EXPLORING A PRIVATE ISLAMIC PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON ENGLISH AS MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION (EMI): A PHENOMENOLOGICAL CASE STUDY

Roni Afero Fanani[1], Nukmatus Syahria[2], Nunung Nurjati[3]
Universitas PGRI Adi Buana Surabaya, Indonesia[123]
Email: roni.afero@gmail.com[1], syahria@unipasby.ac.id[2], nunung.nurjati@unipasby.ac.id[3]

Info article	Abstract
	This phenomenological case study explores teachers' perspectives on implementing English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) with the Cambridge curriculum in a rural Islamic primary school in Mojokerto, Indonesia. Against the backdrop of global EMI expansion and Indonesia's push for bilingual education, the study addresses gaps in EMI research, which predominantly focuses on higher education. Through interviews and classroom observations, four key challenges emerged: teacher language proficiency, students' low English comprehension, inadequate professional development, and teaching anxiety, rooted in rural and non-English educational backgrounds. Conversely, benefits included global competence, improved English skills, elevated school credibility, and teacher enthusiasm. Findings underscore the transformative potential of EMI in marginalized settings, alongside the need for context-specific teacher training and curriculum integration. The study advocates for longitudinal research on student outcomes and technology-enhanced solutions to address rural disparities, contributing to debates on equitable EMI implementation in religious and low-resource contexts. **Keywords:** Teacher Perspective, Islamic Elementary School, Language of Instruction (EMI)

INTRODUCTION

English Medium Instruction (EMI) is a rapidly expanding phenomenon in schools throughout the era of globalization (Dearden, 2014). In addition, she defines EMI as the practice of utilizing the English language to instruct academic topics in a nation or region when the primary language (L1) spoken by most of the population is not English. EMI is particularly pertinent in nations that underwent a colonial period during which the British established the education system (Milligan, 2022). EMI refers to the practice of using English as both the subject matter and the medium of instruction for several disciplines in school. The growing use of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) is driven by the belief that teaching key subjects in English will enhance students' English language skills and thus improve their economic prospects (Haidar, 2019).

Most EMI research primarily examines higher levels of education, such as research conducted by Walkinshaw et al. (2017) and Macaro (2020), who specifically address the application of EMI in Asia-Pacific Higher Education. Another survey conducted by Paulsrud & Toth (2019) explored the difficulties associated with using EMI and examined new EMI undergraduate programs in Vietnam. In globalization, this research focuses on higher education because EMI aims to equip its students with the skills necessary for careers worldwide (Andjelkov, 2022; De Costa et al., 2022; Molino et al., 2022). English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) is closely related to higher education institutions, including high schools and universities. This is mainly due to the need for an international language in conducting academic research and the English language proficiency requirement for accessing information on the Internet, understanding specialized literature, and communicating with foreign colleagues at conferences and forums.

Panggabean (2016) emphasized that English language proficiency, especially in writing scientific papers, cannot be obtained quickly; it requires a long time to use English and practice trial and error. Therefore, developing English language proficiency from the early stages of education is very important. Therefore, implementing EMI can be started at the primary school level as a first step. English as a Language of Instruction (EMI) is generally used in Primary classrooms in various countries, including Indonesia. Apart from using EMI in primary school education, teachers discussed many obstacles to implementing EMI. Literature highlights four main obstacles teachers face in English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI): teacher language proficiency, student proficiency, appropriate teaching techniques, and insufficient resources (Paulsrud & Toth, 2019).

