

Becoming someone else in English through self-efficacy and identity positioning in Vietnamese EMI classrooms

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ABSTRACT

English-medium instruction (EMI) requires learners to reconstitute academic selfhood through a language that is not their own, yet this process remains undertheorised. This study examined how self-efficacy beliefs are associated with identity positioning across four dimensions, disciplinary, academic, linguistic, and social, among Vietnamese EMI undergraduates. Using an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design ($N = 266$ quantitative; $n = 18$ qualitative), the study integrated Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory, Norton's (2000) investment framework, and Dörnyei and Ushioda's (2021) L2 motivational self system. Regression with all four self-efficacy dimensions entered simultaneously showed disciplinary identity most strongly associated ($f^2 = .418$), followed by academic ($f^2 = .293$), linguistic ($f^2 = .209$), and social identity ($f^2 = .182$), with academic self-efficacy the strongest predictor across all four. Thematic analysis identified three dimension-specific themes: an efficacy-attribution pattern for disciplinary and academic identity, a written-oral modality split for linguistic identity, and an emerging cultural-threshold proposition linking Confucian face-saving norms to social identity positioning. These findings suggest identity positioning in EMI is dimension-differential rather than unitary, and that self-efficacy is associated with identity through attribution-conditional rather than performance-contingent pathways.



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1. Introduction

Institutions that mandate English-medium instruction (EMI) rarely account for the identity demands such a mandate places on learners (Chang, 2025; Rahman et al., 2026). Students in EMI programmes are not simply acquiring a language; they are being pressed to reconstitute themselves as academic agents within a linguistic and epistemic framework that is not their own (Galloway & Rose, 2021; Rose et al., 2026). This reconstitution depends, in part, on learners' self-efficacy, the domain-specific belief in one's capacity to achieve outcomes (Bandura, 1997), which predicts engagement, willingness to communicate, and persistence in language learning (Mills et al., 2006; Piniel & Csizér, 2014). Whether self-efficacy beliefs are associated with learner identity, rather than merely predictive of performance, remains theoretically underexplored, particularly in non-Western EMI contexts where cultural and ideological conditions shape learners' psychological resources (Sahan et al., 2023; Thompson et al., 2022; Macaro et al., 2018; Dafouz & Smit, 2020; Zhunussova et al., 2023).

Vietnam represents a theoretically productive site for examining this question. Since 2008, the National Foreign Language Project has imposed English-medium delivery on state universities whose Confucian pedagogical traditions and postcolonial relationship with English were not designed to accommodate it (Pham & Barnett, 2022; Sahan et al., 2022; Phan et al., 2024, Dang, 2021). These intersecting institutional, cultural, and ideological pressures position Vietnam as analytically distinct from dominant East Asian EMI contexts, making the identity effects of EMI in this setting theoretically significant and empirically underexamined.

Three bodies of work bear on this problem without converging: self-efficacy research in EMI has linked efficacy beliefs to performance without examining how those beliefs relate to learner identity (Thompson et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2023; Huang, 2025; Curle et al., 2023; Kamaşak & Sahan, 2024), Vietnamese EMI research has concentrated on policy implementation and language proficiency outcomes rather than psychological dimensions of student experience (Pham & Barnett, 2022; Ryu & Nguyen, 2021; Hoang, 2025), and identity research in Vietnamese contexts has focused on EFL classrooms and overseas study rather than domestic EMI (Ryu & Nguyen, 2021). Learner identity in EMI is not a unitary construct: it encompasses academic, disciplinary, linguistic, and social dimensions that develop at different rates (Mercer, 2011; Darvin & Norton, 2015; De Costa & Norton, 2017). Even Huang's (2025) recent Taiwan-based study linking self-efficacy to EMI identity treats identity as a single outcome, leaving open how self-efficacy relates to each dimension within Vietnamese EMI specifically (Sahan et al., 2023; Bradford, 2017; Macaro, 2022). A parallel narrative-inquiry strand has recently begun documenting investment and identity formation among Vietnamese EMI students (An & Buripakdi, 2026), though without connecting these processes to self-efficacy beliefs. This constitutes a threefold gap: theoretical, empirical, and contextual.

The present study addresses this gap by integrating three frameworks whose combined application has received limited attention in Vietnamese EMI research: Norton's (2000) identity and investment framework, Dörnyei and Ushioda's (2021) L2 motivational self system, and Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory. Together, these frameworks allow self-efficacy to be treated not as a background predictor but as a belief-level factor associated with differential identity positioning across dimensions (Galloway & Rose, 2021; Sahan et al., 2023). Two research questions guide the inquiry:

1. RQ1: What dimensions of identity are most strongly associated with self-efficacy in EMI settings?
2. RQ2: How is self-efficacy associated with identity positioning among Vietnamese EMI students?

