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Multimodality in English-Medium Nursing Classroom Interactions: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

English-medium instruction (EMI) continues to expand globally, yet multilingual classrooms remain linguistically complex, as students and lecturers navigate layered communicative challenges. While EMI research has advanced in general education settings, empirical studies grounded in healthcare-specific, discipline-oriented classrooms, particularly in non-English-dominant regions, remain limited. Addressing this gap, this study examines how multimodal resources including gestures, vocalizations, gaze, body movement, and first-language (L1) use are mobilized in EMI nursing classrooms at a university in Indonesia. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and ten hours of recorded classroom discourse, the study reveals how meaning is collaboratively constructed through multimodal ensembles that also shape power relations and pedagogical agency. A unique contribution of this research is the culturally embedded concept of 'Gado-Gado English', a metaphor for the dynamic blend of linguistic and semiotic resources used by teachers and students to cope with EMI challenges. Findings show that multimodal strategies foster inclusive participation, emotional engagement, and active knowledge construction in clinical learning contexts. By capturing naturalistic interaction in an underexplored EMI healthcare setting, this study offers both theoretical and practical insights into discipline-specific EMI pedagogy. Implications are drawn for EMI policy, curriculum design, and professional

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development, especially regarding the integration of multimodal resources as legitimate and empowering pedagogical tools.

Keywords: Critical discourse analysis (CDA), English-medium instruction (EMI), interactions, multimodality, nursing

1. INTRODUCTION

English-medium instruction (EMI) is increasingly prevalent in higher education worldwide, driven by the need to accommodate international students and enhance the global competitiveness of domestic students. This trend is particularly prevalent in non-native English-speaking countries, where students and teachers often do not speak English as their first language and have multilingual linguistic backgrounds (Galloway et al., 2017). Despite its growing adoption, EMI poses several linguistic challenges, primarily due to the variability in English proficiency among students and the dynamic nature of interactions in multilingual settings (Kuteeva, 2020; Sahan, 2020). This linguistic diversity necessitates multiple effective communication modes, which prioritize negotiation of meaning over strict adherence to native English speaker norms.

Research on EMI implementation has mushroomed globally, including in Indonesia. Numerous studies have examined EMI through multiple lenses, starting from the EMI policies (Fitria, 2020; Muttaqin & Chuang, 2022; Simbolon et al., 2020; Sukardi et al., 2021) and perceptions from the diverse stakeholders encompassing students, lecturers, and policymakers (Bolton et al., 2023; Coleman et al., 2024; Despitasari, 2021; Dewi, 2017; Puspitasari & Ishak, 2023; Sadiq & Simbolon, 2024; Simbolon, 2021; Simbolon et al., 2020; Situmorang & Pramusita, 2024, 2025). Investigating these aspects is crucial in teachers' professional development to enable them to develop effective teaching strategies that address the linguistic realities of the EMI multilingual classroom interactions (Sahan et al., 2021). Current communication demands, especially in higher-education contexts, require examining EMI from a multimodal perspective by emphasizing interactions and discourse practices in the classroom.

Classroom interactions are central to understanding the EMI classroom dynamics (Querol-Julián, 2023). These interactions encompass interpersonal communication and engagement between students-teachers, and students-students. In his study, Querol-Julián (2023) investigated the interactions between 15 international students in the Master of Business Administration (MBA) program during an online class. The results show that the interactions in the online class encompass interpersonal communication and engagement between students-teachers, and students-students. Moreover, the study emphasizes the importance of scaffolding materials and employing multiple strategies to clarify and construct meanings, such as using gestures, varying the camera angle, incorporating arm movements, utilizing chat, and providing silent periods for students. Gu et al. (2021) echoed the growing importance of spaces for multilingual and multimodal meaning-making in EMI settings. Multimodalities refer to using different means of communication, including spoken language, gestures, gaze, and body movement. These 'communicative modes', as coined by Querol-Julián (2023), do not operate independently to make meaning. They operate in harmony to create multimodal ensembles that enhance meaning-making in classroom interactions.

Finally, multimodality in learning has been conceptualized using various theories, such as sociocultural theory (SCT) in Kibler (2017) and Martin-Beltrán (2017), and interactional competence, such as in Moody et al. (2019), Tai (2023), and Tai and Wei (2023). In Kibler (2017) and Martin-Beltrán (2017), SCT informs how learning is mediated through the co-construction of knowledge and expansion of multilingual repertoires. Meanwhile, Tai (2023) and Tai and Wei (2023) examined translanguaging as part of interactional competence, where multiple linguistic repertoires are negotiated during the meaning-making process in a multilingual learning environment. Moody et al. (2019), on the other hand, focused on the use of multimodal resources to achieve the transactional goals collaboratively. While acknowledging the value of SCT and

interactional competence in understanding multimodality, they are lacking in the discussion of power dynamics behind the constructed realities of such practice. This paper discusses the multimodalities in EMI interactions from an empirical perspective to uncover the discourse practices in EMI nursing classes that facilitate or hinder learning. This research employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly the notion of power by Fairclough (2013), to investigate the linguistic complexities of the multilingual setting in EMI. Kumaravadivelu's (1999) concept of a classroom as a 'mini-society' with its rules, regulations, routines, and rituals also sheds light on the analysis as it portrays the power relations and language production in the classroom. These two lenses underline the classroom's role as a dynamic environment where multimodalities can create or inhibit learning opportunities. Although numerous EMI studies have focused on general education, engineering, or business disciplines, EMI in nursing education remains relatively underexplored. However, nursing education has unique interactional demands where effective communication is critical not only for academic success but also for the development of therapeutic communication skills essential in clinical practice. In this context, understanding how multimodal resources and power dynamics influence interaction in EMI nursing classrooms is crucial for improving pedagogical practices and supporting student learning.

