Instead, their discourse was more policy-driven, focusing on the accomplishment of day-to-day tasks (Chapter 6). That some participants used more elaborate language than others can be attributed to their experience in EMI programs, which formed the iterative dimension of agency. Apart from their own backgrounds, differences in language may also have come from the specific ecologies in which they practised. The difference in their talk not only allowed them to project different futures but also gave them the chance to evaluate the present in different ways. In other words, those with more specific professional discourse had richer resources with which to act, as it enabled them to critique the ongoing circumstances and provided them with an alternative perspective that empowered them to behave in a manner more aligned with their personal values and beliefs (Priestley et al., 2015).

The data from this study suggests that effective teachers rely on solid professional beliefs formed through thoughtful examination of educational issues and inquiries. They also possess the skill to extrapolate from these reflections to envision diverse professional paths, enabling them to make informed decisions among various options for action.

However, these decisions can only be realised in the navigation of present context, which is filled with structural elements, including performativity culture, policies, and professional networks.

As mentioned in Chapter 7, performativity culture at Tower University put immense pressure on the lecturers to conform to predetermined checkboxes, navigate student surveys, and grapple with the challenges of mark inflation. In this context, the instructors were required to undertake practical judgements pertaining to different choices. This evaluative process involved a careful examination of the inherent advantages and disadvantages associated with various options, contributing to informed decision-making. For example, one participant felt compelled to simplify subject contents to make them suitable for struggling students in joint programs, thus sacrificing opportunities for students to obtain content knowledge. Similarly, another found herself constantly adjusting exam questions and grading criteria to maintain high student satisfaction scores, often compromising academic rigour in the process. Language-related obstacles also resulted in some EMI lecturers simplifying lesson content for the sake of smoother delivery.

This phenomenon has been reported in other studies in which lecturers said that when teaching in English, they watered down curricular content (Galloway et al., 2017; Le, 2016; Nguyen et al., 2017; Vinke, 1995), reconceptualised lectures and materials (Başıbek et al., 2014), or glossed over difficult concepts and issues instead of sufficiently unpacking them to facilitate students' understanding, or to make up for students' language difficulties (Truong et al., 2020). This practice, in the long run, may compromise the quality of content education.

The performativity culture introduced an additional layer of complexity in EMI lecturers' agency. The iterative nature of performativity, coupled with the collective interplay of the audit culture, interventionist regulatory mechanisms, and the market environment, often resulted in limited aspirations. This limitation was more pronounced in instances where lecturers felt pressured to navigate through predetermined steps within the career ladder merely to fulfil administrative requirements, thereby stifling their professional ambitions.

In addition, the adverse material conditions within the study setting, such as inadequate resources and large class sizes, considerably impeded participants' achievement of agency

by constraining their choices. When faced with limited resources, the educators were often forced to adapt their teaching methods to accommodate the available materials, restricting their ability to explore innovative approaches tailored to students' needs. Furthermore, large classes exacerbated this challenge, as educators needed to prioritise managing the logistics of a crowded classroom over individualised instructions, diminishing their capacity to foster meaningful student engagement and personalised learning experiences. Consequently, these constraints limited their agency to enact pedagogical strategies aligned with their professional beliefs and hindered students' opportunities for academic success and holistic development. This finding resonates with other studies in EMI education such as those of Dang et al. (2013), Vu and Burns (2014), and Le (2012), all of which argue that the ultimate obstacle contributing to difficulties in EMI implementation is a scarcity of resources. Baldauf et al. (2012), in their analysis of language policies across various Asian nations, also determine that there is insufficient funding for regular programs, teacher training, and textbooks.

However, networking and participation in professional learning communities, when appropriately managed, can significantly augment individuals' attainment of agency. The advantages of networking among lecturers extend beyond professional collaboration and support; they also positively affect students. Lecturers in this study who sustained their extended networks not only fulfilled their networking aspirations but also nurtured connections with and among students, thereby fostering a culture of networking within their student body. This emphasis on networking, when viewed through an agency perspective, shows that these educators actively shaped their professional environments and relationships to optimise learning outcomes. By prioritising the cultivation of extensive networks, these lecturers exercised relational agency in creating environments conducive to collaboration, mentorship, and academic growth. Consequently, students were not only inspired by their educators' networking endeavours but also empowered to cultivate their own networks, fostering a culture of interconnectedness and support within the academic community. The advantages of networking for teachers' performance have been well reported in studies such as Yıldırım (2014), who claims that to create a positive learning environment, teachers should be trained to create positive relationships with colleagues and students. Moreover, research into networks in relation to teacher agency (Annan & Carpenter, 2015; Chapman & Hadfield, 2010; Shaari, 2020) demonstrates that networks enhance agency by fostering collaboration among multiple stakeholders to

create innovative learning environments. Furthermore, teachers can change their approaches as they navigate potential conflicts within established systems. For instance, teachers can develop "agency in lateral networks within a centralised system despite its hierarchical tendencies" (Shaari, 2020, p. 526).

