

CLIL-IZING EMI GRAPHIC DESIGN CLASSES: COLLABORATIVE PEDAGOGICAL EFFORTS OF VIETNAMESE TERTIARY LECTURERS

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Abstract. English-medium instruction (EMI) has grown quickly in higher education, yet it remains mainly content-focused and offers little support for the discipline-specific communication that practice-based fields require. EMI and content and language integrated learning (CLIL) are conceptually distinct, but how the two intersect in actual disciplinary practice is still under-theorized. This study frames “CLIL-ization” as a gradual, collaborative process by which lecturers work language-aware practices into an existing EMI structure. Working within an exploratory descriptive qualitative design, we gathered data through a single online focus group with five Vietnamese EMI graphic design lecturers at a transnational university. The findings show that EMI serves visually supported, procedural instruction reasonably well but falls short for critique, justification, and conceptual explanation - the communicative practices at the heart of graphic design. In response, lecturers built in CLIL-oriented scaffolding, modeled disciplinary discourse, and coordinated a shared vocabulary across their courses. This shift emerged through informal collaboration rather than institutional policy, suggesting an EMI-CLIL continuum along which lecturer collaboration drives pedagogical movement.

Keywords: EMI; CLIL; teacher collaboration; graphic design education; Vietnamese higher education.

1. Introduction

English-medium instruction (EMI) has expanded rapidly in higher education, especially where national languages have traditionally dominated and English had limited presence (Wächter & Maiworm, 2014). EMI refers to teaching disciplinary content through English in non-English-speaking contexts, involving teachers and students whose first language is not English (Kirkpatrick, 2014). Promoted for internationalization, EMI yields inconsistent outcomes, with a gap between English-only policy and multilingual practice. Though programs follow monolingual norms, lecturers and students often use translanguaging and code-switching to negotiate meaning and support comprehension (Park, 2019; Smit, 2019). Lecturers prioritize disciplinary content over structured linguistic development, as EMI is often treated strictly as “a pragmatic means to a content-related end”, with the result that “content lecturers have been reported as insisting that they do not teach language” (Airey, 2020, p. 343). Yet limited preparation, uneven proficiency, heavier workloads, emotional strain, and weak institutional support reduce lecturers’ ability to address language needs (Lasagabaster, 2022; Yuan, 2023), disadvantaging students when demands remain implicit.

Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) offers a lens to rethink EMI (Coyle et al., 2010). CLIL combines content teaching with language learning through authentic activity, guided by the 4Cs framework - content, communication, cognition, and culture (Coyle et al., 2010; Lap et al., 2025; Vu & Nguyen, 2022). At tertiary level, it often involves collaboration between content lecturers and language specialists through joint task design, scaffolding, and reflection (Wallace et al., 2020). However, CLIL is demanding due to time pressure, institutional constraints, and

tensions between goals (Wallace et al., 2020). Thus, “CLIL-izing” EMI has become practical, though lecturers still see themselves mainly as subject specialists (Carrió-Pastor, 2021).

Research shows that CLIL-informed EMI can broaden exposure and vocabulary once scaffolding is built in (Nieto Moreno de Diezmas et al., 2024), and that collaboration helps lecturers analyze linguistic demands and design tasks, provided that it proceeds gradually and stays matched to student readiness (Lu, 2022; Xu & Zhang, 2022). Limited time, unclear roles, and weak recognition, however, continue to get in the way (Malmström & Zhou, 2025), and in Vietnam administrative pressure adds a further constraint (Au et al., 2025). Informal, lecturer-led collaboration of this kind has been unexamined (Au et al., 2025; Dalton-Puffer, 2011), a gap that matters particularly in graphic design, where learning depends on visual production, critique, and disciplinary discourse. This study asks how Vietnamese EMI graphic design lecturers integrate CLIL principles, with the aim of contributing to EMI research in Vietnam and in practice-based disciplines more broadly. It addresses the following research questions: (1) *How do Vietnamese EMI graphic design lecturers describe their experiences of integrating CLIL principles into their EMI teaching through collaborative pedagogical efforts?*; (2) *What pedagogical rationales, opportunities, and constraints do the lecturers perceive when CLIL-izing EMI graphic design courses in their institutional context?*

