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A Literature-Informed English Language Support Syllabus for Secondary-School Learners in an English-Medium Instruction Context

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ABSTRACT

English-medium instruction (EMI) can broaden access to academic knowledge, yet it may disadvantage secondary-school learners who lack the English needed to understand explanations, read informational texts, participate in discussion, and demonstrate subject knowledge. This design study develops a literature-informed English-language support syllabus for learners with developing proficiency in an EMI context. A focused review combined curriculum-design scholarship with recent research on EMI support, English for Academic Purposes, content-linked language learning, scaffolding, differentiation, multilingual pedagogy, and action-oriented assessment. The sources were coded thematically and translated into design specifications through Nation and Macalister's curriculum-design cycle. Five requirements emerged: needs-based relevance, explicit academic-language instruction, structured links to subject learning, inclusive and differentiated support, and performance-based alignment. The proposed one-year syllabus contains thirty-two 90-minute sessions in five modules: Academic English Foundations, Content-Linked Language Learning, Communication for EMI Learning, Academic Literacy Development, and Independent Academic Communication. It includes provisional entry expectations, observable outcomes, spiral progression, formative and summative assessment, and an evaluation plan. Because no local needs data, expert validation, or pilot evidence were collected, the syllabus remains a prototype requiring contextual adaptation and empirical evaluation before institutional adoption.
Keywords: academic literacy, English language support, English-medium instruction, secondary education, syllabus design

Introduction

English-medium instruction (EMI) uses English to teach academic subjects in settings where English is not most learners' first language; the instructional focus remains

the subject rather than English itself (Macaro, 2018; Rose et al., 2023). In Indonesia, EMI is associated with internationalisation and access to wider academic resources, but its effectiveness depends on whether learners can use English to engage with subject knowledge (Bolton et al., 2023). Exposure alone does not ensure that students can follow rapid explanations, interpret technical and general academic vocabulary, read dense texts, take notes, ask questions, or demonstrate understanding in speech and writing.

When linguistic demands exceed current proficiency, English becomes an additional barrier rather than a transparent medium for learning. Research reports challenges created by English-only expectations and by the simultaneous need to explain scientific, mathematical, and social concepts (Macaro, 2022; Pun et al., 2022). A focused support course can reduce this gap when its content reflects authentic classroom tasks. Explicit academic-language instruction, collaboration between language and subject teachers, and context-sensitive provision are therefore preferable to a decontextualised general-English sequence (Galloway & Ruegg, 2020; Costa & Mastellotto, 2022; McKinley & Rose, 2022).

The practical problem addressed here is the absence of a coherent syllabus for a supplementary English class serving secondary-school learners with developing proficiency. Without an aligned design, topic selection may be arbitrary, expected progress unclear, and assessment disconnected from participation in EMI lessons. Although research establishes the importance of language support, fewer studies translate this evidence into a complete, adaptable secondary-school syllabus combining academic language, content-linked tasks, interaction, differentiation, strategic multilingualism, and performance assessment. This gap is especially important in multilingual Indonesia, where policy, institutional expectations, resources, and learner diversity interact (Zein et al., 2020).

This need is not addressed by adding more grammar exercises alone. Learners require repeated opportunities to apply language to the same cognitive and communicative operations demanded in subject lessons, while teachers require a sequence that makes progression, support, and evidence of learning visible.

Accordingly, this study aims to formulate a literature-informed English-language support syllabus aligned with the communicative demands of secondary EMI classrooms. It addresses two questions:

1. What design requirements for a secondary-school EMI language-support syllabus can be derived from curriculum-design and EMI-support literature?
2. How can these requirements be translated into a coherent thirty-two-session syllabus with observable outcomes, differentiated pedagogy, and aligned assessment?

The contribution is conceptual rather than evaluative: the product is a defensible prototype for subsequent local needs analysis, expert review, piloting, and outcome evaluation.

EMI Language Demands and Needs-Based Design

EMI classes primarily teach content and may not systematically teach the language through which knowledge is constructed. Learners nevertheless need academic vocabulary and recurring discourse functions such as defining, classifying, comparing, sequencing, explaining cause and effect, interpreting visuals, and justifying claims.

Multimodal research in secondary science and mathematics further shows that understanding is jointly supported by speech, text, images, gesture, and multilingual resources (Pun et al., 2022; Tai, 2022). A complementary language course should therefore rehearse these cross-curricular functions through manageable versions of authentic tasks.

