

Assessment Practices in Vietnamese Universities: Emi Teachers' Perceptions

Phat Tan Tran

Ho Chi Minh University of Banking

Ho Chi Minh City Open University

Email: phattt@hub.edu.vn; phattt.23at@ou.edu.vn

ORCID iD: 243-249-243-249

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ABSTRACT:

The rapid proliferation of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) in Vietnamese higher education has intensified scholarly attention to the ways in which assessment is conceptualised and implemented in EMI contexts. This study explores teachers' beliefs regarding assessment practices and investigates their perceived implications for student learning. Employing an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the study comprised a quantitative survey of 120 EMI teachers from four universities in southern Vietnam, followed by qualitative interviews to provide contextualised interpretations of the survey results. Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire addressing key dimensions of assessment, including fairness, transparency of assessment criteria, instructional–assessment alignment, feedback effectiveness, and preferences for assessment formats. The findings indicate a strong preference among teachers for diversified assessment approaches, while also revealing persistent concerns about the transparency of assessment criteria and the pedagogical value of feedback. These findings underscore the need for more coherent assessment design, sustained professional development, and evidence-informed institutional policies to strengthen assessment quality and promote student learning in Vietnamese EMI higher education.

Keywords: English-Medium Instruction (EMI), assessment practices, teacher beliefs, Vietnamese universities.

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1. Introduction

Over the past decade, Vietnamese higher education has experienced a marked shift towards internationalisation, global engagement, and the development of a highly skilled human workforce. A prominent manifestation of this transformation is the growing adoption of English-Medium Instruction (EMI), through which disciplinary knowledge is delivered and assessed predominantly in English rather than Vietnamese (Tran et al., 2026; Tri, 2026).

Although EMI has been promoted as a strategic mechanism for enhancing graduates' international competence and employability, its implementation has generated complex challenges for institutions, lecturers, and students alike. Of particular significance is the assessment of disciplinary learning, as students' linguistic limitations may impede their ability to demonstrate subject-matter knowledge accurately and equitably (Nguyen et al., 2024). Against this backdrop, the present study investigates teachers'

beliefs about assessment practices in Vietnamese EMI classrooms, focusing on the interplay among educational policy, language-related challenges, pedagogical approaches, and the broader institutional and contextual conditions shaping assessment.

Educational policy (2020 – 2030)

Vietnam's strategic orientation towards EMI is closely associated with the National Foreign Languages Project, commonly known as Project 2020, which was subsequently extended and incorporated into broader educational reform agendas beyond 2020 (Dang et al., 2024; Nguyen et al., 2024). Although the original initiative formally ended in 2020, its emphasis on strengthening English proficiency and internationalising higher education has continued to inform national strategies for the 2020 - 2030 period. Within this policy trajectory, EMI has increasingly been positioned as a means of enhancing institutional internationalisation, strengthening graduate employability, and developing a bilingual workforce capable of responding to the demands of Vietnam's expanding knowledge economy (Tran & Hoang, 2022; Tri, 2026).

Contextual constraints

Beyond policy, linguistic, and pedagogical considerations, a range of contextual constraints can substantially influence how teachers design and implement assessment in Vietnamese EMI classrooms. Institutional limitations remain particularly salient, as many universities provide insufficient access to learning management systems, professional development in assessment literacy, and appropriate English-medium assessment resources (Nguyen et al., 2025). Large class sizes further constrain teachers' capacity to employ formative assessment systematically and to provide timely, individualised feedback. In addition, teachers' perceptions of students' motivation, engagement, and assessment anxiety may shape their choice of assessment formats and feedback strategies, potentially encouraging greater reliance on conventional, easily administered forms of evaluation (Cao, 2025; Dang et al., 2024).