Literature highlights four key challenges in English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI): teacher language proficiency, student proficiency, teaching techniques, and resource limitations (Paulsrud & Toth, 2019), creating significant difficulties for both educators and learners, particularly in early education, where these issues remain understudied (Datnow et al., 2023; Zeichner, 2021). Understanding teachers' perspectives is crucial due to potential divergences with other stakeholders (Al-Shammat, 2015), yet EMI research in Indonesian primary schools, especially religious-based institutions, remains scarce. Addressing this gap, the current study investigates EMI implementation in a rural Islamic primary school in Mojokerto, offering novel insights by focusing on this under-researched context compared to prior higher education and urban studies (Paulsrud & Toth, 2019). While existing research emphasizes general EMI obstacles, this study uniquely explores how rural constraints (e.g., limited English exposure) intensify challenges like teaching anxiety and differentiated instruction, while also revealing unexpected benefits such as enhanced school credibility through hybrid programs (e.g., Quran memorization with EMI)—a dimension overlooked in broader EMI literature (De Moor & Mous, 2023; Ismailov et al., 2021). The phenomenological case study approach further enriches understanding by capturing teachers' lived experiences, providing nuanced perspectives absent in policy-oriented analyses (Masri, 2019).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a Phenomenological Case Study approach to explore and understand teachers' lived experiences about perspectives on the challenges and benefits of implementing the English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) program in the Cambridge International Class Program (ICP) at a Private Islamic Primary School in Mojokerto.

EMI, combined with the Cambridge Assessment International Education (CAIE) Curriculum, is an exciting phenomenon to study because this private Islamic primary school is in a rural area where very few schools can implement a program like this. However, this program can attract parents' interest in registering their children in the international class program from CAIE. Because of this uniqueness, researchers try to study cases that may be experienced by teachers involved in the ICP program, which is an interesting phenomenon.

Given the contextual intricacies of the educational setting and the specific focus on the Cambridge International Class Program, a case study design is deemed appropriate. This design allows for an in-depth investigation of the phenomenon within its real-life context (Masri, 2019) Furthermore, its adaptable structure can reveal the correlation between the phenomenon and the specific context in which it occurs, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the case under investigation (Leal Filho et al., 2020).
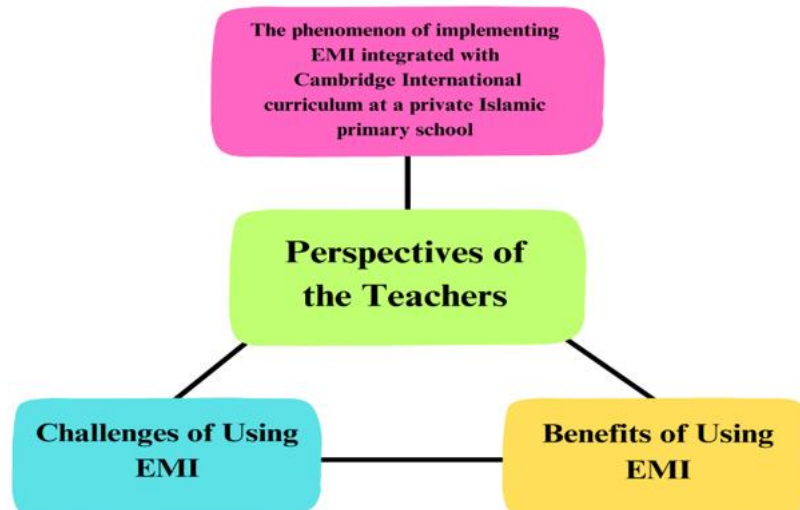
Figure 1. Framework of the Study