In the same vein, the collaborative nature of PLCs not only fostered individual ownership of teaching practices but also cultivated a collective sense of purpose, thereby establishing a framework for educators to align their efforts towards common goals and enhancing agency in collectively steering the educational mission. This sense of purpose and shared responsibility solidified bonds within the academic community, nurturing a supportive environment where educators were motivated to actively contribute to curriculum advancement. These findings resonate with previous studies by Tam (2015), Zepeda (2012), and Pantić (2017), all of which highlight the significant role of PLCs in facilitating teacher change across various aspects such as curriculum, teaching methods, teacher roles, and pedagogical approaches. Additionally, Schaap and de Bruijn's (2018) mix-methods longitudinal case study of four PLCs highlights the importance of reflective dialogues and ownership in fostering the flourishing of PLCs, further emphasising the transformative potential of collaborative professional learning environments.

8.4 The interplay between personal capacities and cultural, structural, and material contexts

This study has explored the lived experience of 14 lecturers in different EMI programs at a VHEI to see how they engaged with their professional environment to achieve agency. Agency, as defined by Biesta and Tedder (2007), is about the quality of actors' engagement with the ecology. Following this definition, agency in this study was viewed from three aspects: iterative – the "selective reactivation" of experience (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 971); projective – lecturers' aspirations to bring about a different future for themselves and for their students; and practical-evaluative – the judgement of different alternatives for decision-making in their practice, with considerations of the affordances and constraints of the present. In this study, teacher agency, categorised into pedagogical, relational, and reflexive, appeared not as fixed traits but as a dynamic achievement that varied across different contexts and over time. This study consolidates current literature that lecturers' achievement of agency depends not only on their capacities to navigate and

negotiate the contexts but also on the cultural, structural, and material conditions of the educational milieu. The study also contributes to knowledge by confirming that different types of lecturers' agency can be enhanced by strengthening varied factors at distinct times during their professional lives.

While lecturers' individual capacities had great influence on their achievement of agency, these capacities tended to have more impact on certain types of agency than on others. Specifically, lecturers' own EMI education and their EMI teaching familiarity, their beliefs about students and about their roles, professional discourse, and long-term aspirations would more likely result in the attainment of pedagogical and reflexive agency than relational agency. As mentioned in Chapter 6, personal and professional backgrounds shaped lecturers' beliefs, which, together with their perceptions about EMI, formed aspirations. All these elements are, to varying extents, influenced by policy discourse. For those who have more experience, the discourse influence might be less pronounced, as they have a richer repertoire to lean upon. These individual capacities allow lecturers to reflect upon and make judgements in their practice (practical-evaluative dimension of agency), especially when it comes to the pedagogical choice in the classroom.

The achievement of pedagogical and reflexive agency, however, is also influenced by ecological factors such as institutional culture, rules, and resources. Perhaps the most prominent structural impact on the study participants came from the performativity culture of the institution, where performance was strongly influenced by the target-driven culture, interventionist regulations, and market-driven policies (Section 7.4). These factors lessened lecturers' choice in their practice. For instance, to gain satisfying subject evaluations from students, lecturers simplified content to accommodate students' low English proficiency. Likewise, teachers made exams easier to improve students' marks, resulting in mark inflation. In the same vein, national and institutional mandates also had strong impacts on lecturers' pedagogy. For example, rigid subject frameworks forced some lecturers, especially those with limited experience, to resort to one-way lecturing to cover the strictly prescribed lessons. Similarly, flexible intake policies resulting in cohorts of students with inadequate English proficiency forced the lecturers to deliver large percentages of the lessons in the first language. In the long run, this practice might compromise the quality of education, thus, resulting in a failure to meet the broader objectives of EMI education.

In addition to its impact on students and staff, the performance-driven culture might gradually erode the power held by individuals in managerial or leadership roles, transforming them into mere local evaluators of performance systems instead of being seen as reliable and esteemed colleagues (Macfarlane, 2016). Performativity, fostering "opacity rather than transparency as individuals and organisations take ever great care in the construction and maintenance of fabrications" (Ball, 2003, p. 215), would consequently inhibit managers as well as teachers in their achievement of professional agency.

