

Rethinking of EMI in Higher Education in Mainland China from a Critical View on its Efficacy

Cheng Zhang^{1,2,*}

¹Department of Basic Education, Jiangxi Police Institute, Nanchang, Jiangxi, China

²Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, City University of Macau, Macao SAR, China

* Corresponding author

Abstract: English as a medium of instruction (EMI) has gained significant popularity and development over the past decade, especially in higher education, reflecting a larger trend toward globalization. While EMI is becoming a widespread institutional practice, the bulk of research has mainly concerned with its effectiveness for subject content and language proficiency. Those research appeared to have reached a point of saturation, necessitating a new perspective focused on problem-solving. However, previous studies have shown inconsistent findings whether students benefit from taking content-based courses through a language that they are still developing. Researchers should promptly examine the elements that impact efficacy, such as students' inadequate English proficiency and teachers' insufficient pedagogical ability. This study analyse the current situation and major problems of EMI course in colleges and universities. From students' learning adaptations, and teachers' pedagogical proficiency, this study clarifies with a view to providing certain insights for the development of EMI courses in China.

Keywords: EMI, Higher education, Efficacy, Problem.

1. Introduction

The idea of internationalizing higher education has been a major force in EMI's rapid growth, which is defined as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, or delivery of Higher Education (HE)".

The Ministry of Education in China issued new regulations in 2004 and 2007 that mandated a greater number of English-medium (EMI) courses in Chinese universities. Furthermore, a legitimate, and eventually rewarding, educational practice that aligns with the socio-political environment of developing China with its increasing participation in global economy and world affairs, this EMI top-down program is also seen to be beneficial.

There is a gap in understanding regarding the balance between content and languaging and contributions for conducting an ideal EMI course. By reviewing the definition, polices, guidelines, theoretical issues in general, and some critical voices especially the imbalance in content knowledge and discipline-specific language. In reality, EMI has presented enormous obstacles for the creation of curricula, the formulation of policies, and the debate over its benefits and drawbacks.

EMI "is still at an experimental stage in China, and has developed unevenly in different regions". Nevertheless, it remains uncertain if these standards are being earnestly adhered to at both the program and classroom levels. The number of students who will successfully achieve the standards of the advanced level of English after completing their coursework in English as a foreign language is likewise uncertain. Significant variations likely exist among various categories of universities, across diverse geographical areas, and within distinct educational settings.

2. Literature Review

2.1. EMI definition and its Scope

Based on a survey of the relevant literature, seven HE-level definitions of EMI are presented in Table 1 of this essay (Akıncıoğlu, M. 2023).

Definition 1 could be one of the most cited in the literature to provide an initial picture of EMI as a globally trending new phenomenon. In the years 2013 and 2014, they spearheaded a groundbreaking study that aimed to better understand EMI at the university level around the world.

Definition 2 relates to the study of academic subjects, which is mentioned in all definitions that specifically illustrate the term "academic subjects." The EMI emerges the greater detailed academic subjects and the wider range of applications. Definition 5 provide more clarification on the concept of 'use', specifically in relation to exclusive use, partial usage, code switching, and other similar examples. These definitions allow for the inclusion of both English and foreign languages in academic education, in different ways. Need not mean English only.

2.2. Previous studies on the efficacy of EMI

Several studies have evaluated the effectiveness of English-medium Instruction (EMI) programs (Kingsley Bolton, Werner Botha, 2017).

Some papers reported positive attitudes towards EMI from the policies and purposes. (Rui Yuan, 2022) also found that ideal EMI course need continuous engagement within and outside classroom. Along the same vein, (Yan Wang, 2023) reported academic content and learning efficiency from students' perspectives and (Seonmin Park, 2022) showed professors' experiences and attitudes benefits EMI-related development programs.

However, the results of studies have been mixed. Although there is evidence supporting the efficacy of EMI, there is also considerable data undermining its usefulness as an

educational method, including resistance from both faculty and students. One potential drawback relates to the full implementation of EMI courses is limited by inadequate proficiency in the language skill. And 'English-only' may be inadvisable in many EMI contexts (Akıncioğlu, 2023).(Si Jinghui, 2023) suggested shifting from a monolingual approach to a multilingual approach. Therefore, more research is needed to shed light on the discussion of the language use of EMI.

