

An Analysis of English Support Courses and Institutional Structural Arrangements of English Language Teaching Staff in English Medium Instruction: Evidence from Three State Universities in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

English support courses at universities are crucial to the academic development of undergraduates in English Medium Instruction (EMI). Similarly, the roles/ institutional structural arrangements of English Language Teaching (ELT) staff who serve in EMI for undergraduates' academic development. Despite the expansion of EMI in Sri Lankan state universities, there is limited empirical understanding of how English support courses are structured and how the roles of ELT staff are institutionally configured across faculties. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the nature of English support courses and the institutional structural arrangements of ELT staff within EMI, drawing on data from nine faculties at three state universities in Sri Lanka. This study employed qualitative research design, drew on purposively sampled lecturer interviews (n = 40) and official, published materials, and analyzed them using qualitative content analysis. The findings indicate that, of the nine faculties, English support for EMI programs is delivered through centralized Departments of English Language Teaching in six of them. Of the nine, three faculties offer faculty-/department-specific English support courses and have faculty-based structural arrangements of ELT staff for EMI. Also, this study reveals an emerging role for ELT staff as academic development practitioners in EMI, in addition to their expected role as ELT lecturers/instructors, which may require greater collaboration. Consequently, the study demonstrates that the effectiveness of English support courses in EMI is not inherent to the courses themselves but is shaped by how ELT roles are institutionally configured within faculties.

Keywords: Collaborations, English Language Support Courses, English Medium Instruction (EMI), Institutional structural arrangements of ELT staff, Sri Lankan Higher Education (SLHE)

INTRODUCTION

The growing institutionalization of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in higher education has transformed the academic context in non-English-speaking countries, positioning English as the primary instructional language in an increasing number of degree programs. In Sri Lanka, where state universities have adopted EMI across a range of disciplines, this shift has brought both opportunities and challenges.

Navaz (2021) points out that although English was initially the medium of instruction in Sri Lankan higher education, post-independence education policies, particularly the introduction of free education and the promotion of mother tongue instruction at the secondary level, significantly reshaped language practices in universities. From the 1960s onwards, mother tongue instruction was introduced in Arts and related disciplines, while English continued to dominate in science, medicine, engineering, and other science-related

fields (Navaz, 2021). In recent decades, alongside policy discourses that frame English proficiency in terms of global competitiveness and graduate employability (University Grant Commission, 2019), EMI has gained prominence in Sri Lankan state universities.

Dhanapala 2021 explains that concerns over undergraduates' English proficiency, particularly in relation to English medium academic study and graduate employability, led the University Grants Commission to establish English Language Teaching Units (ELTUs) and English Language Teaching Centres (ELTCs) in 1983. These units were created to provide institutionalized English language support for undergraduates and were later strengthened by upgrading ELTUs and ELTCs to Departments of English Language Teaching (DELTs) in 2016, to enhance the quality and governance of English language provision in Sri Lankan universities.

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Theoretically, this study contributes to EMI by foregrounding English support courses and the institutional structure of ELT staff as mediating factors in academic development. Practically, the study offers evidence-based insights for universities and policymakers seeking to design more coherent and context-sensitive English support mechanisms within EMI, particularly in multilingual, postcolonial higher education contexts such as Sri Lanka.

Despite the expansion of EMI in Sri Lankan state universities, there is limited empirical understanding of how English support courses are structured and how ELT staff roles are institutionally configured. Central among these is the question of how best to structure English support courses and the institutional structural arrangements for English Language Teaching (ELT) staff to effectively scaffold students' disciplinary learning in EMI. Specifically, it explores how English support is conceptualized, positioned, and delivered across faculties, including the status of such courses (credit-bearing or non-credit), their curricular alignment with disciplinary programs, and the organizational location and roles assigned to ELT staff. In addition, the study investigates how both content lecturers and ELT staff perceive and experience collaboration within EMI contexts, with particular attention to the extent, forms, and effectiveness of cross-disciplinary interaction. By bringing together structural, curricular, and perceptual dimensions, the study seeks to illuminate how institutional arrangements shape collaborative practices and the provision of academic language support in EMI settings.

Research indicates that institutional structural arrangements, such as whether English support is offered as optional or credit-bearing (Fenton-Smith et al., 2017), embedded or stand-alone (Fenton-Smith et al., 2017; Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002), or centrally coordinated or faculty-based (Fenton-Smith et al., 2017), directly shape student outcomes, lecturer collaboration, and the overall sustainability of EMI. However, despite the global growth of EMI, there is limited empirical evidence on how these structural decisions operate in specific contexts, such as Sri Lanka's state universities, where linguistic diversity, resource constraints, and policy imperatives intersect at multiple levels. This study, therefore, examines English support courses and the institutional structural arrangements for ELT staff in Sri Lanka's EMI higher education context to identify practices that enhance academic development in EMI, raising the following research question:

How can English support courses and institutional structural arrangements for ELT staff be best designed to effectively scaffold students' disciplinary learning in EMI contexts?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Literature

This study is grounded in five corresponding approaches that explain how English support courses and institutional structural arrangements impact the academic development of students in EMI. First, an academic literacies perspective views literacy as a social, discipline-specific practice rather than a general skill (Gee, 2008), suggesting that language support is most effective when integrated into courses and genres within the field (Lea & Street, 1998; Wingate, 2015). Second, constructive alignment and assessment validity em-

phasize the importance of aligning Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs), teaching and learning, and assessments to prevent language from causing construct-irrelevant variance or inequity (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Third, language policy and management in higher education, particularly the "ROAD-MAPPING" view of English Medium Education (EME) - English Medium Education in Multilingual University Settings (EMEMUS) as a network of roles, agents, products, processes, assessment, and management (Dafouz & Smit, 2023, p.1), which will be helpful to discuss how institutional structural arrangements position ELT departments/units/centres and influence their capacity for change. Fourth, communities of practice and boundary-spanning collaboration (Wenger, 1998) facilitate the description of how ELT specialists and content lecturers together develop curricula, materials, and feedback processes when organizations establish collaborative roles and shared routines. Finally, the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach of scaffolding and classroom interactional competence explains how trained staff design support mechanisms that facilitate content learning through language, utilizing students' full repertoires (Coyle et al., 2010). Collectively, these perspectives suggest that the delivery of courses and the role of ELT staff will significantly influence both disciplinary mastery and language development (academic literacy) in EMI.