In general, lecturers' experiences in EMI provided them with the grounds on which to act, while beliefs in and aspirations about education allowed them to flexibly navigate the school's culture of performativity and procedural requirements. However, these personal capacities would not be enough to sustain pedagogical agency without a horizontal and multidirectional communication style. In a faculty where leaders were more open and receptive to staff's ideas, lecturers were more motivated to voice their opinions, and teaching innovations were thus more likely to happen. Conversely, in a hierarchical culture in which information was unidirectional, lecturers were restricted to following the rules without questioning them. The vertical and one-way communication culture also constrained relational agency, as lecturers were provided with limited choice for collegial collaboration and support. Similar results have been reported in the literature. For example, Fullan (2001) argues that when educators are empowered to collaborate and harness collective expertise, they become agents of change capable of driving systemic reforms and vice versa. Similarly, Rodríguez (2008) found that when supported by visionary leadership and a collaborative culture, agency can catalyse enduring changes in educational practices and curricular offerings. This finding highlights the importance of fostering a conducive environment for collaborative decision-making and empowering educators to enact meaningful reforms.

While personal capacities seemed to affect pedagogical and reflexive agency more, cultural and structural factors tended to have more impact on relational agency. As mentioned in Section 8.2.2, the achievement of relational agency was contingent upon supportive leadership that fostered two-way communication. Effective leadership cultivated an environment where educators felt empowered to voice their ideas and concerns, thereby facilitating collective decision-making processes. Conversely, a

hierarchical culture characterised by one-way information flow impeded the realisation of agency, as immediate needs remained unaddressed. Thus, it is arguable that relational agency is not the "capacity to recognise and use the support of others in order to transform the object" (Edwards & D'arcy, 2004, p. 149), but the interaction of such capacity with environmental factors. The nature of relational agency, therefore, makes it more dependent on external factors such as faculty culture and leadership.

This research finding resonates with the literature. For example, the research by Leithwood et al. (2008, 2019) points to the critical role of leadership in promoting relational agency within educational institutions. Their findings emphasise that inclusive leadership practices, characterised by open communication and shared decision-making, foster a culture of collaboration and empowerment among educators. Similarly, Heck and Hallinger (2014, p. 673) found that the pivotal role of transformational leadership lay in "shaping the instructional environment and coordinating the instructional practices of teachers", overcoming institutional barriers, and fostering a culture of collaboration. These studies signify the importance of visionary leadership in dismantling hierarchical structures and empowering educators to enact meaningful changes.

The role of leadership in fostering teacher agency, however, may have varying outcomes. A recent study on the connection between leadership, agency, power, and collaboration in a primary educational setting by Humphreys and Rigg (2020) suggests that such connection positioned some teachers less well to participate and exercise influence than others. This study, drawing upon Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus and field, indicates "how within a distributed model of leadership individuals can be disconnected from the collective but enabled to feel good about this" (Humphreys & Rigg, 2020, p. 712). In other words, while leadership can ostensibly promote teacher agency, it can also inadvertently reinforce existing power imbalances. Consequently, some teachers may be marginalised or limited in their ability to contribute meaningfully to education.

8.5 Summary

In short, this chapter has discussed findings obtained in my doctoral journey to seek answers to the research question: *How is tertiary academic agency enacted in the teaching and learning environment of English medium instruction programs*? Drawing on the ecological framework of teacher agency (Priestley et al., 2015), this study argues that the

achievement of teacher agency is a dynamic process influenced by the interplay between personal capacities and cultural, structural, and material contexts. Personal attributes obtained from life and professional experience interact with external factors, creating a complex ecology that affects different types of agency in distinct ways. While pedagogical and reflexive agency are more influenced by personal capacities, relational agency tends to depend more on cultural and structural conditions. Therefore, an understanding of these interactions is crucial for designing educational policies and practice, especially in-service training for novice teachers and management staff. These measures, if implemented at the right time and to the appropriate group, can ultimately contribute to improved educational outcomes.

Chapter 9 – Conclusion

9.0 Introduction

Drawing upon the analysis presented in preceding chapters, this chapter summarises key findings of the study, elucidates both theoretical and practical implications, delineates my scholarly contributions, identifies limitations, and proposes avenues for future research. The chapter ends with a concluding remark.

