

Education in the Asia-Pacific Region:
Issues, Concerns and Prospects 68

Min Pham
Jenny Barnett *Editors*

English Medium Instruction Practices in Vietnamese Universities

Institutional, Practitioner and Student
Perspectives



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Editors

English Medium Instruction Practices in Vietnamese Universities

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Perspectives

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The idea for this book originated with our dear colleague and friend, Dr. Doan Ba Ngoc, who sadly passed on before writing began.

It is dedicated to him with our great respect and appreciation, and trusting that it fulfils his intentions.

Foreword

Two decades into the twenty-first century, it is fair to say that the internationalisation of higher education and, concurrently, the use of English as a medium of instruction is an indisputable worldwide reality. In this respect, Vietnam is no exception. However, as this timely volume edited by Min Pham and Jenny Barnett lucidly portrays, the national and local conditions wherein Vietnamese practitioners, students and institutional management operate are markedly (and excitingly!) different to other world settings.

To explore comprehensively as well as critically such educational realities, the first and last chapters of this volume are framed against ROAD-MAPPING, the acronym for a conceptual model designed to examine broadly English-medium education in multilingual university settings—or EMEMUS in short (see Dafouz & Smit, 2016, 2020). As one of the authors of the ROAD-MAPPING framework, it is a pleasure for me to see how our model proves relevant and useful in educational sites far removed from our own European context, and how, at the same time, ROAD-MAPPING helps to provide a well-defined account of the Vietnamese EMEMUS experiences without losing sight of any of its national and local idiosyncrasies.

Having been involved in investigating EMEMUS for over twenty years now, and in reviewing countless articles, books, and reports, I am delighted to say that this book makes a valuable contribution to the field. Both the editors and the contributors have done an excellent job in putting together a very solid and mature volume which will be of great help to those directly involved in the Vietnamese setting and also to others in distinct environments seeking to find sensible and pedagogically oriented answers.

Of the 16 chapters that conform the book, chapter two sets the scene for EMEMUS across the Vietnamese nation and uses the six ROAD-MAPPING dimensions (i.e. Roles of English, Academic Disciplines, Language Management, Agents, Practices and Processes and Internationalisation and Globalisation) to organise the complex and dynamic reality of the said country. The closing chapter, in turn, revisits the six dimensions one by one against the studies included in the book and brings together key themes from across the different levels examined, reminding us, insistently, that local adaptations are always needed to make EMEMUS effective.

Structurally, the editors adopt three different perspectives, starting off at the national and institutional level, followed by the practitioner level and ending with the student perspective. The tripartite structure, well-balanced in terms of the number of chapters for each part, is deemed effective in two ways. Firstly, it provides a top-down approach that enables the newcomer to the Vietnamese context (like myself) to understand to what extent the macro-level policies explained in the opening chapters impact (or not) the meso-level policies and how these, in turn, influence (or not) the micro-level practices and the student and faculty views described in other chapters. Secondly, such tripartite configuration can also be approached in a reverse order—from a bottom-up perspective—allowing those more familiarised with the topic or the Vietnamese setting to choose a particular chapter and delve deeper into it. If one adopts this bottom-up perspective, the book offers a multi-layered view of the notion of agency, for instance, which cuts across different chapters and levels, in order to help all agents engage in critical reflection and innovative action so that ‘readiness’ for EMEMUS—another key notion in this volume—can be achieved. Similarly, student views and voices are given substantial space in this book, with chapters examining how learner strategies play a part in EMEMUS, or how student agency needs to be aligned with faculty views and supported explicitly beyond concerns for English language proficiency.

One of the major differences I found in this book, when compared to other publications, is its wider scope of the EMEMUS label. In this respect, in the opening pages, the editors explicitly add the area of English Studies programs, where English is taught as an academic subject as well as where students are trained to be teachers of English. Although such a perspective may initially collide with a prototypical definition of EMEMUS which concerns mainly subjects other than English, I realise that by expanding the scope of the label, due respect is paid to the educational dimension of this phenomenon and to all the professionals involved. In other words, if we broaden the term EMEMUS to include English Studies—with its pedagogies, epistemologies and educational developers—we will be counting on a field of knowledge and group of key players who are essential in the EMEMUS agenda and who, surprisingly, are often absent in the equation. With this inclusive educational approach, I believe the editors do not anticipate institutions letting go of strategic and economic perspectives but they certainly do want such organisations to have a stronger commitment to educational perspectives and to support students and teachers in achieving the intended learning outcomes of their programs.