2. Literature Review

2.1. EMI as a Sociolinguistic and Pedagogical Context

EMI programmes share a defining institutional feature (English serves simultaneously as the medium of subject-matter instruction and the instrument of assessment) yet differ substantially in implementation, ranging from near-total immersion to occasional English-language supplementation (Galloway & Rose, 2021; Rose et al., 2026). This variation creates fundamentally different conditions for learner experience, but what unites all EMI settings is the dual demand placed on students: to demonstrate disciplinary competence through a language that is itself still being acquired (Macaro, 2022; Wang et al., 2025). That dual demand positions EMI as an identity environment as much as a pedagogical one, because failure to perform linguistically reads simultaneously as failure to perform academically and intellectually (Galloway & Rose, 2021; Özdil & Kunt, 2025).

The National Foreign Language Project, revised in 2017, imposed English-medium delivery on state universities whose instructional traditions and assessment cultures were not designed for it (Pham & Barnett, 2022; Sahan et al., 2022). Consistent with this, Vietnamese EMI students report substantial difficulties comprehending lecture content, completing assessments, and participating in classroom discussion (Duong & Le, 2024). Vietnamese higher education carries a Confucian pedagogical inheritance (hierarchical knowledge transmission and face-saving norms around unsolicited participation) that conflicts directly with EMI's interactional demands (Phan et al., 2024). English in Vietnam also carries postcolonial ideological weight, its associations with colonial histories and global inequalities generating identity tensions with no direct equivalent in Chinese or South Korean EMI settings (Kirkpatrick, 2014; Pham & Barnett, 2022; Ryu & Nguyen, 2021). These intersecting pressures,

top-down policy, Confucian pedagogy, and postcolonial language ideology, position Vietnam as a theoretically distinct site for examining EMI's identity effects.

2.2. Identity Theory in Second Language and EMI Contexts

The theoretical foundations for understanding identity in language learning were substantially reoriented by Norton (2000), who argued that learners are social actors whose engagement with a second language is inseparable from questions of power, access, and investment in imagined futures. This framework displaced earlier cognitive accounts of motivation by foregrounding the social conditions that enable or constrain learner participation, and was subsequently extended by Darvin and Norton (2015) through Bourdieusian concepts of capital and ideology, positioning identity investment within social fields that legitimise some linguistic practices and marginalise others. In Vietnamese EMI classrooms, where English functions simultaneously as academic currency and social distinction marker, these structural conditions may influence whether learner identity develops or remains stalled, and which dimensions are most vulnerable to that stalling (Pham & Barnett, 2022; Phan et al., 2024).

Dörnyei and Ushioda (2021) offered a complementary motivational account through the L2 motivational self system, distinguishing between the ideal L2 self (the English-proficient academic one aspires to become) and the ought-to L2 self (the performative English user one feels institutionally obligated to be). In EMI settings, these two selves frequently diverge, producing identity tension rather than coherence, particularly where institutional mandates outpace learner readiness (Zhou et al., 2023). This divergence is consequential because it is not uniform: the gap between aspired and obligated self-performance differs across the dimensions of a learner's self-concept, with distinct implications for identity positioning.

Drawing on Mercer (2011) and Darvin and Norton (2015), the present study distinguishes four analytically separable identity dimensions: academic identity, defined as one's sense of competence and belonging within a disciplinary community; disciplinary identity, referring to perceived ownership of subject-matter knowledge; linguistic identity, encompassing one's relationship to English as a legitimate vehicle of self-expression; and social identity, involving positioning within the peer community. Across all four dimensions, this distinction is conceptual rather than terminological: self-efficacy denotes perceived capability to perform a domain-specific task, whereas identity denotes perceived ownership of, or positioning within, the domain that capability makes possible (for example, disciplinary self-efficacy concerns the perceived ability to engage with subject-matter knowledge in English, whereas disciplinary identity concerns perceived ownership of that knowledge). The boundaries between these dimensions, particularly between academic and disciplinary identity, are subject to ongoing theoretical debate (Mercer, 2011; De Costa & Norton, 2017), and the present study adopts this four-dimension structure for analytical tractability rather than as a claim of categorical distinctness. EMI research has largely treated identity as unitary, including recent efficacy-identity work that leaves dimensions undistinguished (Huang, 2025), preventing explanation of why learners with comparable proficiency and exposure follow divergent trajectories (Galloway & Rose, 2021).