This study uses an exploratory descriptive qualitative (EDQ) design to examine lecturers’ experiences. Within a bounded case study framework, we held a 90-minute online focus group via Zoom with five EMI graphic design lecturers at a transnational university in southern Vietnam. The method was chosen to generate collaborative reflections on teaching practices, opportunities, and institutional challenges. The discussion was conducted in Vietnamese to ensure clear communication and natural interaction, recorded with consent, transcribed, and translated into English. We analyzed the data thematically, combining deductive coding drawn from our conceptual framework with inductive coding to capture practices specific to the discipline.

The study’s contribution to EMI and CLIL research runs along three lines. Theoretically, it proposes a framework placing EMI and CLIL on a continuum, in which informal teacher collaboration drives a bottom-up process of “CLIL-ization.” Empirically, it answers calls for context-sensitive accounts of EMI in Vietnam, with attention to studio-based disciplines where discursive practices matter a great deal but have drawn little research attention. Pedagogically, it points to practical strategies (e.g., modeling critique language, coordinating disciplinary vocabulary, and scaffolding peer rehearsal) that lecturers can use on their own initiative. Above all, these lecturer-led approaches suggest that educators can strengthen equity and communicative competence in EMI classrooms without waiting for formal policy reform.

2. Literature review and Conceptual framework

2.1. English-medium instruction (EMI)

English-medium instruction (EMI) has expanded fast where a national language once held sway in higher education (Wächter & Maiworm, 2014), and is generally defined as teaching academic content through English among teachers and students who are not native English speakers (Kirkpatrick, 2014). Often discussed through the lens of English as a lingua franca, it operates in settings that are inherently multilingual even when top-down policy insists on English as the sole medium (Smit, 2019), a stance that puts internationalization ahead of pedagogy. Akıncioğlu (2024, p. 146) tries to resolve some of this conceptual murkiness by defining EMI quality as “the level of excellence at which the institutional EMI policy is reflected in instructional practices (i.e. pedagogies, instructional materials, linguistic landscape and so on), learning outcomes and alumni performance”. Between that policy and everyday practice sits a gap that lecturers and students fill on their own, turning to translanguaging and code-switching to negotiate

meaning and keep informal interaction moving (Park, 2019; Smit, 2019). Such practices reveal a pragmatic orientation toward disciplinary knowledge rather than language development as such (Airey, 2020), and without explicit language support, EMI risks compounding inequality by assuming a level of proficiency students may not have. The familiar challenges include limited pedagogical preparation, monolingual policy, uneven proficiency, heavy workloads, and weak institutional support (Lasagabaster, 2022; Yuan, 2023). As Yuan (2023, p. 673) puts it, “taking up EMI teaching can be an emotionally complex and daunting task for disciplinary teachers”. EMI, in short, requires context-sensitive support, flexible policy, ongoing professional development, and attention to disciplinary literacy (Airey, 2020; Kirkpatrick, 2014; Smit, 2019; Yuan, 2023).

2.2. Content and language integrated learning (CLIL)

In higher education, content and language integrated learning (CLIL) uses an additional language to teach academic content while letting language ability develop through genuine engagement with that content (Coyle et al., 2010). It functions as an umbrella term for flexible practices that integrate language and content without one overriding the other, sustaining students’ exposure to academic English (Dalton-Puffer, 2011; Wallace et al., 2020), although keeping that dual focus balanced is easier said than done. CLIL looks different in varying settings. At one end, reading-oriented instruction tying comprehension to subject-specific terms; at the other, task-based, collaborative work built around the 4Cs framework and grounded in authentic materials and interaction (Coyle et al., 2010; Lap et al., 2025; Vu & Nguyen, 2022). It can also involve content teachers working alongside applied linguists to design scaffolded tasks and shared assessment (Wallace et al., 2020), even though such collaboration needs institutional conditions, such as time, defined roles, recognition, which are not always in place. Intensive preparation demands, stakeholder resistance, and systemic constraints complicate matters further (Lap et al., 2025; Vu & Nguyen, 2022; Wallace et al., 2020), which is why effective CLIL tends to rest on phased implementation, ongoing professional learning, context-responsive adaptation, and solid institutional backing (Wallace et al., 2020).