To close this foreword, I would like to highlight that this publication is highly recommended for *all* engaged in EMEMUS. For those with experience, innovative ideas and perspectives stemming from the Vietnamese setting can be found throughout the book to address seemingly well-known issues. On the other hand, for those new to EMEMUS, this work can be deemed a useful start to move forward in

English-medium education and, as the editors rightly claim, to do so with sufficient readiness.

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Series Editor's Introduction

This edited book by Min Pham and Jenny Barnett, on *English Medium Instruction Practices in Vietnamese Universities*, is the latest volume to be published in the long-standing Springer Book Series 'Education in the Asia-Pacific Region: Issues, Concerns and Prospects'. The first book in this Springer international series was published 20 years ago, in 2002, this book by Pham and Barnett being the 68th volume to be published to date.

English Medium Instruction Practices in Vietnamese Universities provides a clear and comprehensive overview of EMI theory and practice in Vietnam.

The sixteen chapters in the book are organised into three parts. Part One provides institutional perspectives on English Medium Instruction (EMI) while parts Two and Three provide, respectively, Practitioner and Student Perspectives on EMI. The various chapters are strongly evidence and real-life experience based, being written by 26 leading researchers, policy makers and/or practitioners, each of whom have extensive, in-depth knowledge and experience of education in universities in Vietnam, with particular reference to EMI theory and practice.

The book provides a road map of EMI in Vietnamese universities. It examines challenges of English medium instruction at the university level, and comprehensively surveys important considerations in EMI such as classroom practices and approaches in action, areas of job satisfaction (and dissatisfaction) among EMI teachers in Vietnamese universities, content and language integrated learning perspectives, assessment practices in EMI and decision-making processes in undergraduate EMI programmes.

As the editors of this important volume themselves point out, 'together the various chapters illustrate management, curricular and pedagogical practices in action, drawing on a range of different tertiary contexts and disciplines'. The book seeks to understand the complex interactions between pedagogical innovations and the context into which they are introduced.

In terms of the Springer Book Series in which this volume is published, the various topics dealt with in the series are wide ranging and varied in coverage, with

an emphasis on cutting edge developments, best practices and education innovations for development. Topics examined in the series include: environmental education and education for sustainable development; the interaction between technology and education; the reform of primary, secondary and teacher education; innovative approaches to education assessment; alternative education; most effective ways to achieve quality and highly relevant education for all; active ageing through active learning; case studies of education and schooling systems in various countries in the region; cross country and cross cultural studies of education and schooling; and the sociology of teachers as an occupational group, to mention just a few. More information about the book series is available at <http://www.springer.com/series/5888>.

All volumes in the series aim to meet the interests and priorities of a diverse education audience including researchers, policy makers and practitioners; tertiary students; teachers at all levels within education systems; and members of the public who are interested in better understanding cutting edge developments in education and schooling in Asia-Pacific.

The main reason why this series has been devoted exclusively to examining various aspects of education and schooling in the Asia-Pacific region is that this is a particularly challenging and dynamic region. It is renowned for its size, diversity and complexity, whether it be geographical, socio-economic, cultural, political or developmental. Education and schooling in countries throughout the region impact on every aspect of people's lives, including employment, labour force considerations, education and training, cultural orientation and attitudes and values. Asia and the Pacific is home to some 63% of the world's population of 7 Billion. Countries with the largest populations (China, 1.4 Billion; India, 1.3 Billion) and the most rapidly growing mega-cities are to be found in the region, as are countries with relatively small populations (Bhutan, 755,000; the island of Niue, 1,600).