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Thematic analysis of the data the researcher has carried out found that two main themes can be presented and discussed. This answers the first research question, "What are the challenges experienced by teachers when using EMI?" The researcher also found four sub-themes in this theme: Linguistic Proficiency of Teachers, Students with low English Comprehension, Teacher Professional Development, and Teaching Anxiety. The second theme is the benefits of using EMI; this answers the second research question, "What are the benefits experienced by the teacher when using EMI in teaching?" After coding, the researcher also found sub-themes in this theme: Global Competence and Opportunities, Students' and Teachers' English Skill Development, Increasing the School Credibility, and Teaching Excitement.
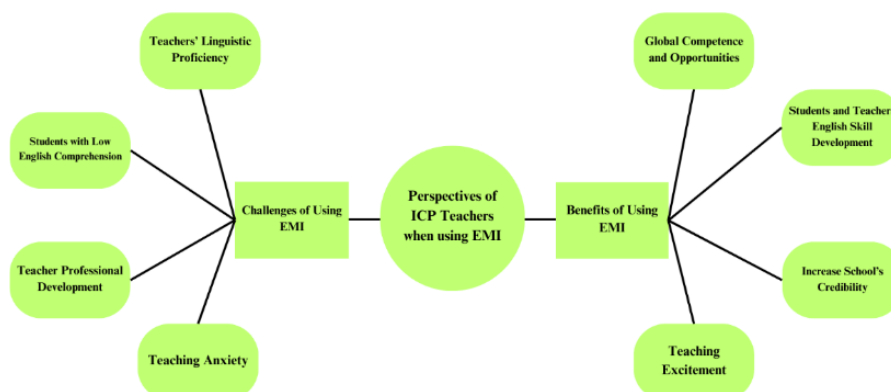

Figure 2. Themes Map

A. Challenges of Using EMI
1) Linguistic Proficiency of Teachers

Three private Islamic primary school teachers often face difficulties because of their limited English language skills. This can lead to a lack of confidence and difficulties in delivering learning. Alam (2024) stated that teachers' limited ability in English can hinder effective communication and teaching, thus causing difficulties in conveying complex scientific concepts, as shown by the results of the following teacher interviews:

"I face some difficulties teaching in these ICP classes. The most challenging part is teaching bilingually (English-Indonesian) because my basic education is Islamic religious education, and my English skills are still not very good. Sometimes, I am afraid of translating or pronouncing wrongly." **(T4)**

T5, who also teaches Islamic religious education in other ICP classes, had a similar experience. She had difficulty speaking English and considered it an obstacle to teaching.

"The challenge is translating and delivering Islamic religious education materials into English. Sometimes, I have to open Google Translate while teaching to translate Islamic religious materials or terms. That is what makes me embarrassed and a bit feeling awkward in front of the kids." (T5)

In addition to the two teachers who teach religious education, other general-subject teachers, especially sports-subject teachers, also faced challenges in teaching in these ICP classes.

"I am not very good at English, but I try to teach bilingually (English - Bahasa) as much as possible. Now, there is Google Translate, so I often use it to help translate materials and special terms in sports. Sometimes, I feel like the students do not understand when I give instructions in English, so I repeat them in Bahasa." (T6)

Yusuf and Novita (2020) stated that many EFL teachers face challenges in maintaining and improving their language skills, especially in Indonesia, where there is a lack of clear guidelines and official data on teachers' language skills, which means that the issue of English language skills is still a problem for teachers, even English teachers themselves. Hence, it is natural that the issue of English language skills is also a problem for teachers who do not have an English language education background. The data from the three teachers' interviews show that they still find it challenging to teach entirely in English due to their limited English skills. However, they still try to use English as much as possible in teaching and delivering materials in English by utilizing technology such as Google Translate.

2) Students with Low English Comprehension

All interviewed teachers also agreed that one of the obstacles to implementing EMI in ICP classes is that many students have low English language skills, which causes difficulty following the lesson materials presented in English, resulting in low academic achievement. This finding is shown in the following example of teacher interview results:

"One of the main challenges that I faced in teaching Science using English is the diverse language abilities of students, most of whom can be said to have low language abilities. However, this is normal because they do not use English daily. Thus, I must work harder and smarter to get the students to understand what I taught. I have differentiated the material I give them according to their ability level." (T1)

"We all know that mathematics is pretty difficult, especially when taught in English; it certainly adds to the difficulty. So, students' diverse English language skills are one of the challenges in teaching. Sometimes, they complain because I deliver to them in English, and they do not understand what I say about mathematical and numerical terms. It forced me to translate it into Bahasa." (T3)

"Besides my lack of English skills, the different English skills of students are also a challenge when I teach Fiqh or other Islamic religious subjects. Many students do not understand the Islamic terms I say in English. Many students do not understand the Islamic terms that I say in English. I have no choice but to translate them into Bahasa; only then did they understand." (T4)