2.3. Self-Efficacy in Language Learning and EMI

Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory defines self-efficacy as a domain-specific, dynamic belief system tied to particular tasks and contexts, continuously recalibrated through four sources: mastery experience, vicarious observation, social persuasion, and physiological states. This domain-specificity matters for EMI research: a learner may hold strong efficacy beliefs for written academic English while holding lower beliefs for oral participation, with different identity implications across the four dimensions above (Thompson et al., 2022). In language learning more broadly, self-efficacy has been empirically linked to willingness to communicate, engagement with challenging tasks, and sustained effort under difficulty, outcomes that are particularly salient in EMI classrooms where oral participation is simultaneously a learning demand and a public identity performance (Duong et al., 2026; Mills et al., 2006; Piniel & Csizér, 2014). Recent instrument-development work has extended this line of research by validating a dedicated measure of self-efficacy, engagement, and satisfaction for EMI populations (Harris & Strefford, 2024).

The more consequential theoretical question is whether self-efficacy beliefs are associated with learner identity, not merely predictive of behaviour. Sahan et al. (2023) found that in Turkish EMI, self-efficacy and self-concept jointly shaped the severity of students' language challenges, pointing toward an identity-mediating function that performance-outcome studies have not captured. Mercer (2011) argued that self-concept shapes how learners position themselves within target-language communities,

determining whether they inhabit or resist the English-speaking academic self that EMI demands. The direction of this relationship is not settled: longitudinal evidence finds prior self-concept predicts later self-efficacy more consistently than the reverse (Arens et al., 2022), cautioning against assuming self-efficacy is the originating belief here. Of Bandura's four efficacy sources, mastery experience carries particular theoretical weight: discrete performance events (passing an assessed task, arguing a disciplinary point in English) generate the recalibrated self-belief that either opens or forecloses identity movement. Studies addressing self-efficacy in EMI have remained largely in East Asian settings, linking efficacy beliefs to academic success without examining how those beliefs relate to learner identity (Thompson et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2023; Bradford, 2023).

2.4. The Self-Efficacy-Identity Nexus: Theoretical Convergence and Empirical Gap

These three bodies of literature converge on a relationship none has yet examined directly: identity theory's dimension-specific renegotiation, motivational self theory's ideal-versus-ought-to divergence, and self-efficacy theory's belief-level process of narrowing or widening that divergence. This absence reflects a disciplinary separation between self-efficacy research (cognitive and motivational traditions; Thompson et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2023) and identity research (social and poststructuralist traditions; Norton, 2000; Darvin & Norton, 2015; De Costa & Norton, 2017).

The gap sharpens in the Vietnamese context specifically: self-efficacy research in EMI has not accounted for the ideological and pedagogical conditions distinguishing Vietnam from the East Asian settings it has studied (Macaro et al., 2018; Dafouz & Smit, 2020), and no study has examined how self-efficacy relates to disaggregated dimensions of identity positioning in Vietnamese EMI specifically (Sahan et al., 2023; Bradford, 2017; Macaro, 2022; Ryu & Nguyen, 2021; Pham & Barnett, 2022).

The postcolonial dimension of English in Vietnam, absent from Chinese and South Korean EMI contexts, further sharpens this gap. Its associations with colonial histories and global inequalities may moderate which identity dimensions are most susceptible to efficacy-associated identity positioning: social and linguistic identity, given their direct relationship to English as public performance, are plausibly more exposed to postcolonial ideological pressure than academic or disciplinary identity (Kirkpatrick, 2014; Pham & Barnett, 2022). Explanations invoking Confucian norms are treated here as a situated account of the present sample rather than a fixed national characteristic, since claims of East Asian learners' cultural reticence have been contested as overgeneralised in language-classroom research (Shao & Gao, 2016). Addressing this gap requires a framework connecting belief-level processes to socially structured identity dimensions within a context whose ideological specificity carries theoretical consequences beyond the Vietnamese case.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell & Clark, 2018) in which quantitative and qualitative data are collected in two phases, with Phase 1 findings shaping Phase 2 design. RQ1 requires statistical inference across a large sample; RQ2 requires qualitative interpretive depth. The explanatory sequential design suits these aims: the qualitative strand explains rather than confirms the statistical findings, identifying the processes behind Phase 1's associations (Creswell & Clark, 2018; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017).