Levels of economic and socio-political development vary widely, with some of the richest countries (such as Japan) and some of the poorest countries on earth (such as Bangladesh). Asia contains the largest number of poor of any region in the world, the incidence of those living below the poverty line remaining as high as 40 per cent in some countries in Asia. At the same time many countries in Asia are experiencing a period of great economic growth and social development. However, inclusive growth remains elusive, as does growth that is sustainable and does not destroy the quality of the environment. The growing prominence of Asian economies and corporations, together with globalisation and technological innovation, are leading to long-term changes in trade, business and labour markets, to the sociology of populations within (and between) countries. There is a rebalancing of power, centred on Asia and the Pacific region, with the Asian Development Bank in Manila declaring that the twenty-first century will be 'the Century of Asia-Pacific'.

I know from comprehensive feedback received from numerous education researchers, policy makers and practitioners, worldwide, that this book series makes a useful contribution to knowledge sharing about cutting edge developments concerning education and schooling in Asia-Pacific.

Any readers of this or other volumes in the series who have an idea for writing or co-writing their own book (or editing/co-editing a book), on any aspect of education and/or schooling, relevant to the region, are enthusiastically encouraged to approach the series editor either direct, or through Springer, to publish their own volume in the series. We are always willing to assist prospective authors shape their manuscripts in ways that make them suitable for publication.

March 2022

Rupert Maclean
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About the Editors

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Jenny Barnett worked for 25 years in the School of Education, University of South Australia, Adelaide. She taught undergraduate and postgraduate courses in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), and supervised doctoral students addressing issues in multilingual learning environments. Until recently, her research and consultancy work focused on the learning and teaching of students in Australia for whom English is an additional language or dialect (EALD), with an emphasis on their learning across the curriculum. This focus has subsequently shifted to English medium education in the Asia-Pacific region more broadly, and particularly in higher education.

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sity, Brisbane, QLD, Australia

Abbreviations

AP	Advanced Program
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference
CLIL	Content and Language Integrated Learning
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EFL	English as Foreign Language
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EME	English Medium Education
EMEMUS	English-Medium Education in Multilingual University Settings
EMI	English Medium instruction
EOI	English Only Instruction
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HERA	Higher Education Reform Agenda
HOT	Higher Order Thinking
HQP	High Quality Program
ICC	Intercultural Communication Competence
ICLHE	Integrating Content and Language in Higher Education
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
JP	Joint Program
LOT	Low Order Thinking
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
PBL	Project-Based Learning
ROAD-MAPPING	Role of English, Academic Disciplines, (Language) Management, Agents, Practices and Processes, and Internationalisation and Globalisation
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
TOEIC	Test of English for International Communication
VMI	Vietnamese Medium Instruction

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Chapter 1

Perspectives on English Medium Instruction Practices in Vietnamese Universities: Introduction



Jenny Barnett and Min Pham

Abstract As an educational innovation, the English medium instruction (EMI) project in Vietnamese universities is dependent for its success on the quality of the instruction practices put in place. Consequently, this book takes the direction of moving forward with EMI—successfully achieving educational goals through EMI, enhancing student learning experiences and outcomes, and developing transformational EMI practices. To this end, institutional, practitioner and student perspectives are all brought into play, representative of the key stakeholders in the educational outcomes of the EMI project. This chapter begins by indicating the aims the book hopes to achieve as a contribution to the forward direction of EMI in Vietnamese universities. It then briefly reviews EMI as a pedagogical innovation internationally and in Vietnam, and outlines the types of undergraduate EMI offerings currently available in Vietnamese universities. There follows an explanation of the three part structure of the book—institutional, practitioner and student perspectives on EMI practices—and an overview of the chapters across the three parts.

Keywords English-medium instruction · EMI · Vietnam · Higher education

Much has been written about the challenges of English medium instruction (EMI) in higher education both internationally and in Vietnam, so this book looks to how such challenges have been understood and constructively addressed in particular contexts in the Vietnamese tertiary sector. Chapter 2 provides a detailed analysis of the complex picture of EMI in Vietnamese higher education generally, highlighting the range of actors and their different opportunities and capacities for enacting agency to move EMI forward educationally. Subsequently, the focus throughout the book is on how institutions, practitioners and students have engaged with the introduction of EMI, and what we can learn about moving forward educationally based on their experiences, reflections and actions within particular settings. The book thus acts on

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the call by Vu and Burns (2014) that studies of EMI ‘generate evidence for good practice that can assist the development of effective EMI programs’ (p. 24).