2.3. CLIL-izing EMI programs

“CLIL-izing” EMI is one practical answer to EMI’s shortcomings where English is not the dominant language. The two approaches look similar but are not the same. CLIL integrates content and language learning through dual assessment, whereas EMI prioritizes content, assumes high proficiency, and leaves language development to chance (Carrió-Pastor, 2021). That difference reshapes what lecturers are expected to do. A CLIL teacher supports both domains at once; an EMI lecturer more often acts purely as a subject specialist, narrowing the room for language scaffolding (Carrió-Pastor, 2021). Nonetheless, how willing lecturers are to take on this broader role, and how much backing they get for it, seems unclear. Folding CLIL principles into EMI addresses some of these gaps without a full program overhaul, building English exposure, vocabulary, and receptive skills through scaffolding. Collaboration between content lecturers and language specialists is helpful, particularly in analyzing linguistic demands and designing tasks that are cognitively progressive rather than merely simplified (Nieto Moreno de Diezmas et al., 2024). None of this works, though, without curriculum alignment, sustained support, and implementation that moves gradually and stays matched to student proficiency (Nieto Moreno de Diezmas et al., 2024).

2.4. Teacher collaboration in EMI programs

Teacher collaboration is widely seen as one of the main ways to work through the pedagogical and linguistic tensions built into EMI programs. Case studies indicate that when content lecturers and language specialists collaborate over an extended period, teaching can change from transmission-focused delivery toward integrated content-language practice. For example, Xu and Zhang’s (2022) longitudinal study shows how team teaching gradually reshaped an engineering lecturer’s language awareness, professional identity, and classroom practice.

Similarly, Lu (2022) found that interdisciplinary collaboration supported by language consultants increased confidence, creativity, and student-centered teaching. Lin (2025) further shows that structured cycles of co-planning, co-teaching, and co-reflection can change classroom interaction and strengthen lecturers’ multimodal awareness. However, most evidence comes from structured or externally supported projects, raising questions about sustainability in less supported contexts. At a broader level, scoping reviews stress the necessity for mediating tools, clear roles, and institutional recognition to maintain collaboration (Malmström & Zhou, 2025). In Vietnam, Au et al. (2025) report that EMI lecturers value collaboration but face structural and administrative pressures. Despite policy rhetoric, the planning of EMI remains “essentially top-down... with little or no proper consultation with agents/actors representing the meso and micro levels” (Tri & Moskovsky, 2019, p. 1342). Nonetheless, most studies examine predefined models, leaving routine lecturer-led CLIL-oriented collaboration underexplored, especially in Vietnamese higher education (Malmström & Zhou, 2025; Xu & Zhang, 2022).

2.5. Conceptual framework: CLIL-ization of EMI through teacher collaboration

EMI, CLIL, and teacher collaboration have each attracted substantial research attention, but they are rarely brought together in a single framework. EMI, as noted, is content-dominant with language support left implicit (Airey, 2020; Carrió-Pastor, 2021); CLIL integrates content and language objectives more deliberately (Coyle et al., 2010; Dalton-Puffer, 2011); and collaboration is usually discussed as a matter of professional development or institutional support (Au et al., 2025; Malmström & Zhou, 2025). What is missing is an account of how collaboration might mediate a transformation from content-focused EMI toward CLIL-informed practice. We position EMI and CLIL on a continuum running from content-dominant instruction to CLIL-informed teaching, and treat collaboration as the mechanism that mediates movement along it. Through dialogue, shared problem-solving, and joint task design, lecturers can make language demands visible, lend legitimacy to scaffolding, and reduce the uncertainty around who is responsible for language support. In this sense, collaboration supplies the social and cognitive infrastructure for gradual “CLIL-ization”, the incremental embedding of language-aware practices without any formal structural reform. This framework guides the present study, both in identifying indicators of movement along the EMI-CLIL continuum and in treating lecturer collaboration as the central mediating process.