This study, therefore, focuses on nursing students as participants to illuminate how meaning-making and power are negotiated in EMI classrooms where precise communication, both an academic and a professional, is imperative. To address these problems, this study is guided by the following research questions: 1) How are multimodal resources used to construct meaning in the EMI nursing classroom interactions, and 2) how is the meaning construction navigated? Beyond documenting interactional patterns, the study also seeks to uncover how students and lecturers exercise agency within power-laden classroom dynamics and how these practices influence participation, comprehension, and identity positioning. In doing so, the research aims to provide insights not only into the communicative challenges faced by nursing students in EMI contexts but also into the pedagogical strategies that can enhance equitable learning opportunities. Ultimately, this focus underscores the relevance of examining EMI in professional disciplines like nursing, where classroom communication practices directly connect to real-world competencies in patient care and clinical interaction.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Multimodal Resources in EMI Contexts

The rise in popularity of EMI globally has emphasized the use of multimodal meaning-making for multilingualism (Gu et al., 2021). Multimodality addresses the construction of meaning and various forms of communication, which are later referred to as semiotic resources or communicative modes (Querol-Julián, 2021). These modes do not operate independently but orchestrate collectively, including gestures, gaze, spoken and written language, visual images, and spatial positioning. Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) explained that:

This meaning-making resides in the combined effects of the orchestration of the modes by the producer and by the reproducer, in the interaction between what is said, what is shown, the posture adopted, the movements made, and the position of the speaker and the audience relative to each other in the interaction. (p. 18)

In other words, multimodality occurs through the interplay of communication forms such as speech, writing, gestures, visuals, and space (Archer, 2013), which collectively contribute to constructing meaning in EMI classrooms (Lasagabaster, 2022).

Multimodal resources have been used by teachers and students in EMI classrooms to foster engagement and clarify content (Morell et al., 2022). The monolingual nature of English in multilingual EMI contexts prompts both parties to adopt multimodal strategies such as visual scaffolding and embodied communication to overcome language barriers and foster learning.

Sabaté-Dalmau and Moncada-Comas (2023) further demonstrated that these resources support both cognitive processing and active classroom participation, often integrating gestures and visual aids alongside verbal language.

The concept of translanguaging is closely associated with multimodality. García and Wei (2014) defined translanguaging as the fluid, strategic use of learners' full linguistic repertoires across named languages to co-construct meaning. In EMI classrooms, translanguaging practices often accompany multimodal expressions, enabling students and teachers to draw on multiple linguistic codes and semiotic tools simultaneously (Sah & Li, 2018). For example, students may use gestures, switch languages, and refer to visual cues in a single communicative event to negotiate meaning.

While multimodality and translanguaging are often used interchangeably or concurrently, they have distinct theoretical origins and focal points. Multimodality, grounded in social semiotics (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001), highlights the orchestration of semiotic forms, visual, gestural, spatial, and textual. In contrast, translanguaging emerges from sociolinguistic and critical pedagogical traditions (García & Wei, 2014), emphasizing the agentive and ideological use of language across boundaries to support learning, identity, and participation. Thus, while multimodality may occur with or without language (e.g., gesture + image), translanguaging always involves linguistic negotiation, often supported by multimodal cues. In this study, translanguaging is treated as a linguistic subset within the broader umbrella of multimodal resources when it serves as one of several integrated meaning-making tools.

An illustration from Lin (2018) exemplified this convergence: in a science class, a student who does not know the English term for a concept mixes Cantonese with gestures to communicate. The teacher permits this fluid communication, enabling knowledge co-construction through both multimodal (gesture, gaze, visuals) and translanguaging practices. This approach contrasts with monologic EMI lecturing styles (Lo & Macaro, 2011), shifting the classroom into an interactive, meaning-centered space. Similarly, Custodio-Espinar and López-Hernández (2023) found that multimodality in EMI and CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) courses supported peer interaction, helping students develop not only English proficiency but also digital, social, and cognitive competencies.

In line with these findings, Boggio-López and Costa (2025) examined language-related episodes (LREs) in EMI engineering courses using multimodal analysis. Their study showed that teachers' translanguaging and use of non-verbal communication (visuals, gestures) facilitated learners' understanding of complex content and vocabulary, illustrating how translanguaging is often enacted through multimodal channels. Importantly, their findings highlight the pedagogical potential of combining multimodal and translanguaging practices to scaffold comprehension of disciplinary content that might otherwise be inaccessible in English-only instruction. Such evidence reinforces the need to reconceptualize EMI classrooms not merely as spaces of language transmission but as dynamic, multimodal learning environments where meaning is collaboratively negotiated. This perspective also aligns with the growing call to view multimodality and translanguaging as complementary rather than competing practices, offering a more holistic framework for understanding classroom communication in multilingual EMI settings.