Needs-based design distinguishes target needs—what learners must do in the target situation—from learning needs—the support and processes that help them reach that performance (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Nation and Macalister's (2010) cycle connects environment analysis, needs analysis, and learning principles with goals, content and sequencing, format and presentation, monitoring, assessment, and evaluation. Graves (2000) likewise treats course design as contextual and iterative. Evidence from EAP course design confirms that disciplinary communication needs should inform objectives, materials, and activities (Abdioğlu et al., 2022). In this study, however, needs derived from literature are anticipated needs and must be verified locally.

Content links should remain selective: the support class does not reteach entire subject units, but uses short, age-appropriate texts, diagrams, data displays, and problems to practise transferable language. This balance protects the language-learning focus while increasing authenticity and the likelihood that strategies will transfer to mainstream lessons.

Pedagogical Integration and Assessment

English for Academic Purposes supplies the academic-communication orientation; content-linked tasks provide authentic subject purposes; and communicative pedagogy creates interaction through problem solving, explanation, and negotiation of meaning. Scaffolding supports participation through modelling, visuals, pre-teaching, sentence frames, guided practice, collaboration, and feedback, with assistance gradually withdrawn (Gibbons, 2015). Differentiation varies access, process, response, and support while retaining shared outcomes (Tomlinson, 2017). Strategic multilingualism may be used briefly to clarify complex concepts, compare expressions, or prepare English output; it functions as a bridge toward EMI participation, not an alternative endpoint (Tai, 2022).

Assessment must capture academic performance rather than isolated language knowledge. The CEFR Companion Volume positions learners as social agents who receive, produce, interact, and mediate meaning (Council of Europe, 2020). These modes support an assessment system combining diagnosis, frequent formative checks, module performance tasks, an integrated final inquiry, portfolio evidence, and self-assessment. Constructive alignment requires each assessed performance to be preceded by relevant instruction, practice, and feedback.

Methods

Design and Source Selection

The study employed literature-informed syllabus development. It did not collect data from students or teachers and therefore makes no claim about programme effectiveness. Focused searches of academic databases, publisher platforms, and journal websites combined terms related to EMI, secondary education, student language support, EAP/ESP, curriculum design, needs analysis, scaffolding, differentiation, and translanguaging. Peer-reviewed studies and reviews published mainly from 2017 onward

were prioritised, while foundational works on needs analysis and curriculum design were retained. Backward citation tracking identified influential sources. Items were excluded when they offered no direct implication for learner support or syllabus components. The review sought conceptual adequacy, not systematic-review completeness.

Analytic Synthesis and Syllabus Construction

Sources were examined for recurring claims concerning EMI barriers, communicative demands, effective support, inclusion, and assessment. Claims were coded as design implications and consolidated into five requirements. These requirements were mapped onto Nation and Macalister's (2010) curriculum components. A provisional environment profile assumed a one-year secondary support class, thirty-two 90-minute sessions, mixed developing proficiency, and cross-subject transfer. Anticipated needs were converted into observable outcomes, sequenced from supported comprehension toward independent interaction, production, and mediation, and aligned with learning tasks and evidence. Three safeguards were applied: outcomes describe observable performance; assessment follows related practice and feedback; and proficiency, pacing, and weighting decisions are explicitly provisional. No personal data were collected, although later validation and piloting require institutional ethics procedures.

During synthesis, each claim was recorded with its source, target learner action, pedagogical condition, and possible evidence of learning. Similar claims were merged only when they implied the same design decision. A traceability check then ensured that every proposed module and assessment could be connected to at least one requirement, while unsupported specifications were marked provisional.

