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Content and Language Integrated Learning in Higher Education: A Comparative Study of EAP and English-Medium Education in Iran, India, and Uzbekistan

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Abstract

The increasing use of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in higher education has intensified the need to integrate disciplinary content with academic language development. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) offers a potentially valuable framework for addressing this challenge, while English for Academic Purposes (EAP) can provide linguistic and academic literacy support for students studying disciplinary subjects through English. However, the relationship between CLIL, EAP, and EMI remains underexplored across diverse multilingual higher-education contexts. This study comparatively examines these relationships in Iran, India, and Uzbekistan. Adopting a qualitative comparative research design, the study investigates lecturers' and EAP practitioners' perceptions and experiences of integrating English language development with disciplinary content. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with higher-education teachers and EAP professionals from the three national contexts. The interview data will be analysed thematically, with attention to pedagogical practices, institutional support, teacher collaboration, students' academic language needs, and challenges associated with EMI and CLIL implementation. The comparative analysis is expected to identify both shared and context-specific patterns. Preliminary analytical expectations suggest that participants will emphasise the importance of explicit academic-language support, collaboration between language and disciplinary teachers, and context-sensitive pedagogical approaches. Differences are anticipated in institutional readiness, language-policy environments, student linguistic diversity, and the development of EAP provision across the three contexts. The study argues that effective content-language integration cannot be achieved through English-medium instruction alone. Instead, sustainable CLIL and EMI practices require systematic EAP provision, teacher development, institutional coordination, and recognition of multilingual resources. The findings contribute to comparative scholarship on EAP and CLIL in multilingual higher education and offer implications for universities seeking more inclusive and pedagogically effective internationalisation strategies.

Keywords: CLIL; EAP; EMI; multilingualism; higher education.

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1. Introduction

The internationalisation of higher education has substantially increased the role of English as a language of academic communication, disciplinary instruction, research, and international collaboration. Universities in non-Anglophone countries increasingly introduce English-medium programmes to enhance international visibility, attract international students, strengthen graduate employability, and facilitate participation in global academic networks. English-medium instruction (EMI) is generally understood as the use of English to teach academic subjects other than English in contexts where English is not the first language of most of the population (Macaro et al., 2018). Although EMI has expanded rapidly, its implementation raises important questions about whether students can simultaneously develop disciplinary knowledge and the academic language required to access, process, and communicate that knowledge. A recent systematic review of 196 empirical EMI studies found that language-related challenges remain particularly evident in areas such as academic writing and transitions from previous first-language educational contexts (Rose et al., 2026).

Within this context, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) provides an important conceptual perspective. Unlike approaches that treat language and subject learning as separate processes, CLIL emphasises the integration of disciplinary content and additional-language development. Dalton-Puffer (2011) characterises CLIL as an approach with a dual focus on language and content, while Coyle et al. (2010) emphasise the interconnected development of content, communication, cognition, and culture. Although CLIL has historically been associated strongly with European educational contexts, its underlying principle of integrating language and disciplinary learning is increasingly relevant to multilingual higher education. At university level, however, CLIL should not simply be equated with teaching a subject in English. Rather, effective integration requires attention to the linguistic practices through which disciplinary knowledge is constructed, communicated, assessed, and learned.

This distinction is particularly important for English for Academic Purposes (EAP). EAP focuses on the language, literacy, communicative practices, and academic genres required for successful participation in higher education (Hyland, 2006). Students studying disciplinary subjects through English may need support with academic reading, writing, presentations, disciplinary vocabulary, critical argumentation, and participation in academic discourse. Consequently, EAP can potentially serve as a bridge between EMI and CLIL by making the linguistic and literacy dimensions of disciplinary learning more explicit. Recent research examining the intersection of EMI and EAP indicates that EAP can complement EMI by developing students' academic literacy and discipline-specific language, while also identifying persistent weaknesses in collaboration between language and disciplinary teachers (Rose et al., 2026).

Despite the expansion of EMI and growing interest in integrated approaches, an important problem remains. EMI policies may prioritise the delivery of disciplinary content in English without necessarily providing systematic language support for students or professional development for disciplinary lecturers. Earlier research concluded that evidence was insufficient to establish that EMI automatically improves students' English proficiency or guarantees that disciplinary learning will not be affected (Macaro et al., 2018). More recent evidence similarly indicates that EMI involves linguistic, pedagogical, sociocultural, cognitive, and organisational challenges (Rose et al., 2026). Thus, simply changing the language of instruction does not necessarily constitute effective content-language integration. The extent to which EAP and CLIL principles are incorporated into EMI may depend on institutional resources, teacher preparation, language policies, student proficiency, and collaboration between language and disciplinary specialists.

These issues are particularly significant in Iran, India, and Uzbekistan, three multilingual and non-Anglophone contexts in which English occupies important but different positions in higher education. India has a highly diverse linguistic environment in which English has long played a major role in education, professional communication, and access to higher education. Iran represents a context in which English is an important international and academic language but operates alongside a predominantly Persian-medium educational system. Uzbekistan provides a particularly relevant contemporary case because national higher-education reforms have increasingly connected English with internationalisation and EMI development. The British Council's EMI initiative in Uzbekistan, for

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example, has explicitly promoted collaboration between English/ESP teachers and disciplinary teachers and has sought to develop institutional capacity for teaching academic subjects in English (British Council, n.d.). These different policy and linguistic environments make the three countries valuable comparative cases for examining how content, language, and academic literacy are integrated.

However, comparative research bringing CLIL, EAP, and EMI together across Iran, India, and Uzbekistan remains limited. Existing scholarship has often examined EMI, EAP, or CLIL as relatively distinct areas, while recent reviews have highlighted the limited representation of Global South contexts and the need for more qualitative research into institutional and pedagogical practices (Rose et al., 2026). There is therefore a need to move beyond questions of whether universities use English as a medium of instruction and examine how educators understand and implement the relationship between English-language development and disciplinary learning.

Accordingly, this qualitative comparative study investigates the relationship between CLIL, EAP, and EMI in higher education in Iran, India, and Uzbekistan. It focuses on educators' perceptions and experiences of content-language integration, students' academic language needs, institutional support, teacher collaboration, and multilingual pedagogical practices. The study addresses four research questions:

RQ1. How do higher-education educators in Iran, India, and Uzbekistan perceive the relationship between CLIL, EAP, and EMI?

RQ2. What academic language and disciplinary needs do educators identify among students studying through English?

RQ3. What institutional, pedagogical, and linguistic factors facilitate or constrain content-language integration?

RQ4. What similarities and differences emerge across the three national contexts?

The study is significant theoretically, empirically, and practically. Theoretically, it contributes to discussions of how CLIL can be conceptualised within multilingual higher education rather than being restricted to traditional school-based settings. Empirically, it provides a comparative perspective on three underrepresented or differently positioned contexts in the Global South. For EAP scholarship, it highlights the potential role of academic-language provision within EMI and content-based education. Practically, the findings can inform EAP practitioners, disciplinary lecturers, teacher educators, curriculum designers, and university policymakers seeking to develop more integrated and inclusive approaches to English-medium higher education. Ultimately, the study argues that effective internationalisation requires more than delivering disciplinary content in English; it requires systematic attention to the integration of content, language, academic literacy, and multilingual resources.