These problems are almost the same as the results obtained from research conducted by Wardani et al. (2024), which stated that the students they studied had difficulty mastering vocabulary and complex sentences, reducing engagement during teaching and learning. All interviewed teachers also noted that the students' limited English vocabulary skills were the main problem; it reduced their engagement during the teaching and learning process. These issues also required the teachers to think harder and more creatively so that their students understood what they were taught. To overcome those issues, the teacher did diagnostic assessments to determine the abilities of each student. This will make it easier for teachers to map the abilities of each student. After that, the teachers will divide them into groups according to their abilities; then, they can provide materials according to their abilities. This approach is called differentiated learning. The teachers also stated that teaching students with different English language abilities is challenging. Their non-English-speaking living environment is another factor that hinders their English language development.

3) Teacher Professional Development

In teaching ICP classes at this private Islamic primary school, teachers need continuous professional development to improve their English language skills and learn effective EMI teaching strategies. Without adequate training, teachers may feel unprepared and unsupported in delivering EMI. According to the results of interviews with several of these teachers, workshops and courses that focus on EMI pedagogy have not explicitly been available or adapted to the needs of madrasa teachers, and all the training obtained is still general around Cambridge Subjects (English, Science, and Math). This makes teachers have to be creative in their approach to learning. This information is proven from the following interview excerpts:
"The training we have received is still around the Cambridge subject group (English, Science, and Math). We need training in teaching Islamic religious subjects in English, and we have not received it yet. Hopefully, such training will be held soon so that it is easier for you to teach Islamic religious subjects using English". (T4)

"Because my English is not good, of course, I need training or a short course to improve my English skills, so that I can be more confident in teaching using English". (T2)

Professional development is still an issue faced by teachers. Teachers may not have access to various professional development programs that suit their specific needs and interests, which can hinder their ability to improve their teaching practice. They may also lack access to information about available professional development programs, making identifying and participating in relevant opportunities challenging (Pasique & Maguate, 2023; Tuli & Tynjala, 2015)Based on the confessions of the teachers above, although they have received some training related to teaching subjects, this is still lacking because the training is limited to Cambridge Subjects. They need special training that discusses teaching Islamic religious subjects and other national curriculum subjects using English or some short English courses to improve their English skills.

4) Teaching Anxiety

The last sub-theme in the challenges of using the EMI theme is teaching anxiety. 2 teachers who were interviewed stated that teaching using EMI made them nervous in presenting lesson material, mainly Islamic religious subjects. They feel less confident in the teaching and learning process using English. The following is a statement from one of the teachers, as well as representing one other:

"Not really; sometimes I feel nervous when teaching in English. My English is not very good; I am afraid of making mistakes or not being clear enough in conveying the lesson material. However, I force myself to speak English even though the pronunciation may be stuttering or unclear". (T5)

The statement above indicates that teachers' poor English skills can cause anxiety when teaching using EMI. This anxiety decreases the teachers' self-confidence. However, they continue to force themselves to speak English despite various shortcomings.

B. Benefits of using EMI

1) Global Competence and Opportunities

All teachers agreed that EMI equips students with English language proficiency, essential for communication and global opportunities. This increases students' ability to compete internationally, pursue higher education at home and abroad, and access the world globally. Fluent English students will gain many advantages, including the ability to enroll in prestigious junior high schools domestically and worldwide and participate in international academic and cultural exchange programs. Hadjer (2024) said that EMI enables the globalization of content, making it easier for students to access and engage with international research and materials, which can enhance their understanding of the subject matter. The following is an excerpt from one of the interview results representing all that supports this information.:

"If we talk about benefits, there are many, one of which is that our students can compete globally. Because they have good English language skills and receive an internationally recognized curriculum, we all know that English has become a world language, and almost all nations use English as a means of international communication. They can continue their education abroad or maybe work abroad as adults. Moreover, the Indonesian government, together with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), has agreed on the ASEAN Economic Community program, where foreign workers from ASEAN countries are free to work in Indonesia and vice versa. Their English skills will be beneficial later". (T2)