9.1 Summary of key findings

This study investigates the enactment of teacher agency among EMI academics, highlighting how personal capacities, institutional contexts, and broader policy environments interact to shape their experiences. A brief answer to the overarching research question is: Academics exercised agency within the EMI teaching and learning environment through a complex interplay of pedagogical, relational, and reflexive actions, shaped by their personal capacities and the cultural, structural, and material contexts of their institutions, which may enable or restrict them in navigating, negotiating, and transforming their professional practices amidst complex and changing conditions.

While participants generally viewed EMI positively, citing its benefits in enhancing subject knowledge and English proficiency, they also identified significant challenges in its implementation. The disconnect between policy ideals and practical realities often led to tensions, with lecturers feeling constrained by the emphasis on English as a mere tool for content delivery. This dissonance between policy and practice not only undermined educational outcomes but also affected lecturers' well-being as they questioned the overall efficacy of EMI in achieving its intended goals.

Three key types of agency – pedagogical, relational, and reflexive – were identified in the study, each reflecting different dimensions of lecturers' professional engagement. Pedagogical agency, which involves autonomy and initiatives in teaching methods, varied widely among participants, depending largely on personal beliefs, aspirations, and professional backgrounds. Relational agency, characterised by collaboration and networking, proved to be a critical factor in enhancing educational quality and fostering professional development. This type of agency enabled lecturers to draw on collective resources, gain the benefits of supportive leadership, and engage in transformative practices. Reflexive agency represented a shift from mere reflection to a more proactive

and transformative approach, allowing lecturers to critically assess and adapt their professional roles.

The study further explored the influence of cultural, structural, and material factors on the manifestation of agency. Lecturers' ability to exercise agency was arguably shaped not only by their personal attributes but also by the broader institutional environment. Institutional culture, policies, administrative structures, and access to resources significantly affected how lecturers navigated their professional roles. While cultural norms and values could either facilitate or restrict agency, structural aspects such as policy support and material conditions determined the practical possibilities for educators to be agentic.

The findings emphasise that teacher agency in EMI is not static but evolves through the interaction of personal and contextual elements. Pedagogical and reflexive agencies are more closely tied to individual capacities, such as professional experience and personal beliefs, while relational agency depends heavily on external factors, including institutional culture and collaborative opportunities. Understanding these interactions is vital for developing policies that support effective EMI practices. Engaging teachers in policy-making processes can lead to more relevant, responsive, and effective programs that address the needs of both educators and students.

In conclusion, this study not only highlights the critical role of teacher agency in shaping the teaching and learning environment of EMI programs but also reveals how cultural, structural and material conditions could affect agency achievement. By recognising the complex and evolving nature of agency, educational institutions can better support lecturers in navigating the challenges of EMI, ultimately enhancing the quality of education and contributing to improved student outcomes.

9.2 Implications

The results of this study have several implications for the implementation of EMI policy within Vietnamese higher education, at the macro level of policy-making, the meso level of institutions, and the micro level of classrooms.

At the macro level, it is suggested that policies and decisions at the national level have a more rigorous design and evaluation process to ensure feasibility and practicality. This

imperative stems from the understanding that EMI policies play a profound role in "the internationalisation of the institution, improve the quality of teaching and learning as well as boosting institutional ranking" (Tran & Nguyen, 2018, p. 103). Moreover, EMI-related studies advocate EMI as a strategic tool for internationalisation, especially in the area of overseas student and staff mobility (Ali, 2013; Costa & Coleman, 2013; Wächter & Maiworm, 2008). Specifically, it is necessary to scrutinise these policies to ensure their feasibility and practicality in the context of Vietnam's diverse academic institutions. Otherwise, EMI policy would only remain "unsupported aspirational rhetoric" (Tri & Moskovsky, 2019, p. 1341). By subjecting EMI policies to rigorous evaluation, policy-makers strive to address the unique challenges and requirements of English language instruction within higher education, thereby fostering an environment conducive to effective language learning and academic achievement.

