

TIRF

Language Education in Review Series

ENGLISH AS A Medium of Instruction

Joyce Kling, PhD

Centre for Internationalisation and Parallel
Language Use, University of Copenhagen



WHAT ARE THE KEY ISSUES?

Defining EMI

While there is a great deal of debate as to a specific definition, *English as a medium of instruction* (EMI) typically refers to the use of English as the language of teaching and learning for academic content courses (e.g., chemistry, biochemistry, sociology, political science) in contexts where English is not the natural or standard language of instruction (Dafouz & Camacho-Miñano, 2016; Henriksen, Holmen, & Kling, 2019). In most cases, the learning outcomes for EMI courses focus on disciplinary competences; the language itself is not being explicitly taught (Coleman, 2006; Pecorari & Malmström, 2018). Although EMI is used at the primary and secondary levels, much of the discussion in research that focuses on the spread of implementation of EMI deals with tertiary education (Kling, 2017).

Background

Over the past few decades, we have witnessed an unprecedented phenomenon at institutions of higher education in non-Anglophone countries. This phenomenon involves the development of local educational language policies and establishment of courses and full-degree programs conducted through the English language (Wächter & Maiworm, 2014). For example, implementation of the Bologna Process in Europe at the start of the 21st century prompted universities across the continent to develop strategies to address a new kind of internationalization. This reform included alignment of European higher education to allow for greater mobility, ease of credit transfer, and more transparent and comparable academic degrees across borders (European Higher Education Area [EHEA], 2018).

Quid pro quo contracts for educational exchange resulted in increased student and staff mobility. As a result, integrating heterogeneous international students into existing content courses with local students became the standard. International exchange students with proficiency in the local language could matriculate into courses taught in the local language of instruction of the institution and study in, e.g., German in Germany, French in France. In countries with less commonly taught languages (e.g., Denmark, Finland, and Japan), this model was untenable. Very few students came prepared with the academic language proficiency in the target language needed to study content courses. This situation created a need to teach in a common language, namely English. Rapidly, courses earmarked specifically for non-local students were developed and taught in English. Likewise, international PhD candidates and academic staff who were new to an institution or employed on short-term contracts often could not teach in the local language. This context created the need for universities to maintain a selection of EMI courses that this group of guest instructors could teach.

The surge of new information and communication technology, including the Internet, social media, etc., gave rise to a series of rapid advancements in research and development around the world, increasingly with the dissemination and publication of knowledge sources predominantly in English. With this development, globalization and internationalization of education and business created the need for targeted, advanced English language proficiency for graduate employability (Yang, 2017).

Thus, the increased desires to facilitate mobility of both academics and students across national boundaries, not to mention a desire for status in the international rankings, led to the development of elective courses and full-degree programs that could accommodate a broad range of people working and studying in English, the academic lingua franca (Björkman, 2013).

From local language to EMI

As a result of globalization and the marketization of higher education, universities around the world are now vying for the same students for their programs (Hultgren, Jensen, & Dimova, 2015; Kling Soren, 2013). EMI has sparked a new level of competition for recruitment at institutions that previously were inaccessible because of language barriers. Given increased training in English for academic purposes at the primary and secondary school levels, EMI offers access to institutions of higher education that have been out of reach to students who did not speak the local language. In addition, over the past 10 years, we have seen increased opportunities for student exchange due to EMI. Countries such as Japan have implemented top-down ministerial policies (McKay, 2018) to increase EMI in an attempt to not only elevate the levels of English proficiency of their graduates, but also to fill empty university seats due to declining population rates (Bradford & Brown, 2017).

WHAT DO WE CURRENTLY KNOW?

EMI as a research field emerged at the turn of the century and has grown under a range of broadly defined terms. The paradigm includes headings such as *English-Taught Programs* (ETP), *Content and Language Integrated Learning* (CLIL), *Content-Based Instruction* (CBI), and *Integrating Content and Language in Higher Education* (ICLHE) (Bradford & Brown, 2017; Smit & Dafouz, 2012). English-Taught Programs fall at the left end of the content and language instruction continuum, see Figure 1, where explicit language learning is not targeted as intended learning outcomes for instruction. The focus here is subject-specific content. In contrast, CLIL (which has been largely linked to primary and secondary education) and CBI fall mid-continuum. CLIL and CBI are methodologies designed for