3.2. Participants and Setting

Phase 1 employed purposive sampling to recruit Vietnamese L1 undergraduates enrolled in state university EMI programmes in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, the two urban centres with the highest concentration of Project implementation sites. Eligibility required completion of at least one full academic semester through EMI and Vietnamese as the L1, ensuring participants had moved beyond the orientation phase of their EMI trajectory (Pham & Barnett, 2022). A total of 266 students across five universities and four disciplines participated.

For Phase 2, criterion-based purposive sampling was applied to the Phase 1 dataset to identify 18 participants whose profiles constituted theoretically informative cases for qualitative follow-up: participants exhibiting high self-efficacy (composite z-score exceeding +1 SD) alongside low identity positioning (composite z-score below -1 SD), low self-efficacy (below -1 SD) alongside high identity positioning (above +1 SD), markedly divergent profiles across the four identity dimensions (within-person range across dimension z-scores exceeding 1.5 SD), and disciplinary outliers identified through

regression residual analysis (standardised residual exceeding ± 2) (Patton, 2002). The goal is theoretical informativeness rather than representativeness. Table 1 presents demographic profiles across both phases.

Table 1. Demographic Profiles of Participants Across Both Phases

Group	M	SD
Gender		
Female	140 (52.6%)	10 (55.6%)
Male	126 (47.4%)	8 (44.4%)
Year of study		
First year	63 (23.7%)	5 (27.8%)
Second year	72 (27.1%)	5 (27.8%)
Third year	80 (30.1%)	4 (22.2%)
Fourth year	51 (19.2%)	4 (22.2%)
Discipline		
Economics	69 (25.9%)	5 (27.8%)
Information Technology	65 (24.4%)	4 (22.2%)
Business Administration	67 (25.2%)	5 (27.8%)
Public Policy Management	65 (24.4%)	4 (22.2%)
Duration of EMI study		
≤ 6 months	51 (19.2%)	3 (16.7%)
7–12 months	63 (23.7%)	5 (27.8%)
13–24 months	80 (30.1%)	4 (22.2%)
> 24 months	72 (27.1%)	6 (33.3%)
English proficiency (CEFR)		
B1	89 (33.5%)	—
B2	112 (42.1%)	—
C1	65 (24.4%)	—
Age (years): M (SD)	20.41 (1.25)	20.7 (1.2)
Range	18–24	19–23
Phase 2 selection basis		
High SE / low identity shift	—	5 (27.8%)
Low SE / high identity shift	—	5 (27.8%)
Divergent dimension profiles	—	5 (27.8%)
Disciplinary outlier profiles	—	3 (16.7%)

3.3. Instruments

Phase 1 employed two researcher-designed questionnaire scales. The self-efficacy scale was developed following Bandura's (2006) domain-specific construction principles, operationalising four dimensions: Academic Self-Efficacy (ASE; ability to complete assessed disciplinary tasks in English), Linguistic Self-Efficacy (LSE; ability to produce and comprehend English across the four skills), Disciplinary Self-Efficacy (DSE; ability to engage with and generate subject-matter knowledge in English), and Social Self-Efficacy (SSE; ability to negotiate academic relationships through English). The scale comprised 24 items on a five-point graduated confidence format (1 = cannot do at all; 5 = highly confident I can do). The identity scale was adapted from Mercer's (2011) self-concept framework and Norton's (2000) investment model, operationalising four corresponding dimensions (Academic Identity, AID; Disciplinary Identity, DID; Linguistic Identity, LID; and Social Identity, SID). Each identity dimension comprised six items on a five-point Likert agreement format (24 items total). A pilot test with 15 EMI students outside the final sample informed item revision.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted in AMOS for both scales to verify the proposed four-factor structures prior to regression analyses, following Hair et al.'s (2019) criteria for model fit evaluation. Both scales demonstrated acceptable fit: the self-efficacy scale yielded CMIN/DF = 1.279, CFI = .974, TLI = .971, RMSEA = .032, SRMR = .050; the identity scale yielded CMIN/DF = 1.060, CFI = .995, TLI = .995, RMSEA = .015, SRMR = .040. All standardised factor loadings exceeded .65 (self-efficacy scale) and .70 (identity scale). Internal consistency was confirmed across all eight subscales