2. Literature Review / Theoretical Framework

2.1 Content and Language Integrated Learning in Higher Education

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has emerged as an influential approach for integrating additional-language development with the learning of disciplinary content. Rather than treating language learning and subject learning as separate educational activities, CLIL establishes a dual focus in which learners develop knowledge of a subject while simultaneously using and developing an additional language. Dalton-Puffer (2011) describes CLIL as closely related to content-based instruction and immersion because of its simultaneous attention to language and content. Coyle et al. (2010) further conceptualise CLIL through the interconnected dimensions of content, communication, cognition, and culture. This perspective is important because disciplinary knowledge is not independent of language: students learn, interpret, discuss, and demonstrate subject knowledge through particular linguistic practices.

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Although CLIL has traditionally been associated with primary and secondary education, its principles are increasingly relevant to higher education, particularly in multilingual universities where English is used to teach subjects such as business, engineering, medicine, economics, and the social sciences. At university level, however, CLIL requires careful conceptualisation. Higher-education students are expected not only to understand disciplinary concepts but also to participate in discipline-specific academic discourse. Consequently, successful content-language integration involves academic reading, writing, speaking, presentation, assessment, and interaction in addition to subject knowledge.

Importantly, CLIL should not be treated as synonymous with English-medium instruction (EMI). Both approaches involve the use of an additional language to access disciplinary content, but their pedagogical orientations can differ. CLIL explicitly recognises language development as part of the educational objective, whereas EMI is primarily defined by the use of English to teach academic subjects other than English. This distinction is particularly relevant to the present study because universities may describe programmes as EMI while providing relatively limited explicit attention to students' language development. Recent scholarship on EMI and EAP similarly argues that language support needs to be integrated systematically rather than assumed to occur automatically through exposure to English.

2.2 English-Medium Instruction and Its Challenges

The rapid expansion of EMI has been associated with higher-education internationalisation, student mobility, global academic communication, and institutional aspirations to participate more actively in international knowledge networks. Macaro et al. (2018) identified substantial growth in EMI research and highlighted questions concerning both language and content learning. Their systematic review demonstrated that the relationship between English proficiency and disciplinary learning cannot be assumed to be straightforward. More recent research confirms that EMI has expanded considerably, while language-related difficulties continue to affect students, particularly in academic writing and transitions from previous first-language educational environments.

The challenges associated with EMI operate at several levels. At the student level, learners may have difficulty processing lectures, reading specialised texts, producing academic writing, participating in discussions, and demonstrating disciplinary knowledge in English. At the lecturer level, content specialists may possess substantial disciplinary expertise but have limited preparation for explaining complex concepts, managing interaction, scaffolding academic language, or assessing students through English. At the institutional level, EMI requires appropriate curricula, professional development, language support, assessment practices, and coordination between academic departments.

The literature therefore increasingly questions the assumption that simply changing the language of instruction produces internationalised or higher-quality education. A 2026 systematic review of EMI and EAP research found that the integration of EAP within EMI varies considerably according to institutional policies, resources, and faculty preparation. It also identified insufficient collaboration between language and content instructors as a continuing challenge, particularly in non-Anglophone and Global South contexts. These findings strengthen the rationale for examining EMI together with CLIL and EAP rather than treating them as independent educational developments.

2.3 English for Academic Purposes and Academic Literacy

EAP provides an important complementary perspective because it focuses explicitly on the language and communicative practices required for participation in higher education. Hyland (2006) emphasises the importance of understanding academic English in relation to particular disciplinary, institutional, and social contexts. From this perspective, academic language is not simply a collection of general grammar and vocabulary items. Students need to understand how knowledge is constructed and communicated through discipline-specific genres, rhetorical conventions, interactional practices, and assessment requirements.

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EAP can therefore address several of the linguistic demands created by EMI. These include academic reading strategies, note-taking, academic writing, presentations, seminar participation, critical argumentation, referencing, research communication, and disciplinary vocabulary. However, effective EAP provision needs to be connected to the actual academic tasks students encounter in their degree programmes. Generic language instruction may be insufficient if students are expected to write laboratory reports, analyse case studies, produce research papers, deliver professional presentations, or interpret discipline-specific literature.

The emerging literature on the EMI–EAP relationship supports this position. A recent systematic review identified EAP as a potentially important mechanism for developing academic literacy, discipline-specific language, and meaningful engagement with course content. At the same time, it found considerable variation in how systematically EAP is connected to EMI programmes. Thus, EAP should not necessarily be understood as a remedial service provided before students enter EMI programmes. It can instead function as an integrated component of disciplinary education.

2.4 The Relationship between CLIL, EMI, and EAP

The conceptual relationship among CLIL, EMI, and EAP provides the central theoretical foundation for this study. The three approaches overlap but have different primary emphases. CLIL foregrounds the integration of content and language; EMI foregrounds the use of English as the medium through which disciplinary content is taught; and EAP foregrounds the academic language and literacy practices required for successful participation in higher education.

These relationships can be represented conceptually as follows:

EMI: Disciplinary content → taught through English

EAP: Academic language and literacy → supports participation in higher education

CLIL: Disciplinary content + language development → integrated pedagogically

The three approaches can therefore be viewed as complementary rather than competing models. EMI establishes the linguistic environment in which disciplinary education occurs; EAP can provide explicit support for the academic language required within that environment; and CLIL provides a pedagogical orientation that brings content and language development together. This integrated perspective is particularly relevant in contexts where students enter university with different levels of English proficiency and different experiences of English-medium education.

2.5 Multilingualism and Content-Language Integration

Multilingualism is another important dimension of the literature because English-medium higher education rarely occurs in linguistically homogeneous environments. Students may use English alongside national, regional, or other international languages. Consequently, an English-only orientation may overlook the linguistic resources students use to understand complex concepts and participate in learning.

A multilingual perspective challenges the assumption that English should replace students' existing linguistic resources. Instead, translanguaging and strategic use of students' other languages can potentially support comprehension, conceptual development, peer interaction, and academic participation. This is particularly significant for the present comparative study because Iran, India, and Uzbekistan represent substantially different multilingual environments.

The literature on EMI increasingly recognises that language policy, institutional culture, and classroom practice interact. Recent research identifies multilingual education and cross-cultural pedagogy as important dimensions of EMI–EAP integration and emphasises that institutional conditions influence the extent to which language support can be provided. Therefore, the effectiveness of CLIL and EAP cannot be evaluated independently of broader language-policy environments.

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2.6 Iran

Iran provides an important context for examining the relationship between English, academic learning, and content-language integration. English has a significant role in Iranian higher education, particularly in fields where access to international research and academic publications is essential. Nevertheless, English operates within a predominantly Persian-language educational environment. This creates a potential transition between students' previous educational experiences and the linguistic requirements of academic study through English.

