

**The 2020 International Symposia on
English Medium Higher Education
(EMHE)**

**Symposium 1 – Quality
Assurance in English
Medium Higher
Education**

27 October 2020



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This symposium was organised as part of the 2020 China International Conference for International Education, in partnership with the Chinese Education Association for International Exchanges. The recorded event is available at <http://live.vhall.com/666236891>

KEY MESSAGES

- English-taught courses (also known as ETCs, EMHE or EMI) continue to increase at Chinese universities, encouraged by Chinese authorities.
- The new challenges of English-taught courses mean that new approaches to Quality Assurance (QA) are seen as necessary and are being implemented in China, UK, and other countries.
- Quality standards are likely to apply to some or all of the following: regulatory requirements; institutional policy; course development; student admission; student support; student achievement and assessment; teacher language proficiency; teacher pedagogy; teacher support; course materials; stakeholder communication; course evaluation.
- Different educational contexts in terms of objectives, student type, and teacher qualifications amongst others mean that the same standards should not be applied to all contexts.
- Quality assurance systems can apply to course development as well as to the implementation of courses.
- Pedagogical skills of teachers in higher education are often linked with the introduction of English-taught courses. This link is complex and contentious and requires further consideration.
- Quality Assurance systems should go beyond measuring the quality and success of courses, and should have a developmental and motivational formative element for teachers and universities.
- Quality assurance in this area is at an early stage globally and there is scope for international collaboration in research and development.

Report and Reflections on the Symposium by John Knagg FAcSS

Over 700 people attended the whole or part of this online symposium, which benefited from simultaneous Chinese and English interpretation. The aim was to raise awareness of English medium education in higher education (EMHE), often called English medium Instruction (EMI), or English-taught courses (ETCs), and in particular the aspect of quality assurance (QA).

Chinese and international speakers emphasised the importance of EMHE, and repeated the rationale for the increase of English as the medium of instruction in universities as being a natural response to globalisation and in particular the internationalisation of higher education. This means in practical terms greater global student mobility and the desire of universities in China and worldwide to attract more international students and sometimes teachers. There is also a desire to give local students a competitive advantage in the global employment market, and having studied courses and programmes in English is seen as giving that advantage. To a large extent this is based on the fact that published research in many international disciplines, especially natural and social sciences and technology is overwhelmingly published in English, and the most up-to-date university level subject text books are most likely to be published in English. At a university level, it is natural for university leaders to want to improve the quality and thus the prestige and ranking of their universities in comparison with other national and international institutions, and the use of English in university operations is seen as contributing to this. Speakers confirmed the commitment of the Chinese authorities to using EMHE as a way of improving the international standings of Chinese universities.

The focus on Quality Assurance in EMHE for this symposium is in part derived from the main findings and recommendations of a research project and report carried out by a team from Britain and China based at Oxford University and University College London in 2019 entitled “Investigating policy and implementation of English-medium instruction in higher education institutes in China”. The first of four major recommendations from this research is: “to create clear and effective evaluative systems to ensure quality implementation of EMI courses and to share good practices”. The Oxford EMI Research Group report is available at www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/investigating-policy-implementation-english-medium-instruction-higher-education-0

The symposium presentations made it clear that there are already some established systems in China to evaluate the effectiveness of EMHE policies, programmes and courses, but at the same time that the development of quality standards and processes for EMHE is in its infancy globally, and that there is much to share, to discuss, and to research to improve those systems. Of course, national education authorities have quality assurance agencies for higher education

generally. In the United Kingdom, it is the Quality Assurance Agency (qaa.org.uk) which sets and monitors the standards for Higher Education in the UK, including in Transnational Education, which is the delivery overseas of UK Higher Education.

However the increased prominence and importance of the use of English in universities is setting new challenges for quality assurance. The symposium presenters detailed a range of challenges which need to be overcome to make EMHE work for students, for teachers, and for universities. One presenter elegantly categorised the main challenges as relating firstly to the English language proficiency of students, secondly to the language proficiency and pedagogical approach of EMI teachers, and thirdly to the policies and regulations of authorities, institutions and departments.