Empirical Literature

The Status of English Support Courses in EMI

An analysis of the literature reveals a range of English support courses in EMI, including embedded versus discrete/stand-alone courses, credit-bearing versus optional courses, and centralized versus decentralized courses. These terms or phrases require careful definition, as they are often context-specific and carry subtle nuances. Frequently, this diversity appears to be influenced by various factors, such as the operationalization of English support courses within the degree, the institutional arrangements of ELT lecturers/instructors, and their academic correlation with content lecturers. This section provides a concise outline of the selected interventions, based on the literature outlined below for this study.

Embedded Versus Discrete/Stand-Alone Courses

Embedded English support strategies integrate mediating language development directly within disciplinary curricula and assessments in EMI. This approach aligns linguistic instruction with mainstream academic practices and learning outcomes, providing more effective support for students' learning and participation (Wingate, 2015). On the other hand, discrete or stand-alone English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses are usually organized as separate support mechanisms that run alongside students' disciplinary programs, delivered by specialist language lecturers/instructors with limited integration into subject teaching or assessments (Wingate, 2015). Some research extends from social approaches to academic literacy indicates that such generic, stand-alone support often does not effectively help transfer academic literacy skills to disciplinary tasks because literacy practices are discipline-specific and not applicable across contexts (Hyland, 2002; Wingate, 2018).

Credit-Bearing and/or Compulsory Versus Optional Courses

Credit-bearing and/or compulsory English support courses are often required as part of a degree program. Credit-bearing and/or compulsory English support courses often ensure participation, structured improvement, and assessment. In contrast, optional English support courses, which are often elective/ non-credit courses, are based on voluntary workshops, flexible, and student-centered, sometimes as self-study online courses. These courses may result in low student uptake and uneven benefits, particularly because students who most need support are least likely to self-select into voluntary language courses (Fenton-Smith et al., 2017).

Centralized Versus Decentralized Courses

Centralized English support courses are managed by a central language unit/English language teaching centre or department that operates institution-wide through English language teaching specialists (Murray, 2016). These English support courses are designed to meet students' language needs for English language development (Pantelich, 2021), although they are less tailored to specific disciplines (Fenton-Smith et al., 2017). On the other hand, in some higher education contexts, discipline-specific departments or faculties run their own English support courses. Content lecturers and language lecturers/instructors are expected to collaborate in these courses for better outcomes (Jacobs, 2015). Although these courses are sometimes led by language lecturers/instructors, the curriculum is often focused on and influenced by the faculty or department's specific needs. Hence, these decentralized courses are discipline-specific and responsive to the needs of students in particular faculties or departments.

In Sri Lanka's state university system, English support is mainly provided through English Language Teaching Departments/Units (DELTs/ELTUs) as separate, stand-alone programs. These are often mandatory and sometimes carry academic credits, such as courses in English for Academic/ Specific or Professional Purposes offered alongside degree studies (University of Peradeniya, Faculty of Science, ELTU webpage, 2025; University of Sri Jayewardenepura, DELT webpage, 2025). Policy at the system level supports this approach by mandating a common undergraduate curriculum and a university-wide English proficiency test, University Test of English Language (UTEL), that students must pass before graduation (UGC Establishment Circular, 2019, p. 1). Some faculties incorporate English support more deeply into their discipline-specific contexts, with faculty-based ELTUs explicitly helping students transition to EMI academic programs, including faculty-specific initiatives tailored to particular degrees (Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, Faculty of Applied Sciences, ELTU webpage, 2025; University of Peradeniya, Faculty of Science, ELTU webpage, 2025). In practice, universities adopt a mixed approach, combining centrally managed English courses through ELTUs (either credit or non-credit, and compulsory) with varying levels of integration into faculty curricula, especially where EMI needs are significant

ELT Staffing in EMI

Raune (2003) discusses the role of language centres in higher education and their future challenges. This study points out different "designations of language centres such

as "language institute, language unit, language teaching centre, institution of foreign language study, language services, language laboratory and many others..." and further moving into formal terms such as "department or institute" (Raune, 2003). Also, there are core functions of the language centre staff or agreed consensus, such as, "practical language training especially for learners not specialising in languages, the use of appropriate technology for language learning," and "research and development in the field of language teaching and learning" (Raune, 2003, p.3). Critchley et al. (2025) also view one primary function of ELT staff in universities as encouraging a research-oriented culture.

However, it is worthwhile to analyze the role of ELT staff in the present SLHE context, where EMI is in increasing demand. As defined by Raune (2003), ELT staff are expected to develop undergraduates' English-language proficiency across diverse disciplinary contexts. So do the SLHE. Still, this study attempts to emphasize an additional role 'assigned' to them due to the introduction of EMI. Therefore, the ELT staff is currently being urged to take on a collaborative academic development practitioner role in the EMI (Galloway & Rose, 2021), to develop mediating English across disciplines, and to support content staff with Continuous Professional Development (CPD). This transition from ELT practitioner to EMI practitioner, and often a back-and-forth between the two roles, can be challenging for the SLHE ELT staff due to limited and controlled human resources within the system.