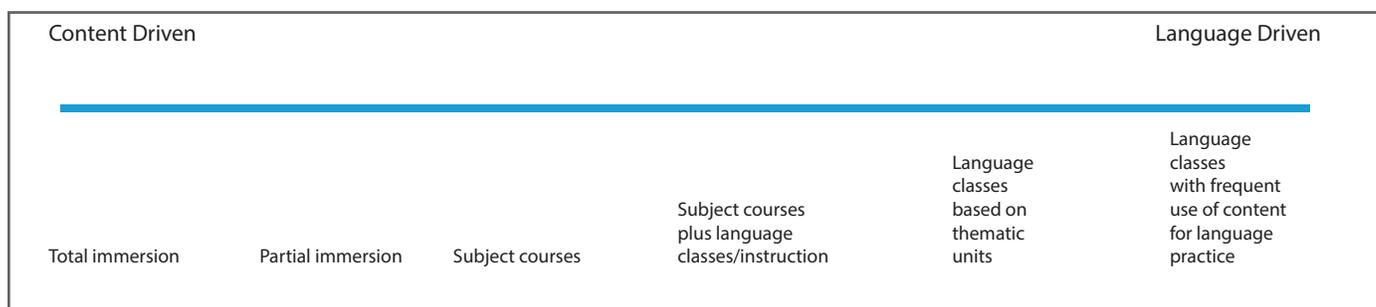


Figure 1. Content-based language teaching: A continuum of content and language integration (adapted from Met, 1998, p. 41)

explicit foreign/second language instruction. The final concept, ICLHE, has become an umbrella term for focused support strategies and initiatives for the teaching and learning of general content course material in a foreign language at the tertiary level.

Early research in the EMI field looked at the political tensions, aspects of university governance, and stakeholder attitudes related to the implementation of English-medium courses and programs (Hultgren et al., 2015). Now, with some experience at hand, studies into how both students and teachers use English as a lingua franca in the classroom, as well as specific language requirements in instructional learning outcomes, are being reported.

Use of foreign language and quality of teaching and learning

Determining adequate language competence for teaching and learning in the EMI context is a challenge. There are limited data specifying adequate English language requirements for students, teachers, and staff. Discussions regarding English language norms have largely been based on native-speaker standards, although movements toward non-standard varieties of English are appearing (Hultgren et al., 2015). During initial implementation periods, EMI teaching assignments were often delegated to instructors considered to be fluent in English and internationally minded. This process very often meant choosing those who had extensive international academic experience in Anglophone countries, the assumption being that these instructors were internationally minded and had the language proficiency and pedagogical competencies necessary for teaching in the EMI classroom. However, many of those who completed advanced research abroad had limited teaching experience. Furthermore, what teaching experience they did have had been acquired in a very different educational context, where instruction was normed to a student population in an Anglophone setting. More recently, as EMI course offerings have been expanding, local instructors are being selected based on their content expertise, with less focus on their English proficiency (Dimova, 2017).

A consistent set of challenges has been reported by those teaching EMI in both Europe and Asia. Non-native users of English who are content instructors tend to report a shift in work-related demands when it comes to teaching in English. In multiple surveys across a range of geographical locations, instructors express the view that preparing and teaching in their second languages (L2s) takes longer and uses more energy than doing so in their L1s (first languages), but ultimately becomes easier with practice and implementation of new or different teaching strategies (Dafouz, Hüttner, & Smit, 2016; Henriksen et al., 2019). Instructors have also reported limitations in their capacity to use humor in their teaching, as well as in expressing concepts in a nuanced, fluent, and comprehensible manner (Tsui, 2017). Furthermore, the role of the instructor in relation to English language support and development has come under scrutiny, as content teachers tend not to see themselves as language instructors and question their role in linguistically supporting their students (Airey, 2012). In addition, due to limitations of their own L2 proficiency, some instructors struggle to identify and give feedback to students concerning their linguistic needs (Macaro, 2015).

Thus, a focus on a threshold language proficiency for EMI content teachers and implications for the quality of teaching has given rise to university development of internal assessment procedures. Supporting the self-report data from the instructor attitude surveys, results from one such oral certification test¹ for university EMI instructors suggest that linguistic weaknesses lie within general and academic vocabulary, as opposed to domain-specific terminology (Dimova & Kling, 2018). Although there are instructors who do not feel linguistically prepared or comfortable teaching in their L2s, and may require additional language training, there are those who report that teaching in their L2s does not affect their sense of their professional teacher identity, professional authority, or professional expertise in the classroom. Experienced instructors appear to draw on compensatory teaching strategies and classroom experience to overcome linguistic limitations (Kling, 2015).

As for English language admission requirements for students applying for EMI programs and courses, types of evidence and

¹ Test of Oral English Proficiency for Academic Staff (TOEPAS), University of Copenhagen. <https://cip.ku.dk/english/certification/>

test cut-scores on commercial proficiency tests vary, often even within the same institution of higher education (Dimova, 2018). Admission cut-score decisions can be influenced by factors beyond documented language competence. Due to national regulations in some countries, local students and international students are often not held to the same standard. Based on concerns about increased drop-out rates and lower exam results, universities have begun to implement pre-sessional and integrated language training for students enrolled in EMI programs (Swerts & Westbrook, 2013). There is little empirical evidence on student performance and achievement in EMI courses compared to courses conducted in a local language. The limited results available at this point do not show statistically significant differences in EMI and non-EMI student performance, in non-Anglophone settings (Dafouz & Camacho-Miñano, 2016).