Together the chapters illustrate management, curricular and pedagogical practices in action, drawing on a range of different tertiary contexts and disciplines. All the authors have deep practical experience of EMI in their particular disciplines, not only as current EMI lecturers but often as previous graduate students studying overseas in English speaking environments.

1.1 Aims of the Book

We take seriously the importance of ‘understanding the complex interactions between a pedagogical innovation and the context into which it is introduced’ (Schweisfurth, 2015). EMI as a pedagogical innovation in Vietnamese universities is set within the broader context of internationalisation in South East Asia, and specifically within higher education. In Vietnamese universities, this context has exerted considerable pressure and has frequently resulted in the implementation of EMI in undergraduate programs without sufficient readiness in terms of planning and resourcing (Nguyen et al., 2017; Tri & Moskovsky, 2019). Consequently a key aim of this book is to understand how particular institutions, teachers and students have engaged with EMI and the implications for moving forward with EMI to develop transformational EMI practices and provide quality educational experiences and outcomes for students.

More broadly, the purpose of the book is to provide a resource for the successful implementation of EMI programs and courses in Vietnam and other Asian settings. To this end, the specific objectives are:

- to bring alive the realities of teaching and learning through EMI and options for moving forward educationally;
- to inform the constructive development of institutional EMI policies and practices;
- to illustrate valuable EMI practices for teachers and students; and
- to provide professional learning and support for lecturers engaging in EMI.

Macaro et al. (2018, p. 11) argue that the evolution of EMI ‘should be research-led, not imposed top-down by market forces or by managerial imperatives [to] ensure that EMI would be of benefit to society at large and to the learners in particular’. Consequently, a further aim of this book is to contribute to the research-led evolution of EMI in Vietnamese higher education. We set the broad context in this chapter and the next, while subsequent chapters are grounded in the authors’ lived experience. This encompasses a range of disciplines—from engineering to business—and a range of university settings—metropolitan and regional; early to late undergraduate coursework. The emphasis throughout is on finding ways of making EMI work as effectively as possible within particular local constraints, and within the particular type of program offered. The experiences and strategies represented in this volume also enable comparison and contrast with those in similar contexts across Asia or elsewhere.

1.2 EMI as a Pedagogical Innovation

EMI is commonly defined as ‘the use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English’ (Dearden, 2014, p. 4). Although many have reported this definition as excluding the study of English itself, we agree with Dearden’s original definition that includes such study. English in Asian universities is taught as an accredited academic subject incorporating linguistics, literature and cultural studies, with all their associated conceptual content. It is also taught as a preliminary foundation for entry into EMI programs, in which case it may or may not be taught through EMI.

The focus in an EMI program is typically on achieving content-related learning outcomes, with English viewed solely as a tool for teaching (Airey, 2016), and with no explicit English language learning outcomes set out. Consequently, as Airey points out, EMI programs must be seen as very different from programs explicitly integrating content and language in higher education (ICLHE), where language learning is an assessable goal on a par with content achievement. Nevertheless there is often an implicit expectation on the part of policy makers, students and other stakeholders that there will indeed be some improvement in students’ English language proficiency over the years of an EMI program.

The rise of EMI in Asian universities is a direct reflection of the place of English within a globalising and glocalising world, reflecting ‘the rise in the geopolitical status of English as a lingua franca’ (Walkinshaw et al. 2017, p. 1). Internationally, English has been promoted as a pathway to ‘improve national competitiveness in a rapidly changing global market place’ (Wedell, 2009, p. 15), while in the ASEAN region, English also means that citizens ‘are able to communicate directly with one another and participate in the broader international communities’ (ASEAN Secretariat, 2009, p. 3). In Vietnam, proficiency in English is seen as ‘synonymous with economic growth and prosperity’ (Le, 2019, p. 8), and the aim of EMI programs has been to ‘promote international exchange, increase revenue, raise the quality and prestige of educational programs, and provide a well-qualified, bilingual workforce for Vietnam’s rapidly-developing economy’ (Nguyen et al., 2017, p. 37). Thus, EMI has an integral responsibility to society, while also being closely tied to university competitiveness, prosperity and international engagement, as well as having direct implications for the students and staff who engage with it.