Further, beyond centralized language teaching, Wingate and Hakim (2022) points out that discipline-specific academic literacy embedded in programs may improve alignment between content learning and language demands, thereby making EAP staff central collaborators. Further, Malmström and Zhou (2025) highlight the importance of collaboration between language and subject lecturers in EMI for better academic outcomes, and Jacobs (2015) also discusses "discursive spaces" between them for improved collaboration.

Another framework will provide a more structured classification for English support courses in EMI based on two major philosophies: autonomous and ideological. It may also provide insights into the English support courses and the roles/institutional structural arrangements of ELT staffing in EMI. The autonomous model of literacy, as viewed by Lea and Street (2006) within the field of New Literacy Studies (NLS), is seen as neutral and technical, a skill that is free from its immediate social and cultural contexts. In contrast, the ideological understanding of academic literacy encompasses a broad social perspective. This philosophy does not view the two significant aspects of EMI: the subject knowledge and the mediating language, as two separate components (McKenna, 2004), so that there is no over-demand for the mediating language proficiency or discrete English courses (ESL or EAP/ESP) for academic development in EMI.

Placing these two major theoretical understandings: autonomous and ideological in the background, this section discusses the three models: study skills, academic socialization, and academic literacies configured by Lea and Street (2006). Often, the study skills model and the academic socialization model are influenced by autonomous understanding, while the ideological understanding influences the academic literacies model. According to Lea and Street (2006), these three models have overlapping features.

The Study Skills Model

According to Lea and Street (2006), the study-skills model treats writing and literacy as individual, cognitive skills, emphasizing surface features and assuming students can transfer these skills across contexts. Instruction is mainly remedial and decontextualized from the mainstream curriculum, e.g., college composition, remedial classes, and ESL/EFL courses aimed at correcting language inaccuracies. McKenna's (2004) EMI Curriculum Cycle-1 (ESL) mirrors this study-skills approach.

Academic Socialization Model

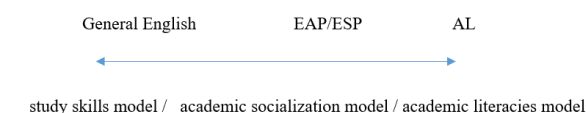
The academic socialization model views literacy as a process of induction into disciplinary communities (Lea & Street, 2006), where students learn to emulate the ways of speaking, writing, and thinking characteristic of each field, thereby helping them meet the demands of university-level education. In practice (EAP in McKenna's Curriculum Cycle 2), it orients learners to subject-specific genres. Critics argue that it presumes a homogeneous, stable academy and undertheorizes institutional practices and power, implying that students can reproduce disciplinary discourse unproblematically once taught.

Academic Literacies Model

The academic literacies model adopts a broad, critical perspective on literacy, foregrounding meaning-making, identity, power, and how institutions define legitimate knowledge. Unlike academic socialization, it views learning academic literacy as a complex, dynamic, and situated process that involves epistemological issues and social relations, including power dynamics and shifting social identities (Lea & Street, 2006).

Accordingly, the three main practices of the English support programs in EMI may be kept within the academic literacies' framework by Lea and Street (2006). English as a Second Language (ESL)/General English practice reflects the features of the study skills model, while EAP/ ESP reflects the features of the academic socialization model. Mainstreaming academic literacy is considered best practice for developing it, reflecting the features of the academic literacies model (Jacobs, 2015; McKenna, 2004). McKenna (2004) considers it under the third curriculum cycle. This third model also expects to develop English within the discipline in an integrated manner through the disciplinary curriculum (McKenna, 2004) and the pedagogy (Jacobs, 2015) in EMI. Furthermore, the following continuum illustrates the relationship between these English support courses and the Sri Lankan education system, spanning from primary education to higher education.

Figure 1: The Spread of Three Models and English Support Courses of EMI in a Continuum.



source: Developed by the Author, 2025.

Further, these English support courses in EMI will also help understand the role of ELT staff and their institutional structural arrangements in EMI. Given the nature of the courses, ESL/General English or EAP/ESP courses are language-based and are therefore often taught by the ELT staff. On the other hand, academic literacy courses may be taught by the ELT staff, the faculty academic staff, or a collaboration between both. The following table summarizes the features of three interventions.

Table 1 - The Summary Table for Interventions in the EMI.

Intervention	Intervention 1	Intervention 2	Intervention 3
Philosophical understanding of AL	Autonomous	Autonomous	Ideological
Theoretical model configured by Lea & Street (2006)	Study skills	Academic Socialization	Academic literacies
Curriculum model configured by McKenna (2004)	Curriculum cycle 1	Curriculum cycle 2	Curriculum cycle 3
Type of English support courses in the EMI	ESL/ General English	EAP/ESP	Mainstreaming Academic literacy
Nature of practice	Discrete	Discrete	Mainstreamed
Collaboration	No/less collaboration	No/less collaboration	collaborative
Main objective	Four language skills (Reading/Writing/Listening/Speaking)/ and grammar and vocabulary development	Inducting students into a set of Academic English norms	Mainstreaming academic literacy development practices into the curriculum and pedagogy
Implementation	Through language lecturers/instructors	Through language lecturers/instructors	Collaborations between language lecturers/ instructors and subject lecturers/ or Trained (may be CLIL) subject lecturers or trained (may be CLIL) language lecturers/instructors

Source: Developed by the Author, 2025.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative design, appropriate for exploring institutional practices, meanings, and experiences surrounding EMI and ELT support in higher education contexts (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative approaches are well-suited to examining how policies and support structures are interpreted and enacted within specific institutional settings, enabling in-depth, context-sensitive analysis (Tisdell et al., 2025).