Findings and Discussion

Conceptual Framework and Design Requirements

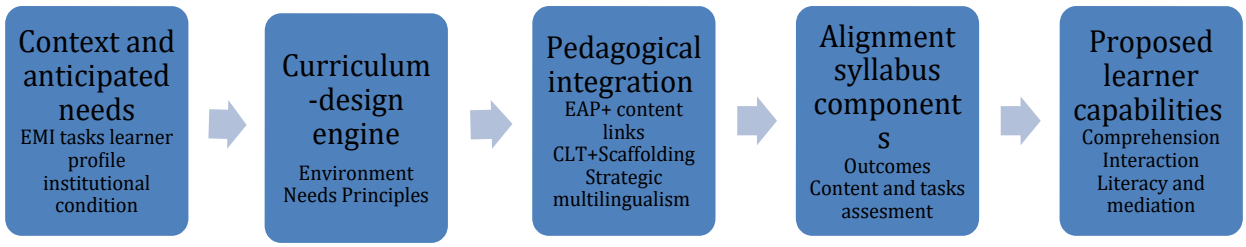


Figure 1. Literature-Informed and Iterative Syllabus-Design Framework

Figure 1 represents an iterative design process. Context and anticipated needs enter a curriculum-design engine and are interpreted through an integrated pedagogy. The resulting outcomes, content, tasks, and assessments target comprehension, interaction, literacy, and mediation. Evidence from implementation must return to contextual review and revision rather than merely confirm a fixed syllabus.

Table 1. Literature-to-Design Synthesis

Requirement	Indicative evidence	Syllabus implication
Needs-based relevance	Hutchinson and Waters (1987); Nation and Macalister (2010); Abdioğlu et al. (2022)	Confirm local tasks, proficiency, learner priorities, and institutional conditions before finalising content.
Explicit academic language	Galloway and Ruegg (2020); McKinley and Rose (2022)	Teach classroom language, academic vocabulary, discourse functions, and study strategies directly.
Content-linked transfer	Costa and Mastellotto (2022); Pun et al. (2022)	Use short Science, Mathematics, and Social Studies tasks to practise transferable communication.
Inclusive support	Gibbons (2015); Tomlinson (2017); Tai (2022)	Vary input, grouping, scaffolds, response modes, and multilingual resources while maintaining shared outcomes.
Performance alignment	Nation and Macalister (2010); Council of Europe (2020)	Align outcomes, practice, feedback, and assessment around reception, production, interaction, and mediation.

Programme Architecture and Outcomes

The syllabus supplements rather than replaces mainstream English or subject teaching. It targets learners provisionally working around CEFR A2 and progressing toward B1 academic performance; placement must be confirmed diagnostically, and learners below this level may need additional foundational support. Small-group delivery is preferred where feasible, with language teachers coordinating current materials and tasks with subject teachers. By the end, learners should be able to follow instructions and short explanations; use academic vocabulary to describe, compare, sequence, classify, and explain; participate in discussion; read, annotate, and summarise short multimodal texts; write a coherent 100–150-word paragraph; give a four-to-five-minute visual-supported presentation; mediate information from texts, processes, or visuals; and use feedback and self-assessment to plan further learning.

Table 2. Module Architecture, Outcomes, and Assessment Evidence

Module / sessions	Academic focus	Priority capability	Main evidence
1. Foundations 1–6	Instructions, vocabulary, listening, note-taking, short reading	Comprehension and learning strategies	Diagnostic profile, notes, reading response
2. Content-linked learning 7–14	Science processes; mathematical comparison and procedure; Social Studies chronology and causation	Cross-curricular explanation and multimodal interpretation	Content-language portfolio and mini-project
3. EMI communication 15–22	Clarification, questioning, discussion, evidence, data description, presentation	Interaction and spoken production	Observed discussion and individual presentation
4. Academic literacy 23–28	Reading strategies, claims and evidence, paraphrase, summary, paragraph writing	Reading-to-write literacy	Revised paragraph and portfolio reflection
5. Independent communication 29–32	Mini-inquiry, ethical source use, presentation, portfolio and transfer planning	Integrated production and mediation	Inquiry product, presentation, post-assessment, action plan

Instruction, Differentiation, and Assessment

Each session follows a consistent cycle: retrieval or connection, explicit modelling, guided practice with linguistic or visual scaffolds, a collaborative content-linked task, independent performance, and feedback or self-assessment. Differentiation uses flexible support bands rather than fixed ability groups. High-support versions provide bilingual glossaries, segmented input, models, sentence frames, and additional rehearsal; guided versions retain prompts but allow more choice; independent versions reduce prompts and require strategy selection. Learners move between bands according to task demands. Before each module, language teachers should collect current instructions, texts, diagrams, and assessment questions from subject teachers, adapting them for language learning without distorting disciplinary meaning.