(ASE: $\alpha = .839$; LSE: $\alpha = .853$; DSE: $\alpha = .847$; SSE: $\alpha = .880$; AID: $\alpha = .901$; LID: $\alpha = .894$; DID: $\alpha = .892$; SID: $\alpha = .903$) with all corrected item-total correlations exceeding .30 (Nunnally, 1978; Taber, 2018). Composite reliability (CR > .85 for all factors) and average variance extracted (AVE > .50 for all factors) confirmed convergent validity; discriminant validity was established as the square root of each factor's AVE exceeded its inter-factor correlations, with maximum shared variance (MSV) remaining below AVE throughout (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). As a further check on the conceptual distinction between self-efficacy and identity constructs, the observed-variable correlation between each self-efficacy dimension and its corresponding identity dimension was modest (ASE-AID = .359; DSE-DID = .178; LSE-LID = .074, not significant; SSE-SID = .189). Because the two scales were validated in separate four-factor CFA models rather than a single combined model, this correlational evidence is offered as a partial, not definitive, indicator of construct distinctness; the absence of a joint eight-factor CFA and HTMT assessment across both scales is acknowledged as a limitation of the present validation strategy.

Phase 2 employed a semi-structured interview protocol developed directly from the Phase 1 regression findings. Questions addressed the specific efficacy-identity associations and anomalies identified statistically, ensuring the qualitative strand moves toward explanatory depth rather than description (Creswell & Clark, 2018). Items were anchored in Norton's (2000) investment framework and Sahan et al.'s (2023) conceptualisation of self-beliefs in EMI contexts, and were designed to elicit accounts of the four self-efficacy dimensions in relation to concrete classroom episodes, enabling the analysis to connect statistical patterns to the lived experiences through which those patterns were produced (Mercer, 2011).

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

Data collection proceeded across two phases between January and February 2026. In Phase 1 (January 2026), both questionnaires were administered online via a secure, password-protected platform, distributed through EMI programme coordinators at the five participating universities. Participants received a written information sheet covering the study's purpose, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw, and gave written informed consent electronically before instrument access, consistent with the APA's (2017) ethical guidelines. Online administration was selected to reduce social desirability effects in hierarchical Vietnamese academic settings, where deference norms may discourage candid self-reporting in the presence of institutional figures (Phan et al., 2024).

Phase 1 data were fully analysed before Phase 2 commenced, ensuring that participant selection and interview protocol development were directly informed by the quantitative findings. Phase 2 interviews were conducted in February 2026 under the same informed consent procedures, individually with each of the 18 selected participants at their respective institutions in a private, audio-recorded space. Interviews were conducted in Vietnamese to remove the linguistic constraint that would otherwise shape participant expression about English-mediated identity experience, consistent with Norton's (2000) investment framework. All recordings were transcribed and translated into English by the researcher; a randomly selected subsample of six transcripts was independently back-translated by a qualified bilingual colleague to verify translation accuracy. Interview duration ranged from 45 to 70 minutes.

3.5. Data Analysis

Phase 1 quantitative data were analysed using IBM SPSS (Version 29) and AMOS across five steps. Item-level descriptive statistics verified distributional assumptions, Cronbach's alpha assessed internal consistency for all eight subscales, and CFA verified the proposed four-factor structures for both scales before inferential analyses were performed. Pearson correlation analyses then examined bivariate relationships between each self-efficacy subscale and its corresponding identity subscale, and across all variable pairs, to establish the pattern of associations and test domain-congruent specificity. Finally, multiple regression was employed with the four self-efficacy dimensions (ASE, LSE, DSE, SSE) entered simultaneously as predictors of each identity dimension, modelled separately as outcome variables, generating standardised beta coefficients for each predictor, total variance explained (R^2), and Cohen's f^2 effect sizes, calculated as $\Delta R^2 / (1 - \text{Total } R^2)$, with thresholds of .02 (small), .15 (medium), and .35 (large; Cohen, 1988). Multicollinearity among the four predictors was evaluated using variance inflation factors ($VIF < 5$; Hair et al., 2019) prior to interpretation. Comparing effect sizes across the four regression models directly addresses RQ1. Regression assumptions, normality of residuals and homoscedasticity, were verified prior to interpretation.

Phase 2 qualitative data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase framework, proceeding inductively from participant language before moving deductively through Norton's (2000) investment framework and Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory. Reflexive thematic analysis was selected because its epistemological foundations, treating theme development as an interpretive act rather than a coding procedure, align with the poststructuralist identity theory underpinning the study (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The researcher's positionality as a Vietnamese-English bilingual with institutional familiarity in Vietnamese higher education was documented and interrogated throughout the analysis as a potential source of interpretive shaping rather than a liability to be bracketed.