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS?

EMI provides opportunities for both local and international students and academics, but there are implications. To begin, the desire to attract students and qualified teachers weighs heavily on IHEs as they compete over international university rankings and for tuition revenue from students taking online courses. This race can result in top-down policy decisions that can lead to limited buy-in from both academic staff and university administrators. Instructors and mid-level decision makers alike do not feel that they have had a voice in determining the direction of their course offerings. In addition, many are reluctant to admit lacking adequate competencies to do their jobs, fearing repercussions regarding career progression or simply loss of face (Tange, 2010; Werther, Denver, Jensen, & Mees, 2014).

Although there is agreement that EMI classrooms typically comprise non-native English speakers, these groups can vary greatly regarding their linguistic diversity and educational backgrounds. The variety of populations presents challenges regarding teaching and learning. Within a more homogenous population, instructors and students may share a first language as well as common educational experiences from a similar learning context and thus share a tacit understanding of the local academic culture (Brown & Iyobe, 2013). In these situations, both the instructors and students can utilize the local/national language to support learning through the second language via clarification and translation, as well as the inclusion of local language texts in course material.

In contrast, in a more heterogeneous classroom, there may be speakers of multiple languages who come with very different concepts of higher education, including the concepts of teaching and learning, e.g., the roles and responsibilities of teachers and learners. Heterogeneous, multilingual populations

require more explicit awareness of language for learning and interaction on the part of all the stakeholders due to these differences in educational cultures. While inclusive pedagogy aids in accommodating for student diversity, this EMI context places new demands on instructors. Instructors may need to juggle and diversify the language input when they teach and consider sources and methods to support students in a new learning context. Regardless of the student population, EMI requires explicit clarification about administrative guidelines, teaching, and assignments, as well as learning outcomes for courses clearly outlined.

EMI also affects course content. EMI contributes to the exclusion of non-English language material in required reading and course materials. There are questions regarding the requirement for English-only materials in EMI courses, such as, concerns about the diminishing use of local languages for research and dissemination, and ultimately 'domain loss' of local languages for specific purposes. For example, in Danish universities, there are concerns that English may become so widespread in areas such as Science, that Danish will become a 'second class language' in those areas. In other words, some countries fear that they will experience disciplinary domain loss, i.e., that academic terminology and precision in their national languages will diminish with increased use of English for research and teaching. Though there is little evidence to support domain loss (Hultgren, 2016), there is evidence that exclusive use of English, at the cost of learning the local language, i.e., for mobile and international staff, can limit inclusion and membership status in local communities of practice (Chopin, 2016). Lastly, there are concerns about the hierarchy of English publications relative to other language publications, perspectives, and research traditions. Does exclusion of non-English texts push a Western education agenda?

EMI continues to proliferate, and universities are gaining experience. But one area that is still often neglected is intercultural competence development and language support for administrative staff. Institutions need to determine guidelines and standards that meet the local context and teaching requirements. Discussion must be focused on the needs of both national (those who speak the local language) and international (those who do not speak the local language) stakeholders to provide transparent and sustainable support. Administrative support staff members need competence development to provide services to mobile academic researchers, instructors, and students. Administrative staff are often an institution's first and last line of contact for communication with guest students and staff. Whether via a telephone receptionist in student admissions, counseling, human resources, or housing, or simply groundskeepers who need to direct guests to destinations on campuses, changing the language of instruction at institutions of higher education goes far beyond the classroom. All stakeholders at institutions are affected by policy changes of this sort.

WHAT IS ON THE HORIZON?

The administration and implementation of EMI courses and programs in the early part of the millennium have been characterized as grassroots endeavors. Early implementation failed to consider possible unintended consequences resulting from the use of a foreign language for subject-specific content instruction (Wilkinson & Zegers, 2008). Ten years on, we have a substantial body of experience of EMI practices, and researchers are beginning to move beyond attitudinal surveys about the concept of implementing EMI. Investigation into both intended and unintended consequences of EMI is necessary. The intended consequences can include increased internationalization of academic staff and students, global branding and recognition, increased access to English language journals and publications, as well as global employability of graduates. As noted above, unintended consequences of EMI include the risk of 'domain loss' and limited or non-existent local, general, and academic language policies, as well as increased student dropout rates, and negative effects on the identities of students, instructors, and researchers.