The previous review highlighted a stark difference between the widespread use of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in Chinese higher education and the lack of empirical research investigating its efficacy in the given setting.

3. Problems Encountered in EMI

All-english teaching (EMI), as one of the most efficient teaching modes to improve the language and skills of college students, has been rapidly popularized and developed in many non-English speaking countries and regions in recent years. On the one hand, to meet the needs of the global labor market, to cultivate talents proficient in subject knowledge and professional English ability; On the other hand, to enhance the international academic research ability and competitiveness of the university, and promote graduates to the international market. However, in the process of its rapid development, many problems and difficulties have gradually emerged.

3.1. Ineffective EMI teaching

Many colleges and universities have launched programmes using English as the medium of instruction from 2001 to the present, and EMI teaching has developed in the aspects: teacher training, curriculum construction, textbook construction and teaching methods. However, more than a decade later, English-mode teaching is still at the stage of exploration, which includes the unclear teaching objectives, lack of systematical teaching design; incapacity to demand-driven. Thus, overall results are not satisfactory. The overall effect restricting the development of the subject is not satisfactory.

The development of students' comprehensive language skills and professional content competence remains disappointed. Loss of expertise due to language barriers has resulted in not only failing to learn the language, but also failing to achieve the effect. Not only did they not benefit from professional English, but they also lost the professional knowledge that would have been gained by teaching in Chinese. Unfortunately, in some cases, it is even a failure of "1+1<1".

On the whole, the quality of EMI teaching in our country is not satisfied. Most EMI courses in China are not offered on demand, or they are not able to be offered. Most of them are vague, ineffective, and even have negative effects, and students have not achieved the expected gains in both language and content.

3.2. Weak learning adaptation

The attitude of both students and faculty were more conservative. On the one hand, the language learning outcome of the current EMI courses was not satisfying according to the students' evaluations. In general, it seems that students have a favorable attitude about EMI, and the reasons that they give to support their good stance tend to be the same as those that their instructors have indicated. However, students also

mention unfavorable aspects of EMI.

Nevertheless, the utilization of English as a medium of education adds an additional layer of complication to the learning process. This is due to the fact that they admit certain linguistic limits. Most students believe that the most difficult aspects of English Language Instruction (EMI) are vocabulary, writing, and speaking.

On the one hand, students consider it necessary to set up EMI courses, recognizing the importance and necessity of internationalization. However, on the other hand, students are reluctant to choose these courses, mainly for reasons including: lack of confidence in English foundation, lower grade point ranking due to exam results, low relevance to future employment, and low interest in courses.

Additionally, they lack the intrinsic motivation and external assistance to learn professional knowledge through English, and once they leave the classroom, they cannot develop themselves independently. Even in class, they only deal negatively, and even resist the "English-only", all of which hinder the progress of EMI courses. Therefore, teachers must not only focus on how to teach, but also on how to regulate students' learning to maximize the effectiveness of the curriculum.

3.3. Insufficient teaching staff

At present, the serious shortage of qualified teachers has become a key factor that makes it difficult to fully implement EMI. Due to the constraints of various conditions, the courses are mostly scattered, not rich enough and lack of hierarchy. The existing EMI courses are difficult to form a system and cannot constitute a full-English teaching major.

The current situation in China is that the vast majority of professional teachers have limited English proficiency, especially poor oral expression, and even English teachers are not always capable of teaching in English only. Many teachers actually just use English to organise the course, but the meaningful communication in English is rare.

English teachers are single-skilled. Although some have also begun to try to set up the new courses in other disciplines, their content knowledge of other disciplines is limited, which due to the vast majority in China have an academic background in English language and literature, and are exposed to English and American literature, linguistics and translation.

Short-term teacher training has had little effect. Although colleges and universities have the policy to encourage teachers to study further, in fact, most of the teachers have few opportunities for international exchanges, so that they can not keep pace with the forefront of the discipline. Even though some colleges and universities provide multi-channel training for EMI teachers, short-term on-the-job training is not systematic and sustainable enough to make up for language deficiencies.

In addition to weak learning adaptation, insufficient teaching staff and ineffective EMI teaching, These views are especially important to interpret and understand the lack of balance between content and language in the current EMI program.

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