The introduction of English medium into a historically monolingual Chinese HE sector began several years ago and is bound to be a lengthy process of change and discovery. There are well established quality assurance systems for the teaching of English, for example Accreditation UK (<https://www.britishcouncil.org/education/accreditation>) in the United Kingdom, which accredits over 400 public and private institutions including universities with a quality mark for English Language Teaching to foreign students, and gives students of accredited institutions special privileges in the UK government's student visa application process. This system, developed over 40 years, follows a standard Quality Assurance methodology of specifying a series of standards alongside a process for verifying whether the standards have been met. While it is a possibly useful benchmark for EMHE standards and processes, the standards relate to the teaching of English as a subject or a skill in the UK, and not to the teaching of other subjects through the medium of English. There are other British quality assurance systems closely related to EMHE such as the BALEAP accreditation scheme (www.baleap.org/accreditation), which inspects and accredits the teaching of English for Academic Purposes in universities. The NARIC Quality Assurance Scheme for English Medium Instruction (www.naric.org.uk) as outlined by Fabrizio Trifiro (see below) in this symposium is an innovative initiative directly targeted at English-medium education activity. The 2020 British Council publication "[English in higher education – English medium. Part 1: literature review](#)" has a section pp. 55-56 dedicated to quality assurance in EMI.

The three 2020 EMHE symposia target all stakeholders in EMHE and designed to share experience and good practice, raise awareness and facilitate increased collaboration. The stakeholders include policy makers at national level or below, programme managers, university subject teachers and language teachers, educational researchers, and probably most importantly current and future EMHE students. As we move forward we will look at what each of these stakeholders can learn from the presentations and discussions.

An overview of the presentations

1. Ernesto Macaro. Oxford University. English medium education research – what do we know so far and what do we still need to do?”. Ernesto Macaro wrote the authoritative Oxford University Press book “English Medium Instruction” which challenges some current EMI practice and sets a research agenda for the future. In the presentation, which acts as an introduction to the 3 symposia in the 2020 series, he makes the point that EMI globally is usually a top-down policy directive from education authorities or institutions rather than a bottom-up pressure from teachers or students. He casts doubt on whether EMI is, as might be claimed, “*a simple and cheap solution to internationalisation and English language proficiency*”. He tells us that much research is about student and teacher beliefs and attitudes around EMI, and that there is little research on the impact of EMI on the learning of subject matter or on improved English proficiency. He highlights the positive attitudes of students regarding the potential of EMI to facilitate study abroad and professional opportunities, while acknowledging the challenges of low students English proficiency, EMI teacher workload and lack of support, and the potential for social exclusion. He calls for more comparative research across institutions and countries as opposed to case-studies of single institutions, for more research on classroom interaction and the relationship between EMI and pedagogical skills, and more on what are appropriate levels of teacher and student English proficiency. EMI research might clarify what good classroom practice is and thus facilitate better teaching. It is remarked with regret that research in EMI is driven almost exclusively by language specialists as opposed to content teachers, and calls for more collaboration. [Slides from the presentation and an audio file are available here](#)

2. Samantha Curle. Bath University. “Quality assurance in English medium higher education.” Based on her work for the British Council literature review mentioned above, Dr. Curle emphasised that EMHE is new enough and big enough globally to require special quality assurance mechanisms to hold universities to account and ensure quality learning and teaching through English. While emphasising that QA mechanisms are in their infancy and that research into the QA systems is needed, she described QA processes already developed in Turkey, Europe, Germany, and UK. Going into more detail in the UK NARIC scheme, she showed the quality mark system is meant to be formative, recognising best practice in EMI while giving guidelines for continued improvement. The quality standards are divided into four sections: context and management; learning and teaching; admissions and student support; assessment and student academic and linguistic outcomes. There is a focus on teacher qualifications, preparation and support. Recommendations for quality assurance system development were made, including the need to build consensus between all stakeholders, and the need to build in the flexibility to ensure that differing contexts are taken into account. [Slides from the presentation are available here](#)

3. Weiren Yang. Shanghai Education and Public Health Committee. “Shanghai’s practice of constructing quality assurance systems for English taught courses in HE”. In 2013 universities in Shanghai were encouraged to develop EMHE courses. The scale of the challenge involved 60,000 international students in over 800 courses in 40 universities. A quality process was set up for the product development stage of the English-taught courses. This process involved 5 stages for each course: recording; application; initiation; construction and conclusion. In 2015 a set of evaluation standards was established covering 4 broad areas: support & guarantee; documents & resources; teaching & effects; and relevant majors. There are sub-sections of standards under each of these areas. Three reports on progress have been published, and the QA system continues to be improved with special focus in 2020 on improvement of teaching groups, the responsibility of universities, and guarantees of the system. Refinement of the QA system is ongoing with an expectation that there will be a move from English-taught courses to English-taught majors, and an increased expectation of integrated digital elements.

4. Wenshu Zhao. Nanjing University. “Criteria for the second national review of English-taught courses for international students: an interpretation.” The second review appraises current courses in all disciplines and sets guidance and models for future development. Institutional reviews build up to provincial reviews and ultimately a national review. The review criteria are grouped into four sections: teaching team; course materials; supporting materials; and special characteristics and innovation. Dr. Zhao broke these sections into more detailed areas of review. As a result, 150 courses have been awarded the title of “outstanding English-taught courses for international students. An important aim of the exercise is to promote the sharing of quality and resources across provinces and universities.

