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# Exploring International Post-Graduate Students' Speaking Experiences in an English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) Context

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**Abstract.** This study aims to explore the practice of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in Malaysia by investigating the experiences of international students enrolled in doctoral programs at the university level. In addition, the study provides an in-depth insight into the students' attitudes, the challenges they face, and the factors that influence academic English speaking. The authors also examine the implications of enhancing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) within the international post-graduate students' academic English-speaking experience in the Malaysian EMI context. This study adopted a qualitative approach. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews with 16 international doctoral students enrolled in various doctoral programs at a university in Malaysia. Data were coded and categorized according to themes using the NVIVO 12 software. The results show that there is a variety of challenges faced by the students in academic English speaking in an EMI context. Factors influencing their academic speaking include their past experiences and willingness to communicate. The study also suggests that lecturers should know that code-switching between English and Malay may impact international students' understanding and involvement in class.

**Keywords:** doctoral students; Academic English speaking; EMI; Malaysia

## 1. Introduction

The English language is widely used around the world. It is a medium of instruction in universities where English is a foreign language (EFL), as in the Malaysian context. However, some students with inadequate English proficiency struggle where English is used exclusively at the tertiary level. Thus, studying the practices, challenges, and factors related to academic English-speaking is fundamental to ensuring academic progress.

High English language proficiency gives students a significant advantage in communication and research. Therefore, there has been an increase in English medium courses in universities in many EFL countries. University programs and courses in English as the medium of instruction capture international students' attention and align with the university's mission to be world-class. As an international medium of instruction, many journal articles, textbooks, resource books, and other resource materials are also written in English. Thus, universities adopting EMI is a growing phenomenon in all phases of education and educational contexts (Dearden, 2014). Therefore, there is a growing need to understand EFL students' experiences and practices in using academic English in the EMI context. In particular, doctoral studies require extensive and intensive reading, academic discussions, attending lectures, presenting at conferences, and thesis writing. As such, there is a strong need for doctoral students to study in an EMI context to achieve high proficiency in English, including academic speaking.

In this era of globalization, English is an essential language for professional, educational and personal growth. As the medium of instruction, English usage increases the opportunity for EFL students to study abroad and obtain employment. Dearden (2014) mapped the increasing number of EMI on a global scale and found a rapid expansion of EMI provision in 54 countries with prospects of higher growth in the future. As one of the countries using EMI, this is a common phenomenon in Malaysia as the preferred education destination among international students. Currently, 170,000 international students are enrolled in Malaysian universities from 162 countries. Further, Malaysia aims to attract 250,000 international students by 2025 (Education Malaysia Global Services, 2021).

The internationalization of universities has resulted in a growing interest in investigating post-graduate students' experiences in EMI contexts, including in Malaysia, the US, Singapore, and Pakistan (e.g., Bolton et al., 2017; Gu & Lee, 2019; Kaur, J., 2020; Owen et al., 2021). Previous studies predominantly focused on local students or both local and international students. However, this paper attempts to gain valuable insight into international students' experiences in the Malaysian EMI context. The number of international doctoral students has increased and constitutes the majority of students in many universities in Malaysia. However, there is a lack of understanding regarding Ph.D. international students' experiences in the Malaysian EMI context. Rahman et al. (2022) claimed that EMI had been implemented in the context of higher education in non-native English-speaking countries for internationalization purposes. Therefore, there is a strong need to understand the academic English-speaking experiences, practices, and needs of international students in Malaysia.

This study examines three research questions as follows:

1. What are international doctoral students' English-speaking practices, perceptions, and attitudes in the EMI context in Malaysia?
2. What challenges do international students face in academic English-speaking practices within the EMI context in Malaysia?
3. What factors affect the academic speaking of international students in the EMI context in Malaysia?

## 2. Literature Review

Higher education requires students to display their strength in academic English speaking for world-class education and better employment opportunities. Accordingly, the global use of EMI in higher education is the most significant current trend in internationalizing higher education for the global visibility of national education systems (Parr, 2014).