Table 3. Proposed Assessment System

Component	Purpose and evidence	Weight
Diagnostic assessment	Placement and goal setting through listening, reading, interaction, and writing samples	0%
Formative checks	Low-stakes retrieval, notes, rehearsals, feedback, and self-checks	20%
Module tasks (1–4)	Comprehension, content mini-project, discussion/presentation, and reading-to-write portfolio	50%
Final inquiry	Integrated product, visual-supported presentation, and responses to questions	20%
Portfolio and self-assessment	Selected evidence, revisions, reflection, and transfer plan	10%

A common four-point rubric should evaluate comprehensibility, language control, completion of academic function, organisation and evidence, interaction or independence, and appropriate use of visuals or sources. Before implementation, curriculum, EMI/subject, and practising-teacher reviewers should judge relevance, alignment, clarity, age appropriateness, and feasibility. A pilot should document attendance, task completion, work samples, learner feedback, teacher reflection, subject-teacher observations, and pre/post performance on comparable tasks. These data should guide revisions to content, pacing, scaffolding, and assessment.

Programme evaluation is distinct from learner assessment. Assessment describes individual performance, whereas evaluation asks whether the syllabus is relevant, feasible, coherent, and capable of supporting transfer. Reviewing both process evidence and learner products avoids judging the programme only by test-score change and helps identify why a component succeeds or requires modification.

Conclusion

For RQ1, the synthesis identified five interdependent requirements. Relevance must be based on verified tasks and learner needs rather than a general assumption of low proficiency. Academic language must be taught explicitly. Transfer requires deliberate links to subject tasks. Mixed proficiency requires flexible scaffolding, differentiation, and strategic use of learners' multilingual resources. Finally, outcomes, instruction, feedback, and assessment must converge on authentic academic performance. The framework assigns complementary functions to its pedagogical traditions: EAP and needs analysis establish purpose, content links supply academic contexts, communicative pedagogy creates interaction, inclusive supports enable participation, and performance assessment demonstrates learning.

For RQ2, these requirements were translated into a thirty-two-session spiral sequence. Module 1 establishes classroom language and learning strategies; Module 2 rehearses recurring functions across subjects; Module 3 develops interaction and presentation; Module 4 strengthens reading-to-write literacy; and Module 5 integrates the capabilities through inquiry and portfolio review. Vocabulary, comprehension,

interaction, production, and reflection recur with increasing independence. The design therefore mediates a central EMI tension: a language course can become detached from subject learning, while a strongly content-focused class may assume language develops automatically. Here, language is explicitly taught through simplified but authentic academic activity.

The proposed sequence also preserves continuity across modules. A skill introduced as supported comprehension is revisited through discussion, writing, presentation, or mediation, allowing the same language resource to serve increasingly complex purposes. This spiral organisation reduces fragmentation and makes portfolio evidence useful for tracing development rather than collecting unrelated products. Together, these design choices clarify what students learn, how teachers support it, and what evidence should guide later decisions.

The syllabus should be treated as an adaptable structure, not a fixed package. Local diagnosis may show that listening is more urgent than writing, particular subjects create greater barriers, or entry proficiency is lower than anticipated. Schools should then revise module order, pacing, materials, and support. Implementation also requires institutional coordination: language teachers need access to subject materials and assessment demands; subject teachers need strategies for making disciplinary language visible; and leaders must provide time for collaboration and review. The syllabus should therefore operate within a school-wide language policy rather than carry sole responsibility for EMI success.

Three limitations constrain the claims. First, the focused review was purposive rather than systematic and may have omitted relevant studies. Second, much EMI-support evidence comes from higher education and cannot be transferred uncritically to secondary learners. Third, the provisional learner profile, session allocation, outcomes, and assessment weights have not been examined through local needs analysis, expert review, or piloting. The study supports the internal coherence of a prototype, not its empirical effectiveness.

This study developed a literature-informed English-language support syllabus for secondary learners with developing proficiency in an EMI context. The prototype integrates five design requirements in thirty-two sessions across five modules, linking explicit academic-language teaching with subject-related communication, inclusive scaffolding, strategic multilingualism, and performance assessment. Its principal contribution is a coherent and adaptable design, not evidence of effectiveness. The next stage should verify local needs, obtain expert and practitioner validation, pilot selected modules, and evaluate learner progress and transfer to subject lessons. Iterative revision can then transform the prototype into a locally validated programme.

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