The research context comprised three state universities selected through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is widely recommended in qualitative research when cases are intentionally selected for their relevance and potential to yield information-rich data in relation to the research questions (Patton, 2015; Tisdell et al., 2025). In this study, the universities were selected to ensure variation in English support provision across state universities and to capture diverse institutional and structural arrangements of ELT staff working within EMI settings, thereby enhancing analytical depth and comparative insight. Two universities (labelled university 1 and university 2) were located in the Western Province, while the third (university 3) was a pioneering regional university, enabling the study to account for both urban and regional higher education contexts.

Data were generated through interviews, a well-established qualitative research method for eliciting participants' perspectives, professional experiences, and interpretations of institutional practices (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Interviews are particularly effective for investigating complex educational phenomena such as EMI and academic support structures, where participants' lived experiences and reflective accounts are central to understanding institutional realities (Seidman, 2006). Across the selected universities, nine faculties offering undergraduate programs in management, science, and arts (including social sciences, humanities, and languages) were included. For analytical clarity, these faculties are hereafter referred to as management, science, and arts.

Data collection

Data collection was conducted through official, published higher education documentation and interviews with lecturers.

Official Documentation

Data were collected from official documentation, including prospectuses (2019) and (2020), Department curricula of selected universities, the Sri Lanka Qualification Framework

(SLQF), subject benchmark statements (UGC), and University Test of English Language (UTEL) benchmarks, to examine the nature of English support courses offered in EMI and the roles and institutional structural arrangements of ELT staff.

Interviews

Lecturers were selected for interviews based on their experience teaching in higher education, using a purposive sampling strategy. Interviews were conducted with 40 lecturers (13 female and 27 male) from three faculties (social sciences/humanities, management, and applied sciences). In all cases, the interviews were relatively short and were followed by informal conversations about issues that arose in the study.

Of these forty, nineteen interviews were with academics holding administrative roles at universities, namely deans of faculties or heads of departments. Ten deans who had completed their doctoral studies (including five who were professors) were interviewed, and all were experts across various disciplines. Next, nine department heads were interviewed. All of them were senior lecturers, and six had completed their doctorates at the time of the interview. These nine department heads were also specialists in their respective fields. Semi-structured questions were used as prompts for both deans and heads. The questions focused on various administrative issues affecting the EMI, particularly the design of English support courses and the allocation of ELT staff.

Regarding the distinction between subject and language lecturers, 37 of the 40 participants were subject experts. All of them were senior lecturers, with fourteen holding PhDs and the remaining having master's degrees. Three language experts with master's degrees were interviewed, but none had earned doctoral degrees. The disciplinary experts were asked about the teaching-learning process in their classes in terms of EMI, and about the contribution of English support courses and ELT staff to EMI in undergraduates' academic development. The language experts were interviewed about their teaching experience in English support courses and their role in EMI.

All interviews were conducted in English (though code-switching was present), except for two, which were entirely in Sinhala. In the latter case, the researcher translated the interviews into English.

The summary of the demographic information of the academics is given below:

Table 2: Summary of the Demographic Information of the Academics.

Site	Faculty	No. of Academics	Age range	Gender	Masters/PhDs	Experience
University-1	FMSC ¹ / FAS ² / FHSS ³	13	34-61 years	8-M	11 PhDs	4-29 years
				5-F	2 Masters	
University-2	FCMS ⁴ / FS ⁵ / FSS ⁶ / FH ⁷	14	37-66 years	9-M 5-F	11 PhDs 3 Masters	13-40 years
University-3	FMS ⁸ / FAS ² / FSSL ⁹	13	35-55 years	10-M	8 PhDs	6-25 years
				3-F	5 Masters	

Source: Developed by the Author, 2025.

¹FMSC – Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce

² FAS – Faculty of Applied Sciences

³FHSS - Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

⁴FCMS - Faculty of Commerce and Management Studies

⁵FS - Faculty of Science

⁶FSS - Faculty of Social Sciences

⁷FH – Faculty of Humanities

⁸FMS – Faculty of Management Studies

⁹ FSSL – Faculty of Social Sciences and Languages

Data Analysis

Data collected through lecturer interviews were analyzed using Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) to identify themes.

In this approach, the literature-based summary table of English support courses and other dimensions identified in the EMI empirical literature was also utilized. The manual coding process was used for analysis and one example was provided below for further clarification.

Table 3 - A Table to Display an Example of The Manual Coding Process.

Transcript	Implication/Latent view	Theme
<i>No...not actually academic lecturers cannot do...cannot take such type of responsibility within this limited time. ---Not actually all the subject teachers even we, even myself I don't know how to correct grammatical mistakes</i>	Subject lecturers are already given much responsibility due to the teaching and learning process, so that they are not in a position to take up another added responsibility like developing undergraduates' English language proficiency, as they are not aware of grammar rules in order to teach them to students.	Preference for English instruction delivered by language specialists Perceived constraints of subject lecturers in supporting undergraduates' English language development Discrete, language-expert-led English support courses

Source: Developed by the Author, 2025.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As outlined earlier, this section addresses the research objectives by examining the nature of English support courses and the institutional and structural arrangements of ELT staff within EMI across three selected state universities in Sri Lanka, drawing on data obtained from official institutional documents and semi-structured interviews.

A brief introduction to EMI in three universities

The three selected universities offer English-medium degree programs. In particular, both the management and science

faculties offer all their degree programs entirely in English medium. The faculties of arts offer their degree programs selectively in English, often when they teach a particular subject matter in English. Therefore, the English-medium degree programs selected for this study in three faculties conduct all stages of learning in English, including lectures/tutorials, assessments, and thesis writing/VIVA.

This section first provides details on the English support courses, and then on the roles and institutional structural arrangements of ELT staff.

English support courses

Table 4 - The Summary Table of English Support Courses in Three Selected Universities.