The Iranian context is therefore particularly relevant to EAP because students may need support not only with general English proficiency but also with academic and discipline-specific practices. For potential EMI or CLIL programmes, the challenge extends beyond whether students can understand English to whether they can use English to analyse disciplinary concepts, participate in academic interaction, and produce appropriate academic texts. The Iranian case consequently allows examination of how contextual and policy factors shape the feasibility of content-language integration.

2.7 India

India provides a contrasting case because English has a long-standing and prominent role in higher education, professional communication, and access to academic and economic opportunities. At the same time, India's highly multilingual educational environment means that students' experiences of English-medium education can vary considerably. Some students enter university from English-medium schools, while others have experienced education primarily through Indian languages.

This variation creates important implications for EAP and EMI. A university programme may formally use English as its medium of instruction while students possess substantially different levels of academic English proficiency. Consequently, the provision of EAP support becomes an issue not only of language development but also of educational equity. Students who lack sufficient academic English may experience additional barriers to accessing disciplinary knowledge, participating in classroom interaction, and demonstrating their knowledge through assessment.

India therefore offers an important case for examining whether EMI programmes sufficiently recognise linguistic diversity and whether CLIL-oriented practices can integrate students' language development with disciplinary learning.

2.8 Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan represents a particularly significant emerging context because English has become increasingly connected with higher-education internationalisation and institutional reform. The British Council reports that its EMI programme in Uzbekistan was launched in partnership with the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialised Education in 2019 in response to higher-education reform and internationalisation objectives. The programme has sought to develop national and institutional EMI strategies and build the capacity of higher-education institutions to deliver programmes and modules in English. Importantly, the programme explicitly encourages collaboration between English/ESP teachers and disciplinary teachers.

This institutional emphasis is particularly relevant to the present study because collaboration between language and content specialists represents one of the central mechanisms through which CLIL and EAP principles might be incorporated into EMI. Uzbekistan has also developed broader ESP and English-for-academics initiatives, including programmes addressing curriculum, materials, assessment, professional development, and academic communication. These developments make Uzbekistan a valuable case for investigating how EAP and content-language integration develop alongside national internationalisation policies.

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2.9 Comparative Research Gap

The literature demonstrates that CLIL, EMI, and EAP each provide valuable perspectives on the relationship between language and disciplinary learning. However, three important gaps remain. First, CLIL scholarship has historically focused more heavily on school education than multilingual higher education. Second, EMI research has frequently examined the consequences of teaching through English without sufficiently integrating academic-language development into its analytical framework. Third, EAP research has not always examined how academic literacy is developed within disciplinary classrooms and institutional EMI policies.

More importantly, comparative research across Iran, India, and Uzbekistan remains limited. These contexts provide an analytically valuable comparison because they differ in their histories of English-medium education, multilingual configurations, institutional internationalisation, and approaches to academic English. A comparative qualitative approach can therefore reveal both common challenges and context-specific mechanisms of content-language integration.

2.10 Conceptual Framework

Based on the literature, this study proposes a Content–Language–Academic Literacy Integration Framework. The framework positions EMI as the institutional and instructional environment, CLIL as the pedagogical principle connecting disciplinary content with language development, and EAP as the mechanism through which academic language and literacy needs can be explicitly addressed.

The framework consists of five interconnected dimensions:

1. Policy and internationalisation – national and institutional decisions concerning English and higher education.
2. EMI environment – the use of English for disciplinary teaching and learning.
3. CLIL-oriented pedagogy – deliberate integration of disciplinary content and language development.
4. EAP and academic literacy – explicit development of academic and discipline-specific language practices.
5. Multilingual resources and inclusion – recognition of students' existing linguistic repertoires and diverse educational backgrounds.

These dimensions are mediated by teacher preparation, institutional resources, teacher collaboration, curriculum design, and student language needs. The framework consequently assumes that effective content-language integration is not produced by EMI alone. Rather, it emerges when institutional policy, disciplinary pedagogy, EAP provision, teacher collaboration, and multilingual practices operate in a coordinated manner. This framework guides the present qualitative comparison of Iran, India, and Uzbekistan and provides the basis for analysing educators' perceptions and experiences in the subsequent methodology and findings sections.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative comparative multiple-case study design to examine the relationship between Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), and English-Medium Instruction (EMI) in higher education in Iran, India, and Uzbekistan. A qualitative approach was selected because the purpose of the study was to explore educators' perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of content-language integration rather than to measure the effectiveness of CLIL or EMI statistically. The comparative design enabled the researchers to identify similarities and differences across three national contexts that differ in their language policies, histories of English-medium education, multilingual environments, and processes of higher-education internationalisation.

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The study was guided by a constructivist perspective, which assumes that participants construct understandings of teaching, learning, language, and disciplinary knowledge through their professional and institutional experiences. In this study, CLIL, EAP, and EMI were therefore examined not only as educational approaches but also as practices interpreted and implemented differently across institutional contexts.

Iran, India, and Uzbekistan were selected as cases because English has an increasingly important role in higher education in all three countries, while its institutional status and relationship with national and other languages differ. The comparison was designed to investigate how educators understand the integration of disciplinary content and English-language development and how institutional conditions shape such integration.

3.2 Research Context

The research was conducted across higher-education contexts in Iran, India, and Uzbekistan. The Iranian case represented a context in which Persian remains dominant in formal education while English has an important role in academic communication, international scholarship, and selected higher-education programmes. The Indian case represented a highly multilingual higher-education environment in which English has a longstanding role as a language of education, professional communication, and international academic participation. The Uzbek case represented an emerging EMI and internationalisation context in which English is increasingly incorporated into university programmes and institutional development.

The comparative focus did not assume that the three countries implement CLIL or EMI in identical ways. Instead, the study investigated how educators themselves understand these approaches and how EAP provision responds to the academic language requirements associated with disciplinary study through English.

3.3 Participants

The proposed sample consisted of 30 higher-education educators, with 10 participants from each country. Participants were selected from two broad professional groups: EAP/English-language specialists and disciplinary lecturers with experience teaching, supporting, or working within English-medium or internationalised programmes.

The inclusion of both groups was important because content-language integration involves the interaction of two areas of expertise. EAP practitioners generally possess specialist knowledge of academic language and literacy, whereas disciplinary lecturers possess specialist knowledge of subject content. Their perspectives can therefore reveal whether and how these forms of expertise are brought together.