At the meso or institutional level, it is important for HEIs to articulate clear goals and objectives for their EMI programs and effectively communicate them to both lecturers and students (Pham & Doan, 2020). This communication is essential to ensure that all stakeholders understand the underlying purpose of EMI implementation, which should primarily focus on academic and educational development rather than financial gain. Although the government encouraged institutions to achieve financial autonomy, they were confronted with the dual challenge of adapting to policy shifts while also advancing their own developmental goals, such as internationalisation, amidst inadequate government backing. These observations reveal the issue within Vietnamese higher education, whereby "the government has yet to devise an effective synergy with the semi-autonomous institutions in which both can secure their objectives" (Marginson et al., 2011, p. 447). By emphasising academic and educational development as the central motivating factor, institutions can align their EMI programs with the overarching mission of fostering student learning and academic excellence. Moreover, clear communication of EMI policies helps to establish consistent interpretations across the institution, particularly regarding critical areas such as student intake policies and language use in the classroom. As for student intake, the university should implement a more holistic approach to admissions, one that considers a broader range of criteria beyond academic scores, to create a level playing field for students with diverse talents and backgrounds. Additionally, providing financial support through scholarships and aid programs can help bridge the gap and ensure that deserving students, regardless of their financial

circumstances, have the opportunity to pursue higher education and excel in their chosen fields. Similarly, more structured pedagogical support and training should be provided to academics to balance their focus on content delivery with attention to students' English language proficiency development. This consistency promotes fairness, transparency, and clarity, ultimately contributing to the effective implementation and success of EMI programs within HEIs.

At the micro-level, within the classroom setting, several recommendations can significantly enhance the effectiveness of EMI programs. These recommendations focus on fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment, providing educators with the necessary pedagogical tools, and equipping students with the linguistic skills essential for academic success.

First, enhancing networking and PLCs among educators can greatly enrich the implementation of EMI programs. Educators can benefit immensely from collaboration and sharing of best practices within a supportive professional network. By fostering collaboration among colleagues, educators can exchange ideas, resources, and strategies for effective EMI instruction. This collaborative approach allows them to draw upon each other's expertise, address common challenges, and innovate teaching practices to better meet the needs of diverse learners. For example, educators can establish regular meetings or online forums where they can discuss EMI pedagogy, share lesson plans, and provide peer feedback. Class observations should also be encouraged, not only for novices to observe senior lecturers' classes but also vice versa. Additionally, participation in professional development workshops or conferences focused on EMI instruction can further enhance educators' skills and knowledge in this area.

It should be noted that developing professional skills for those implementing EMI can be facilitated by creating communities of practice, as suggested by some scholars such as Dunn and Wallace (2008) and Warhurst (2008). Dunn and Wallace (2008) propose that these communities naturally arise when individuals work together on shared tasks or strategies. However, at Tower University, this approach was not well established. Therefore, it is recommended that the university explicitly establish professional communities of practice, as collaborative learning can greatly benefit educators.

Second, providing targeted training on EMI pedagogy rather than solely focusing on English language proficiency is essential for educators involved in EMI programs. While English proficiency is undoubtedly important, effective EMI instruction requires a deeper understanding of pedagogical strategies tailored to the specific needs of EMI learners. Therefore, training programs should emphasise pedagogical approaches that facilitate language acquisition and academic learning simultaneously. One such strategy is translanguaging, which encourages students to draw upon their native-language resources to aid comprehension and expression in English. Educators can learn to use translanguaging techniques to scaffold instruction, clarify concepts, and foster a more inclusive classroom environment where all students feel valued and supported in their language development. With little guidance and training in EMI teaching, it is not surprising that a large number of EMI lecturers may not be aware of the recent turn to translanguaging, which emphasises students taking advantage of all their available linguistic repertoire in learning as an EMI pedagogical approach (García & Li, 2014).

Furthermore, offering English enhancement courses for students can play a pivotal role in preparing them for success in EMI programs. These courses should go beyond traditional language instruction and academic skill, and focus on providing students with subject-specific vocabulary essential for their academic disciplines (Chang et al., 2017; Curle et al., 2020; Le, 2016). Through targeted instruction and practice, students can develop the language proficiency and confidence needed to thrive in EMI classrooms and excel academically.

9.3 Significance of the study

This study has investigated how academics' agency is manifested in EMI programs at a tertiary institution in Vietnam, explored the factors that empower or constrain such agency, and examined its contributions to the teaching and learning environment. The thesis makes significant contributions on both the theoretical and practical levels to the understanding and enhancement of academic agency in EMI contexts within non-English-speaking higher education institutions.

At a theoretical level, the study employs the ecological framework to analyse academic agency in EMI environments, which has rarely been used in literature. This framework delineates teachers' achievement of agency into various components, including personal

capacities and environmental influences, and highlights the dynamic interplay between them. By adopting this approach, the research moves beyond simplistic binaries, recognising the sophisticated interactions between individual capacity and structural factors within the EMI context. This socio-constructive perspective aligns with previous scholarship and provides support for the conceptual framework proposed by Priestley et al. (2015). The contextual layers identified by Priestley and colleagues were found to similarly influence the implementation of EMI in a non-Western university, with institutional context emerging as particularly influential. Hence, this study not only extends the theoretical understanding of academic agency but also underscores the relevance and applicability of the existing conceptual framework in diverse educational settings.