2.2 Power Dynamic Interactions through Critical Discourse Analysis

Power relations in EMI classrooms shape how knowledge is delivered, received, and negotiated (Fairclough, 1989). EMI, now prevalent in non-English-dominant contexts such as nursing education, involves complex classroom interactions where language, roles, and participation are shaped by institutional and sociocultural forces (Gee, 2005; Macaro & Akincioglu, 2018). These dynamics often determine who gets to speak, whose contributions are valued, and how classroom authority is legitimized. In professional fields such as nursing, these power-laden structures are particularly significant because classroom discourse is not only about academic knowledge but also about shaping professional identity and communicative competence essential for clinical practice.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a lens for uncovering how language and multimodal practices reinforce or challenge power asymmetries. Fairclough's (2013) three-dimensional model: text, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice, which later helps reveal how authority, identity, and norms are enacted in EMI settings. Teachers, positioned as knowledge authorities, influence interaction not just through language but also through embodied cues and translanguaging control (Rachmawati, 2022). By analyzing both spoken and embodied modes of communication, CDA allows researchers to identify the subtle ways in which hierarchies are reproduced or resisted. This perspective is especially valuable for EMI contexts, where surface-level language proficiency may obscure deeper issues of access, participation, and equity in learning.

Classrooms operate as 'mini-societies' (Kumaravadivelu, 1999), where power is negotiated through both teacher-student and peer interactions. In multilingual nursing contexts, language proficiency, gender, and professional hierarchies further complicate participation (Mai et al., 2024). Such hierarchies may manifest in who feels confident to ask questions, who dominates group discussions, or whose responses are legitimized by the teacher. Recognizing classrooms as microcosms of broader social structures highlights how the reproduction of inequalities in EMI education may mirror larger dynamics of privilege and marginalization in society, making critical examination all the more necessary.

While multimodal and translanguaging practices can empower learners, unequal regulation, e.g., when only teachers are permitted to switch codes, may sustain inequities. This asymmetry positions students as passive recipients of knowledge rather than active participants in the creation of meaning. Moreover, when translanguaging is selectively permitted, it can reinforce teacher authority while constraining students' agency to draw on their full linguistic repertoires. Such patterns reveal the tension between innovation in pedagogy and entrenched ideologies that privilege certain language practices over others.

Research highlights how EMI teachers adjust their stance using voice, gaze, and code-switching (Tai, 2023) or provide inclusive feedback that supports learner agency (Chen et al., 2023). Translanguaging has also been shown to affirm multilingual identities and enhance engagement (Sadiq & Simbolon, 2024). These findings demonstrate that teachers' multimodal and linguistic choices directly influence whether classrooms become inclusive spaces of collaboration or remain controlled environments, reinforcing hierarchies. However, nursing education remains underexplored in this regard, despite its unique demands for transparent, empathetic, and collaborative communication. Understanding how power operates in these classrooms has direct implications for preparing students to navigate not only academic contexts but also complex real-world clinical interactions.

This study addresses this gap by applying CDA to examine how multimodal and translanguaging resources are employed or restricted in EMI nursing classrooms, and how these shape classroom participation and identity. Situating these practices within a critical framework illuminates not just how meaning is made, but whose voices are amplified or silenced, essential knowledge for building equitable, responsive EMI pedagogies in healthcare education. Ultimately, the study contributes to bridging theoretical perspectives on power and multimodality with the practical realities of EMI in professional training. In doing so, it aims to inform both policy and pedagogy, fostering EMI practices that promote fairness, inclusivity, and communicative competence among future healthcare professionals.

3. METHODS

3.1 Research Context

This study took place in an EMI nursing class in Indonesia, a country known for its rich linguistic diversity, "comprising over 700 languages, presents unique challenges and opportunities for multilingual education policies" (Rusdiansyah et al., 2025, p. 2). Bahasa Indonesia, the official national language, serves as a lingua franca among speakers of diverse

indigenous languages. In this multilingual environment, English functions as a foreign language, yet it has long been embedded in the school curriculum and is increasingly present in higher education.

The participating students came from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds, with Bahasa Indonesia commonly used as a default medium of communication. Previously, classroom interactions occurred predominantly in Bahasa Indonesia. However, the recent inclusion of three students from Myanmar, who did not speak Indonesian, necessitated a shift to English. This shift presented communication challenges for both teachers and students, prompting increased reliance on multimodal resources (gestures, visuals, objects) and translanguaging strategies as survival mechanisms, resulting in *Gado-gado* English (Situmorang & Pramusita, 2025). *Gado-gado* is a well-known local culinary dish in Indonesia, which is a mixture of cooked vegetables, tofu, tempeh, and peanut sauce. It is called *gado-gado* as it comes from the word *gado*, which means mixed. ‘Gado-gado English’, as coined by Situmorang and Pramusita (2025), encompasses the multimodalities utilized in the classroom, ranging from translanguaging, sounds, gestures, facial expressions, and media that are used to deliver meaning in the communication EMI classroom.

The motivation to investigate this EMI nursing classroom was grounded in both educational and global health imperatives. Students enrolled in this program are expected to be internationally competent nurses, addressing projected global nursing shortages, an estimated 4.5 million by 2030, especially in regions like Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Eastern Mediterranean (World Health Organization, 2025). Despite these global ambitions, the EMI program curriculum mirrors that of regular nursing classes conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, with the only distinction being the medium of instruction and the international job promise. Notably, there is no formal policy guiding the implementation of the EMI program, making this an opportune site to study grassroots EMI practices.

3.2 Research Method

This study adopted a qualitative case study approach informed by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to explore power dynamics, language practices, and multimodal meaning-making in an EMI nursing classroom. Fairclough’s (2013) three-tiered CDA model guided the analysis of textual interaction, discourse practice, and sociocultural context. This framework enabled examination of how language and multimodal resources shaped communication and authority in classroom settings.