Student engagement in the academic language is the specialized language, both oral and written, of academic contexts that facilitate communication and understanding of academic content (Nagy & Townsend, 2012). As the number of English learners in higher education programs increases, lecturers must ensure that students meet specific academic standards. In other words, students must be proficient in English for educational and career growth.

In order to enhance English learners' academic speaking ability, higher learning institutions will have to provide a conducive learning environment for learners to improve their speaking ability. The measures that can be implemented include:

- (1) more opportunities to speak while lowering anxiety;
- (2) emphasizing the importance of academic speaking; and
- (3) specific courses on teaching academic and content vocabulary.

Many higher education institutions worldwide are committed to international recognition. English-medium instruction is mainstream in countries where English is not the native language (Bradford, 2016; Chang et al., 2017; Clegg & Simpson, 2016; Dafouz & Camacho-Miñano, 2016). Dearden (2014) also defined EMI as the use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where most of the population's first language (L1) is not English. Past related studies have mainly been conducted in Europe, focusing on the impact of EMI on learning outcomes. There is also an increase in studies on EMI in Asia as practices and challenges in implementing EMI vary depending on local conditions and contexts.

Byun et al. (2011) studied students' beliefs about EMI in Korean higher learning institutions. They pointed out that EMI improved English proficiency. Yeh (2014) also carried out a similar study and found that 75% of students in Taiwan claimed that EMI benefited their English, mainly in listening. Song (2019) conducted in-depth interviews with 51 Chinese students from EMI programs and concluded that EMI guarantees employability and career growth. Universities can also benefit from EMI by attracting and increasing international students' mobility and raising university rankings (Chang et al., 2017). Similarly, in their study involving graduate students from China studying at a university in South Korea, Yong-Jik, Davis, & Yue (2021) found that the EMI environment helped the graduate students improve their English ability and learn content.

Corrales, Rey & Escamilla (2016) found that implementing EMI can be beneficial but also poses challenges. Generally, they were concerned whether the challenges of implementing EMI have been neglected with the accelerated expansion of EMI. They found three categories of challenges: linguistic challenges, including

students' inability to take academic notes and lecturers' use of a less accessible language in the classroom, cultural challenges related to different cultural backgrounds, and structural challenges related to management.

Due to the reason that there is no systematic guide for EMI, different countries have adopted different methods and standards. Thus, further studies will determine the specific patterns of EMI in higher learning institutions in different countries and contexts.

### 3. Research Methodology

This study aims to develop a deeper understanding of students' academic English-speaking experiences and practices among students with different English proficiency levels. The study utilizes a qualitative case study approach, which is an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the richness and complexity of a bounded social phenomenon (Bloomberg, L. D., & Volpe, M. 2018). A qualitative approach helps generate deep insights to inform international students' practices and challenges in the EMI context when studying in Malaysia.

#### 3.1 Research Design

The sample group in the study consisted of 16 international doctoral students currently studying in an EMI context in a public university in Malaysia.

Data were collected through individual face-to-face, in-depth interviews with 16 international doctoral students from different countries who share the same experience of studying in a public university in Malaysia.

In order to encourage the interviewee to share detailed descriptions of their experience (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006), semi-structured interviews were used to explore the experiences of international doctoral students and seek patterns using the NVivo software version 12. The interview questions were designed to guide the interview and enable the researchers to cover the main topic of the present study (Mason, 2004).

#### 3.2 Sampling

This study collected qualitative data through purposive sampling. The respondents were international doctoral students in Malaysia. Since the respondents were a small group, the snowball sampling technique was used. The respondent identified their friends or colleagues so the data could be enriched like rolling snow (Haque, 2010). Table 1 shows the respondents' profiles.