Integration of the two phases was achieved through a joint display (Creswell & Clark, 2018), placing regression coefficients and effect sizes for each identity dimension alongside the qualitative themes explaining them. This integration produces an account of both the strength of association and the explanatory themes underlying the efficacy-identity relationship, directly addressing RQ2. Trustworthiness was addressed through credibility (member checking; peer debriefing), transferability (thick description; criterion-sampling rationale), dependability (audit trail), and confirmability (documented researcher positionality; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Self-Efficacy Is Differentially Associated with Four Identity Dimensions

Table 2 presents Pearson correlations between the four self-efficacy subscales and the four identity dimensions. Academic Self-Efficacy (ASE) reached significance with all four identity dimensions (all $p < .001$). Three domain-incongruent correlations were non-significant: Linguistic Self-Efficacy with Linguistic Identity ($r = .074$) and with Social Identity ($r = .117$), and Disciplinary Self-Efficacy with Social Identity ($r = .042$).

Table 2. Pearson Correlations Between Self-Efficacy Subscales and Identity Dimensions (N = 266)

SE Subscale	DID	AID	LID	SID
Academic SE (ASE)	.411**	.359**	.302**	.368**
Social SE (SSE)	.362**	.302**	.317**	.189**
Linguistic SE (LSE)	.257**	.190**	.074	.117
Disciplinary SE (DSE)	.178**	.225**	.164**	.042

Note. ** $p < .01$.

Table 3 presents the regression results for the four self-efficacy dimensions entered simultaneously. Step 1 covariates explained little variance and reached significance only for disciplinary identity, where English proficiency was the sole significant predictor ($\beta = .180$, $p = .003$); EMI duration was not significant for any outcome at Step 1. At Step 2, the four self-efficacy dimensions explained significant incremental variance in all four identity dimensions (ΔR^2 range: .151 to .281). The disciplinary identity model produced the largest effect ($f^2 = .418$), followed by academic identity ($f^2 = .293$), linguistic identity ($f^2 = .209$), and social identity ($f^2 = .182$), the smallest. Academic self-efficacy (ASE) was the strongest predictor in every model, including linguistic and social identity, where domain-matched efficacy was frequently non-significant: linguistic self-efficacy did not significantly predict linguistic identity ($\beta = .015$), and disciplinary self-efficacy did not significantly predict social identity ($\beta = -.008$).

Table 3. Regression Results: Covariates and Self-Efficacy Dimensions Predicting Identity Dimensions (N = 266)

	DID	AID	LID	SID
Step 1: Covariates				
English proficiency (CEFR)	.180**	.105	.057	.099
EMI duration	-.102	.049	.012	-.072
Year of study	-.072	-.042	-.083	.074
R ²	.047	.017	.011	.019
F(3, 262)	4.28**	1.47	0.97	1.71
Step 2: + Four SE Dimensions				

	DID	AID	LID	SID
ASE (β)	.304***	.281***	.231***	.336***
LSE (β)	.195***	.118*	.015	.073
DSE (β)	.114*	.169**	.143*	-.008
SSE (β)	.275***	.231***	.261***	.122*
VIF range	1.05-1.08	1.05-1.08	1.05-1.08	1.05-1.08
Total R ²	.328	.240	.182	.170
Cohen's f ²	.418 (large)	.293 (medium)	.209 (medium)	.182 (medium)

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

4.2. Self-Efficacy Is Associated with Identity Positioning Through Dimension-Specific Explanatory Themes

Reflexive thematic analysis of the 18 interviews generated four identity-dimension-specific themes, presented in Table 4. For disciplinary identity, the dimension with the largest quantitative effect ($f^2 = .418$), participants described using self-efficacy beliefs, most often academic rather than disciplinary self-efficacy specifically, to attribute successful English-medium performance to intellectual ownership rather than linguistic effort. P14's account represents a counter-case within this otherwise convergent pattern, describing successful assessment performance that was still attributed to strategic language use rather than disciplinary ownership.

Table 4. Qualitative Themes and QUAN-QUAL Relationship by Identity Dimension

Identity Dimension	Theme	Key Excerpt	QUAN-QUAL Relationship
Disciplinary (DID) $f^2 = .418$	Claiming disciplinary authorship through English	"I feel like I am not just studying economics, I am becoming an economist." (P7) [Counter-case] "I still feel I borrowed the English to do it." (P14)	Convergence (dominant pattern); dissonance (P14)
Academic (AID) $f^2 = .293$	Episodic recalibration of academic legitimacy	"Every graded task felt like proof, to myself, that I could actually be a student here." (P3) [Counter-case] "The English is hiding what I actually know." (P11)	Convergence (dominant pattern); dissonance (P11)
Linguistic (LID) $f^2 = .209$	Asymmetric ownership: written English as identity, oral English as performance	"Writing in English feels like it is becoming part of how I think. Speaking in class still feels like a costume." (P12)	Complementarity/expansion (explains LSE-LID non-significance, $\beta = .015$)
Social (SID) $f^2 = .182$	Social efficacy beliefs culturally mediated	"If I say something wrong in front of everyone, the embarrassment stays for weeks. So I stay quiet." (P5) [Single-account] "My social identity changed because of that decision to just speak, not before it." (P1)	Expansion (introduces a pattern the quantitative model did not test; DSE $\beta = -.008$)