Classroom discourse analysis captured real-time interactions, while focus group discussions (FGDs) with students and teachers provided reflective insights into their experiences, beliefs, and attitudes toward EMI. This dual-method design ensured methodological triangulation, allowing for a richer understanding of both observed practices and participants’ interpretations (Doiz et al., 2014). FGDs were especially valuable in surfacing emotional and ideological dimensions that are often invisible in classroom observations. Together, these methods provided a comprehensive lens on EMI pedagogy, bridging what participants do and say, and revealing the layered complexities of teaching and learning in multilingual, multimodal environments (Creese, 2008; Dafouz & Smit, 2020).

3.3 Research Participants

Fifty first-year nursing students from an EMI class (locally called by the faculty an international nursing class, or INC) participated in this study. The students were recruited through a loan scheme and placed in the dormitory. They were recruited through a university-administered loan scheme covering tuition, accommodation, and living expenses, with post-graduation service required at partner hospitals.

Of the 50 students, 5 were males and 45 were females with ages ranging from 18 to 19 years. Forty-seven were Indonesian students with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, while three were from Myanmar and spoke Burmese. Students were selected for the EMI class

based on entry-level English exam results. Upon arrival, all were given a CEFR-based proficiency test using EnglishRadar.com.

Table 1. EnglishRadar proficiency test result level.

Number of correct answers	Number students	EnglishRadar level	CEFR level
1–7	0	Elementary	A1
8–20	2	Pre-Intermediate	A2
21–30	36	Intermediate	B1
31–40	9	Upper-Intermediate	B2
41–50	2	Advanced	C1
51–60	1	Proficiency	C2

Table 1 presents the proficiency test results across six CEFR levels. Most of the students (36 out of 50) scored at the Intermediate B1 level. Nine students were at the Upper-Intermediate level, and few students achieved Advanced and Pre-Intermediate level. Only one student was noted to achieve Proficiency level.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). All participants were informed of the study's aims, procedures, and their rights, including voluntary participation and the ability to withdraw at any time without consequence. Informed consent was collected from all students and faculty involved, and pseudonyms were used in all transcripts and publications to ensure confidentiality. Data were securely stored and only accessible to the research team. Given the power dynamics between faculty and students, special care was taken during FGDs to create a non-threatening atmosphere, mainly by conducting student and teacher FGDs separately to minimize hierarchical influence.

3.5 Data Collection

Data was collected through classroom observations, audio recordings, and focus group discussions (FGDs). Observations were conducted in both lecture-based (Fundamental Nursing Assessment) and practical (Anatomy and Physiology) classes to examine the use of multimodal resources in different instructional contexts. Approximately 10 hours of classroom interaction were audio-recorded to document natural discourse without disrupting the flow of instruction. The recordings were made using a high-quality digital recorder placed unobtrusively in the classroom to minimize distraction and observer effects. These audio files were later transcribed verbatim for analysis, with particular attention given to pauses, overlaps, and paralinguistic features (e.g., intonation, emphasis) that contributed to meaning-making. The use of audio recording was crucial for capturing the fine-grained details of spoken interaction, enabling the researchers to revisit episodes multiple times for accuracy and deeper interpretation. Two FGDs, one with students and one with teachers, provided in-depth insight into participants' perceptions and experiences with EMI. These discussions also served as reflective spaces where participants could critically engage with their language practices (Shabina et al., 2024; Williams & Katz, 2001). The combination of these methods ensured data triangulation, enabling a comprehensive understanding of both observable practices and the beliefs underpinning classroom interaction in multilingual nursing education.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) frameworks, particularly Fairclough's (2013) concepts of power in and power behind discourse. Power in discourse refers to the dynamics reflected in interactions, such as the roles and relationships between teachers and students. In contrast, the power behind discourse examines the institutional

and ideological influences that shape classroom practices. Discourse analysis provided a robust framework for exploring the multifaceted ways in which students communicate and create meaning.

FGDs with students and teachers were also transcribed and thematically coded to capture experiences and perceptions of EMI. Themes such as linguistic insecurity, identity negotiation, and pedagogical adaptation emerged. Inter-coder agreement was established through independent coding of 20% of transcripts by two external researchers. Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation, member checking, peer review, and thick description.

This study also adopted Mullet's (2018) seven-stage framework for CDA in educational settings. The methodology was made tangible through specific examples of coding and linguistic features identified in the data. The first stage involved selecting discourse relevant to the research focus, where role-play sequences in nursing assessment classes were chosen because they required both clinical and linguistic performance. The second stage prepared data sources by organizing and transcribing recorded interactions, including notation of pauses, overlaps, gestures, and gaze. Gathering contextual information about the texts and their educational settings constituted the third stage, encompassing classroom norms, course objectives, and institutional language policies.

The fourth stage involved coding for themes through systematic analysis, where excerpts were coded under themes such as 'teacher corrective feedback', 'student anxiety in language use', and 'multimodal scaffolding'. For instance, in Extract 1 (*'miring... bahu'*), the student's use of L1 terms was coded as agency through translanguaging, while the teacher's insertion of 'shoulder' was coded as authority through corrective feedback. The fifth stage analyzed internal relations, including aims, social context representation, and speaker positionality. In the same extract, the student's use of L1 demonstrated a goal of completing the assessment despite gaps in English vocabulary. At the same time, the teacher's correction reinforced her institutional role as linguistic gatekeeper.