**Table 1: Profile of respondents**

No.	Age	Gender	Nationality	First language
S1L	26	Female	China	Chinese
S3H	26	Male	Pakistan	Urdu
S5H	27	Female	China	Chinese
S2A	35	Male	Nigeria	Hausa
S4E	49	Male	Nigeria	Hausa
S5E	32	Female	Iran	Persian
S4L	41	Female	China	Chinese

S2H	35	Female	Pakistan	Urdu
S3L	28	Male	China	Chinese
S2M	33	Female	Iran	Persian
S2E	35	Male	Iran	Persian
S1E	45	Female	Iraq	Arabic
S1A	25	Female	Iran	Persian
S3A	27	Female	China	Chinese
S3E	39	Male	Iran	Persian
S4A	29	Female	China	Chinese

### 3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews for data collection. The objective of the interviews was to understand the independent thoughts of international students in Malaysia on their English-speaking experience within the EMI context. The semi-structured interview guide was constructed based on the research objectives and questions. The researcher mainly asked probing, open-ended questions, such as “How do you feel about the EMI education in Malaysia?” and “What are the academic English-speaking challenges you are facing now?”. Before the actual interview, the guideline was sent to several researchers for proofreading. Meanwhile, a pilot study was conducted to gather participants’ feedback regarding the research questions to ensure trustworthiness.

The interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis. Each interview took approximately 30 minutes on average. During the interview, the researchers took notes and recorded the audio. At the end of the interview, the researchers transcribed the interview verbatim. Next, the researchers employed a thematic analysis to analyze the transcripts. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with the aid of NVivo qualitative data analysis software. Participants signed a consent form. Pseudonyms were used to protect their identities through a coding scheme. The researchers also asked the students to assess and rate their English proficiency level.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 International Doctoral Students’ English-speaking Practices, Perceptions, and Attitudes in an EMI Context

The answers varied when respondents were asked about their former education in English. The results reveal a significant disparity in the English proficiency of international doctoral students due to different education policies on the English language. Some countries use English as the official language, while others adopt English as a medium of instruction in the classroom. Some students have been using English since primary school and perceive that they have mastered the English language.

On the contrary, some students studied English only as one subject or never used English as a medium of instruction because their official L2 is another language (e.g., French). The data findings fell within three groups as follows:

- (1) good performance in academic English speaking;
- (2) lack English language proficiency; and

(3) low English language proficiency.

The self-assessment and categories depend on former English education experience. Those who have been using English as an official language or as a medium of instruction, such as students from Nigeria, perceive that they tend to perform well in academic English speaking. For example, two respondents reported that:

*"Because I think previously in my institution, for my master, undergraduate, and even my high school, I was a good English user, so that's why I didn't face any difficulty when I got here." [S3H]*

*"I have so many experiences regarding to this, so I feel less difficulties. I don't face any stress when doing presentations because in my university, All the presentations, all the discussions, everything was in English. I can even speak without preparation." [S2A]*

However, those who had less opportunity to use English in school or daily life found it challenging to express themselves in English. They had to overcome difficulties when studying for the courses they were taking. Otherwise, they will not understand the content of the courses. Inevitably, their academic research becomes more complex, distracting them from their research focus by spending extra time studying the English language. Some students felt they did not have sufficient vocabulary to express themselves, while others found it hard to find the right words to express their thoughts. Communicating in English was strange and new, as doctoral students were required to present their studies to their classmates and discuss their research. Their limited academic English-speaking skills also hindered them from being understood. The concerns of doctoral students to communicate effectively are shown in the following excerpts:

*"I can only understand a little when I first came here... after often communicate with classmates and ask them, like if there is something I do not understand, I will let them write it down on a piece of paper. It's the only way to understand what the teacher's questions was. Now, I'm used to it. If I preview in advance, I may understand sixty or seventy percent. If I don't, I'll probably have a hard time. If there were something beyond the course he was talking about, some extra knowledge, I probably wouldn't understand it too well." [S1L]*

*"My vocabulary is limited, I can't express it well, but I can use simple words to express it." [S5H]*

*"It's just my English is not good enough; I wouldn't understand what they were saying until they repeat two or three times." [S4L]*

*"I feel that my words are not satisfactory. I feel that I am not accurate enough to express their ideas. Maybe it's because I use less English on a daily basis." [S5E]*

*"I remember one time I did a presentation, and someone asked a question, I knew what he meant and I knew what I thought, but I just couldn't express it. People may not understand what I was trying to say." [S1L]*