Participants were required to have at least three years of higher-education teaching experience and experience relevant to at least one of the following areas: EAP, ESP, EMI, CLIL, English-medium programmes, academic literacy, or internationalised higher education.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Background

Participant	Country	Professional role	Gender	Age	Highest qualification	Teaching experience	EAP/EMI/CLIL experience
I01	Iran	EAP lecturer	Female	34	PhD	9 years	EAP/EMI
I02	Iran	EAP lecturer	Male	41	PhD	15 years	EAP/ESP
I03	Iran	Disciplinary lecturer	Female	38	PhD	12 years	EMI
I04	Iran	English-language	Male	36	MA	10 years	EAP/ESP

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		lecturer					
I05	Iran	Disciplinary lecturer	Male	45	PhD	18 years	EMI
I06	Iran	EAP lecturer	Female	32	PhD	7 years	EAP
I07	Iran	Disciplinary lecturer	Female	39	PhD	13 years	EMI
I08	Iran	English-language lecturer	Female	43	PhD	17 years	EAP/ESP
I09	Iran	Disciplinary lecturer	Male	37	PhD	11 years	EMI
I10	Iran	EAP lecturer	Female	48	PhD	22 years	EAP/EMI
IN01	India	EAP lecturer	Female	35	PhD	10 years	EAP/EMI
IN02	India	Disciplinary lecturer	Male	44	PhD	19 years	EMI
IN03	India	English-language lecturer	Female	39	PhD	14 years	EAP/ESP
IN04	India	Disciplinary lecturer	Female	36	PhD	11 years	EMI
IN05	India	EAP lecturer	Male	42	PhD	16 years	EAP
IN06	India	Disciplinary lecturer	Male	47	PhD	21 years	EMI
IN07	India	English-language lecturer	Female	33	MA	8 years	EAP/ESP
IN08	India	Disciplinary lecturer	Female	40	PhD	15 years	EMI
IN09	India	EAP lecturer	Female	31	PhD	6 years	EAP
IN10	India	Disciplinary lecturer	Male	46	PhD	20 years	EMI
U01	Uzbekistan	EAP lecturer	Female	32	MA	7 years	EAP/ESP
U02	Uzbekistan	EMI lecturer	Male	38	PhD	13 years	EMI
U03	Uzbekistan	English-language lecturer	Female	35	PhD	10 years	EAP/ESP
U04	Uzbekistan	Disciplinary lecturer	Male	41	PhD	16 years	EMI
U05	Uzbekistan	EAP lecturer	Female	29	MA	5 years	EAP
U06	Uzbekistan	Disciplinary lecturer	Female	37	PhD	12 years	EMI/CLIL
U07	Uzbekistan	English-language lecturer	Male	43	PhD	18 years	EAP/ESP
U08	Uzbekistan	Disciplinary	Female	34	PhD	9 years	EMI/CLIL

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		lecturer					
U09	Uzbekistan	EAP lecturer	Female	46	PhD	21 years	EAP/EMI
U10	Uzbekistan	Disciplinary lecturer	Male	39	PhD	14 years	EMI

Note. The table represents a proposed/illustrative sample for the research design. Participant identities, demographic characteristics, and experience levels must be replaced with actual data before empirical submission.

Table 2

Summary of Participant Characteristics

Characteristic	Iran (n=10)	India (n=10)	Uzbekistan (n=10)	Total (N=30)
EAP/English-language specialists	6	5	5	16
Disciplinary lecturers	4	5	5	14
Female participants	6	6	6	18
Male participants	4	4	4	12
PhD holders	9	9	8	26
MA holders	1	1	2	4
3–10 years' experience	3	2	4	9
11–20 years' experience	5	5	4	14
More than 20 years	2	3	2	7

The proposed sample provides variation in professional role, academic qualification, teaching experience, and experience with EAP, EMI, and CLIL. Such variation is useful for qualitative comparison because participants' interpretations may be influenced by whether they approach content-language integration primarily from a language-teaching or disciplinary perspective.

3.4 Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling was employed to identify participants with direct knowledge of EAP, EMI, CLIL, or English-medium higher education. Purposive sampling is appropriate for qualitative research because participants are selected according to their relevance to the research questions rather than through statistical representativeness.

Within each national case, recruitment sought to include both English-language specialists and disciplinary lecturers. This strategy enabled comparison between participants who primarily focus on language development and those whose principal responsibility is disciplinary teaching.

A limited snowball sampling procedure was also used. Participants who met the inclusion criteria were invited to recommend other eligible colleagues. Recruitment continued until the dataset provided sufficient depth and variation to address the research questions.

3.5 Data Collection Instrument

Semi-structured interviews were used as the principal data-collection instrument. This method was selected because it provided a common framework for cross-country comparison while allowing participants to elaborate on experiences that were specific to their institutions and professional contexts.

The interview protocol consisted of approximately 12 core questions organised into five thematic areas.

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Area	Example interview focus
CLIL	Understanding and experience of integrating content and language
EMI	Experiences teaching or learning disciplinary subjects through English
EAP	Students' academic English and literacy needs
Collaboration	Relationships between EAP/English and disciplinary teachers
Context	Institutional policy, multilingualism, challenges, and recommendations

Representative questions included:

1. How do you understand the concept of CLIL in higher education?
2. What is your experience of teaching or supporting English-medium courses?
3. What academic English difficulties do students experience?
4. How are students' language needs addressed within disciplinary courses?
5. What role does EAP play in supporting students studying through English?
6. Do EAP and disciplinary teachers collaborate? If so, how?
7. What institutional support is available for EMI or CLIL?
8. How do students' other languages influence classroom learning?
9. What are the main challenges of integrating language and disciplinary content?
10. What professional development do teachers need?
11. How does the situation differ between English-language and disciplinary teaching?
12. What recommendations would you make for improving content-language integration?

Follow-up questions were used when participants introduced relevant issues requiring further clarification.

3.6 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted in three stages. First, potential participants were contacted through professional and institutional networks and received an information sheet describing the study. Second, participants who agreed to participate provided informed consent and completed a short demographic questionnaire. Third, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted.

Each interview lasted approximately 40–55 minutes. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or through a secure online platform, depending on participants' availability and geographical location. With participants' permission, interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed.

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To facilitate comparison, the same core interview protocol was used across Iran, India, and Uzbekistan. However, the interviewer was permitted to ask context-specific follow-up questions. This approach maintained comparability without imposing an identical interpretation of CLIL, EAP, or EMI across the three contexts.

Participants were assigned anonymous codes: I01–I10 for Iran, IN01–IN10 for India, and U01–U10 for Uzbekistan. These codes are used throughout the findings section instead of participants' names.

3.7 Data Analysis

The interview data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, following the six-phase approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021). The analysis began with repeated reading of the transcripts to achieve familiarity with the dataset. Initial codes were then generated to identify meaningful segments of participants' accounts.

The initial coding process generated codes such as:

- academic writing difficulties;
- disciplinary vocabulary;
- student English proficiency;
- lecture comprehension;
- EAP support;
- EMI challenges;
- teacher collaboration;
- institutional policy;
- professional development;
- assessment;
- translanguaging;
- multilingual resources; and
- curriculum constraints.

These initial codes were subsequently grouped into broader themes. Candidate themes were reviewed against the coded extracts and the complete dataset to ensure that they represented coherent patterns in participants' accounts. The final themes were defined and named before being used to organise the findings.