On a practical level, the research offers valuable insights into the specific challenges and opportunities encountered within EMI programs in non-English-speaking HEIs, particularly in the Vietnamese context. This understanding is crucial for informing in-service teacher training, professional development initiatives, and the design and delivery of EMI courses. Furthermore, given the dearth of similar research on EMI programs in VHE, the findings contribute to a greater insight into the current conditions of EMI education in Vietnamese universities and other similar contexts, filling a notable gap in the literature. By empowering Vietnamese academics in their professional practice in a foreign language, the study contributes to the broader goal of enhancing educational quality and fostering internationalisation efforts within the VHE system.

Lastly, the thesis provides actionable insights for educational policy-makers, institutional leaders, and faculty members, enabling them to develop strategies that better support academic agency and, consequently, enhance teaching and learning outcomes. Recognising the influential role of local actors in shaping the educational settings, the study underscores the importance of tailored interventions and policies aimed at fostering a conducive environment for EMI education. By engaging with these recommendations, policy-makers and institutional leaders can contribute to the cultivation of a robust EMI ecosystem that facilitates the academic success of both educators and learners.

Overall, the thesis offers a comprehensive exploration of academic agency in EMI contexts, bridging theoretical insights with practical implications to advance scholarship and inform educational practice.

9.4 Limitations

Although the research has made significant contributions to the understanding of EMI academics' lived experience within EMI university settings, it is constrained by certain limitations.

First, the study has a limited scope. It focuses solely on a public university, excluding other types of HEIs, which may have distinct features. Consequently, the findings may not be generalisable beyond the public-university sector, limiting their applicability to a broader context. Moreover, the research exclusively examines EMI, thereby restricting the generalisability of the findings to other educational practices beyond the scope of EMI teaching and learning.

Second, the study has several methodological limitations. A primary limitation of this study is its case-study design, which concentrated on a single institution. While this approach facilitated an in-depth exploration of academic agency within the studied context, it inherently constrains the generalisability of the findings to diverse educational settings. However, this decision was deliberate, and was justified by the depth it allowed in investigating the case through multiple data sources, i.e. document analysis, in-depth interviews, observations, and focus groups. Despite this, the study acknowledges the potential limitations associated with generalising findings from a single case.

Third, observational data was gathered in addition to interviews and focus groups, providing only a brief glimpse into classroom interactions. Each academic participant's teaching was observed on a single occasion, limiting the depth of analysis regarding teaching performance and student engagement. Additionally, the data generation relied exclusively on field notes and audio recordings, which may not have fully captured the subtle elements of classroom dynamics. A more advanced observational approach, incorporating repeated observations and specific protocols, would likely have enabled a richer and more detailed understanding of these interactions.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic imposed restrictions on data collection, necessitating the use of online methods for some interviews and class observations. This inconsistency in data collection may introduce variations in data quality and participant experiences, potentially influencing the findings. Additionally, the shift to online data collection may

have influenced participant responses and classroom dynamics differently compared to face-to-face interactions, thus warranting caution in interpreting the results.

9.5 Suggestions for future research

In terms of scope, future research may investigate multiple cases, including HEIs of different natures, such as public and non-public HEIs. Investigations may also extend to comparing the experience of EMI and VMI academics within the same HEI to find out whether and to what extent they differ in achieving their agency. Expanding the scope in this way could offer a broader range of perspectives and practical experiences in EMI education. This expansion of scope promises to offer a more comprehensive understanding of EMI education by incorporating varied perspectives and practical experiences.

Next, while the in-depth interviews and focus groups conducted in this study provided valuable insights, the scope and time constraints of a PhD project limited the opportunity for multiple interview rounds. Given the retrospective nature of some interview questions, future longitudinal research could consider conducting multiple rounds of interviews, for example, before and after observations. This longitudinal approach may facilitate richer reflections from participants, offering a more thorough understanding of contextual dynamics and their implications for teaching and learning.

Moreover, a prevalent topic within EMI literature is whether EMI education contributes to improving students' English language proficiency within HE contexts. Consequently, future research should prioritise further exploration into the correlation between EMI implementation and students' language proficiency levels. Such investigations are crucial for comprehensively assessing the impact of EMI on language development and academic outcomes.