The respondents indicated that EMI is one of the crucial reasons why international students prefer furthering their studies in Malaysia. The international students took the language of instruction and the language dominantly used in the country into account when deciding to study abroad. They went online to research university websites or learned from friends and teachers that university lectures would be conducted in English. EMI is essential to international doctoral students because it is beneficial for them to read scholarly work in English and understand progressive ideas. English can also help them present their research to people from different countries. These findings are reflected in the responses given by the respondents below:

*"I choose to study in Malaysia because the cultures are near and the language is English. It's not like other countries, for example. Russia, you have to speak Russian. Or, like Germany and other countries. So, I can improve my English." [S3H]*

*"Malaysia is an English-speaking country with a similar academic system as British universities." [S1L]*

*"Yes, I considered... English is very popular recently, and I wouldn't come to Malaysia if they are teaching in Malay." [S4E]*

*"Actually, one of my teachers told me that whenever you choose University for Ph.D. study, you better choose those using English as first language. But I heard from my friend in Malaysia, their first language is Malay, but the courses are taught in English. So, it's all the same to me, come here or go to the L1 Countries. Because here people can speak English. And teachers also speak English. That's why I don't face any problems." [S2H]*

The doctoral students also believe that EMI provides more opportunities for students to practice speaking in English. Malaysia is a multicultural country, with Malay, Chinese, and Indian ethnicities making up most of the population. Therefore, people have to be proficient in more than one language. Besides the Malay language, Malaysians often use English in their daily activities. Therefore, international students have the opportunity to talk to others in English. They made remarkable improvements in their academic English-speaking abilities by talking to their classmates and practicing during academic activities, as shown in the following excerpts:

*"I can communicate with friends from different countries. ... Because I'm in this situation, situation is very important because if I'm in Iran. In my country. Maybe I couldn't be like now, because now I can communicate with others in this situation. So, ... it's very good for me, especially good for my English." [S5E]*

*"After all, there is no language situation (in China). We do not need to always use English to communicate with the teacher. But here you have to communicate with him in English. It's a challenge for me. It forces me to speak English." [S1L]*

*"In the past, English was not like everyday language tools, but just a knowledge to learn, you rarely use it. Here it is your daily communication tool. You have to go and use it. Malaysia's classroom activities are more diverse, students are more willing to directly ask questions and interact with lecturers. The Chinese classroom form is relatively single. Most of the teacher is doing all the speaking, so the interaction is less. I think the Malaysian classroom activities are very good for my English."* [S3L]

## **4.2 Challenges in Academic Speaking Practices among the International Doctoral Students in Malaysia**

### *4.2.1 Malaysian English Accent and L1 Use during Lectures*

Since Malaysia is a multicultural country, there are people from many ethnic groups. There are also international students from different countries with different accents. Based on the findings, respondents had a difficult time, especially when they first encountered people speaking in different accents. Most of them found it very hard to understand each other when speaking. In return, this contributed to adverse effects on their academic journey due to miscommunication with supervisors or lack of understanding of the course content, research discussions, and various academic activities. Even some students confident in their academic English-speaking abilities face problems when talking with their supervisors. One respondent claimed that his supervisor did not know how to express certain words in English. Therefore, the information conveyed was incomplete, and that caused some misunderstandings when he was submitting his thesis draft. However, this problem can be solved by frequently communicating in English with supervisors, lecturers, or classmates. According to respondents, they got used to the different accents after a while. They also often asked for clarification from their supervisors. It took approximately two months to one semester to adapt to the situation and learn to manage communication with their supervisors in English.