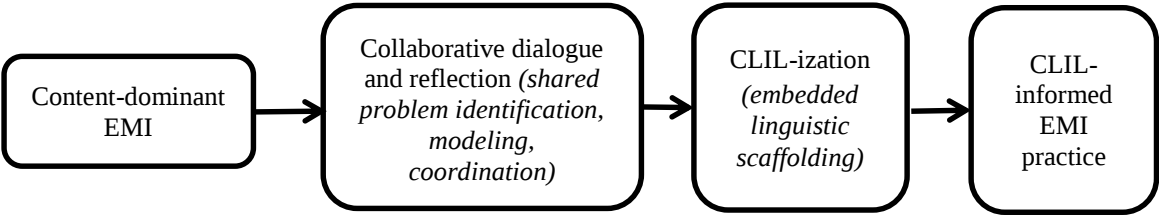


Figure 1. Conceptual model of CLIL-ization of EMI through teacher collaboration

3. Research methodology

3.1. Research design

To examine how Vietnamese EMI graphic design lecturers collaboratively integrate CLIL principles, the study adopts an exploratory descriptive qualitative (EDQ) approach, suiting an underexplored area like this one, since it produces grounded descriptions of lecturers’ lived experience and reasoning (Hunter et al., 2019). Combined with purposeful sampling and semi-structured interviewing (Hunter et al., 2019), EDQ lets lecturers explain, in their own terms, how they collaborate, what pedagogical choices they make, and what gets in the way. Embedding this approach

within a case study anchors those accounts in one bounded institutional setting, which in turn gives insights shaped by the specific disciplinary, curricular, and organizational conditions at play.

3.2. Research context and participants

The study took place at an EMI transnational university in southern Vietnam. English is the official language of instruction, but no structured framework governs language development in disciplinary courses, so responsibility for linguistic support falls to individual lecturers. We focused on the undergraduate Graphic Design program, a studio-based degree that requests technical, conceptual, and evaluative English alike. Students typically enter with IELTS scores of 5.5-6.0, but lecturers describe their proficiency as uneven in practice, especially in oral explanation and specialized vocabulary, which is exactly why explicit disciplinary language support matters in this case. Five lecturers were selected through purposive sampling to represent a range of perspectives on CLIL-oriented EMI practice. This non-probabilistic strategy favors information richness over statistical representativeness (Creswell & Poth, 2018), with adequacy judged by depth rather than sample size. All participants had at least three years of teaching experience, some involvement in language-related initiatives, and a demonstrated willingness to reflect critically. Such qualities can support the credibility and analytic transferability of what they had to say.

3.3. Research instrument

Data were collected from a single online synchronous focus group with all five participants, chosen to capture their collaborative CLIL-oriented EMI practices. Online focus groups adapt the traditional interview format to a digital setting while still preserving guided interaction, which is suitable for participants who are geographically dispersed or short on time (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2017). Held live on Zoom, the 90-minute session ran in Vietnamese to keep communication precise, and both audio and video were recorded with oral informed consent; a small group and a fixed duration helped keep the session manageable online and the data of good quality (Willemsen et al., 2023). The semi-structured protocol, built from our conceptual framework, covered three broad areas - EMI experiences, CLIL-oriented practices, and collaboration - through 17 guiding questions organized into five clusters (EMI practice, CLIL adjustments, collaboration, perceived benefits, constraints). We piloted the protocol with two external EMI lecturers beforehand and refined the wording accordingly to improve content validity.

3.4. Data collection and analysis

As noted, the 90-minute online focus group was designed to elicit lecturers' shared reflections and their interactive sense-making around collaborative CLIL-izing. Vietnamese was used for rich, uninhibited discussion, and the discussion was recorded (audio and video) with consent, transcribed verbatim, and then translated into English. Thematic analysis guided our reading of the data, aimed at identifying patterned meanings across the transcript (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process moved recursively through familiarization, coding, and theme development. In a first, deductive cycle, we coded for content-dominant EMI, CLIL-informed practices, and collaboration as a mediating mechanism; a second, inductive cycle picked up discipline-specific practices such as modeling critique sentences, pre-presentation rehearsal, and vocabulary building. These codes were then refined into subthemes and consolidated into four overarching themes. To support trustworthiness, we maintained reflexive engagement throughout, kept an audit trail, and grounded our interpretations in representative excerpts from participants.