As key agents in the design and implementation of assessment, teachers' beliefs can substantially influence how assessment criteria are interpreted, tasks are selected, feedback is provided, and students' disciplinary knowledge is ultimately evaluated. Nevertheless, teachers' perspectives remain comparatively underexplored in the Vietnamese EMI literature, which has often concentrated on broader policy and institutional dimensions (Nguyen et al., 2024). Investigating teachers' beliefs can therefore provide valuable insights into the perceived fairness, transparency, validity, and practicality of current assessment practices, while informing more coherent assessment design, professional development, and institutional policy. Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the teachers' beliefs on assessment practices in Vietnamese EMI classroom?
2. How do the assessment practices relate to the students' learning results in Vietnamese EMI classroom?

2. Methodology

The study adopts an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design to investigate teachers' beliefs about assessment practices in Vietnamese EMI classrooms. This design consists of an initial quantitative phase followed by a qualitative phase, in which qualitative data are collected and analysed to explain, elaborate upon, and contextualise the quantitative findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Plano, 2018). The integration of quantitative patterns and qualitative accounts enables a more comprehensive understanding of how EMI teachers conceptualise and implement assessment within the linguistic, pedagogical, and institutional conditions of Vietnamese higher education.

2.1. Research participants

The target population comprises university lecturers who teach disciplinary subjects through English in EMI programmes at four Vietnamese universities: University A, University B, University C, and University D. The institutions were selected through purposive sampling to

capture variation across several contextual dimensions, including geographical location, institutional type, and disciplinary orientation. All four universities are situated within the southern key economic region but serve distinct student populations and demonstrate different institutional profiles, including public and private higher education institutions and programmes specialising in banking, open and distance education, and multidisciplinary provision.

The quantitative phase involves 120 EMI teachers, with 30 participants recruited from each participating university. The sample size is informed by previous empirical research on EMI and assessment in Vietnamese higher education, where questionnaire-based studies have employed samples of varying sizes (Luu et al., 2023). A sample of 120 teachers is considered sufficient for the planned statistical procedures, including descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, and correlational analyses examining relationships among teachers' assessment beliefs, perceived assessment practices, and perceived effects on student learning.

For the qualitative phase, a purposive subsample of teachers is invited to participate in semi-structured interviews. Selection is guided by the quantitative findings to ensure representation of contrasting or particularly salient response patterns, such as strong versus moderate perceptions of assessment fairness, clarity, feedback usefulness, and instructional-assessment alignment.

2.2. Research instruments

The study employs two principal research instruments: a structured quantitative questionnaire and a qualitative semi-structured interview protocol. Both instruments are designed specifically to examine EMI teachers' beliefs and experiences concerning assessment practices and their perceived implications for student learning.

2.2.1. Questionnaire

The primary quantitative instrument is a structured questionnaire developed for the purposes of the present study and informed by

relevant literature on EMI assessment and teacher assessment beliefs. The questionnaire comprises four sections: demographic and professional information, teachers' beliefs about assessment practices, perceived relationship between assessment and student learning, and perceived student learning outcomes.

2.2.2. Semi-structured interview protocol

The interview questions are organised around key themes emerging from the quantitative phase, including assessment fairness, transparency of criteria, alignment between teaching and assessment, feedback practices, assessment format preferences, language-related challenges, and the perceived influence of assessment on student learning. The semi-structured format provides sufficient consistency across interviews while allowing the researcher to pursue emerging issues and obtain clarification of unexpected quantitative findings. Interviews may be conducted in either English or Vietnamese, depending on participants' preferences, in order to facilitate nuanced and unrestricted expression. Each interview is expected to last approximately 243-249 minutes. With participants' informed consent, interviews will be audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim.

2.3. Data collection

Data collection proceeds in two sequential phases in accordance with the explanatory sequential mixed-methods design.

Phase 1: Quantitative data collection

Following ethical approval from the researchers' home institution and the participating universities, the questionnaire is administered to 120 EMI teachers. Participants receive an information sheet explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality procedures, and their right to withdraw without penalty. Informed consent is obtained prior to participation. The questionnaire may be distributed electronically or in paper-based format, depending on institutional circumstances and participants' accessibility. Completion is expected to require approximately 243-249 minutes. Each participant is assigned a

unique identification code to protect anonymity and, where consent is provided, facilitate the linkage of quantitative responses with subsequent interview participation. Data collection is conducted across the four universities over an approximately eight-week period.