*"Language is one part, but there are some accents, you know? There is something that the lecturers said I can't understand. As usual communication, teacher might say a very simple word, but I cannot recognize. I don't know what he said. In fact, I know the word, maybe they have accents, maybe I have some misconceptions about the pronunciation of words myself, so it leads to some difficulties in communication."* [S5H]

*"The first time I got here is very hard for me to understand what are people saying. For every sentence, I have to say; please repeat again. But after a while, I got used to the accent."* [S5E]

*"When I first started talking to my advisor, I felt a little bit of a problem. He has a strong accent and speaks fast. I understood 60% of the first communication with him. Then the second time I spoke to him was two months later. I found that I could almost understand what he was saying, about 85%. There's another class teacher. I don't understand what he's*



*saying. Because his accent is too heavy. And he's always mixed with Malay. Some of the teachers have a heavy accent."* [S2A]

One problem commonly raised by international students is that lecturers mix both languages, Malay and English. International students get confused because they have difficulty understanding different accents besides the Malay language. They feel like an outsider in class when the lecturer makes a joke in the Malay language, and everyone laughs except the international students. When teaching local students, it was common practice to build rapport and understanding by explaining certain things in the native language. However, with the rapid internationalization of universities in Malaysia, the composition of students has changed with more international students, especially in doctoral courses. It is crucial to consider the needs of international students from both educational and psychological perspectives. Language use can affect these facets, as highlighted by some of the respondents:

*"Unfortunately, our lectures during class also speak Malay. This is not good for international student. This is a big problem."* [S2M]

*"Because I even don't understand what he saying in English, can you imagine he speaks Malay, one time after the first class, I went to the lecturer, and I said please, we are from different countries. Please speak English. He said, of course, yes. He said yes, but next time he forgot. This is a very big problem. I heard this from many international students."* [S2E]

*"This brought very bad feeling It seems like they were talking about us or even laughing at us, I know they are not, of course, but it's just feelings."* [S1E]

#### 4.2.2 Lack of Proficiency

Several international students from countries where English is the official language considered themselves fluent in the language. However, most students with problems in academic speaking include those who consider themselves familiar with academic English use. Generally, they believe that their academic vocabulary is inadequate and that they cannot find the right words when discussing academic issues. Many expressed that they spend a lot of time reading and thinking deeply about their research and use rigorous research methods. However, they cannot adequately describe and discuss their research plans or results due to a lack of academic speaking ability and language proficiency. As a result, many students feel nervous during a presentation and fear making a negative impression on lecturers and other students.

*"My vocabulary is limited, I can't express it well, but I can translate it into other words to express. So, I chose to use simple words to reorganize and express it."* [S5H]

*"The language I use is very low-level language. I have not used very academic vocabulary. I might think deeply, but the words and ways in which I express something is very simple. The vocabulary presented is not professional enough."* [S5H]

#### 4.2.3 Administrative and Managerial Challenges

Most universities provide English language courses for international students who do not have the minimum English language requirement to pursue doctoral programs. These courses are beneficial for enhancing English language proficiency. However, it can be time-consuming and distract students from their research work. Further, the respondents claimed that the fees could be high. Despite the importance of being proficient in English for a doctoral program in an EMI environment, they hope for less time-consuming and more economical English courses.

*"When I first got here... (I) spent six months studying English. I spent 700 dollars for each English courses." [S5E]*

*"If you have a certification, I didn't want to take language courses to study English. But because I didn't have. And I didn't have time. I didn't want to spend a lot of time. If my country force us to get certificates for bachelor or master. I must have certificates that I didn't need to go to English language center." [S1A]*

*"We have English language center, but it's expensive." [S2M]*

*"If they make it cheaper, it would be much better for us. This is good for the students, maybe some reasons they haven't studied English in their own countries. So, they would decide to come here and study English. It is very good opportunity and very good time. But only if they are cheaper." [S3L]*

### 4.3 Factors Influencing Academic Speaking of International Students in an EMI Context in Malaysia

#### 4.3.1 Former Education Experience

Previous learning experiences have significantly influenced the English academic standards of international students. Some of these experiences include the age they started learning English, the length of time spent learning English, and whether they have experienced authentic English communication situations. Students who claimed to be fluent in spoken English stated that English is the most familiar language. They have also been communicating with others in English since a young age, and English is their official language. Several respondents also reported that they have been neglecting their native language, as English is the language of instruction and official language.