A comparable theme for academic identity linked assessed performance events to moments of judging one's own academic standing, again converging with the quantitative effect for that dimension ($f^2 = .293$) except for a counter-case in which assessment success was described as concealing rather than reflecting competence. Linguistic identity followed a different pattern: participants distinguished written English, described as integrated into their own thinking, from oral English, described as still feeling like a performance. This theme complements and expands the quantitative finding that linguistic self-efficacy did not significantly predict linguistic identity even after controlling for the other three self-efficacy dimensions ($\beta = .015$), offering an account of that non-significance not tested directly in the regression model.

Social identity was associated with a theme describing face-saving norms alongside high social self-efficacy and sustained classroom non-participation, consistent with the non-significant relationship between disciplinary self-efficacy and social identity ($\beta = -.008$). One participant's account (P1) described a different sequence, in which a decision to participate preceded rather than followed a change in social identity, differing from the sequence described elsewhere in the data. This pattern is based on a single case and is reported here as one candidate account among the four, not as a generalised finding.

4.3. Discussion

a) Self-efficacy is differentially associated with four identity dimensions

The finding that self-efficacy is most strongly associated with disciplinary identity ($f^2 = .418$) and least associated with social identity ($f^2 = .182$) is consistent with, though cannot establish, a domain-specificity extension of Bandura's (1997) framework. Existing EMI research has treated self-efficacy as a generalised predictor of academic outcomes (Thompson et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2023); the present findings indicate that its association with identity positioning instead follows a hierarchy tracking epistemic proximity to the identity dimension. Disciplinary identity shows the strongest association, plausibly because believing one can engage with subject-matter knowledge in English maps onto the intellectual selfhood EMI demands (an aspired self in Dörnyei and Ushioda's (2021) terms), while social identity shows the weakest, plausibly because the path from efficacy belief to social self-positioning may be intercepted by cultural conditions that Bandura's (1997) framework, rooted in Western individualist settings, does not model. That disciplinary identity supersedes academic identity in effect size is consistent with the ideal-versus-ought-to distinction (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021): the aspired disciplinary self may generate stronger identity investment than the obligated academic self.

The domain-incongruent non-significances, particularly the non-significant association between Linguistic Self-Efficacy and Linguistic Identity ($r = .074$), challenge the assumption that domain-congruent efficacy beliefs necessarily correspond to domain-congruent identity positioning (Sahan et al., 2023; Macaro, 2022). This non-significance is consistent with linguistic identity positioning at early-to-mid EMI exposure being associated primarily with the written modality, while oral linguistic self-efficacy operates in a separate register. This modality specificity may be more precise than domain specificity, a candidate refinement of Bandura's (1997) framework that remains underexamined in EMI contexts (Bradford, 2017; Galloway & Rose, 2021). The regression results bear on this argument as well: academic self-efficacy, not the domain-matched dimension, was the strongest predictor in every model, including linguistic and social identity, indicating that a general academic-efficacy resource is associated with identity positioning as much as matched domain-specific beliefs are, a distinction aggregated self-efficacy measures in prior EMI research would not have captured.

b) Self-Efficacy is associated with identity positioning through dimension-specific explanatory themes

The qualitative findings suggest theme-specific pathways linking self-efficacy to identity positioning that differ across dimensions. For disciplinary and academic identity, both most strongly predicted by academic self-efficacy, one candidate pathway is an efficacy-attribution process in which mastery experience is associated with identity shift primarily when successful performance is attributed to genuine competence rather than to strategic language deployment. This attribution conditionality may qualify Bandura's (1997) mastery experience construct, which treats successful performance as sufficient for efficacy recalibration; the counter-cases of P14 and P11 instead suggest that performance attributed to linguistic strategy rather than intellectual ownership may not produce the corresponding identity positioning. The path from mastery experience to identity positioning is conditional on attribution rather than on performance outcome alone, a pattern consistent with De Costa and Norton's (2017) argument that identity investment is mediated by how learners interpret their own agency.