Phase 2: Qualitative data collection

Following the preliminary analysis of the quantitative data, participants for the qualitative phase will be selected purposively on the basis of patterns identified in the survey results. Selection aims to capture diverse perspectives and cases that can illuminate particularly significant or unexpected quantitative findings. The interview protocol is subsequently refined to address the issues requiring further explanation. Semi-structured interviews are conducted within approximately four weeks of completing the quantitative analysis. Interviews are conducted either face-to-face or online, depending on institutional arrangements and participant availability. With informed consent, all interviews are audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Interviews conducted in Vietnamese are translated into English for analysis and reporting, with appropriate procedures employed to preserve the intended meaning of participants' responses.

3. Results

Table 1 presented the reliability analysis and variance values of the six constructs related to EMI teachers' assessment beliefs and practices. The findings demonstrated a very high level of internal consistency across all constructs, indicating that the questionnaire was statistically reliable and suitable for academic research purposes. Cronbach's Alpha values range from .883 to .946, which were all above the commonly accepted threshold of .70. According to research methodology standards, alpha values above .80 indicated strong reliability, while values above .90 suggest excellent reliability. Therefore, the results confirmed that the questionnaire items consistently measured the intended constructs and provided dependable data for further analysis.

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha and Variance Values of Teachers' Assessment Constructs

Factor	Items	No of Items	Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	% Variance
F1	243-249	4	Role of English	.883	19.4
F2	243-249	5	Fairness and Equity	.920	15.3
F3	243-249	6	Assessment Methods	.911	12.9
Total					47.6

The first construct, Role of English (F1), obtained a Cronbach's Alpha value of .883 and explained 19.4% of the variance. This result indicated a strong level of consistency among the four items related to teachers' beliefs about the role of English in EMI assessment. The relatively high percentage of variance also suggested that this construct substantially contributed to explaining teachers' assessment perspectives. This finding implied that language played a

central role in EMI classrooms, especially in how teachers evaluated both content knowledge and English proficiency. Teachers appeared to share relatively similar beliefs regarding the importance of English in assessment practices.

The second construct, Fairness and Equity (F2), produced an exceptionally high Alpha value of .920. The construct accounted for 15.3% of the variance. This result suggested that teachers strongly agreed on issues related to fairness in

EMI assessment, particularly concerning students with different levels of English proficiency. The high reliability may reflect the growing awareness among EMI teachers that assessment should balance academic content with linguistic accessibility. Teachers may also believe that fairness was an essential principle in EMI contexts where language barriers can affect student performance.

Similarly, Assessment Methods (F3) demonstrated excellent reliability with an Alpha value of .911 and explained 12.9% of the variance. This indicated that the six items measuring different assessment approaches were highly consistent. The result suggested that teachers generally supported the use of diverse assessment methods, such as written exams, presentations, and group work, to evaluate EMI students more effectively. The relatively high variance percentage further indicated that assessment methods were an important component of EMI teaching practices.

4. Discussion

Research question 1: What are the teachers' beliefs on assessment practices in Vietnamese EMI classroom?

Several important claims emerge from these findings. First, EMI teachers in Vietnamese universities conceptualise assessment as a means of evaluating content knowledge, confirming that content remains the central focus of EMI pedagogy. Second, although teachers prioritise subject knowledge, they acknowledge that language mediates academic communication and therefore cannot be excluded from assessment decisions. Third, participants adopt a pragmatic and balanced assessment theories that distinguishes communicative effectiveness from linguistic accuracy, allowing students to demonstrate conceptual understanding without being impacted for minor language errors. Fourth, these findings indicate that effective EMI assessment requires integrating content expertise with informed professional judgement regarding language use, rather than applying rigid language-based marking criteria. Finally, the study suggests that future EMI assessment frameworks should

clarify the relationship between content and language, providing teachers with clearer guidance on how to apply for content standards while ensuring equitable assessment for learners. Such an approach would strengthen assessment validity, promote fairness, and better reflect the fundamental objectives of EMI within Vietnamese higher education.