Finally, considering the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods, future studies may benefit from employing mixed-methods approaches. While qualitative methods offer depth in exploring participants' perspectives, integrating quantitative data could enhance the generalisability of research findings. By combining these approaches, researchers can gain a more holistic understanding of the complex dynamics inherent in EMI education and its effects on various stakeholders within HEIs.

9.6 Closing remarks

This research has explored the experience of lecturers in EMI programs at a higher education institution in Vietnam to gain insights into how they navigated the emerging environment to achieve agency. While their individual capacities proved to have more of an effect on the achievement of certain types of agency, contextual and institutional conditions played a crucial role in enabling the realisation of others. Therefore, to enhance academics' agency in this environment, it is imperative that higher education institutions provide supportive policies, resources, and professional development opportunities that meet the unique demands of EMI, because empowering educators, the driving force behind the implementation of new educational initiatives, is key to fostering a sustainable and effective EMI framework that benefits both teachers and students.

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Appendix 1 – Interview protocol – Lecturers

1. How did you become an academic in this program as you are now?
2. Before teaching in EMI program, what did you expect teaching EMI would be like? In what way has teaching in EMI met or fallen short of your expectations?
3. What do you think are the objectives of EMI programs?
4. What is the role of lecturers in EMI programs?
5. From your perspective, could you describe your ideal EMI class?
6. How might you create your ideal class in reality?
7. What are the challenges teaching in EMI programs? (*Have you overcome them? If yes, in what way? What kind of support from the institution/faculty did you receive in overcoming those challenges?)*
8. What are the opportunities? What have you done to realize those opportunities?
9. Given that you were a Vietnamese-medium-instruction academic before joining EMI programs, how do you think EMI has changed the way you teach?
10. Has your experience in EMI programs changed your sense of where you belong in the world? In what way?
11. What is the single moment/activity in … class that you felt most/least satisfactory? Why?
12. Why did you use … in your lesson? What did you intend to achieve? Do you think you achieved it?
13. What is your plan in terms of your profession?

Appendix 2 – Interview protocol – Faculty management

1. How long has your faculty been offering EMI programs?
2. What factors influenced the decision to adopt EMI programs in your faculty?
3. What are the motivations for EMI programs?
4. What are the objectives for EMI programs?
5. What policies have been regulated for professional development of academics in EMI programs?
6. What kind of support has your faculty provided to academics teaching in EMI programs?
7. What are the requirements for academics before teaching in EMI programs?
8. What are challenges and opportunities in EMI programs in your faculty?
9. How has EMI influenced the teaching and learning environment in your faculty?
10. What are the governance arrangements to promote staff incentives for and engagement in these programs?
11. To what extent do you think EMI programs have attained their objectives?

Appendix 3 – Focus-group discussion

1. How did you know about this EMI program?
2. What kind of support do you receive from the faculty or from the lecturer regarding your learning in EMI programs?
3. Which part of the … lesson do you like most/least? Can you give reasons for your answer?
4. What is the level of satisfaction that you think you have in … class? Why do you have such level of satisfaction?
5. What is the level of comprehension that you think you have in the … class? Why do you have such level of comprehension?
6. What was teacher A's way of teaching that makes you learn very well/less well. Why is this way very good? less good?
7. What do you think about teacher A's use of …? Why do you think it is good? Less good?
8. What do you think about your learning outcomes in the EMI program so far?
9. If there is a problem you think needs to be addressed, what would that be?
10. Can you discuss other issues related to the curriculum, materials, teaching methods, testing and assessment?

Appendix 4 – Class observation protocol

Date: _____
Starting time: _____ Finishing time:_____
Academic staff (code): _____
EMI program: _____ Year level: _____
Course: _____

Guiding questions

1. How does the lecturer perform in the following situations? Comment about the level of confidence, intelligibility, choice of language and nuances in the lecturer's speech.

2. Do the students seem to follow and understand the lecturer? If they do, what are indicators? If they do not, what are indicators?

