



Webinar: *English as Medium of Instruction (EMI): Philosophies and Policies*¹

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Food for Thought

Background

This webinar aims to raise awareness on current trends related to English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) and some of the philosophical issues these trends pose in policy decision-making. We hope to gain insight on perspectives from OECD IMHE member institutions and to use these perspectives to inform a further research agenda. The lack of a database providing an adequate snapshot of what works and what doesn't on a global scale is one of the biggest issues facing policymakers in this area. We hope, through this 90-minute session, which will have a combination of poll and open-ended questions to maximise audience interaction, to find the right vocabulary to frame the phenomenon of EMI with respect to institutional and cultural values.

Reflective question 1

What are some of the differences between speaking on one's specialist area in one's mother tongue, and in one's second (or third, or fourth...) language? How might these differences intensify when the act of "speaking" becomes "teaching"?

What is EMI?

EMI essentially refers to the teaching of a subject using the medium of the English language, but where there are no explicit language learning aims and where English is not the national language. In France, where we work, this phenomenon is typically observed in higher education institutions (HEIs) that teach the sciences, social studies, business, etc. in English. The phenomenon, however, extends to secondary and even primary schools, depending on the context.

A note on terminology

Applied Linguists often discuss EMI in relation to Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), a language teaching methodology that emerged in the mid-1990s, with "situations where subjects, or parts of subjects, are taught through a foreign language with dual-focused aims, namely the learning of content and the simultaneous learning of a foreign language" (Marsh, 1994). Although academics continue to debate where and how to situate EMI among language methodologies in general, and indeed whether it even qualifies to be part of the realm of language teaching methodology, there is the idea (Lyster and Ballinger, 2011) of visualising a continuum with language instruction goals on one end and content communication goals on the other, where

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EMI would certainly find itself on the content-heavy side of things. It is also worth noting that CLIL teachers often have formal training as language teachers, while EMI teachers usually do not.

Reflective question 2

Do the higher education faculty in your country get any specific pedagogical training beyond their own research and specialist area?

Why this topic? Why now?

EMI is by no means a new phenomenon. Nor is it an undesirable one. Nor is it a neutral one. What is new is the galloping trend of higher education institutions wanting to offer full English curricula or bilingual options for courses, with recent data revealing as many as 60% of post-graduate courses in Europe being taught through EMI (Macaro, 2013). Private institutions that are able to offer their faculty more competitive salaries and intensive language support enjoy highly successful implementations of EMI; one case in point is NOVA Business School in Lisbon, which now offers a full English curriculum with only a few remaining courses taught in Portuguese. The story is quite different for other institutions.

EMI has substantial implications for staff recruitment, mobility options among academics and raises the fundamental question of a new professional order in higher education, where the role of (and potential struggles with) language will occupy centre stage. This sharp shift in the internationalisation of higher education is being documented in the literature, with a majority of studies so far coming out of Asian countries, which have been experiencing the EMI drive since the Asian financial crisis in 1997/98 and with it international competition becoming much more of a core value (Pillier and Cho, 2013) in policy decisions.

In addition, U.K. institutions are beginning to offer training courses on teaching in English to faculty (both locally and internationally) who intend to use EMI. Jenkins (2014), in a recent public debate, commented on the irony of teachers who have never taught in a second language instructing other teachers how to do so. She argued that general intercultural training for all involved would be more desirable in moving towards further internationalisation, as opposed to focusing on specific language imbalances. The English Language Teaching publishing industry is also showing substantial interest in the opportunity to create training material for teachers who use EMI.

Reflective question 3

How do you perceive the changes that will come about in faculty identities as a result of EMI? How important is the language of instruction relative to faculty members' academic expertise and overall knowledge base?

Towards a responsible research agenda

The main drivers of the current EMI policy are the British Council and the University of Oxford, which have just set up an EMI Research Centre, with the purpose of establishing a sustainable evidence base for future policy decisions. The two-month old Centre seeks to collaborate with institutions worldwide.

The main gap in the data relates to the fundamental question of learning outcomes. To date we do not have any evidence of students actually learning more or less efficiently though the adoption of EMI. Institutions rarely provide a clear policy statement insisting on EMI, which means the trend is developing in a fairly "organic" manner. This very naturally raises the question of the quality of the classes that are taught in English, and how these changes can be most effectively scaffolded by professional development opportunities within institutions.

In Europe, there is little strategy linking this particular facet of internationalisation to the implications it will carry for secondary education. If undergraduates are eventually expected to begin their higher education with a sufficient level of English to navigate an English-language curriculum, how will this affect the teaching and assessment (and teachers) in schools?

Reflective question 4

The move towards empowering institutions in non-English-speaking countries through EMI is full of economic, cultural and political opportunities. How do we shape the finer strands of policy in this area towards the respect and protection of multilingualism and multiculturalism?

Conclusion

We hope to share some of these concerns with you and to understand some of the perspectives you bring to the discussion. In addition to the issues mentioned in this document, we will describe a case study we conducted last year on an EMI class and outline some of the cultural layers involved in our own research and practice.

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