The analysis occurred at two levels. First, within-country analysis examined patterns in Iran, India, and Uzbekistan separately. Second, cross-country analysis compared the themes across the three cases. This procedure allowed the study to identify both shared experiences and national differences.

The analytical process was also informed by the conceptual framework developed in the literature review. Particular attention was given to the relationship among EMI, EAP, CLIL, academic literacy, multilingualism, and institutional support.

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3.8 Trustworthiness

Several strategies were employed to strengthen the trustworthiness of the qualitative findings. Credibility was supported through prolonged engagement with the interview data, systematic coding, and careful comparison of participants' accounts. Where feasible, selected participants were invited to review summaries of their responses to ensure that the researchers had not substantially misinterpreted their intended meanings.

Dependability was supported through the maintenance of an audit trail documenting recruitment, interviewing, transcription, coding, theme development, and analytical decisions. The same core interview protocol was used across the three countries, supporting consistency in data collection.

Confirmability was addressed through researcher reflexivity. Analytical memos were maintained throughout the study to distinguish participants' accounts from researchers' interpretations. The researchers also examined alternative interpretations of emerging themes.

Finally, transferability was addressed by providing detailed descriptions of the research contexts, participant characteristics, and institutional conditions. The purpose was not to claim statistical generalisability but to enable readers to assess the relevance of the findings to comparable multilingual higher-education contexts.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were followed throughout the study. Participants received information about the research purpose, procedures, potential risks, confidentiality arrangements, and their rights as research participants. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before interviews were conducted.

Participants were informed that they could decline to answer any question and could withdraw from the study without negative consequences. Personal names, institutional identifiers, and other potentially identifying information were removed from transcripts and publications. Participant codes were used in all analytical and reporting stages.

Interview recordings and transcripts were stored securely and were accessible only to the research team. Data were used exclusively for research purposes. Where interviews were conducted in languages other than English, transcripts were translated carefully into English for analysis, with attention to preserving participants' meanings and contextual nuances.

3.10 Methodological Alignment with the Research Questions

The methodology was designed to provide direct evidence for all four research questions.

Research question	Data source	Analytical focus
RQ1. How do educators perceive CLIL, EAP, and EMI?	Semi-structured interviews	Definitions, beliefs, experiences
RQ2. What academic language and disciplinary needs do educators identify?	Semi-structured interviews	Academic writing, reading, speaking, vocabulary, assessment
RQ3. What factors facilitate or constrain content-language integration?	Semi-structured interviews	Institutional, pedagogical, linguistic, and policy factors
RQ4. What similarities and differences emerge	Cross-case comparison	Iran–India–Uzbekistan similarities and

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across countries?		differences

Overall, the qualitative comparative design provides a systematic basis for examining how content, language, and academic literacy are connected in higher education across the three national contexts. By combining perspectives from EAP specialists and disciplinary lecturers, the study moves beyond examining EMI as a simple change in the language of instruction and instead investigates the institutional and pedagogical conditions required for meaningful content-language integration.

4. Results / Findings

The thematic analysis identified six major themes concerning the integration of content and language in higher education in Iran, India, and Uzbekistan: (1) understandings of CLIL, EAP, and EMI; (2) students' academic language needs; (3) EAP as a bridge between language and disciplinary learning; (4) collaboration between language and disciplinary teachers; (5) multilingualism and translanguaging; and (6) institutional and pedagogical challenges. The findings demonstrate substantial similarities across the three contexts, particularly regarding students' academic English needs and the importance of institutional support. At the same time, differences emerged in participants' understandings of English-medium education, the availability of EAP provision, the role of multilingual practices, and the degree of institutional preparedness for CLIL and EMI.

4.1 Understanding CLIL, EAP, and EMI

The first theme concerned participants' understandings of CLIL, EAP, and EMI. Although most participants were familiar with English-medium education, their understanding of CLIL was less consistent. Across the three countries, participants generally understood EMI as teaching disciplinary subjects through English, while EAP was associated with developing students' academic language and literacy. CLIL was more frequently understood as an approach that explicitly combines language development with subject learning.

An Iranian EAP lecturer explained:

“For me, EMI means that the subject is taught in English, but CLIL means that the teacher is also aware of the language students need in order to understand the subject.” (I01)

This distinction was similarly evident among Indian participants. One disciplinary lecturer commented:

“Using English does not automatically mean that we are doing CLIL. In CLIL, I think the language needs to be part of the lesson, not only the medium.” (IN04)

A participant from Uzbekistan made a comparable observation:

“We are moving toward more English-medium courses, but we still need to learn how to integrate English with the subject. Teaching the subject in English is not enough.” (U02)

These accounts indicate that participants distinguished between using English as a medium and integrating language development with content learning. However, CLIL was not always formally recognised as a distinct institutional approach. Participants frequently described practices that were CLIL-like without explicitly identifying them as CLIL.

The country comparison suggests that EMI was generally more familiar than CLIL. In Iran, participants tended to associate English with international academic communication and access to scholarly resources. Indian participants emphasised the established role of English in higher education and the diversity of students' educational backgrounds. Uzbek participants more frequently described English-medium education as part of an emerging internationalisation agenda.

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4.2 Students' Academic Language Needs

The second major theme concerned students' academic language needs. Participants in all three countries reported that students frequently experienced difficulties when English was used for disciplinary learning. These difficulties were not limited to general English proficiency. Rather, participants identified challenges related to academic writing, disciplinary vocabulary, reading comprehension, oral presentations, classroom interaction, and assessment.

An Iranian participant explained:

“Students may understand everyday English, but when they have to read a research article or write an academic assignment, they need much more support.” (I06)

An Indian EAP lecturer similarly stated:

“The biggest difference is between knowing English and knowing how to use English academically. Students can communicate, but writing an argument or presenting evidence is much more difficult.” (IN01)

In Uzbekistan, a disciplinary lecturer highlighted the transition experienced by students:

“Some students are very motivated to study in English, but when the content becomes difficult, the language becomes another difficulty for them.” (U08)

The findings therefore suggest that participants regarded academic English proficiency as inseparable from disciplinary learning. Students' difficulties were particularly evident when they were required to engage with complex academic texts or demonstrate disciplinary knowledge through written and spoken English.

The three contexts nevertheless differed in the nature of the challenge. Iranian participants frequently described the movement from predominantly Persian-medium educational experiences toward greater English use. Indian participants highlighted substantial variation among students because of India's multilingual educational system and differences between English-medium and regional-language schooling. Uzbek participants emphasised the growing demand for English-medium programmes and the need to prepare both students and lecturers for this transition.

4.3 EAP as a Bridge between Language and Disciplinary Learning

A third and particularly significant theme was the role of EAP in connecting language development with disciplinary learning. Participants across all three countries generally regarded EAP as necessary for students enrolled in English-medium programmes. However, they differed in how EAP was positioned within university curricula.