The sixth stage identified linguistic features and text structures representing power and social relations. For example, raised intonation, use of authoritative imperatives (shoulder), and code-switching permissions (In English/*lah, campur-campur* is okay 'of course in English, mixing [the languages] is allowed') were analyzed to show how authority was enacted or softened. The final stage interpreted the data to uncover insights into multimodal communication and power dynamics in the classroom. This process illuminated how multimodal ensembles (speech + gesture + gaze) and translanguaging were negotiated, sometimes empowering students to participate and other times reinforcing hierarchical classroom norms. This approach facilitated a nuanced examination of how multimodal resources and discourse practices influence the construction of meaning and the creation or limitation of learning opportunities in EMI nursing classrooms.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A comprehensive analysis of the classroom interactions revealed three central themes in the multimodal resources and linguistic strategies employed by both teachers and students in the EMI nursing classroom, including (1) code-switching and L1 use occurred frequently in 14 out of 18 role-play interactions, serving as a compensatory mechanism for linguistic gaps; (2) multimodal communication (gestures, sounds, gaze, touch, facial expressions, and demonstrations): present across all role-play activities that contribute to meaning making and reinforcing content; and (3) teacher-initiated corrective feedback was provided in 11 role-play sequences, using both verbal and nonverbal strategies to scaffold language learning. These interrelated patterns generated a dynamic flow of communication in which students simultaneously navigated language learning and clinical skill acquisition. The excerpts presented in the following section exemplify these themes and to demonstrate how they unfold in context, revealing both the students' agentive use of multimodal resources and the teacher's strategic negotiation of authority and support.

The sections analyze classroom excerpts that exemplify how multimodal strategies support learning while also revealing complex power dynamics between teachers and students. Drawing on sociocultural theory (Kibler, 2017; Martin-Beltrán, 2017) and Kumaravadivelu's (1999) concept of the classroom as a 'mini society', the excerpts are examined to explore how authority is negotiated, how rules are enforced or relaxed, and how agency is distributed among participants. Rather than viewing power as a top-down imposition, this analysis foregrounds its fluid nature, where teachers may simultaneously enact institutional authority and accommodate students' needs through flexible pedagogical strategies. These interactions reveal the shifting roles of teachers as both gatekeepers of language norms and facilitators of inclusive, agentic learning.

4.1 Constructing Meaning through Multimodal Resources

The analysis of multimodal interactions reveals how students strategically combine linguistic, gestural, and visual resources to navigate complex academic tasks despite language constraints. In the EMI nursing classroom, meaning making is not confined to verbal exchanges, but it emerges from the interplay of multimodal cues including bodily actions, gaze, touch, and semiotic tools. These multimodal resources facilitate understanding, participation and bridge communication among students, while teachers provided corrective feedback and embody modelling by mediating these interactions. This orchestration not only enables task completion but also reflects the co-construction of professional discourse in training contexts where linguistic and clinical competencies develop simultaneously. Extract (1) exemplifies how multimodal resources play as dynamic meaning making devices during a clinical role-play activity.

- (1) Role play : Doing a head-to-toe assessment.
 Student : Can you *miring* [tilt] 180? Okay, now *miring* [tilt] to the side, left and right. (demonstrating side sleeping).
 (the pair slept on the side; the student continued his assessment)
 88, 87, normal, *ya* [part.]. (while looking at the goniometer) I will assess you because you say your *bahu* [shoulder] is painful. (touching his pair's shoulder)
 Teacher 1 : 'Shoulder'. (raising the volume, maintaining eye contact with the student).

In Extract (1), during classroom interaction, the interplay of multimodalities is used to support idea flows through teacher and student interaction. In this part of the excerpt, students are participating in a role-play activity in the fundamental nursing assessment class, where they learn to conduct a head-to-toe assessment. However, due to their lack of English proficiency, they need more than just a spoken language to accomplish their role-play task. The student then, through her discourse, performed an L1 switch to emphasize his point, '*miring*', meaning sleeping on the side, while demonstrating it. At the same time, his pair navigates the meaning through the demonstration, which reinforces the verbal instruction given. The students, at the same time, measuring the range of motions in joints integrated visual and verbal modes, '88, 87 normal ya' emphasized the content learning process that he integrates into his language use. Similarly, when he states '*bahu*' while touching his peer's shoulder, it facilitates meaning as they proceed with verbal and gestures. Using *bahu* and *miring* as L1 here contributes to the successful flow of ideas (Lemke & Lin, 2022), where he fills his gap of English lexical knowledge with Bahasa Indonesia. Although *miring* and *bahu* may suggest a linguistic limitation, here, they can also be seen as a manifestation of their agency in shaping their discourse (Liu et al., 2024). They are exercising their L1 instead of keeping silent and submitting to their English incapability of not knowing specific words, resulting in stress and anxiety, as other EMI programs have shown (Tajik et al., 2024).

Whether this strategic use of L1 supports long-term English acquisition or functions as a temporary compensatory mechanism depends on how it is pedagogically mediated. In this interaction, the teacher responds with corrective feedback, saying 'shoulder' while maintaining eye contact, which not only affirms the correct term but also models the linguistic equivalent in English. This moment of feedback creates a learning opportunity where L1 use becomes a bridge

toward target language development, consistent with sociocultural theory's notion of scaffolding. When L1 switches are followed by teacher mediation that links them to English vocabulary, they may support retention and eventual lexical integration. However, in the absence of such scaffolding, these switches risk remaining surface-level coping strategies that lack sustained language gains, hence highlighting a topic for future research on the assessment of EMI students' L2 acquisition.