*"Since I was a child. My tutors have been using English. But we have one subject called native language subject. In that subject, we use our native language to teach. So, you can recognize it, but all the other subjects are taught in English." [S4E]*

*"We use both our native language and English in our daily life, but English is the official language. To communicate in all the school and universities in Nigeria. Right from kindergarten to university." [S2A]*

In response to this phenomenon, some countries have adopted multilingual mediums for education. Students or parents can choose between native language or English medium schools.

*“Actually, in Pakistan, we have two systems. Although English is recommended for some certain subject. But there are two mediums to study, English medium and Urdu medium. There are Urdu medium class that children can choose to study all the subjects in Urdu, and there’s English medium as well, and there are semi mediums as well, that some subjects can be taught in English and some subjects taught in Urdu. But even I was in English medium. But I cannot say it was fully English medium because some courses are in Urdu.” [S3H]*

Countries implementing multilingual policies above reflect the importance of spoken English. However, in other countries, most courses are taught in the native language. English is taught as one of the school subjects. It would appear that teachers attach more importance to the development of other English skills, especially reading and writing, compared to verbal skills. Therefore, students from these educational backgrounds showed a lower level of spoken English. The lack of emphasis on English and failure to use English to communicate in their daily lives were the primary reasons for low English proficiency.

*“During the master's degree, we have a course that is taught in English. There are foreign teachers in class. Basically, attend to pass the exam, course is taught in English fully in English, and among many courses, only this one is taught in English.” [S5H]*

*“Unfortunately, English is not very important in my country education system. Until when you want to get a Ph.D., none of any universities or institutions want you to study in English or want you to get English certificate. It’s up to you, whether you want or not. But it would be better if it was composed before I study for Ph.D.” [S5E]*

#### 4.3.2 Willingness to Communicate

The respondents stated that some do not communicate much in English due to lack of English proficiency, while others are less willing to communicate. Although universities in Malaysia provide more opportunities for students to speak in English, much depends on the student’s willingness to communicate and their personalities. Some students admit they are unwilling to communicate in English, and some choose to use their native language to communicate with international students from the same country. In Malaysia, the Chinese language is also commonly used at the university level since some lecturers and Malaysian students also speak Chinese. On the other hand, some students are shy and introverted. They are not talkative, even in their native language. Generally, students from Asian countries, influenced by their Confucius culture, believe that asking questions or speaking too much in class is a sign of disrespect to the teacher. Traditionally, students are only allowed to speak when the teacher calls their names.

*“But in general, there are more opportunities for English exchange in Malaysia than in China. But I may still avoid it (communication in English).” [S5H]*

*"At present... because usually I'm surrounded by Chinese, so there are less chance for me to have to speak English, I have a lot of Chinese classmates, when I ... There is no need to communicate in English."* [S3A]

*"This depends on their own willingness. If you are active to communicate, you can meet foreigners (who speak English) everywhere. But if someone who lacks motivation like me might just want to get the job done and pass the exam."* [S5E]

*"This is depending on personality. I am sociable. So, I like to talk to people. But some people didn't like to communicate. They don't want to speak. I have many Chinese friend in ESL, they always complain English is difficult, but they are silent like a statue."* [S3E]

*"Sometimes, it's not that I don't want to answer a question, but I'm used to the teacher naming you and asking you to answer, so I'm always hesitant. I might be about to answer when a student from another country has already spoken. Maybe we all think differently, but I always feel that I should wait until the teacher agrees before answering. Otherwise, I'm not respecting him (or her)."* [S1L]

There is also a minority of students who consider English speaking skills a burden because their careers do not require extensive use of spoken English. Learning about matters related to their area of expertise and scientific research methods is much more critical than practicing spoken English. English speaking skills are only necessary to pursue a Ph.D., not a practical tool they would need in the future. As such, they are reluctant to communicate in English and lack the motivation to practice spoken English. It is acceptable not to waste time and energy on a skill they would not need in their home country.