3.5. Ethical considerations

The study followed standard ethical procedures for research involving human participants, with attention throughout to their rights, dignity, and well-being. Participation was voluntary; oral informed consent was recorded before the interview began, as soon as the study's aims, procedures, and intended use of the data had been explained, and participants were free to decline

any question or withdraw at any point. We protected confidentiality by assigning pseudonyms (Minh, Trang, Lan, Huy, and Phuc) and by stripping identifying personal, professional, and institutional detail from the transcripts and the findings. Data were stored securely, and reflexivity on our part as researchers informed both analysis and reporting. These safeguards, we believe, are part of why lecturers were willing to speak openly about their pedagogical challenges, collaborative practices, and the constraints of their institution, without worrying about professional exposure.

4. Research findings and Discussion

4.1. Research findings

4.1.1. EMI as an incomplete pedagogy

In the discussion, participants kept returning to one distinction, stating that EMI worked reasonably well for procedural delivery but struggled with discursive engagement. It held up fine for technical instruction, especially where learning depended on demonstration and imitation. As Minh put it, *“From my experience, EMI is relatively manageable when we are dealing with technical or procedural content, such as software functions or production steps, because students can follow demonstrations and imitate actions”*. Visual modeling compensated for linguistic limitations, as students could, for instance, reproduce Adobe Illustrator layering and masking techniques from step-by-step demonstration even when the verbal explanation only partly landed. Things got harder when teaching moved into conceptual reasoning, verbal justification, and critique. Minh noted that students often had good ideas but could not put them into English, so their thinking came across as weaker than it actually was; project rationales tended to collapse into simple statements with little said about audience, hierarchy, or meaning. Trang made a similar observation, revealing that students could produce sophisticated layouts but explained typeface or spacing choices only in the thinnest terms, reaching for words like *“nice”* or *“clear”* and little else. For Lan, the real difficulty was disciplinary language, not everyday English. Lexical frames such as *“This design aims to position the brand as...”* were introduced, explanations grew longer and more coherent. Interaction during critiques also thinned out, and Huy pointed to fear as the reason, clarifying students stayed silent because they worried about getting their opinions wrong in English. Taken together, participants saw EMI as adequate for visually supported teaching but not up to the task of meaning-making, critique, and discipline-specific communication.

4.1.2. CLIL as a pedagogical reframing of EMI

Participants described their engagement with CLIL principles as something that developed gradually, out of teaching experience rather than formal training or institutional policy. In other words, it was a way of rethinking EMI practice rather than a separate model. Lan said that *“I see CLIL not as a separate method, but as a mindset shift. Instead of assuming students will pick up the language, we started to ask ourselves what linguistic resources students need to participate meaningfully in design activities”*. Language stopped being an assumed by-product of content exposure and became a visible condition for participation. Instead of adding language teaching on top, lecturers reconsidered the linguistic demands already built into disciplinary tasks, replacing a vague instruction like *“present your concept”* with sentence starters such as *“This campaign targets...”* or *“The central visual metaphor represents...”*. Phuc connected this to advertising design specifically, as he stated if students cannot explain a concept persuasively, the concept loses its force. He began introducing short modeling before critique sessions, showing students how to justify design choices through audience analysis, brand positioning, and visual elements, and over time, student presentations moved from *“This is my logo”* toward fuller statements like *“This logo uses geometric shapes to convey stability and align with the brand’s corporate identity”*. Communication became part of disciplinary competence, not just simply a supplementary skill. Several participants tied this reframing to fairness and access. Minh worried

that students often produced good work they simply could not explain, raising questions for him about whether EMI was equitable at all, while Trang argued that without language scaffolding EMI became unrealistic. Specifically, CLIL, in her view, made it more humane and pedagogically defensible. In practice, this perspective turned into critique checklists, dedicated preparation time for peer feedback, and group rehearsals before presentations.