The teacher takes the chance to support the learning where possible by providing corrective feedback, which facilitates multimodal ensembles, verbal, gestures, and gaze, by saying and giving input to the English words that are needed, facilitating linguistic improvement (Turnbull et al., 2011) while watching the clinical role-play. At the same time, the teacher also, when giving corrective feedback, shoulder to translate the student's word of *bahu*, indicating the rules and dynamics of the classroom as a mini society where there are rules and authority that need to be complied with Kumaravadivelu (1999).

This episode demonstrates that language correction is not merely disciplinary but serves as a scaffold that links students' linguistic resources to academic norms. The teacher's ability to balance authority and responsiveness, by modeling without overtly punishing, illustrates power as a pedagogical resource. This aligns with sociocultural perspectives that position learning as mediated through interaction and guided participation (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). It also confirms that meaning-making and language development can be co-constructed even amid linguistic asymmetries.

4.2 Navigating Meaning through Power Dynamics and Teacher Flexibility

The teacher has the authority to correct linguistic errors and maintain the accuracy of using English as the primary language in the classroom. When the students make mistakes with linguistic production, the teacher gives feedback as the class authority. Teacher's exercising power to facilitate learning was in line with the study by Custodio-Espinar and López-Hernández (2023), who frequently initiated enriching students' vocabulary learning using translanguaging and multimodal resources. Facilitated by the power, the teacher of this paper can even tolerate the aid used in communication, including the interplay of multimodal resources, to create learning opportunities. Extract (2) shows a further example of how teachers allow and utilize multimodalities to create learning opportunities.

- (2) Student : *Bahasa Indonesia aja, Bu* [Just Indonesian, Ma'am]? (asking for permission)
Teacher 1 : In English *lah* [part.], *campur-campur* [to mix] is okay. (smiling)
Student : She, she can... (stuttering)
Class : He! (all exclaiming)

In Extract (2), in the same role-play situation, a student begged for tolerance to speak in Bahasa Indonesia (L1) to plead for her linguistic incompetence. The student is aware of the rules in the classroom, that English is the language of communication, and that the teacher is the one with authority whom she should respect and obey. Saying, '*Bahasa Indonesia aja Bu?*' can I speak in Bahasa Indonesia, Ma'am? She submits to the power relation in the classroom and may have been anxious, as described by Tajik et al. (2024). This anxiety was evident at the moment when the student finally tried to speak in English; the student stuttered, 'she... she,' validating her struggle with English proficiency. This indicates the tension she receives from trying to perform in English and the reality of the multilingual learners in the classroom. In focus groups, students mentioned they often ask questions in Bahasa Indonesia because 'we can explain ourselves better' (Student 5, Teacher 2) and 'sometimes our English is not enough' (Student 1, Teacher 3).

The teacher, in response, exerts her authority as a rule-maker by saying that it needs to be in English. However, instead of enforcing the rules, she provides an opportunity for the student by showing a kind gesture, smiling and convincing the students that they can try and mix it with the local language, '*In English lah*'. The *lah* particle serves as a friendly and encouraging marker,

helping the teacher negotiate her power in the interaction. Rather than marginalizing an already vulnerable student, she uses multimodal strategies, her tone, facial expression, and linguistic choices, to create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment (Li & Han, 2023). This approach not only softens the enforcement of English but also acknowledges the student's linguistic background, signaling that language learning does not require a strict separation between English and the local language. The teacher's choice to add '*lah*' transforms what could have been a rigid correction into a friendly nudge, maintaining warmth and encouragement rather than distance. By doing so, she balances authority with approachability, positioning English not as something imposed but as something flexible and accessible. Instead of reinforcing a strict linguistic hierarchy, she reassures the student that their existing linguistic resources are valuable, ultimately fostering a more empowering and less intimidating learning experience. As the teacher still tries to align with the institutional norms, she accommodates the students' learning by stating that '*campur-campur* (mixing languages) is okay' to stretch the rule. The teacher ensures that mixing English with her L1 makes sure the student has the linguistic repertoire that she needs. The teacher's flexibility in allowing mixing languages here acknowledges the reality of multilingualism in the classroom. A similar finding on teacher flexibility has been reported by Lin (2018), giving insights into teachers' exercise of power to choose to empower students in EMI classrooms to impact students positively.

Subsequently, this joint meaning-making process allowed the class to join the discussion between the students and the teacher by responding to their friend's mistakes in indicating the pronoun 'she... she', exclaiming 'he' to correct the mistake. This indicates the classroom readiness to co-construct and elaborate on the ideas started by the students, and that they are engaged in the flowing ideas resulting in active knowledge construction in the classroom. If the teacher ignores the students' active construction in the classroom, the class will remain monologic lecturing (Lo & Macaro, 2011) and teacher dominated (An et al., 2021). Furthermore, the fact that the classroom can jump into the flow of ideas and co-construct the meaning indicates that any student in the classroom can enforce the rules of the mini-society (Kumaravadivelu, 1999). The class reminds the students to adhere to linguistic and social norms in the community highlighting their societal norms in the classroom. The students navigate their linguistics while subtly fulfilling the expectations surrounding them, either by their peers or teacher.