Despite the importance of English language and the phenomenal, perhaps inevitable, development of EMI, concerns have been raised about educational effectiveness, social equity and English hegemony. Educational effectiveness relates to how EMI impacts learners’ acquisition and application of both content knowledge and English language competence. The findings internationally have been unclear, with Macaro et al. (2018) stressing that conclusive proof is required. As elsewhere, such proof is not yet available in the context of Vietnamese universities, and there is an urgent need for national research. With regard to social equity in Vietnamese tertiary study, access to EMI is at present available to only a small number of students in a limited number of academic disciplines. Tuition fees for EMI programs are often

higher than for standard programs, which hinders those students who cannot afford to enroll in EMI programs. In addition, low and/or varied competences in English occur widely across Vietnam, with considerable inequality of access to English and limited resources in many schools (Le, 2019), making it difficult for students to meet entry requirements for EMI programs. Nevertheless, although concern has been raised about social equity in Vietnam, impacts currently remain limited as the majority of tertiary students enroll in standard programs (Tran & Nguyen, 2018). Another recently emerging EMI concern internationally is related to the hegemonic status of English at the potential expense of mother tongues (Blattes, 2018; Wilkinson, 2013). The degree of such concern varies from one country to another due to historical and cultural factors, and it appears not to be a major concern in Vietnam. This is for several reasons. English is neither institutionalised as an official language, nor is it popular across workplaces. Furthermore, the number of people who speak English fluently is very small and it is not a language used in the home (Hoang, 2021); it is mainly favoured by teachers and students due to its advantages for employment and ongoing study (Le, 2017). Consequently, we do not foresee English hegemony over Vietnamese as problematic at this time.

Students in EMI classrooms such as those at Vietnamese universities can be categorised into four types (Anderson, 2016). Foreign students are differentiated according to whether they are participating in short-term mobility or exchange programs or have enrolled to follow a full program. Both types are currently represented in small numbers across many Vietnamese EMI higher education programs and across most of the chapters in this volume. Anderson (2016) further differentiates two types of domestic or ‘home’ students according to whether they are majoring in English through EMI, where English is *core*, or majoring in other areas, where English is *instrumental*. This categorisation is in line with our chosen definition of EMI, covering the use of English to teach any academic subject, including English. For the majority of students referred to in this book, English is instrumental, not core, although the students referred to in Chapter 9 do fall into the ‘core’ category. The teacher education students represented in Chapter 13 could be said to constitute a third domestic category—perhaps ‘instrumental-core’—since the students are majoring in primary school teaching, with English as just one specialist area.

A feature of EMI university students internationally has been their low and/or varied competences in English, and Vietnam is no different (Le, 2019). In response to inadequate English competence among students, universities internationally frequently put in place a sequence of overlapping language-conscious components making up what Schmidt-Unterberger (2018) refers to as a ‘paradigm of EMI’. The first component of the paradigm is typically a pre-session course in English for Special Purposes (ESP) and/or English for Academic Purposes (EAP). This is followed by curricular (embedded) ESP/EAP and/or adjunct ESP, the former targeting discipline-specific language and the genre knowledge needed for that discipline, while the latter is tied to and runs parallel with a particular content course. All of these components are taught by English language specialists. Vietnamese universities offering EMI programs reflect this EMI paradigm to some degree, but with

important differences and with corresponding implications for moving forward, as indicated in several chapters.

1.3 Undergraduate EMI Programs and Courses in Vietnamese Universities

The presence of EMI undergraduate programs in Vietnamese higher education institutions (HEIs) has been directly influenced by the 2008 government policy initiative entitled ‘Teaching and Learning Foreign Language Education in the National Education System in the Period 2008–2020’, known as the National Foreign Language 2020 project (Doan et al., 2018; Nguyen, 2018).