For social identity, the sequence described in P1's single-participant account, social identity shifting as a consequence of a volitional participation decision rather than preceding it as a readiness state, is not fully captured by Bandura's (1997) efficacy framework, Dörnyei and Ushioda's (2021) motivational self system, or Norton's (2000) investment framework, each of which anticipates gradual rather than discrete, threshold-like identity renegotiation. Read cautiously, given the single-case basis, this suggests a candidate culturally mediated efficacy-participation pathway in which a cultural threshold may precede social identity positioning, occurring at the moment of volitional decision rather than accumulating gradually with efficacy. In Vietnamese EMI classrooms, participants' accounts suggest Confucian face-saving norms may govern the conditions under which English can be deployed publicly without social penalty (Phan et al., 2024; Shao & Gao, 2016; Hillman et al., 2023), such that self-efficacy may be

necessary but not sufficient for social participation, a proposition this account raises rather than one this study establishes. Classroom power relations and individual differences in willingness to communicate may also contribute to this pattern.

c) Theoretical and practical implications

The present study generates three theoretically informed propositions for future testing. It suggests that identity positioning in EMI is dimension-differential rather than unitary, a pattern that would benefit from dimension-specific instruments capable of testing the DID > AID > LID > SID hierarchy documented here. It proposes that the pathway linking self-efficacy to identity positioning is attribution-conditional rather than performance-contingent, a candidate qualification of Bandura's (1997) mastery experience construct. It proposes a cultural threshold construct as a candidate addition to the self-efficacy-identity model in Confucian pedagogical settings, suggesting that Norton's (2000) investment framework may benefit from cultural specification to account for the social dimension of identity positioning.

These findings carry implications for EMI programme design and pedagogy. Assessment feedback in EMI should be designed to support competence attribution: framing students' successful English-medium performance as evidence of academic ability, rather than as linguistic proficiency, is more likely to facilitate identity positioning alongside performance gain (Macaro et al., 2018; Dafouz & Smit, 2020). In high face-saving contexts, however, efficacy development alone is insufficient to generate classroom participation; pedagogies would benefit from structured low-risk participation opportunities that allow learners to cross the cultural threshold (Phan et al., 2024; Kirkpatrick, 2014). At the curriculum level, the written-oral asymmetry in linguistic identity development suggests that written English-medium tasks warrant recognition as primary sites of linguistic identity formation at early-to-mid EMI stages, a finding with implications for task sequencing in Vietnamese and comparable postcolonial EMI programmes (Pham & Barnett, 2022).

5. Conclusion

This study addressed a theoretically productive gap at the intersection of self-efficacy research and identity theory in EMI contexts. Examining how self-efficacy beliefs are associated with identity positioning across four dimensions in Vietnamese EMI, the study generated three theoretically informed propositions. Identity positioning is dimension-differential rather than unitary: self-efficacy is most strongly associated with disciplinary identity and least associated with social identity, consistent with epistemic proximity between efficacy domain and identity dimension and with the ideal-versus-ought-to distinction (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021). Academic self-efficacy, however, was the strongest predictor across all four dimensions rather than only the domain-matched one, a pattern detectable only once self-efficacy was disaggregated into its four components. The qualitative evidence suggests an attribution-conditional pathway linking self-efficacy to identity positioning, rather than a performance-contingent one: mastery experience appears associated with identity shift primarily when successful performance is attributed to genuine competence rather than strategic language deployment. Social identity positioning in high face-saving EMI contexts appears linked to a cultural threshold that self-efficacy alone may not cross, a proposition specifying conditions under which Norton's (2000) investment framework may apply to the social dimension of learner identity.

These findings carry implications for EMI research beyond the Vietnamese context. The cultural-threshold proposition, the attribution conditionality of mastery experience, and the written-oral modality split in linguistic identity may be relevant to other EMI settings, though this transferability was not tested here. This study has limitations future research should address: the sample is drawn from two Vietnamese cities and four disciplines, restricting the generalisability of the cultural-threshold proposition, which further rests on a single participant's account; the cross-sectional design cannot capture longitudinal identity dynamics or establish the direction of efficacy-identity relationships; and the written-oral asymmetry warrants examination in more advanced EMI cohorts to test whether it attenuates with extended exposure (P17). Longitudinal and comparative designs across postcolonial EMI contexts would advance the theoretical agenda these propositions open.

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- Conflict of interest** : The author declares that there is no competing interest.
- Ethical declaration** : All procedures performed within this study were out in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee, and the informed consent was obtained from all individual participants involved in this study.
- We support ELTEJ in maintaining high standards of personal conduct, practicing honesty in all our professional practices and endeavors.
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