This exchange reveals a nuanced negotiation of classroom norms where the teacher's institutional authority is softened through humor, cultural familiarity (*lah*), and flexible rule interpretation. Rather than reinforcing rigid top-down control, the teacher uses interpersonal strategies to co-construct a more equitable learning environment. This illustrates what Li and Han (2023) describe as 'pedagogical empathy' and echoes Kumaravadivelu's (1999) assertion that teachers can reshape institutional constraints through situated practice.

4.3 Facilitating Active Knowledge Construction

When students have freedom in the classroom to exercise their multimodality, they have more agency. In FGD, a student (S2, T2) mentions, 'If you don't know how to explain it to patients, you can demonstrate it and show it to them. We can make the sound of it using our hands and bodies to guide them to understand what we mean'. This excerpt indicates that the students are confident that multimodalities can be used to construct meaning and deliver messages when they cannot convey just words. The interplay of the combination of semiotic resources can be seen in Extracts (3) and (4).

- (3) Student : Okay, I will check your hair, *set set, set*. (making a sound, moving her hand as if doing an assessment)
 Now open your mouth, three fingers, *ya, aaaaaaaa...* (opening his mouth and making an aaa sound while showing his finger)
 Student : Can you sit here? (whisper and demonstrate how to sit)
- (4) Teacher : An example of an acute condition is the cardiovascular system. For example, we are watching an Indonesian drama, and suddenly... (holding breath, holding her chest) *Huh huh hu...* (out of breath)

Class : Heart attack.
Teacher : Yes!

In Extract (3), multimodalities are employed in the form of typical sounds and movements to construct meaning and shape peer dynamics in classroom interaction. The students orchestrate using sound, gestures, and gaze as communicative modes. In turn, these catalyze a supportive and productive learning environment. The sound, ‘*set set set* while moving hands’, delivers messages to the class that the student is demonstrating a head-to-toe assessment confidently. The student takes the role of a nurse in authority who professionally instructs the patient, creating a situation in the mini-clinic. The demonstration of using three fingers and opening the mouth with the ‘*aaaa*’ sound and then leading fellow students to sit at the chair by proving the demonstration created a multimodal scaffolding. In Extract (4), a similar typical sound appears to generate the meaning and support the dialogic interaction. The teacher explains a concept by providing an example that all the students are familiar with, such as a scene of a heart attack on an Indonesian television broadcast, and engages the students. Therefore, typical sounds here, such as ‘*set set set, aaaa*’, and ‘*huh huh hu*’ produced by the teachers and students, ensure dynamic and lively dialogue, which later facilitates understanding. As a result, these lessen the anxiety and foster a relaxed environment. In addition to typical sounds, a demonstration alongside the explanation is also shown in the interaction, which helps navigate meaning-making. In Extracts (3) and (4), both students and teachers use demonstrations alongside the spoken words and sound to add meaning to their dialogue. These give the situation an authentic atmosphere and create meaningful communication. Therefore, typical sounds and demonstrations not only support the construction of meaning but also provide learning opportunities in the classroom. This finding aligns with Nikula et al.’s (2024) finding that teachers are found to use multimodal resources to explain abstract and concrete knowledge.

The students’ confident use of multimodal tools to assume professional identities demonstrates their growing agency in the classroom. The playful, embodied interactions reduce anxiety and foster collaborative meaning-making. Here, the teacher’s non-intervention also signifies a strategic withholding of authority, allowing students to take ownership of the discourse. This reflects a horizontal flow of power, in contrast to traditional hierarchical instruction, and supports Lo and Macaro’s (2011) call for dialogic engagement in EMI settings.

4.4 Emotional and Cognitive Engagement through Multimodalities

The learning opportunities are expanded through the use of L1 to provide a case study of a particular disease to illustrate the mental state of the patients. In Extract (5), the teacher first asked the students to assess their bodies during tense situations. This is an effective communication strategy for presenting challenging material to local students, which the teacher led them to position themselves as patients. The teacher also draws their students’ engagement by asking a linguistic question between asking the English word for ‘morning’. The teacher has integrated two strategies, including giving a case study in Bahasa Indonesia and asking about the meaning of a word in English, to engage her students. The integrated strategies through multimodalities have also been found by Sadiq and Simbolon (2024).

- (5) Teacher 2 : So after you finish your skill test, your body returns to normal. Imagine the patient! *Coba bayangkan kalau pasien ada yang sakit cancer* [Just imagine a patient who has cancer]. They withdraw from family. They become *murung* [gloomy]. *Apa ya murung* [What is the word for ‘murung’]? (looking at the students for help)
Class : Looks sad. (students provide translation)
Teacher 2 : Yes, they look sad. (feeling glad). So, we must find out the cause.

The teachers further orchestrate the use of multimodalities to ensure students understand the content and emphasize the topic’s importance. However, it is also worth noting that there is another side to teachers switching language and exercises to multimodalities. During the interview, Teacher 2 stated, ‘I switch to Bahasa Indonesia sometimes because I just cannot figure

out the exact word. I also switched to Bahasa Indonesia to make students understand the context and put themselves in the emotions. I also switched the language to make sure the students follow the explanation' (T2). Their linguistic limitations can also be one of the aspects of changing language, in addition to facilitating students' understanding of the emotional atmosphere and understanding of the concept. In Extract (6), the teacher provides direct translation to ensure the concept's understanding.