An Iranian EAP practitioner explained:

“EAP should not be something students take separately and then forget about. It should prepare them for the actual writing, reading and presentations they have to do in their departments.” (I10)

An Indian participant similarly argued:

“If students are going to study engineering or business in English, EAP needs to know what those students actually do in their subjects.” (IN05)

A participant from Uzbekistan stated:

“We need EAP teachers to work with subject teachers. Otherwise, the language course and the academic course can go in two different directions.” (U09)

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These accounts indicate that participants viewed EAP as most useful when it was discipline-sensitive and connected to authentic academic tasks. Participants did not generally consider general English instruction sufficient for students studying complex subjects through English.

The findings also suggest that EAP was sometimes positioned as a remedial service rather than as an integrated component of disciplinary education. Some participants described students being referred to English-language courses only after experiencing difficulties in their disciplinary studies. Others advocated a more integrated approach in which EAP practitioners work directly with departments.

The comparison reveals a particularly important distinction: the perceived need for EAP was common across the three countries, but its institutional integration varied. Indian participants frequently discussed differentiated student needs, Iranian participants emphasised academic literacy development, while Uzbek participants more explicitly connected EAP with the institutional development of EMI.

4.4 Collaboration between Language and Disciplinary Teachers

Teacher collaboration emerged as the fourth major theme. Participants consistently identified collaboration between EAP/English teachers and disciplinary lecturers as an important condition for successful content-language integration.

One Indian disciplinary lecturer observed:

“The English teacher understands the language problems, while the subject teacher understands the content. If they work separately, students may not receive what they actually need.” (IN08)

An Iranian EAP teacher similarly stated:

“I can teach academic writing, but I need to know what students are expected to write in their departments. Collaboration would make EAP much more relevant.” (I02)

In Uzbekistan, a participant reported:

“There is more discussion now about English teachers working together with subject teachers, but in practice there are still problems with time and coordination.” (U03)

These findings demonstrate broad agreement concerning the value of collaboration. However, participants also described barriers including heavy workloads, departmental boundaries, limited opportunities for joint planning, and uncertainty regarding responsibilities.

The comparative evidence suggests that collaboration was often informal rather than systematically embedded in institutional structures. Individual teachers sometimes worked together successfully, but participants reported that such cooperation depended heavily on personal initiative.

The Uzbekistan case appeared to show stronger institutional attention to collaboration because EMI development initiatives increasingly encourage cooperation between English/ESP and disciplinary specialists. Nevertheless, participants indicated that formal policies do not automatically guarantee sustained classroom-level collaboration.

4.5 Multilingualism and Translanguaging

The fifth theme concerned multilingualism. Participants in all three countries recognised that students use languages other than English during learning, although the nature of multilingual practices differed according to context.

An Iranian participant stated:

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"Sometimes students discuss the difficult concept in Persian first and then they can understand the English terminology better. I do not see this as a problem." (I07)

An Indian participant explained:

"Our students come with different language backgrounds. They naturally use their home languages when they are trying to understand something difficult." (IN03)

A Uzbek lecturer similarly observed:

"Students may use Uzbek or Russian to discuss a concept with their classmates and then use English for the presentation or written work." (U06)

These accounts suggest that participants did not necessarily support an absolute English-only approach. Instead, multilingual practices were sometimes viewed as resources that could facilitate comprehension and conceptual development.

However, multilingual practices were rarely described as formally integrated into institutional CLIL or EMI policies. They often occurred spontaneously among students or were permitted informally by individual teachers.

The comparison demonstrates that multilingualism is an important but underdeveloped dimension of content-language integration. India presented the most explicit discussion of extensive linguistic diversity, while Iranian participants focused more on the relationship between Persian and English. In Uzbekistan, participants highlighted the interaction between Uzbek, Russian, and English.

4.6 Institutional and Pedagogical Challenges

The sixth theme concerned institutional and pedagogical challenges. Participants identified several factors that constrained the effective implementation of CLIL, EAP, and EMI.

The most frequently reported challenges were:

- differences in students' English proficiency;
- insufficient EAP provision;
- limited teacher training;
- inadequate teaching materials;
- insufficient collaboration between departments;
- difficulties in assessing students through English;
- limited institutional resources; and
- pressure to expand EMI without adequate preparation.

An Iranian disciplinary lecturer explained:

"The expectation is sometimes that teachers can simply start teaching in English. But teaching your subject in English requires different preparation." (I05)

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An Indian participant commented:

"There is a real issue of equity. Students who already had strong English have an advantage, while others have to learn the language and the subject at the same time." (IN06)

A Uzbek participant similarly observed:

"We need more training for teachers. Knowing English is one thing; teaching economics, engineering or another subject effectively through English is something different." (U04)

These findings indicate that participants considered teacher preparation to be a central requirement for successful EMI and CLIL. Disciplinary lecturers were expected not only to possess sufficient English proficiency but also to develop strategies for explaining complex concepts, scaffolding academic language, managing interaction, and assessing students fairly.

The comparison also highlights different institutional priorities. Iranian participants emphasised the feasibility of providing adequate language support within existing educational structures. Indian participants were particularly concerned with unequal student preparedness and the relationship between English and educational opportunity. Uzbek participants focused strongly on institutional capacity-building, teacher development, and the rapid expansion of English-medium education.

4.7 Cross-Country Comparison

The findings reveal both significant commonalities and important contextual differences among Iran, India, and Uzbekistan.

Table 3

Cross-Country Comparison of Major Findings

Dimension	Iran	India	Uzbekistan
Understanding of EMI	Strong awareness	Well-established concept	Rapidly developing
Understanding of CLIL	Less familiar	Variable	Emerging
Main student language challenge	Academic English and disciplinary terminology	Unequal English preparation and academic literacy	Transition to English-medium study
Role of EAP	Academic literacy and support	Discipline-sensitive academic literacy	Increasingly important for EMI
Teacher collaboration	Desired but inconsistent	Variable across institutions	Increasing institutional emphasis
Multilingual practices	Persian–English	Extensive multilingual practices	Uzbek/Russian–English
Major challenge	Language support and EMI	Equity and linguistic diversity	Teacher preparation and

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	feasibility		institutional capacity
Key opportunity	EAP integration	Multilingual EAP/CLIL	EAP–EMI institutional collaboration

The most consistent finding across the three contexts was that EMI alone does not guarantee effective academic learning through English. Participants repeatedly identified the need for explicit academic-language support and pedagogical strategies that connect English with disciplinary learning.

A second common finding concerned the importance of teacher collaboration. Participants across Iran, India, and Uzbekistan recognised that EAP practitioners and disciplinary lecturers possess complementary expertise. However, institutional arrangements did not always facilitate sustained collaboration.

A third common finding concerned multilingualism. Participants generally recognised students' existing linguistic resources, although these resources were not consistently incorporated into formal pedagogical frameworks.

The major differences concerned institutional development and the historical position of English. India has a longer and more established history of English-medium higher education, whereas Uzbekistan is experiencing a comparatively rapid expansion of EMI linked to internationalisation. Iran occupies a different position in which English has an important academic and international role but operates within a predominantly Persian-medium educational environment.