Moving forward, researchers are working to provide stronger empirical support for creating competence development programs for both teaching and learning through EMI. Presently, few institutions require specific minimum threshold levels of language proficiency for instructors or local students (international, mobile students are often required to prove proficiency – levels vary). The introduction of EMI without confirming adequate language proficiency can be detrimental, leading to, e.g., increased dropout rates. And although there are aspects of inseparability regarding knowledge of language, pedagogy, and learning strategies for EMI, these competences must also be treated as distinct but complementary. Thus, clearer identification of the specific needs of students and instructors is required to assist recognition and differentiation of discipline-specific vs. common characteristics of the EMI classroom. Students must be provided with specific language support and formative feedback to succeed in their studies. If EMI content instructors do not themselves have the linguistic competencies to provide this support, cooperative teaching (content instructors working with language specialists) should be considered.

Transnational networks and research cooperation have given rise to focused examination of the concerns discussed above. An obvious goal of these networks is the opportunity to share experiences and determine commonalities and elements of good practice. Clearly, inclusion of EMI programming must be built on an informed foundation. Management teams must consider the cost-benefit of mandatory EMI at a national and local level for students across disciplines. If courses are to run in English, then the reality of the challenges and implications of this decision must be acknowledged. Along with the costs of course development, sustainable resources need to be made

available to develop and implement training programs to support the advancement of the minimum language and pedagogical competencies for teaching and learning, as well as for administering EMI.

Regardless of discipline, there is a growing trend in the field to move away from strict adherence to an English-only policy in EMI classes. Instead, there is more focus on inclusion of students' L1 competencies and the development of bilingual disciplinary competencies (Airey & Linder, 2008). In this respect, students are encouraged to use all the languages they have, to enhance the development of both their target language proficiency (in this case, English) and their disciplinary knowledge.

WHERE CAN YOU FIND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES?

1. Association for Integrating Content and Language in Higher Education (<http://iclhe.org>)

The ICLHE is the association for expertise, networking, and resources in the integration of content and language in higher education. The website offers updated information on research, conferences, and symposia around the world.

ICLHE has produced several conference compendia comprising several seminal articles on EMI over the past 20 years.

Valcke, J., & Wilkinson, R. (Eds.). (2017). *Integrating content and language in higher education: Perspectives on professional practice*. Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Peter Lang.

Wilkinson, R., & Walsh, M. L. (Eds.). (2015). *Integrating content and language in higher education: From theory to practice*. Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany: Peter Lang GmbH.

Wilkinson, R., & Zegers, V. (Eds.). (2008). *Realizing content and language integration in higher education*. Maastricht, The Netherlands: Maastricht University Language Centre.

2. INTE-R-LICA - Internationalization of university teaching from an interdisciplinary perspective (<https://www.ucm.es/interlica-en>)

This international project focuses on the linguistic, cultural, and academic challenges derived from the implementation of bilingual degrees and post-graduate programs.

3. Transnational Alignment of English Competences for University Lecturers (TAEC) (<https://cip.ku.dk/english/projects/taec/>)

This Erasmus+ transnational project seeks to develop a common framework for EMI quality assurance and support.

4. Linking EMI to applied linguistics and a focus on training and development, *TESOL Quarterly* published this special issue with state-of-the-art research in the field:

Pecorari, D., & Malmström, H. (Eds.). (2018). At the crossroads of TESOL and English medium instruction. *TESOL Quarterly*, 52(3). doi.or/10.1002/tesq.415

5. These monographs and edited volumes offer various perspectives:

Dimova, S., Hultgren, A. K., & Jensen, C. (2015). *English-medium instruction in European higher education: English in Europe*. Berlin, Germany: De Gruyter Mouton.

Fenton-Smith, B., Humphreys, P., & Walkinshaw, I. (Eds.). (2017). *English medium instruction in higher education in Asia-Pacific: From policy to pedagogy*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

Henriksen, B., Holmen, A., & Kling, J. (2019). *English medium instruction in multilingual and multicultural universities: Academics' voices from the Northern European context*. Oxon, UK: Routledge/Taylor & Francis.

Macaro, E. (2018). *English medium instruction*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Nikula, T., Dafouz, E., Moore, P., & Smit, U. (Eds.). (2016). *Conceptualising integration in CLIL and multilingual education*. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

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Joyce Kling, PhD

Joyce Kling, PhD is a Research Academic Officer at the University of Copenhagen. Her research interests include EMI, teacher cognition, language testing, and foreign language pedagogy. Her work appears in several anthologies, including TIRF's publication *on Teacher Education and Professional Development in TESOL: Global Perspectives* (Routledge, 2016), as well as *TESOL Quarterly*. She is the co-author of *English Medium Instruction in Multilingual and Multicultural Universities: Academics' Voices from the Northern European Context* (with Birgit Henriksen and Anne Holmen). She served on the Board of Directors for TESOL International Association from 2006 to 2009. She currently serves on the Board of ICLHE Association (Integrating Content and Language in Higher Education).

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