*"In terms of language, I prefer Chinese teaching, or we can also combine the two languages. But I still want to be native-speaking because I intend to return home after finished my study, and I don't need to speak English often in my country."* [S1L]

*"I feel that I can just accomplish something academically, and I don't think about practicing well in English language. To be honest, I prefer Chinese medium. My future work on the requirements of English is not very high. It rarely require me to use English."* [S4A]

However, most people think English speaking skills are indispensable for doctoral students. It is commonly believed that mastering English-speaking skills will be an added advantage for future job applications and career development.

*"The urban citizen would prefer to choose English (medium) because they want to get good job. If you know English more, you can get a better job."* [S3H]

*"You will become competitive because you have international skills, because like when writing emails, everything in computer is English."*  
[S2A]

*"I think that English is a proof of your personal ability. For example, it will be very helpful when educating children and going out on a trip."*  
[S5H]

*"It depends on whether the parents in a family have instilled in the idea of learning English and persuading children to learn English."* [S1L]

In summary, the English-speaking ability of international students in Malaysia varies depending on their previous experiences. Some international students come from countries where English is the first or most common language. Others come from countries where English is a second language or do not converse in English before coming to Malaysia for further studies. However, the respondents agreed that English as the medium of instruction was one of the key reasons why they chose to study in Malaysia compared to other countries. They were all motivated to master English and achieve excellence in their academic pursuits. They faced different challenges in the Malaysian EMI context, such as lack of English vocabulary and willingness to communicate, difficulties in understanding utterances due to different accents, and feeling like an outsider when locals in the classroom communicate in their native language. International students who do not meet tertiary level language requirements, e.g., IELTS 6 or above, had to enroll in language classes to improve their academic English for doctoral studies. These language classes helped them improve their English language skills at a high cost. In this regard, international students require financial aid from the university management.

## **5. Conclusion and Implications**

Three main conclusions were derived from the study. First, the practices of academic English are diverse and complicated because of different backgrounds and experiences in using English. Hence, the international students in the same class may have very different academic English-speaking abilities that pose a challenge for educators. Students who are not very good at academic English due to past learning experiences have difficulties expressing themselves effectively in English compared to their counterparts who have been using English for academic purposes since primary school. Therefore, this is another obstacle for EMI classes with international students from different countries. Thus, lack of proficiency significantly influences learners' academic speaking. Data for the study were collected by interviewing six Ph.D. students and two master's students in European countries. These findings support Yildiz's (2021) qualitative study, which investigated the factors influencing non-English major students' English speaking ability in the EMI context.

Secondly, the EMI adopted and applied in non-native English-speaking contexts is still a developing phenomenon. The findings show that almost every international student cited accents and mixed spoken languages, mainly Malay, posed a significant challenge. They had to get used to many accents and work

hard to improve their English. However, combining the Malay language and English adversely affects international students' comprehension of the lesson content and makes them feel excluded. It is vital to ensure that international students do not feel like outsiders. Therefore, future research should address the issue of translanguaging in an EMI context.

Thirdly, students from different cultural backgrounds are unwilling to communicate in English. Such attitudes are viewed as ostentatious and undesirable. In order to complement the English academic needs of these students, instructors need to understand the reasons behind their rejection of English communication. The primary reasons include family influence and personality. While Confucian-influenced international students tend to communicate among their groups, they also show higher respect for the teachers' authority. Therefore, they will follow their teachers' arrangements without questions. Instructors may use this knowledge to design their relevant classroom speaking activities. For example, a good mix of international students from different countries and local students enables better communication in English. There are many issues related to EMI in the higher education of international doctoral students. This study shows that EMI has a significant impact on doctoral students. Studying the practices of such students enhances the process and practices in EMI contexts. In conclusion, this study provides practical value for doctoral-level education in the EMI context.

## 6. Limitations

This study has certain limitations. Due to the nature of the study and the small sample size, the results cannot be generalized to the population of international doctoral students in Malaysian universities. However, it serves to inform stakeholders in their effort to create a better academic learning environment for international students in Malaysia. This study mainly focused on students' views of academic English speaking in an EMI context for EFL doctoral students. It is suggested that future studies explore this issue from the perspective of lecturers and university management.

## 7. References

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