English is a *lingua franca*, the connecting language of all nations in the world (Tang, 2020). This is also agreed upon by the teachers who teach ICP classes at this private Islamic primary school. They are optimistic that with their English skills, their students can compete globally. Students who graduate from this ICP class can continue their education to the next level abroad and may even be able to work overseas later when they are adults. In addition, the Indonesian government and ASEAN have established the ASEAN Economic Community program, which opens opportunities for citizens to work in other ASEAN countries efficiently. With good English skills, the teachers are sure their students will not be less competitive than other ASEAN citizens. This is also in line with what was conveyed by Liu (Liu, 2022), who stated that in Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia, the use of English as a language of instruction has been recognized as increasing English language proficiency among students. This, in turn, equips them with the necessary skills to address the challenges of the era of globalization effectively.

2) Students' and Teachers' English Skill Development

EMI fosters linguistic and cognitive skills, helping students become bilingual or multilingual. The students develop the ability to switch between languages fluently, which can

improve their overall cognitive skills and adaptability. This information was confirmed by the three teachers interviewed who taught Cambridge subjects group (English, Science & Math); here is one of the excerpts that represents all the teachers' statements:

Although some students have difficulty following, it does not mean no students are enthusiastic about using English to communicate at school. Because I expose them to English almost daily, a few students start to dare and be confident speaking English during class hours. They are beginning to switch languages fluently between Indonesian and English, even with some pronunciation or vocabulary usage mistakes, which is good progress". (T3)

Gamez (2015) emphasizes the importance of exposure in language acquisition, stating that since exposure significantly impacts second language acquisition, the more students are exposed to English, the more they will read and speak. The teachers also conveyed this because they continue to accustom their students to English daily, making them accustomed to using English despite some shortcomings in the delivery. This is good progress considering their environmental background, which does not use English daily as their mother tongue. Hu (2016), in his research, also showed that children who start learning a foreign language after three years may face challenges in achieving native-like proficiency. Those who start learning later may take longer to reach a level of proficiency than their peers who start learning earlier. This highlights the importance of age and duration of exposure in language acquisition. This strengthens the idea that exposure to the target language, in this case, English, will be more effective if done at an early age. In addition to students' benefits, teachers also experienced increased language and teaching skills due to using the Cambridge International Curriculum. As stated by the following teacher.

"Even though I am used to teaching English, the Cambridge International curriculum will allow me to study again to improve my English skills to a higher level. Because the material is far different from the national curriculum in Indonesia, I have to study the curriculum framework provided by the Cambridge Center and browse the internet so that my knowledge about this curriculum increases. The training I received from the Cambridge Center also significantly improved my English teaching skills". (T2)

Behind the challenges and difficulties, there must be benefits. This is also what the teachers experienced because the international curriculum is something new for them, making them have to learn again, which will automatically improve their language and teaching skills. This aligns with what Purnomo et al. (2024) conveyed, who stated that teachers acknowledge that self-awareness regarding their professional growth is crucial for maintaining high standards in language teaching.

3) Increase the School Credibility

Using EMI combined with an international curriculum can increase the school's credibility. This also happens in this private Islamic primary school. All the teachers who were interviewed conveyed this information. Here is one of the interview excerpts that represents all the statements of the teachers:

"Since the management of the madrasah decided to open an international class using the Cambridge curriculum, the number of our students has increased quite a bit. From the previous approximately 40-50 students per academic year, now there are even 72 students who have registered for the next school year. Maybe because it is rare for rural schools, especially Islamic schools, to open a program like ours that uses English as its teaching combined with the Quran memorization program; besides that, our better infrastructure facilities than other madrasahs in our area are also supporting factors. Those two things are a favorable attraction for our school". (T5)

Changes in educational needs are one of the references that schools must use to form a brand to be accepted by the community. Many changes have occurred in the world of education, such as school modernization and curriculum internationalization, to answer the challenges of today's era (Ainunnisa et al., 2022). As done by the management of this private Islamic primary school, using EMI and Cambridge Assessment International Education has been proven to increase the school's credibility. Coupled with the *Tahfidzul Quran* program and strengthened by good infrastructure facilities, the school's credibility has increased.