Research question 2: How do the assessment practices relate to the students' learning results in Vietnamese EMI classrooms?

EMI assessment in Vietnamese universities is evolving from an examination-based system towards a more diversified, authentic, and competency-oriented model. Teachers recognise that no single assessment method can adequately evaluate the complex knowledge, skills, and competencies required in English-medium higher education. Also, the widespread adoption of presentations, projects, group work, and authentic assessment demonstrates teachers' commitment to student-centred pedagogy and active learning, suggesting a gradual transformation of assessment philosophy within Vietnamese EMI programmes. Next, collaborative assessment offers significant pedagogical benefits by promoting communication, peer learning, confidence, and deeper conceptual understanding. However, its effectiveness depends on transparent assessment criteria and mechanisms for evaluating individual contributions fairly. Moreover, authentic assessment strengthens the relationship between university learning and professional practice by encouraging students to apply disciplinary knowledge in realistic contexts, thereby supporting the development of transferable competencies increasingly demanded in global labour markets. Finally, although diversified assessment enhances inclusiveness and educational quality, successful implementation requires continued professional development, institutional guidance, and assessment literacy to ensure that innovation is accompanied by reliability, fairness, and validity. These findings therefore suggest that the future development of EMI assessment should focus on integrating diverse assessment methods within coherent

institutional frameworks that balance pedagogical innovation with rigorous academic standards.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study make several important theoretical contributions to the literature on EMI, assessment literacy, and assessment implementation in higher education. First, the study extends existing EMI research by demonstrating that EMI teachers' assessment beliefs are shaped by an integrated understanding of content knowledge, language use, fairness, and student learning, rather than by a single focus on language proficiency. In addressing the first research question, the findings indicate that teachers primarily view assessment as a means of evaluating students' conceptual understanding while recognising that English proficiency inevitably influences students' ability to demonstrate disciplinary competence. This finding supports the integrated perspective of EMI, which conceptualises language and content as mutually interconnected rather than independent dimensions of learning. Second, the findings addressing the second research question demonstrate that teachers employ diverse assessment practices, including authentic assessment, formative assessment, continuous feedback, flexible grading, and technology-assisted assessment, reflecting contemporary theories of assessment for learning (Carless & Boud, 2018). These practices also reinforce Xu and Brown's (2016) reconceptualisation of teacher assessment literacy as a dynamic interaction among teachers' knowledge, beliefs, contextual understanding, and professional judgement. Rather than applying fixed assessment procedures, EMI teachers continuously adapt their assessment practices according to students' linguistic diversity and disciplinary learning needs. Third, the findings related to the third research question expand theoretical understanding of sustainable EMI implementation by highlighting that effective assessment depends not only on individual teacher competence but also on institutional

support, professional development, collaborative learning communities, and policy coherence. Teachers consistently recommended clearer assessment frameworks, specialised EMI assessment training, authentic assessment models, and responsible integration of digital technologies and artificial intelligence. These findings reinforce sociocultural perspectives that regard educational practice as socially and institutionally mediated while extending recent EMI scholarship by demonstrating that assessment implementation represents a multidimensional interaction among teacher beliefs, assessment literacy, organisational capacity, and educational policy. Overall, the study proposes that EMI assessment implementation should be conceptualised as an integrated framework in which teachers' beliefs, assessment literacy, classroom practices, and institutional contexts collectively shape assessment quality, thereby contributing to the theoretical advancement of EMI assessment research in multilingual higher education.

Suggestions for future research

Future research should broaden the scope of investigations into EMI teachers' assessment implementation beyond the three research questions examined in this study. While the present research focused on teachers' assessment beliefs, assessment practices, and recommendations for improving EMI assessment, subsequent studies could explore additional dimensions, including the relationships between assessment practices and student learning outcomes, assessment literacy, academic achievement, student motivation, and graduate employability. Researchers could also investigate discipline-specific assessment models, intercultural communication, curriculum alignment, and institutional quality assurance mechanisms within EMI programmes. Comparative studies across different regions of Vietnam and international EMI contexts would further enrich understanding of contextual influences on assessment implementation.

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