Uni.	Faculty	Status	Course name	Credits
1	FMSC ¹	Core	BCC 1340 Business Communication I	Credited (3)
		Core	BCC 1341 Business Communication II	Credited (3)
		Core	ACC 2241 Professional Communication and Academic Writing	Credited (2)
		Non-Credit	BEC 2001 English for Business Economics Part I	Non-Credit (Pass/Fail)
		Non-Credit	BEC 2002 English for Business Economics Part II	Non-Credit (Pass/Fail)
		Non-Credit	BEC 3001 English for Business Economics Part III	Non-Credit (Pass/Fail)
		Non-Credit	BEC 3002 English for Business Economics Part IV	Non-Credit (Pass/Fail)
		Non-Credit	BEC 4001 Academic Writing p.53-59	Non-Credit (Pass/Fail)
		Core	BCC 2240 Business Communication III	Credited (2)
		Optional	BCC C001 2nd, 3rd & 4th Years: Semester I Certificate in Professional Communication	Optional
		Optional	ACC 2340 Certificate in Professional Communication	Optional
		Core	BCC 2340 Business Communication III	Credited (3)
		Optional	BCC C001 Certificate in Professional Communication	Optional
		Optional	BCC C001 Certificate in Professional Communication	Optional

	On demand for any dept.	BCU 2nd, 3rd & 4th Years: Semester II Department/Program Certificate in Academic Writing	Certificate	
FAS ²	Compulsory	ENG 101 2.0 English for Scientific Communication	Compulsory	
		(Semester -1)		
	Compulsory	ENG 101 2.0 English for Scientific Communication	Compulsory	
		(Semester -2)		
FHSS ³	Compulsory	DELT 1101.3 English in Use	Credited (3)	
		DELT 1201.3 Pathways in English	Credited (3)	
2	FCMS ⁴	Core	DELT 21532 Advanced English for Commerce and Management Studies	Credited (2)
	Core	DELT 31522 English for Commerce and Management Professionals	Credited (2)	
FS ⁵	Compulsory	DELT 11222 English for Biology	Credited but not counted for GPA	
	Compulsory	DELT 22232 English for Communication and Further Studies	Credited but not counted for GPA	
	Compulsory	DELT 12262 English for Physical Science	Credited but not counted for GPA	
	Compulsory	DELT 12262 English for Physical Science	Credited but not counted for GPA	
	Compulsory	DELT 11242 English for Environmental Science	Compulsory	
	Compulsory	DELT 11232 English for Professionals	Compulsory	
	Compulsory	DELT 12282 Communication Skills for Professionals	Compulsory	
	Compulsory	DELT 11232 English for Professionals	Compulsory	
	Compulsory	DELT 12282 Communication Skills for Professionals	Compulsory	
² FSS ⁶ FH ⁷	Compulsory	ELTU Compulsory English Courses (	Compulsory	
3	FMS ⁸	Core	FM/BI/MM/BM/TM/HM/EBM 1163 Business English -I	Credited (3)
	Core	FM/BI/MM/BM/TM/HM/EBM 1263 Business English-II	Credited (3)	
	Core	FM/BI/MM/BM/TM/HM/EBM 2163 Business Communication -I	Credited (3)	
	Core	FM/BI/MM/BM/TM/HM/EBM 2263 Business Communication -II	Credited (3)	
FAS ²	Compulsory	Professional English 1	Compulsory	
	Compulsory	Professional English 2	Compulsory	
	Compulsory	Professional English 3	Compulsory	
	Compulsory	Professional English 4	Compulsory	
FSSL ⁹	Compulsory	CELL 111 English Language Level-1	Credited (3)	
	Compulsory	CELL 121 English Language Level-2	Credited (3)	
	Compulsory	CELL 211 English Language Level-3	Credited (2)	
	Compulsory	CELL 221 English Language Level-4	Credited (2)	

Source: Developed by the Author Using Faculty Prospectuses- 2019/2020.

¹FMSC –Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce

² FAS – Faculty of Applied Sciences

² There were two separate faculties, the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Faculty of Humanities, in university 2, but they are considered in this study under one category: arts.

³FHSS - Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

⁴FCMS - Faculty of Commerce and Management Studies

⁵FS - Faculty of Science

⁶FSS - Faculty of Social Sciences

⁷FH – Faculty of Humanities

⁸FS – Faculty of Management Studies

⁹FSSL – Faculty of Social Sciences and Languages

Across three universities and nine faculties, English support courses reflect standard and unique features.

Standard Features of English Support Courses

All faculties offer English support courses either in the first or second academic year, demonstrating their commitment to supporting students in EMI at the early stages of the degree programs. Except in a few cases (3) at university 1 (management) and university 3 (management and science), the remaining six faculties seek English support courses offered by the DELTs of the relevant university. All three faculties of university 2 obtain English support courses from the university DELT. Those courses range from general to academic/specific, ensuring that a range of undergraduate proficiency levels is supported. Also, such courses range from educational to professional, thus preparing undergraduates for future industrial communication.

When these standard features are analyzed through the academic literacies framework, it is clear that the nature of English support courses ranges from the study skills model to the academic socialization model (General English/EAP/ESP courses) taught by ELT experts. In terms of the teaching learning process, there is no close collaboration between the subject lecturers and the language experts during the delivery of lessons and assessments, so the language experts alone teach the courses and conduct assessments. Constructive alignment is evident at the faculty level through the provision of General English, EAP, and ESP courses, however, at the macro level, a misalignment is apparent between faculty expectations of EMI, namely, full disciplinary mastery through English, and the nature of the English support offered, due to the absence of academic literacy courses that engage students deeply in discipline-specific meaning making beyond generic or skills-based language instruction.

It shows that DELTs at these three universities have a strong capacity to provide English support courses to meet the needs of various disciplines in EMI across multiple faculties, thereby assuring the centralized system for the operationalization of English support courses. Therefore, it is clear that all faculty programs in arts and science (except the science faculty in university 3) in this study align with the centralized English support courses.