4.1.3. Collaborative attempts of CLIL-izing EMI

The process of CLIL-izing EMI was regular and strongly shaped by lecturer collaboration. Rather than resulting from policy mandates, pedagogical change was socially negotiated through daily professional interaction. Participants emphasized that informal collaboration, more than institutional structures, drove this change. Lan explained: *“Most of our collaboration is informal, but it’s very meaningful. We talk after class, share frustrations, and exchange small teaching ideas. That’s where CLIL really developed for us”*. She recalled post-class discussions in which lecturers compared students’ presentation difficulties and revised task instructions by adding clearer prompts for justification and audience analysis. CLIL-ization thus developed through shared reflection rather than formal implementation. Through these interactions, lecturers developed shared ways to support language use. Huy described explicit modeling of critique language, demonstrating sentences such as *“The visual hierarchy guides the viewer’s attention toward the focal point”*, so students had concrete linguistic models. After several examples and key phrases on the board, students moved from isolated adjectives such as *“confusing layout”* to fuller evaluations like *“The layout feels confusing because the alignment shifts between sections”*. Collaboration also led to shared disciplinary vocabulary across courses. Minh noted that lecturers developed shared vocabulary lists so students could see design language as cumulative rather than fragmented, with terms such as *“visual hierarchy”*, *“contrast”*, *“brand positioning”*, and *“user experience”* emphasized across courses. Collaboration further strengthened lecturers’ confidence. Phuc said the shared discussion made language support feel like a collective responsibility, and Huy added that trying similar approaches together made him more confident. Even so, participants noted the absence of structured collaboration time, formal guidance, or institutional support. As a result, CLIL stayed lecturer-initiated and depended primarily on collective goodwill.

4.1.4. Merits, shortcomings, and recommendations

Participants introduced several benefits of these CLIL-informed adjustments, particularly for participation and disciplinary communication during critiques. Collaboration led lecturers to co-develop guiding questions such as *“What design principle are you applying here?”* and *“How does this visual choice support your concept?”*, alongside language frames like *“I chose this layout because...”*. In some studios these prompts made their way onto critique sheets or were projected during presentations, making disciplinary expectations explicit rather than assumed. Increased student engagement came up repeatedly. Phuc observed that *“students are more willing to speak now, not perfectly, but more confidently”*, with voluntary peer comments growing from one or two brief remarks to five or six fuller responses in a typical session. Minh described a fairly stark shift: *“Before, they just said ‘I like this color’ or ‘It looks better’. Now they say, ‘I chose this color palette to create harmony and reflect the brand identity’”*. He also said students increasingly connected hierarchy, audience, and emotional tone when lecturers agreed to require justification using such terms. In addition, lecturers changed their own practice too. Trang recommended pair rehearsal before critiques to ease anxiety, and Lan revised her project briefs to include a language focus, listing key vocabulary such as *“brand personality”*, *“visual consistency”*, and *“market positioning”*. These changes indicate that CLIL-ization happened through incremental task redesign, not structural overhaul. Sustainability remains fragile, as time constraints came up again and again, and lecturers found it genuinely hard, in oral assessment, to separate linguistic weakness from conceptual weakness. Institutional support was uneven throughout, leaving CLIL-oriented work dependent mostly on informal collaboration. It is the

reason why participants expressed their expectation for tighter alignment between curriculum, assessment, and communicative demands that actually focused on students.