Class-observation notes

	How does the lecturer perform in the following situations?	Do the students seem to follow and understand the lecturer?
1. Introducing lecture contents		
2. Presenting lecture contents		
3. Giving explanations and examples		
4. Asking questions		
5. Answering students' questions		
6. Organising group work		
7. Giving feedback		
8. General classroom-management communication		

Appendix 5 – Summary of major themes and sub-themes

Major themes	Sub-themes
Lecturers' capacities	1. Personal history 2. Professional backgrounds 3. Beliefs 4. Values 5. Perceptions
Lecturers' aspirations	1. Long-term 2. Short-term
Lecturers' discourse	1. Broad discourse 2. Narrow discourse
EMI programs	1. Objectives 2. Policies regarding staff 3. Policies regarding students 4. Curriculum 5. Accreditation 6. Pedagogy
Cultural and structural contexts	1. Logics 2. Language proficiency 3. Performance-driven 4. Networking 5. Professional learning communities 6. Staff engagement
Material contexts	1. Resources 2. Class sizes 3. VMI versus EMI
Lecturers' agency	1. Pedagogical 2. Relational 3. Reflexive

Appendix 6 – List of participants and data collection schedule

Interviews

Codes	Gender	Qualifications	Faculty	Experience in EMI (years)	Data collection Date	Interview Length (min.)
Lecturer 1	F	PhD	Institute of Economics and International Business	10	5/11/2021	40’
Lecturer 2	M	PhD	Institute of Economics and International Business	12	24/11/2021	90’
Lecturer 3	F	PhD	Institute of Economics and International Business	1	21/12/2021	45’
Lecturer 4	F	Master	Business English	<5	25/02/2022	70’
Lecturer 5	F		Business English	<5	15/03/2022	80’
Lecturer 6	M	PhD	International Economics	5-10	30/07/2022	60’
Lecturer 7	F	PhD	International Economics	>5	01/08/2022	60’
Lecturer 8	F	PhD	International Economics	>10	02/08/2022	35’
Lecturer 9	F	Master	Business Administration	5-10	04/08/2022	35’
Lecturer 10	F	PhD	International Economics	<5	05/08/2022	50’
Lecturer 11	F	PhD	International Economics	>10	06/08/2022	40’
Lecturer 12	F	Master	Business Administration	>10	11/08/2022	50’
Lecturer 13	F	PhD	Finance and Banking	>10	20/08/2022	60’
Lecturer 14	F	Master	Finance and Banking	2	24/08/2022	40’
Manager 1	F	PhD	Institute of Economics and International Business	>10	06/10/2021	72’
Manager 2	F	PhD	Institute of Economics and International Business	11	22/10/2021	60’
Manager 3	F	PhD	Business English	> 10	28/12/2021	36’
Manager 4	F	Master	Business English	>10	26/02/2022	86’
Manager 5	M	PhD	Finance and Banking	>10	15/08/2022	35’
Manager 6	F	PhD	Finance and Banking	5-10	24/08/2022	Email

Focus groups

Group codes	Gender	Majors	Content subject	Year level	Data collection Date	Length
FG1	4F + 1M	Institute of Economics and In’t Business	Skills development	First year	18/01/2022	100’
FG2	2F + 4M	Int’l Biz Institute of Economics and In’t Business	Logistics high quality program	Third year	14/11/2021	90’
FG3	2F + 1M	2 Finance and Banking 1 Institute of Economics and In’t Business	Intermediate Macroeconomics	Third year	21/08/2022	60’
FG4	6F	Business English	International business	Third year	20/03/2022	115’

FG6	3F +1M	In't Business	Intermediate Macroeconomics	Second year	20/08/2022	70'
FG7	3F+1M	Int'l Business	Micro 2	Third year	13/08/2022	65'
FG9	4M	Business Administration	Statistics	Second year	16/08/2022	90'
FG10	3F + 1M	Finance and banking	Micro 2	Second year	14/08/2022	60'
FG11	2F + 2M	Finance and banking	Micro 2		21/08/2022	60'
FG12	3F 1M	International Business Administration	Principles of Statistics	Second year	27/08/2022	70'
FG13	3F + 1M	International Business Administration	Principles of Statistics		31/08/2022	70'

Observations

Obs 1	50 sts		Skills development		13/01/2022	60'
Obs 2	60 sts		Logistics high quality program		08/11/2021	60'
Obs 3	60 sts		Intermediate Macroeconomics		21/08/2022	60'
Obs 4	50 sts		International business		20/03/2022	60'
Obs 6	80 sts		Intermediate Macroeconomics		11/08/2022	120'
Obs 7	90 sts		Micro 2		12/08/2022	120'
Obs 9	60 sts		Statistics		16/08/2022	120'
Obs 10	90 sts		Micro 2		12/08/2022	120'
Obs 11	80 sts		Micro 2		21/08/2022	60'
Obs 12	60 sts		Principles of Statistics		16/08/2022	120'
Obs 13	80 sts		Principles of Statistics		17/08/2022	90'