For some years now there have been three types of EMI program operating in Vietnamese universities, as well as the more recent introduction of individual EMI courses within standard Vietnamese Medium Instruction (VMI) programs. The first two types of EMI programs were born of cooperation between Vietnamese HEIs and foreign universities. Of these, Joint Programs are fully designed and delivered by staff of the foreign university, and offer an overseas qualification, while Advanced Programs use overseas curricula that are modified and delivered under agreement between local and foreign institutions, offering a domestic qualification (Nguyen et al., 2017; Vietnamese Government, 2008a, 2008b). Reflecting the current situation, only Chapter 4 in this book has a Joint Program setting, while Chapters 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12 and 14 have data relating to Advanced Programs. The third type of program, known as a High Quality Program, is a more recent introduction and involves a minimum of 20 per cent of its courses being delivered in English (MOET, 2014). These latter are fully domestic programs, developed, administered and delivered by Vietnamese universities, albeit with some reference to overseas programs. In addition, a number of regular undergraduate programs across the disciplines are beginning to offer single EMI courses in the later years of VMI programs (Nguyen et al., 2017; Rahman et al., 2018). Chapters 4, 6, 10 and 12 relate to High Quality Programs, while Chapters 6, 9, 10 and 13 relate to single courses within VMI programs, and Chapter 8 has data relating to both.

In regard to EMI programs imported from overseas, it must be noted that it is not just the language and the content that are imported, but also ways of thinking and understanding the world. While different academic disciplines call on different ways of thinking and viewing the world through their particular disciplinary lens, there are nonetheless some general ways of thinking and learning that come with imported EMI programs and are applicable to all disciplines. For example, ‘[c]ritical thinking, independent learning, lifelong and life-wide learning, and adversarial forms of argument are cited as virtues of Western education and seen as desirable goods’ (Ryan & Louie, 2007, p. 413). It follows that EMI in such programs inherently requires students to develop a degree of intercultural competence if they are to be successful (Aguilar, 2018). It also follows that Joint Programs would require

a very highly developed intercultural competence given that the imported program is taught without any of the locally relevant adaptations that are possible within Advanced Programs. At the same time, the widely used practice of translanguaging in EMI classrooms creates possibilities for the co-construction of knowledge using a combination of linguistic repertoires. Li Wei (2018) emphasises translanguaging as ‘a process of knowledge construction that goes beyond language(s) [taking] us beyond the linguistics of systems and speakers to a linguistics of participation’ (p. 15). It is participation in the globalising world that EMI is designed to foster.

1.4 Overview of the Chapters

This book has three parts, each highlighting the perspectives and voices of key university stakeholders in English medium education: institutions, practitioners and students. Each part concludes with a commentary from an international scholar active in the field of EMI-related research and practice. These commentaries respectively highlight the importance of institutional preparation, consultation and support; the need for a glocal educational approach; and the value of a socio-ecological perspective. The three parts are flanked by this introductory chapter and by a concluding chapter of meta-analysis and reflections from the editors.

The first part of the book—Institutional perspectives on EMI practices in Vietnamese universities—provides a backdrop and frame of reference for the subsequent parts. It considers institutional practices in English medium instruction in higher education, addressing both the broad educational context of university EMI programs and particular curricular and extracurricular environments. The second part, on EMI classroom practices, provides perspectives from lecturers who have been actively engaging with EMI and attempting to support their students’ learning. These practitioner perspectives focus on how to approach the learning needs of students in an overall and comprehensive way and some pedagogical practices teachers can usefully engage in. The third part offers student perspectives on ways of engaging with EMI and addressing its challenges, along with ideas for improving their EMI experience. These student perspectives relate to their actual experiences of learning, indicating the strategies they draw on and the outcomes they achieve in terms of both the disciplinary content and their intercultural and linguistic competences. Across the book, it is the agency of stakeholders that is in focus in terms of moving forward with EMI. This focus on the agency of institutions, teachers and students offers pathways for readers to engage in critical reflection and consider innovative action in other settings.

Of the three chapters discussing institutional practices, the first is wide-ranging across Vietnamese university settings in general, the second offers the experience of a single university that set out to enhance students’ EMI experience, while the third considers the issue of sustaining practitioners as they undertake EMI within their particular disciplines. Chapter 2 puts forward an analysis of the current EMI situation in Vietnamese universities using the ROAD-MAPPING framework proposed