



**Title of Project:**

Teacher Identity in English-Medium Instruction:  
Teacher Cognitions from a Danish Tertiary Education Context

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**Project Summary:**

Rapid internationalization of European higher education has resulted in a considerable increase in the number of English-medium instruction (EMI) degree programs now implemented at all levels of instruction. While this change of medium provides increased academic opportunities for all university stakeholders, the use of English by non-native speakers for teaching and learning in non-Anglosphere countries necessitates consideration of the ramifications of EMI. This study was motivated by the growing discussion of the challenges of English-medium instruction confronting lecturers for whom English is a foreign language.

This case study investigated how 10 experienced lecturers in the natural sciences at the University of Copenhagen define their own *teacher identity* and their perceptions of any effects on their identity when shifting from Danish-medium instruction to English-medium instruction. This study utilized a multi-method approach to allow fuller access into the teachers' cognitions and to overcome the weaknesses that arise from the use of self-report surveys to collect thoughts and perceptions. This approach was comprised of classroom observations of graduate level lectures, stimulated recall of these teaching events, and individual semi-structured interviews with the lecturers. The observations and stimulated recall served as a scaffold on which the interviews were built. In addition to questions directly focused on identity, the interviews also included two card sorting activities as elicitation devices. The analysis drew on the lecturers' comments and concerns related specifically to their underlying teacher cognitions about professional expertise, professional authority, and professional identity when teaching outside their mother tongue in a multicultural, multilingual graduate setting.

The results provide: 1) a model of teacher identity for lecturers in the natural sciences, 2) evidence that experienced NNS lecturers of natural science EMI do not find that the identified challenges of teaching in a foreign language affect their personal sense of teacher identity, and 3) reflections on teacher cognition studies. The lecturers highlight teaching experience and pedagogic content knowledge as factors that are at the core of their teacher identity.



While the findings here report that these lecturers express confidence and security in the EMI context and do not believe that the shift from teaching L1 content courses to teaching EMI courses affects their teacher identity, the lecturers confirm the challenges described in previous EMI research. These challenges related to weaknesses in language proficiency and/or appropriate approaches to meeting the students' diverse needs are real. As such, universities need to acknowledge these challenges and develop and implement training programs to support the advancement of the minimum knowledge bases needed for comprehensible teaching.

These training programs should address elements of culture, both from an international and domestic perspective, and language. First, university lecturers need to become more aware of the multicultural aspects of education, both in regard to the cultures (e.g., social, academic, etc.) their international students bring to the EMI classrooms, as well as how the educational culture at home is interpreted and understood by these students. Second, language training must be available for those lecturers who have not yet acquired sufficient language proficiency needed for teaching in English. Less experienced lecturers entering into EMI must be made aware of the challenges they face when entering into the EMI context. While the participants in this study claim that they can cope with their current level of proficiency, they had all proven themselves through language testing prior to their participation in this project. Establishment of both an awareness of and a proficiency in this threshold level of language is vital for success.

The results reported here also have implications on the role and use of language proficiency testing for academic staff in higher education. The implementation of a testing scheme such as the Test of Oral Proficiency for Academic Staff (TOEPAS) at the University of Copenhagen Faculty of Life Sciences was a top down decision made as a quality control measure. In addition, it was also to serve as an advocacy tool to support lecturers in need to competency development. First, as a quality control measure, the results of the test could be used to confirm that the level of English used by the teachers of this faculty was on par with comparable faculties at other universities teaching through the medium of English. Second, the test results and subsequent formative feedback the teachers received were also devised to serve as a needs analysis tool for identifying strengths and weaknesses of the teachers' proficiency, as well as a training tool. Once areas of weakness were identified, teachers' needs could be addressed through competence development training. However, the possible positive washback effect inferred from the findings of this study suggests that the testing of language proficiency of the teaching staff may actually support their self-perceived teacher identity. As noted above, the findings in this study indicate that these participants define an element of the teacher identity, their professional identity, as the acknowledgement by others of areas of expertise. Receiving, for example, a successful result on the TOEPAS provides such an external stamp of approval, an external acknowledgement, that one's language skills are good enough for the job at hand. The results provide a sense of achievement and security. Thus, one could argue for continued language proficiency assessment as a means of supporting teacher identity.

A third implication for investment at universities goes back to the question of responsibility in the ever changing internationalizing university. Throughout the discussion, there is a running



theme that questions whose responsibility it is to address the diverse needs of the students in the EMI context. According to the participants, some international students come to Danish universities without the pre-requisite tools needed to be successful. Comments from the participants repeatedly note frustrations and concerns as to how to best train students so that they can acquire these tools as quickly as possible, and succeed academically in this Danish educational environment. While there is an appreciation for the need to develop student awareness and make the differences of educational cultures explicit, the question still remains: whose job is it to train the students? Content lecturers on their own may not be fully equipped, or have the time or desire to take on this responsibility. Training programs that involve the expertise of these EMI content teachers, in cooperation with language teachers and international office staff should be devised to assist these lecturers in assisting the students, while simultaneously maintaining the lecturers' teacher identity. As an extension of this challenge, one must also ask, whose responsibility is it to make sure that the teachers also have the minimum knowledge base for teaching EMI. If universities are going to recruit both international students and teaching staff under the guise of internationalization and globalization, then university policies must begin to address these questions.



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