The Unique Features of English Support Courses

English support courses offered across nine faculties at three universities have unique features. Some faculties at three universities offered credited English courses as core subjects, which were often discipline-specific. This feature is unique to all three management faculties but not to the other faculties in this study. However, these course contents cannot be identified as academic literacy course content embedded in the core, but rather as ESP course content, which is highly aligned with the core disciplines. The credits

offered for the English courses at the management faculty at university 3, are counted for the final GPA, and across all three universities, the total number of management faculty credits ranges from 4 to 12. This heavy weightage given to English support courses is noteworthy, as it reflects the faculty's commitment to upgrading EMI standards. Also, the management faculties of university 2 and 3 offered only core courses, while the management faculty of university 1 offered a combination of core, non-credit, optional, and on-demand courses. Further, these courses of all three management faculties were mainly EAP and ESP courses, which can be categorized under the academic socialization model that runs parallel to mainstream courses. Such courses fell under the purview of faculty academics, and they catered to faculty-specific EMI needs with the help of language lecturers/instructors. Some courses were highly contextualized into their own disciplines, such as English for Business Economics and English for Commerce and Management professionals, reflecting the discipline-specific EMI demands.

Science faculty courses of all three universities range from academic (university 1 – scientific communication) to professional (university 3 – Professional English). Furthermore, discipline-specific English courses (university 2- English for physical sciences/ English for biology), which fall under the academic socialization model, are also offered in science faculties, serving both faculty- and department-specific demands.

All faculties of arts offer English support courses, often focusing on industry-oriented English communication and serving a wide variety of English language and EMI needs. However, the arts faculty of university 3 stands out by offering credited and compulsory English support courses delivered by the university DELT. This approach emphasizes the faculty's intense need to enhance EMI standards.

The unique features of English support courses in the faculties reflect further important aspects, such as clear differentiation by discipline and institutional priority. At university 3, English support courses are offered for 12 credits and count directly toward the final GPA. From a constructive alignment perspective, this heavy credit allocation signals a strong institutional recognition of English as integral to disciplinary success in EMI rather than as a peripheral skill. Across all three universities, management faculties stand out for offering English courses, often with substantial credit weightings of 4-12 credits, and, in the case of the management faculty at university 3, for contributing credits directly to the final GPA. From a constructive alignment perspective, this heavy credit allocation signals a strong institutional recognition of English as integral to disciplinary success in EMI rather than as a peripheral skill. Viewed through the academic socialization model, discipline-specific English courses, often offered in management and science faculties, demonstrate stronger alignment with disciplinary conventions than General English courses, which respond to both faculty- and department-level EMI needs. However, EAP/ESP courses still remain largely discrete, suggesting limited movement towards an academic literacies model in which language practices are embedded within core discipline teaching and assessment. The arts faculty of university 3 is particularly notable for offering credited and compulsory English support courses delivered by the central DELT, marking a departure from faculty-controlled provision seen elsewhere. From a

language policy and management perspective, this arrangement indicates a strong institutional-level intervention to raise EMI standards and positions the DELT as a key agent rather than a peripheral service unit. However, centralized delivery may also distance language instruction from discipline-specific practices unless strong collaboration mechanisms are in place.

Subject Benchmark Statements

This study also analyzed the Sri Lanka Qualification Framework (SLQF) to identify the SLHE expectations for graduates in their communication at the end of degree programs. SLQF states the English communication standards that are expected from a graduate (SLQF- Level 5/6) at the end of their degree as follows:

Table 5 - Communication Standards of SLQF- Level 5/6, (UGC SLQF-2016, p.26).

Categories of Learning Outcomes	SLQF – Level 5 bachelor's degree	SLQF – Level 6 Bachelor's Honours Degree
3.Communication	Present information, ideas, and concepts efficiently and effectively	Present information, ideas, and concepts efficiently and effectively Demonstrate awareness of the current developments in the area of study

Source: Developed by the Author, 2025.

The above standards are not medium-of-instruction-specific, but they indicate the generic communication skills expected of a graduate. The English support courses offered by the selected universities emphasize the communicative outcomes outlined in the SLQF. Further, SLHE subject benchmark statements are analyzed to assess the alignment of English support courses with them. However, it was evident that subject benchmark statements provide non-specific,

common attributes they expect of graduates, regardless of the degree's medium of instruction. For example, the following table summarizes the selected subject benchmark statements, particularly those related to the communication attributes of science, social science, and management graduates.

Subject Benchmark Statements of Communication for Selected Subjects in SLHE

Table 6 - Subject Benchmark Statements (Communication Attributes) for Selected Subjects in SLHE.

Type of the Degree	Name of the Degree	Communication Attributes
Social Sciences and Humanities	Journalism and Communication Studies	4. Skills and Attitudes 4.1 The graduates will also be able to communicate effectively in interpersonal settings, in writing, and in a variety of media Apply communication skills in dealing with audiences, clients, consumers, markets, sources, and/or users (UGC Subject Benchmark Statement, Journalism and Communication Studies, 2013, p.5).
Management	Management	4. Skills and Attitudes 4.1.1c. Effective communication, oral and in writing, using a range of media which are widely used in management, for example, the preparation and presentation of management reports 4.1.1j. Interpersonal skills of effective listening, negotiating, persuasion, and presentation (UGC Subject Benchmark Statement, Management, 2010, p.5).

Source: Developed by the author using subject benchmarks proposed by SLQF.