4.2. Discussion

One outstanding finding in this study is that EMI was considered workable for visually supported, procedural instruction, but appeared insufficient for the conceptual reasoning, critique, and justification at the center of graphic design education. This finding fits a broader pattern in EMI research, that is, only content delivery does not guarantee equitable access to disciplinary meaning-making when students lack the linguistic resources to express complex thinking (Airey, 2020; Smit, 2019). Lecturers repeatedly observed that students had ideas but could not express them, suggesting that EMI can end up conflating language proficiency with cognitive ability and thereby obscure how much students actually understand. This orientation echoes Park's (2019) finding that EMI classrooms often run on implicit linguistic expectations that disadvantage students in interaction-heavy activities. Notably, participants were not worried about general English proficiency but about the absence of discipline-specific language, a distinction that supports CLIL scholarship's claim that academic success hinges on access to subject-specific discourse rather than generic language skill (Dalton-Puffer, 2011; Wallace et al., 2020). EMI's limits, then, showed up most clearly in critiques, explanations, and presentations, precisely where linguistic ability and disciplinary performance are hardest to pull apart.

Participants treated CLIL as a reframing of EMI, a mindset that foregrounds the linguistic demands built into disciplinary participation. It fits the literature's distinction between EMI as content-focused delivery and CLIL as a dual-focused pedagogy integrating language and content learning (Carrió-Pastor, 2021). However, unlike the formal CLIL implementations (Coyle et al., 2010; Wallace et al., 2020), these lecturers never articulated explicit language objectives or assessment criteria; instead, they folded CLIL principles selectively into existing practice, mainly to make EMI feel more pedagogically realistic and ethically defensible. This point extends earlier work on CLIL-izing EMI by showing that such integration can grow out of lecturers' own professional reflection rather than formal policy or training. Their recurring emphasis on fairness and access also suggests that equity concerns, more than anything else, were driving this thinking, which is consistent with critiques that EMI can reproduce inequality wherever linguistic support is missing (Lasagabaster, 2022).

The collaborative practices observed also differed from the intervention-driven or formally structured models in earlier studies (Xu & Zhang, 2022). Collaboration in this case was informal, lecturer-initiated, and woven into routine professional exchange rather than set up from outside. Through collaborative reflection, mutual modeling, and a coordinated approach to disciplinary language, lecturers validated language support as part of their teaching responsibilities, addressing a tension that shows up repeatedly in the EMI literature (Carrió-Pastor, 2021). This finding supports the argument that collaboration reshapes not just teaching practice but lecturers' professional identity and confidence in handling language issues (Lu, 2022). That none of this involved a language specialist speaks to how adaptive the process was, though the limited institutional recognition it received leaves real questions about its sustainability (Au et al., 2025; Malmström & Zhou, 2025).

Pedagogically, the findings regard CLIL-informed EMI as a good strategy for practice-based disciplines such as graphic design, where understanding grows out of multimodal artifacts but still has to be communicated through specialized discourse. Explicit modeling of critique language, shared vocabulary building, and scaffolded interaction can support participation without pushing EMI toward a full CLIL program. Theoretically, the study shows CLIL principles operating as a pedagogical logic rather than a fixed model. Thus, it could extend EMI-CLIL scholarship beyond its formalized frameworks and answering calls for context-sensitive accounts of Vietnamese higher education (Au et al., 2025).

5. Conclusions

This study was conducted to examine how Vietnamese EMI graphic design lecturers collaborate to integrate CLIL principles, and what pedagogical reasoning, opportunities, and constraints shape that process. Lecturers turned to CLIL to address students' communicative difficulties. EMI worked well enough for visual and procedural instruction but proved less effective for critiques and conceptual justification, where disciplinary language was in short supply. In response, lecturers built CLIL-oriented scaffolding into their teaching informally, through collegial discussion and shared observation rather than institutional guidance, underlining just how central collaboration was to CLIL-izing EMI in this setting. Collaboration also pushed lecturers to redefine their own professional role, gradually accepting language support as part of content teaching, which helped strengthen their confidence and made classrooms more inclusive. Sustainability, however, remains an open problem, given time pressure, assessment that is not yet aligned with these practices, and a lack of policy recognition. In short, CLIL-EMI integration looks like a situated, lecturer-led process that would benefit from closer alignment between EMI policy, assessment, and communicative demands which placed on students in class. The study is still limited to lecturers' perspectives at a single institution, so its findings result in a necessity for further future research among different disciplines, institutional contexts, and significantly student viewpoints.

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