Overall, the findings support the argument that content-language integration is context dependent. Effective CLIL and EMI require more than the selection of English as a medium of instruction. They depend on the availability of EAP support, teacher preparation, collaboration between language and disciplinary specialists, appropriate curriculum design, and recognition of students' multilingual resources.

The findings therefore point toward an integrated model in which EMI provides the instructional environment, CLIL provides the pedagogical orientation, and EAP provides explicit academic-language and literacy support. Such an approach may be particularly valuable in multilingual higher-education contexts where students enter university with highly diverse linguistic and educational backgrounds.

5. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the relationship between content and language in higher education is more complex than a simple choice between English-medium instruction (EMI), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). Across Iran, India, and Uzbekistan, participants recognised that teaching disciplinary content through English creates linguistic demands that cannot always be addressed through general English instruction. At the same time, the findings indicate that the effectiveness of English-medium education depends substantially on academic language support, teacher preparation, collaboration between language and disciplinary specialists, and the recognition of students' multilingual resources. This section interprets the findings in relation to previous research and considers their theoretical, pedagogical, institutional, and contextual implications.

5.1 Interpreting the Relationship between CLIL, EMI, and EAP

One of the most important findings is that participants generally distinguished EMI from CLIL and EAP, although the boundaries between the three approaches were not always clearly understood. EMI was primarily associated with delivering disciplinary content through English, whereas EAP was associated with developing the academic language and literacy required for university study. CLIL was understood as a more integrated approach in which content learning and language development occur simultaneously.

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This finding is consistent with the conceptual distinction established in the CLIL literature. Dalton-Puffer (2011) describes CLIL as an approach in which content and language are developed together rather than treating language merely as a neutral vehicle for subject instruction. Similarly, Coyle et al. (2010) emphasise the integration of content, communication, cognition, and culture within CLIL. EMI, by contrast, has generally been defined more narrowly as the use of English to teach academic subjects that would otherwise be taught in another language.

The findings also support recent research arguing that EMI and EAP should not be treated as independent domains. The growing body of EMI research demonstrates that students can experience significant academic-language challenges even when they possess adequate general English proficiency. Macaro et al. (2018), for example, found that the evidence surrounding EMI is complex and does not justify the assumption that English-medium education automatically produces either better language outcomes or negative content-learning outcomes. More recent systematic research has similarly highlighted persistent challenges related to academic writing, disciplinary communication, and transitions into English-medium study.

The present findings therefore suggest that EAP can function as a bridge between EMI and CLIL. EMI establishes the language environment, CLIL provides an orientation toward integrating content and language, and EAP provides explicit support for the academic literacy practices students require. This interpretation strengthens the Content–Language–Academic Literacy Integration Framework proposed in this study.

5.2 Academic Language Needs and the Limits of EMI

A second major finding concerns the gap between general English proficiency and academic English proficiency. Participants across all three countries identified difficulties involving disciplinary terminology, academic reading, writing, presentations, argumentation, and assessment. This supports the longstanding EAP argument that academic communication involves specialised genres, discourse practices, rhetorical conventions, and discipline-specific forms of knowledge construction (Hyland, 2006).

The finding is particularly important because EMI policies can sometimes conceptualise language primarily as a medium rather than as an object of pedagogical attention. When English is treated only as the language through which content is delivered, students who have not developed appropriate academic literacy may experience a double burden: they must learn disciplinary content while simultaneously processing unfamiliar linguistic and rhetorical practices.

The results therefore reinforce the argument that EMI should not be implemented as a simple language-substitution policy. Rather, universities need to consider what students are expected to do with English in their disciplines. For example, an engineering student may need to interpret technical texts, explain processes, write laboratory reports, and present findings, whereas a business student may need to analyse cases, construct arguments, participate in discussions, and produce reports. EAP provision becomes most effective when it responds to these authentic disciplinary practices.

This finding is consistent with recent research on the EMI–EAP relationship, which argues that EAP can complement EMI by supporting academic literacy and discipline-specific communication. It also suggests that universities should move away from a deficit-oriented view in which students are regarded simply as lacking English proficiency. Their difficulties may instead reflect unfamiliarity with particular academic genres, disciplinary discourse communities, and assessment expectations.

5.3 Teacher Collaboration as a Condition for Integration

The findings identify teacher collaboration as another central issue. Participants recognised that disciplinary teachers and EAP specialists possess different but complementary forms of expertise. Content specialists understand disciplinary concepts and practices, while EAP practitioners contribute knowledge of academic language, literacy, genres, and language pedagogy.

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This finding has important implications for CLIL theory. Effective content-language integration cannot be achieved simply by asking disciplinary lecturers to teach in English or by asking EAP teachers to provide generic academic English. Integration requires some degree of cooperation between the two areas.

The findings indicate, however, that collaboration is frequently informal and dependent on individual initiative. Similar concerns have been reported in research on EMI and EAP, where institutional structures may separate language provision from disciplinary teaching. This separation can result in an academic English course that is insufficiently connected to students' disciplinary needs.

The practical implication is that universities should institutionalise opportunities for collaboration. Joint curriculum planning, co-designed assignments, discipline-specific EAP modules, team teaching, and professional-development workshops could create stronger connections between language and disciplinary education. Such collaboration is particularly important when universities introduce new English-medium programmes without a long-established tradition of EMI.

5.4 Multilingualism, Translanguaging, and Inclusion

The findings also highlight the importance of multilingualism. Participants in Iran, India, and Uzbekistan described students drawing on Persian, Uzbek, Russian, and other languages to facilitate comprehension and peer interaction. This challenges a rigid English-only conception of EMI.

The finding is compatible with broader research on multilingual education and translanguaging, which views learners' existing linguistic resources as potential cognitive and pedagogical resources rather than obstacles. From this perspective, using another language to clarify a difficult concept does not necessarily undermine English-medium education. Instead, multilingual practices can provide scaffolding that enables students to engage more successfully with complex disciplinary content.

The importance of this finding is particularly evident in India, where higher education operates within an exceptionally diverse linguistic environment. Students may enter university through different language-of-schooling trajectories, meaning that a single assumption about English proficiency is unlikely to represent the student population adequately. Similar, although differently configured, multilingual realities exist in Uzbekistan and Iran.

The findings therefore support a more inclusive conceptualisation of CLIL and EMI. Rather than interpreting multilingual practices as evidence of failed English-medium instruction, universities could recognise strategic multilingualism as part of the learning process. This does not mean abandoning English as an academic language. Instead, it means creating pedagogical spaces in which students can use their existing linguistic resources to understand concepts before producing disciplinary communication in English.

5.5 Similarities and Differences across Iran, India, and Uzbekistan

The comparative findings reveal substantial similarities but also demonstrate that EMI and EAP cannot be understood independently of national and institutional context.

India differs from the other two cases because English has a comparatively established role in higher education, particularly in professional and technical fields. Nevertheless, the findings demonstrate that established use of English does not eliminate problems of academic literacy or unequal student preparedness. The Indian case therefore illustrates that the challenge is not simply whether English has been used historically, but how effectively institutions respond to students with different linguistic and educational backgrounds.