However, the subject benchmark statements in the Food Science and Technology degree program at university 1 provide a broader approach to communication skills than those in other degree programs. For example, it states:

The Subject Benchmark Statements in the Food Science and Technology Degree

“Communication skills (with special emphasis on scientific communication);

- receiving, evaluating, and responding to a variety of information sources (e.g., electronic, textual, numerical, verbal, graphical);
- communicating accurately, clearly, concisely, confidently, and appropriately to a variety of audiences in written, verbal, and graphical forms;
- contributing constructively to group discussions;

- listening to, appreciating, and evaluating the views of others.” (UGC Subject Benchmark Statement, Food Science and Technology, 2010, p.8)

Compared with the above statements, this benchmark may help assess students' linguistic achievements in that EMI degree program and may serve as a model for others.

UTEL Benchmarks Reflected in the Curriculum

The University Test of English Language (UTEL) is a benchmark series proposed by the UGC to assess undergraduates' linguistic achievements. It illustrates the level of proficiency desirable in an academic context for each of the reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills areas. These benchmarks are also not specified in terms of the medium of instruction. When benchmarks are generally stated and applied to both English-medium degrees and Sinhala/Tamil-medium degrees, the assessment process may over-assess

Sinhala/Tamil-medium undergraduates while under-assessing English-medium undergraduates. However, this benchmark series may be used in English-medium degrees to identify the desired linguistic achievement levels of undergraduates in the absence of medium-specific benchmarks.

Of the nine faculties, only one management faculty (university 1) mentions aligning its courses with the UTEL benchmarks. It offers ESP course units that are non-credit, but the final result appears on the detailed result sheet. These units are English for Business Economics Part I, II, III, and IV. These are designed with the UTEL benchmarks that the particular department uses in the curriculum, and explain this process in the prospectus as follows:

“BEC2001: English for Business Economics Part I

The BEC 2001 course on English for Business Economics is designed with the aim of enhancing the four competency skills of reading, listening, writing and speaking skills of the students in the field of Business Economics. The courses have been formulated according to the UTEL Benchmark band of 6, which will develop the skills of the students to comfortably reach the benchmark band of 7, the course will proceed in a gradual and an incremental manner. ...” (USJ Prospectus, 2019, p. 58)

Even though the features of embedded curricula practices, in which mediating language and the subject matter are integrated to support overall academic success in EMI, are not shown, the analysis of English support courses offered at the selected universities reflects their alignment with national-level requirements, as discussed above.

Institutional Structural Arrangements of ELT Staff

Regarding the institutional structural arrangements of ELT staff in three universities and nine faculties, there are standard and unique features.

All three universities have DELTs, and language lecturers/instructors are attached to them and serve English-language and EMI needs across the faculties. All selected faculties at university 2 receive services from the ELT staff to meet their English language and EMI needs. This arrangement shows a strong centralized system established in that university.

The other two universities also showcase the same strong centralized system of DELT English support courses, except for the management faculties of universities 1 and 3 and the science faculty of university 3. The two management faculties of universities 1 and 3 each have their own Business Communication Units (BCU) and language lecturers/instructors, which offer all English support courses to their respective faculties under the guidance of management faculty academic staff, showcasing some features of a decentralized institutional structure. In that case, the content and language lecturers/instructors collaborate in the teaching-learning process, curriculum development, and assessment (i.e., at the management faculty of university 3 - drawing topics from management disciplines for presentations, essay writing, or paragraph development), and identify faculty-specific and department-specific EMI needs. The Faculty of Applied Sciences also has an ELTU with language instructors at university 3.

Collaborations in EMI

In line with the research objectives, this section explores how content lecturers and ELT staff conceptualize collaboration within EMI.

Overloaded DELT Lecturers/Instructors

It is worthwhile to analyze the role of ELT staff in the present SLHE context, where EMI is in increasing demand. As defined by (Raune, 2003), ELT staff are expected to develop undergraduates' English-language proficiency across diverse disciplinary contexts. Within SLHE, these expectations translate into substantial teaching responsibilities, and due to various factors, DELT lecturers/instructors are already overloaded with large student populations.

A content lecturer (Lecturer 37) from an arts faculty effectively reflects this perception in her comments,

Yeah, they are revising syllabuses from time to time, and they offer a variety of courses, and actually, they have hectic work to do there. Overloaded with work, right? And ...uh... they are doing different courses... the teaching courses for teachers and language separately for language students, and then for other students... commerce, science, and their requirements are different. They have designed different courses for them as well, to meet their requirements. So, they have heavy work to do, and their work is commendable.

Describing ELT staff's work as "commendable" recognizes their labour-intensive, multifaceted responsibilities within the institution. Except in three controlled instances, the institutional structural arrangements for ELT staff at three selected universities generally serve the entire university student population, leaving DELT ELT staff overloaded and struggling to meet quality standards. Still, this study emphasizes an additional role 'assigned' to them as a result of the introduction of EMI. Therefore, ELT staff is currently being urged to take on a collaborative academic development practitioner role in EMI, to develop mediating English across disciplines, and to support content staff with CPD. This transition from ELT practitioner to EMI practitioner, and the often back-and-forth between the two roles, can be challenging for the SLHE ELT staff due to limited and controlled human resources within the system.

This study also draws attention to an emerging redefinition of the role of ELT staff in the EMI context. Evidence across the nine faculties suggests a tendency for ELT staff to be positioned primarily within English support courses, with a predominant focus on English language proficiency development. While instances of collaboration were identified, these were not consistently embedded within EMI as part of a broader academic development role, indicating a pattern rather than a definitive institutional model.

Need for Discipline-Specific Courses

The analysis of lecturer interviews reflects views on collaboration between content lecturers and language lecturers/instructors. Content lecturers indicate the need for embedded English support courses and ELT staff in their disciplines. The following excerpts from content lecturers show how they perceive the discipline-specific approach.

Lecturer 19:

---...they cater for the common needs. Because we have some unique ...areas. We have some subject specific needs. If the lecturers are attached to our faculty then we can discuss and then... yes, we can discuss even...we have some authority to...the amends and do some instruction ... other things. But when the ELTD handle then they will come and teach only the grammar and general English.

