

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

## Symposium 2 – Research in English Medium Higher Education

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In partnership with



中国教育国际交流协会  
CHINA EDUCATION ASSOCIATION FOR INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE

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This symposium was organised in partnership with the Chinese Education Association for International Exchange and was supported by the Chinese Association for ESP and the China EAP Association.

## Key Messages

- The rapid growth of EMHE has outstripped research, and a good deal of policy and practice is not evidence-based and not fully effective. Policy-makers should build in resources for research at the beginning.
- Much EMHE research has been small-scale case studies, based on attitudes and beliefs of stakeholders
- There are several areas that are under-researched, including the impact of EMHE on content learning and English proficiency.
- Research should be designed to have real-world impact – to improve policy-making and practice with strong simple messages.
- Collaboration in research is important – between language and content experts, involving policy-makers and teachers, and including researchers with diverse backgrounds and skills.
- EMHE consists of many different contextual dimensions which need to be taken into account and made explicit in research outputs
- Researchers and policy-makers should be aware of EMI research in non-university settings (i.e. schools).

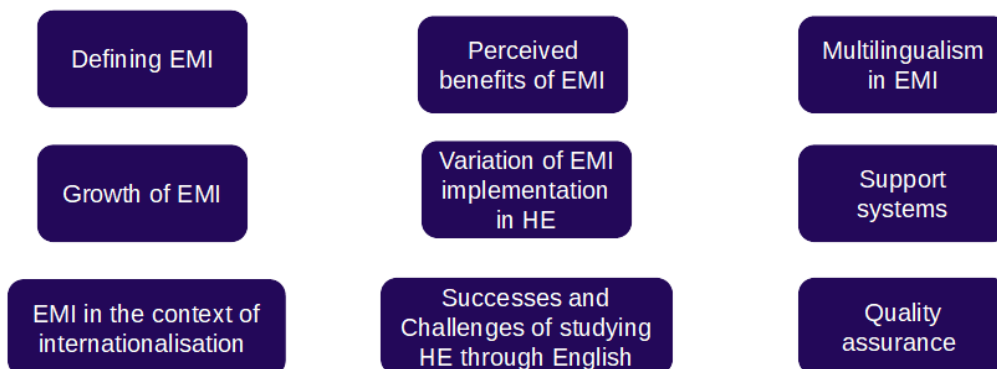
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# Report and Reflections on the symposium by John Knagg FAcSS

Over 160 people attended this second 2020 online symposium. 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 **research** into this area.

**Why is research important?** We chose research as the theme of this symposium because the huge growth in EMHE courses around the world in recent years has too often not been based on research or on accepted educational good practice. The reasons for this growth have very often been driven the socio-economics around globalisation and the internationalisation of higher education rather than on evidence-based decisions to improve the subject learning outcomes or English language proficiency of students. The introduction of EM is sometimes mistakenly seen as a quick low-cost route to the internationalisation of universities. But if it is not well planned and implemented there can be negative consequences, including reduced student learning. Like many social movements, implementation of what may be an excellent idea has advanced more rapidly than the identification and communication of what is good practice. In this symposium we looked at what is known, and what remains to be discovered. How can we conduct good useful research to help policy makers, programme managers and teachers take decisions that are in the best interests of their students.

**Components of EMHE.** Participants considered the different components of EMHE that have been and should be researched. The British Council has recently published a paper looking at the research done into the policy and practice of EMHE. “English in Higher Education – English Medium Part 1: Literature Review” is freely available to read at <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/english-higher-education-%E2%80%93-english-medium-part-1-literature-review> .This publication addresses 9 components, each one of which can be a subject of research.



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There is no single accepted way of naming the different areas of EMI. Other ways of describing potential areas for research might include: classroom interaction; teacher roles; learner strategies; and the attitudes and beliefs of the different stakeholders. Other areas of research are around the type of English which is used and should be used in EMI outside anglophone countries, and the use of other languages in addition to English in EMHE. One presenter made a case for moving away from native speaker norms of English and the standard varieties such as “British English” and “American English” and towards an acceptance of an ELF (English as a lingua franca) approach which accepts that most English use in the world today involves at least one person who is not a native speaker.