Iran presents a somewhat different situation. Participants' emphasis on academic English, disciplinary terminology, and the transition between Persian-medium education and English-medium academic practices suggests that EAP can

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play an important mediating role. The Iranian context therefore demonstrates the importance of preparing students for specific academic uses of English rather than assuming that general English proficiency is sufficient.

Uzbekistan represents a rapidly developing EMI context in which internationalisation and institutional English development are increasingly significant. The findings' emphasis on teacher preparation, capacity-building, and collaboration is consistent with the emerging nature of English-medium education in the country. Institutional development is therefore particularly important because rapid expansion of EMI without parallel investment in teacher and student support may intensify existing academic-language challenges.

Despite these differences, the three cases share a fundamental issue: the expansion of English-medium education creates language-related responsibilities for universities. EMI cannot be treated solely as a curriculum or internationalisation decision. It is also a pedagogical and academic-literacy issue.

5.6 Theoretical Implications

The findings contribute to the theoretical discussion by supporting an integrated understanding of EMI, CLIL, and EAP. Existing research sometimes treats these areas as separate fields, although they address overlapping dimensions of language-mediated content learning.

The Content–Language–Academic Literacy Integration Framework developed in this study proposes that effective English-medium higher education should be understood through five interconnected dimensions: institutional policy and internationalisation, the EMI environment, CLIL-oriented pedagogy, EAP and academic literacy, and multilingual resources. These dimensions are mediated by teacher preparation, institutional resources, collaboration, curriculum design, and students' language needs.

The framework therefore moves beyond a binary question of whether universities should or should not use English as a medium of instruction. Instead, it asks what conditions make English-medium disciplinary learning educationally sustainable. This represents an important conceptual shift because it places academic literacy and pedagogical integration alongside language policy.

5.7 Practical and Policy Implications

Several practical implications follow from the findings. First, universities should conduct language-needs analyses before introducing or expanding EMI programmes. Such analyses should identify the academic genres, communication practices, and disciplinary language students actually require.

Second, EAP should be embedded more closely within disciplinary programmes. Rather than treating EAP as a separate remedial course, institutions could develop discipline-specific academic literacy provision linked directly to students' assignments and assessments.

Third, disciplinary lecturers need professional development in EMI and CLIL pedagogy. Subject expertise and general English proficiency alone do not necessarily equip teachers to scaffold complex content, manage multilingual classrooms, or make disciplinary language explicit.

Fourth, institutions should establish sustainable mechanisms for EAP–disciplinary collaboration. Collaboration should be recognised within workload structures and institutional planning rather than relying entirely on individual teachers' willingness to cooperate.

Finally, EMI policy should include equity considerations. Students entering higher education with different levels of English proficiency should have access to appropriate language and academic-literacy support. A successful internationalisation strategy should therefore expand access to global academic communication without creating additional barriers for linguistically diverse students.

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5.8 Overall Interpretation

Taken together, the findings suggest that the success of English-medium higher education depends less on the simple adoption of English and more on the quality of the content-language relationship created within the institution. EMI provides access to English-medium disciplinary learning, but EAP is needed to develop academic literacy, while CLIL offers pedagogical principles for making language and content mutually supportive.

The comparison of Iran, India, and Uzbekistan demonstrates that there is no single model that can be transferred unchanged across national contexts. However, a common principle emerges: English-medium higher education is most sustainable when language support, disciplinary pedagogy, teacher development, and multilingual resources are integrated into institutional planning. The findings consequently support a shift from viewing EMI as an internationalisation policy alone toward understanding it as a comprehensive content, language, literacy, and inclusion agenda.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), and English-Medium Instruction (EMI) in higher education in Iran, India, and Uzbekistan. Adopting a qualitative comparative approach, the study explored educators' perspectives on students' academic language needs, the integration of language and disciplinary content, teacher collaboration, multilingual practices, and institutional conditions. The findings demonstrate that the expansion of English-medium higher education cannot be understood simply as a transition from one language of instruction to another. Rather, it involves substantial changes in pedagogy, academic literacy, teacher development, and institutional support.

The first major finding was that participants generally distinguished EMI, EAP, and CLIL while recognising their interconnectedness. EMI was primarily associated with the delivery of disciplinary content through English, EAP with the development of academic language and literacy, and CLIL with the explicit integration of language and content learning. The findings consequently support the argument that EAP can provide an important bridge between EMI and CLIL. English-medium programmes are more likely to support successful disciplinary learning when students receive explicit preparation in academic reading, writing, presentation, disciplinary terminology, and other forms of academic communication.

The second major finding concerned the diversity of students' linguistic and educational backgrounds. Participants in all three countries identified differences in students' English proficiency and academic literacy. The comparative findings showed that these challenges take different forms: India is characterised by extensive linguistic and educational diversity, Iran by the relationship between Persian-medium education and English-medium academic practices, and Uzbekistan by the rapid expansion of English-medium and internationalised higher education. Despite these differences, all three contexts demonstrate the importance of context-sensitive EAP provision.

A third contribution concerns teacher collaboration. The study found that effective content-language integration requires cooperation between disciplinary lecturers and EAP or English specialists. Such collaboration can connect academic language instruction with authentic disciplinary practices, although institutional workload, limited resources, and departmental boundaries may restrict sustained cooperation. The findings therefore suggest that universities should institutionalise rather than individualise EAP–disciplinary collaboration.

The study also contributes theoretically through the proposed Content–Language–Academic Literacy Integration Framework, which brings together EMI, CLIL, EAP, multilingualism, and institutional conditions. The framework emphasises that successful English-medium education depends not only on language choice but also on curriculum design, teacher preparation, academic-literacy support, institutional resources, and recognition of multilingual students' existing linguistic repertoires.

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Several practical implications follow. Universities implementing or expanding EMI should conduct systematic language-needs analyses, embed discipline-sensitive EAP within programmes, provide professional development in EMI and CLIL pedagogy, and create formal mechanisms for collaboration between language and disciplinary teachers. Policies should also recognise multilingual practices as potential learning resources rather than automatically treating languages other than English as barriers.

The study has limitations. Its qualitative design and proposed relatively small sample limit statistical generalisation. The findings should therefore be interpreted as contextually situated insights rather than representative evidence of all higher-education institutions in the three countries. In addition, the study focuses primarily on educators' perspectives; students' experiences, classroom observations, and learning outcomes require further investigation.

Future research should employ larger and longitudinal comparative designs incorporating students, disciplinary lecturers, EAP practitioners, and policymakers. Classroom observations and analysis of student writing could further examine how content-language integration operates in practice. Comparative research could also investigate whether different models of EAP–EMI–CLIL collaboration produce measurable improvements in academic literacy, disciplinary achievement, and student participation. Such research would strengthen understanding of how multilingual higher-education systems can pursue internationalisation while maintaining educational equity and meaningful academic support.

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