Lecturer 3:

---their vocabulary is very poor in the sense of academic content so therefore they cannot captured those ideas clearly at the beginning because ...uh... they...they have learnt English but just basic English here... but not directly related to the economics or academic content...so that's the problem.

Lecturer 21:

Those should be separately for each faculty if we can do it for each degree programme.... subject-specific... not like common...general...common. Then they will learn technical terms and everything and get ready for the ... to follow the subject.

Lecturer 11:

---Because actually that degree program actually we are conducting in English medium. So, therefore English is essential. Especially for technical language... if we can improve their technical knowledge...sometimes you know general English is not enough. According to my knowledge 50%, 50% better technical at the beginning...and general. ...you know--

Taken together, these perceptions highlight the perceived limitations of general English provision in adequately supporting students' engagement with disciplinary knowledge in English-medium programs. Lecturers consistently emphasized that students' difficulties stem not from a lack of basic English proficiency per se, but from insufficient exposure to academic and technical vocabulary specific to their fields of study. From this perspective, discipline-specific English courses are viewed as essential for enabling students to access, interpret, and articulate subject-related concepts more effectively within EMI contexts.

The emphasis on subject-specific terminology and academic discourse suggests that generic English support is perceived as insufficient preparation for the linguistic demands of disciplinary learning, particularly in technical fields. These perceptions underscore the importance of aligning English support provision with disciplinary epistemologies and communicative practices, thereby positioning discipline-specific English courses as a critical intermediary between general language proficiency and successful participation in EMI degree programs.

As can be seen from the above excerpts, subject lecturers recognize the importance of EAP/ESP, discipline-specific English support courses, or discipline-specific English language teaching. Prospectuses of all three management faculties included EAP/ESP courses in their curricula. Furthermore, the two management faculties (university 1 and 3) obtained services from faculty-owned language lecturers/instructors. This trend emphasizes the need for integrated approaches in EMI. Further, a language lecturer highlights the

importance of subject lecturers' involvement in the enhancement of academic development in EMI.

Further collaborations between subject lecturers and the ELT staff.

Lecturer 39:

---English taught in isolation does not work in the long run. It works as a go-between, whereas when the discipline lecturers deal with the matter itself, there is direct, immediate application of the language.

The above excerpt by a language lecturer argues that stand-alone English instruction is insufficient for sustained academic development in EMI. By stating that "English taught in isolation does not work in the long run," the participant critiques decontextualized language teaching that is detached from disciplinary content. The metaphor of English as a "go-between" may suggest that generic English courses function only as a temporary or intermediary support rather than as a mechanism for deep academic engagement.

In contrast, this language lecturer emphasizes the pedagogical value of discipline lecturers directly addressing language within subject teaching, arguing that this enables "direct, immediate application of the language." This phrase indicates a belief that students acquire academic language more effectively when the mediating language is embedded in authentic disciplinary practices, such as lectures, discussions, assignments, and assessments, rather than taught separately. Overall, the excerpt reflects a preference for integrated language and content instruction, where language learning is inseparable from disciplinary meaning making.

As shown above, when discipline-specific English courses are introduced, faculty-owned or department-owned language lecturers/instructors are expected to work closely with the subject lecturers across all three stages of the teaching-learning process – pre-, during-, and post-teaching. In such cases, collaborations with subject course coordinators and language lecturers lead to identify writing needs that undergraduates require to complete course assignments, reports, or projects in various disciplines. However, such embedded English courses were not evident in any of the faculties in this study, except for the three instances mentioned above, related to two management faculties (university 1 and 3) and a science faculty (university 3) that recruited faculty-owned language lecturers/instructors.

The above discussion informs the additional role of ELT staff as academic development practitioners in the EMI. Additionally, they may support content lecturers in identifying language needs in their own disciplines by providing Continuous Professional Development (CPD) using the CLIL approach, which informs effective integrated strategies of content and language. Such collaborations might strengthen the academic development in EMI.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the nature of the English support courses and the roles/institutional structural arrangements of ELT staff across nine faculties at three state universities

offering EMI. It has been concluded that all nine faculties offered English support courses in EMI as stand-alone courses. Among these discrete English courses were EAP/ESP courses, and such instances can be considered within the academic socialization model. There was evidence of the discipline-specific courses serving department-specific needs. Regarding the roles/institutional structural arrangements of ELT staff, there were three instances in which ELT staff exclusively served faculty-specific EMI needs. This integration of discipline-specific content and the linguistic aspect into the mainstream classroom aims to develop undergraduates' academic development in EMI. Such practices are vital to the curriculum design process and to the academic development of undergraduates in EMI.

The findings indicate that English support within EMI across the selected faculties is predominantly organized through stand-alone courses, with EAP and ESP provision aligning broadly with an academic socialization model. While discipline-specific English courses address department-level linguistic needs, the limited integration of ELT staff into mainstream disciplinary teaching suggests a continued structural separation between language and content. Faculty-specific arrangements in which ELT staff supported EMI more directly point to the potential value of integrated academic development roles in enhancing undergraduate learning in EMI contexts.

This study is limited by its focus on three state universities and nine faculties, which constrains the transferability of the findings. As a qualitative inquiry, the findings represent interpretive patterns rather than generalizable conclusions.

At an institutional level, it may be useful to reflect on the balance between stand-alone English support courses and more integrated forms of language support within EMI programs. Greater clarity regarding the roles and positioning of ELT staff in relation to academic development could support more coherent curriculum design. Continued attention to discipline-specific English provision may help align language support more closely with the academic demands of different faculties.

Future research could examine a wider range of institutions to explore the prevalence of similar structural arrangements. Longitudinal and comparative research on stand-alone versus integrated English support models may further inform EMI-related academic development.

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