5. Slobodanka Dimova. Copenhagen University. “Transnational alignment of English competences for university lecturers”. This project focusses on one important element of quality EMI, namely the skills needed by EMI teachers. A certificated qualification – The Test of Oral Proficiency for Academic Staff (TOEPAS), which has been aligned with the European CEFR scale, has been developed. This allows teachers and universities to demonstrate EMI teacher quality standards while aiming to support lecturers rather than exclude. The test is based on a simulated lecture to elicit classroom language, with criteria based on language proficiency rather than pedagogy, and with results that are accompanied by detailed feedback. The test is designed to match the face validity of local EMI teacher certificates that have been developed, but also to have the rigour and reliability of well known international examinations such as IELTS and TOEFL which are not specifically designed for EMI. Dr. Dimova questioned the practice of universities importing top-down standards based on anglophone university norms, which can lead to a threat to EMI lecturers professional and linguistic identity and status and also to local languages losing disciplinary terms (domain loss). She also questioned why pedagogy in HE contexts suddenly becomes important in EMI contexts, a topic that our discussions should return to. More information on TOEPAS is available at <https://cip.ku.dk/english/certification/>. Slides from the presentation are available [here](#)

6. Fabrizio Trifiro. UK NARIC. “NARIC UK: EMI quality review and training and TNE quality benchmark”. NARIC is the UK national Agency responsible for providing advice and expert opinion on international education systems and qualifications and their comparability to the UK. Three major challenges were identified for EMI: teacher proficiency and pedagogy; student proficiency on admission and completion; and institutional policy and strategy. The NARIC EMI quality review and training scheme, in association with Oxford EMI, is designed to help universities improve their EMI provision. Evaluation, recommendations and subsequent training is carried out based on a framework consisting of 4 areas: institutional strategy and management; admission and student support; teaching and learning; quality assurance and enhancement. The presenter went on to explain the Transnational Education (TNE) benchmark which is an international independent peer-review scheme aimed at improving the international understanding of and confidence in TNE qualifications of demonstrated quality and standards. The TNE benchmark standards include: management of the TNE operation; standards of the programme of study; quality of the student experience; alignment with local requirements; and information to students and public. [Slides from the presentation are available here](#)

7. Mark Henebury. UK Department of International Trade. “The UK ELT sectors experience of supporting English Medium Instruction”. While some may think that the UK English Language Teaching (ELT) sector is just about English lessons for students wanting to learn English in the UK, the reality is much wider and sophisticated. UK support to institutions interested in improving English learning globally includes research and consultancy, quality assurance, qualifications and tests, publishing, educational technology and teacher training. A number of case studies of public and private schools, colleges and universities show the range of possible international collaborations. The Department of International Trade has published a catalogue of UK providers of EMI services, available [here](#). [Slides from the presentation are available here](#)

John Knagg FAcSS

Recent British Council publications on English medium education in HE

1. “*English in higher education – English medium. Part 1: literature review*”. Edited by Nicola Galloway. British Council 2020.
www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/L020_English_HE_lit_review_FINAL.pdf
2. “*Investigating policy and implementation of English-medium instruction in higher education institutes in China*”. A review by the EMI Oxford Research Group in association with the British Council in China. Heath Rose, Jim McKinley, Xin Xu, Sihan Zhou. British Council with Oxford University Department of Education 2020.
www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/investigating-policy-implementation-english-medium-instruction-higher-education-0
3. “*2019 International Symposium on EMI for Higher Education in the New Era: Selected Proceedings*”. Edited by Deborah Bullock. British Council 2020. This publication brings together selected proceedings shared at the ‘2019 International Symposium on EMI for Higher Education in the New Era’, Beijing. It comprises of 13 papers that shed light on key challenges and solutions relating to English Medium Instruction (EMI) policy and implementation in a variety of contexts. The articles within are a record of expert speakers’ presentations, summarising how EMI programmes can be best implemented and offering different perspectives on how challenges can be addressed in a new era where EMI programmes are expanding at a rapid pace in higher education sectors throughout the world. Key themes covered include:
 - Current trends in EMI policy and provision
 - Continuing professional development for practitioners
 - Developing quality assurance standards
 - Creating support systems for lecturers and students.
 - ‘*English-medium instruction (EMI) policy implementation in universities in China*’ (2019)
<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/2019-international-symposium-emi-higher-education-new-era-selected-proceedings>

The 2020 International Symposia on Quality Assurance of English Medium Higher Education (EMHE)

Website: <https://www.britishcouncil.cn/en/teach/oct20-sym>

You may refer to the symposium report(s), speaker biographies, and speaking PPTs online.