**What questions should EMHE research answer?** Ernesto Macaro’s opening session of this symposium series “[EME research: what do we know so far and what do we still need to do?](#)” is very relevant. Macaro is also the author of the authoritative Oxford University Press 2018 book “English Medium of Instruction” in which he attempts to answer the following 11 key questions which are also a good guide for prospective researchers:

1. Who should decide to introduce EMI?
2. Is EMI only for a social elite or only for certain groups of students?
3. Which English are we talking about in EMI?
4. Is EMI “English only” or some form of “bilingual education”
5. What is the effect on the home language / culture of the widespread introduction of EMI?
6. Does EMI improve English proficiency and does it do so better than EFL?
7. Does EMI at least maintain the same subject content achievement?
8. What are the EMI teacher’s responsibilities?
9. What does the EFL teacher become in an EMI context?
10. Is EMI going to become CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) or might CLIL become EMI?
11. Can we wait for a research-based evolution of EMI?

From “English Medium Instruction”, Ernesto Macaro, Oxford University Press, 2018.

**What research is lacking?** In his book and symposium presentation Macaro suggested that much EMHE research to date had been small-scale case-studies of individual institutions often carried out by university staff involved in the programmes. He called for more attention to the following broad themes:

- ❖ research on the impact of EME on content learning and English proficiency
- ❖ comparisons between countries or institutions or courses
- ❖ research on transition from secondary to HE
- ❖ research on the nature and level of teacher and student language proficiency

- ❖ research on effective teacher – student interaction
- ❖ non-linguists involved in research on equal terms with linguists
- ❖ policies with resources for research built in from the beginning

**The impact of EMHE research.** The symposium also called for research to be designed with a real-world purpose and end beneficiary in mind. Those end beneficiaries are likely to be the central EMHE stakeholders, namely policy-makers, programme managers, teachers, or students. But beyond this, researchers should consider what strong and simple messages to those stakeholders and how they can be sent. None of the four stakeholder groups are likely to read academic research papers, especially outside their own subject disciplines, so different effective communication channels need to be found to send simple messages about key issues such as ensuring necessary levels of student and teacher English language proficiency, either by pre-selection or language support during EMHE courses, and the pedagogical skills of and approaches of both content and language-specialist teachers. The impact of research is to be measured in terms how policy and practice is improved, not in terms of scholarly citations by other researchers.

We saw in the symposium presentations that some of these recommendations were being taken on board. A major research and evaluation exercise in Chinese universities preceded the development of a new quality assurance system for undergraduate EMI medical education for international students. This sets out minimum English language requirements for student recruitment as well as requirement for those international students to reach an adequate level of Chinese language proficiency in order to fulfil the practical elements of their studies in medical facilities with Chinese patients and colleagues. This example highlighted another aspect of the expert recommendation to consider the use of more languages than just English in EMHE contexts – a recommendation usually related to EMHE classes of local students with a common first language.

**Different contexts in EMHE.** The example above highlights the variety of contexts in EMI / EMHE and the need for policy and practice to take the context into account. Case-study research needs to be clear about the different dimensions of the context so that readers can see to what extent the lessons can be transferable to their own contexts, and research comparing different courses needs to be clear about how contexts are similar and different. These different dimensions of EMI context have not been definitively categorised, but too often research papers are not sufficiently clear about the full context being described. We might expect the following factors to be included in a description of context.

1. The drivers of EMHE: Where is the primary driver – national authorities, university management, teachers, or students? Internationalisation of HE; foreign student & faculty recruitment; local student mobility and employability; ranking & prestige; English language proficiency gain ...
2. Students: Are they international; local; mixed; language background; local language proficiency; English proficiency; group size; how selected; support available ...

3. Teachers: English proficiency; local language proficiency; pedagogical (including intercultural) skill level; enthusiastic about EMI or reluctant; support available in terms of English and pedagogical skills and compensation for workload; ...
4. Learning mode – all or some of: listening to teacher; speaking in discussion group; reading independently; writing assignments; writing examinations or other assessment ...
5. Course: subject; high vs low-stakes for students; optional vs compulsory...
6. Level: postgraduate; undergraduate; secondary; primary; professional; type of institution – public or private; elite or popular ...
7. The linguistic environment or landscape within and beyond the university....
8. Policies, constraints, regulations, including about use of English and other languages. linguistic environment....