The parents' trust in this private Islamic primary school seems to be increasing; They seem very proud that their children can speak English and memorize the Quran well. They are also happy to be able to send their children to a school with an international curriculum like this private Islamic primary school because few schools in remote areas have programs like this. The branding strategy carried out by the school management above is identity branding. Identity branding highlights the school's unique characteristics (Irdiyanti et al., 2023).

4) Teaching Excitement

The final sub-theme of the benefits theme discusses the excitement of teachers who use EMI in this ICP class. The three teachers interviewed stated that they felt comfortable teaching subjects other than English using English; this made them feel challenged and more enthusiastic about developing their English skills. Like what was said by this teacher, it also represents the statements of 2 other teachers. She said:

"Yes, I feel comfortable teaching science using English. I feel challenged and enthusiastic about further developing my English skills. I have a pretty good basic English, so I need to develop it to the next level with the training I get". (T2)

The statement above indicates that teaching with EMI can also encourage and entice students to further develop their linguistic and teaching skills. EMI does not burden them; it makes them feel challenged and enthusiastic about developing their English skills.

C) Classroom Observation Result

The researcher also included classroom observation data and field note-taking in this study. The points observed include Lesson Planning and Preparation, Teachers' Language Use, Classroom Management, Student Engagement, Differentiation, and Language Support. The six teachers observed in-point lesson planning and preparation showed promising results. The lesson plans from the six teachers have complete components and align with the national curriculum or CAIE curriculum guidelines. Furthermore, regarding the Language Use point, of the six teachers who were observed, it was found that three teachers were quite proficient in English when teaching. They are also quite comfortable when teaching in English. These three teachers specifically teach English, Mathematics, and Science. According to the CAIE curriculum guidelines, these three subjects must be presented in English because they are of an international standard. Meanwhile, the other three teachers are pretty good but lack confidence in speaking English. So, we still often use Indonesian, and the percentage of English used in class still needs to be increased.

Then, for classroom management, the six teachers showed quite good results. They managed the class so that it was conducive to learning, and even though a few students were still unable to calm down, overall, it was pretty good. The efforts to increase student engagement from the six teachers observed were also reasonable. They use techniques such as questions and answers or quizzes to increase student engagement. Even though some students are less active in learning, overall, it is pretty good and has succeeded in increasing student activity.

The last observation point is differentiation and language support. At this point, the results obtained from all teachers observed were also quite good. Before teaching, they conducted a diagnostic assessment to determine each student's abilities; then, the teacher divided groups based on the diagnostic assessment results. Finally, different materials and treatments for each group will be provided. Even though sometimes some materials and requirements are not quite right at the level, the efforts made are pretty good. Overall, the teachers' performance in implementing EMI in the ICP classes of this private Islamic primary school can be considered good enough (sufficient).

CONCLUSION

This study examined teachers' perspectives on implementing English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) with the Cambridge curriculum in a rural Islamic primary school in Mojokerto, Indonesia, identifying four key challenges—teacher language proficiency, students' low English comprehension, insufficient professional development, and teaching anxiety—stemming from limited English exposure in rural environments and non-English educational backgrounds, alongside four benefits: enhanced global competence, improved English skills for both teachers and students, increased school credibility, and teaching excitement, which collectively elevate the school's status from a marginalized institution to a globally competitive one. Future research directions include longitudinal studies on EMI's impact on student outcomes, comparative analyses between urban and rural contexts, development of targeted teacher training programs, investigations into parental and community perceptions, exploration of local culture integration within EMI, and assessments of technology-enhanced solutions to address rural educational limitations.

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