- (6) Teacher 3 : When we know the stressor of what makes us uncomfortable. Stress is the body's reaction to a threat. However, anxiety is a feeling of fear and worry; the trigger is unknown. Anxiety can sometimes be a stress reaction. *Ketika kita kenal stressor yang buat kita tidak nyaman. Stress itu adalah reaksi tubuh pada ancaman. Tapi, ansietas itu lebih kepada perasaan takut dan cemas; triggernya kita tidak tau. Ansietas bisa jadi juga adalah reaksi terhadap stress* [When we recognize a stressor that makes us feel uncomfortable. Stress is the body's reaction to a threat. But anxiety is more about feelings of fear and worry; the trigger is unknown. Anxiety can also be a reaction to stress].

The direct translation is provided because the teacher is aware of the differences in nursing terminology between English and Bahasa Indonesia. During the interview, the teachers expressed, 'English is the predominant language of health literature' (T1, interview 1), and as T2 noted, 'Indonesian terminology isn't as dominant as English terminology in nursing' (T2, interview 2). This sets the background for why Teacher 3 provided the direct translation, as she was aware of the terminology difference. This finding aligns with Macaro (2020) research, which demonstrates that teachers often switch to their L1 to explain concepts in academic disciplines. In relation to terminology, evidence of giving questions to test the understanding of terminology has also been found. The teacher asks a question in English while referring to the technical concepts being discussed (acute and chronic) in English. While she allows the students to answer in L1, she keeps on elaborating on the English, making sure the international students also understand the answer.

- (7) Teacher 2 : What's the difference between acute and chronic? (asking the class)
 Student : *Akut itu adalah penyakit yang terjadi di bawah 3 bulan, yang di mana penanganannya itu cepat, misalnya seseorang dengan penyakit infeksi saluran perkemihan. Juga kayak influenza. Kalau kronik terjadi di atas 3 bulan, diderita dalam waktu yang lama* [Acute refers to a disease that lasts less than 3 months, where the treatment is quick, for example someone with a urinary tract infection. Also like influenza. Chronic, on the other hand, occurs for more than 3 months and is experienced over a long period of time].
 Teacher 2 : So, the symptoms and signs are less than three months. In a short period of time. Meanwhile, chronic happens for a long time with worsening symptoms, right?

The teacher here summarizes the answers of the student in L1, who is considered to have insufficient English to become a successful answer without jeopardizing the content and the student's English level (Sabaté-Dalmau & Moncada-Comas, 2023). As a result, the student's linguistic diversity is acknowledged, their participation in the classroom is included, and the available resources are catered to different students' individual abilities in the classroom (Tai & Wei, 2025). In these moments, the teacher's decision to blend L1 with L2, through strategic translation and emotional engagement, positions her not only as an instructor but also as a cultural mediator. The ability to shift between enforcing norms and accommodating linguistic gaps reflects an adaptive use of power, one that validates students' identities while promoting access to disciplinary knowledge. This flexible orchestration of authority reinforces learning while maintaining students' affective security.

This study highlights the centrality of multimodal resources in meaning-making within EMI nursing classrooms. Both teachers and students used gestures, L1 switches, and demonstrations to overcome linguistic challenges and reinforce nursing concepts. Teachers facilitated understanding through corrective feedback, multimodal scaffolding, and flexible language use, supporting both comprehension and engagement. A key contribution lies in framing classroom interaction as a co-constructed, dynamic process. Power and identity are continually negotiated; teachers balance institutional authority with support, while students assert their

agency through creative language use and embodied participation. Power, therefore, is not fixed but mobilized in ways that can either enable or limit learning opportunities.

Teacher feedback, often delivered through multimodal cues such as gaze, verbal prompts, and modeling, created a responsive learning space that respected students' linguistic limitations without diminishing their confidence. For instance, teachers' decisions to provide direct translation or revoice student answers in English not only clarified disciplinary knowledge but also validated students' participation, ensuring that meaning was accessible to all. This underscores the role of multimodal practices as a form of pedagogical scaffolding, where emotional reassurance and cognitive support are intertwined. In high-stakes contexts like nursing, such practices are particularly vital as they ensure both conceptual accuracy and student confidence, reinforcing the argument that EMI pedagogy must move beyond monolingual norms to embrace multilingual and multimodal meaning-making. Practically, the findings support integrating role-plays, reflective debriefings, and bilingual explanations into EMI classroom design. Training lecturers to view translanguaging and embodied interaction as signs of engagement rather than errors can foster more inclusive, student-responsive EMI environments. Overall, the study calls for a shift toward a more fluid and equitable model of language use in multilingual nursing education.

5. CONCLUSION

This study examines classroom discourse in an EMI nursing context, highlighting how teachers and students strategically used multimodal resources, such as gestures, gaze, visual aids, spatial positioning, and L1, to construct meaning and facilitate communication in a multilingual setting. Rather than signaling deficiency, the use of L1 emerged as a pedagogical agency that supports inclusive learning. While rich in detail, the study's focus on a single Indonesian EMI classroom limits broader generalizability, and its reliance on naturalistic observation may not fully capture cognitive engagement or long-term effects.

Future research should explore structured language support mechanisms and cross-institutional contexts to understand multimodal scaffolding in professional EMI programs better. Practically, these findings call for intentional training in multimodal pedagogy and translanguaging practices, alongside flexible language policies and culturally responsive curriculum design. At the same time, integrating multimodality requires critical attention to potential misinterpretation, overreliance on L1, and subtle power dynamics that may shape participation. Rethinking EMI as a fluid, interactional, and multimodal pedagogy offers a promising path to enhance both content learning and communicative competence in global nursing education.

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