Suggested contextual dimensions of EMHE

**Collaboration.** A key feature of the symposium was the call for collaborative research. This collaboration can take a number of forms, including between colleagues from different institutions and countries, between professional researchers and classroom teachers and most importantly research which does not rely solely on applied linguists, but is an interdisciplinary cooperation between content education specialists (chemistry teachers, accountancy teachers etc.) and language education specialists.

**Research in other EMI settings.** One final call would be for researchers in EMHE to ensure that they are aware of and take account of the decades of research that has been done on EMI at school level, which has led to organisations such as UNESCO and The British Council developing positions on school level EMI in low and middle income countries. It is clear that given the right resources and approach, EMI in basic education can be successful. It is equally clear that when the planning and resources are not available then EMI in schools can be less effective than L1 medium of instruction and even damaging to young people's education. We see many examples of schools in low and middle income countries trying and failing to replicate the educational success of well-resourced schools. The attraction of the "English-medium" label to parents and students can lead schools to underestimate the difficulty of introducing high quality EMI, and to mistakenly believe that EMI is a quick, cheap and easy way to English language proficiency and prestige education. It is not. At least some of the lessons learned from EMI school education must have relevance to universities. The British Council position on EMI in primary schools is available at

[https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/K068\\_EMI\\_position\\_low-and-middle-income\\_countries\\_Final.pdf](https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/K068_EMI_position_low-and-middle-income_countries_Final.pdf). There is also an excellent research study of EMI in schools in India and Africa at <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/multilingual-classrooms-opportunities-challenges-english-medium-instruction-low-middle>

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# An overview of the presentations

All presentation slides and speaker biographies can be seen [here](#)

**1. Ann Veitch. British Council UK. “English in Higher Education – English Medium: a Literature Review.”** Ann Veitch gave an overview of British Council work on EMHE including the already published literature review referenced above and below, and the research on Chinese universities by Oxford EMI research group. There will also be a study of EM in HE in ODA contexts, a British Council perspective on EM in HE and a study on gender and EM in HE. The components of EMI included in the literature review include: defining EMI; growth of EMI; EMI and internationalisation; perceived benefits of EMI; varieties of EMI implementation; successes and challenges of EMHE; multilingualism; support systems; and quality assurance. While all these areas have been researched to some extent, there is need for much more as implementation outstrips research.

**2. Fang Fan. Shantou University. “Complexity of Language Choice and Practice in EME: Revisiting the ‘E’ from ELF and the ‘Trans’ from Translanguaging.”** Dr Fang Feng highlighted 4 characteristics of EMHE in China: courses tend to be taught by younger teachers; Anglo-American course books are usually used; there are substantial variations in the English proficiency levels of both students and teachers; and there are concerns about student English proficiency levels. A number of challenges were laid out including shortage of qualified teachers, lack of materials, a lack of language support for students, and a lack of a sociolinguistic environment conducive to EMI. The concepts of English as a lingua franca (ELF) and translanguaging were introduced, and the reliance on a native-speaker model of English in EMI was questioned. The students’ first language should be seen as a resource to be used while the “English-only model of EMI should be questioned. Once again, the importance of the specific context was emphasised, while the need for ongoing language support in many contexts was seen as underestimated and necessary.

**3. Zhang Xiumei. Shandong University. “Constructing MBBS Curriculum Systems to Improve the Quality of Training for International Medical Students in China”** The contribution of Dr Zhang Xiumei was notable as he is a leader in university level medical education, and not language education, which contributed to a balance in a community of research practice often dominated by language specialists. There are 70,000 international medical students in China, with 45 universities accredited to teach undergraduate MBBS degrees to foreign students, with a current national intake of 3000 students per year. The growth has led to research across over 100 universities, and the design and implementation of quality assurance standards and processes. The quality control standards have been published and include such areas as student admission, curriculum and teaching, and academic performance assessment. The development of a high quality teaching force was



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identified as a priority and over 600 medical teachers have received training. Syllabuses and textbooks specific for international students have been written and published. There is a focus on a range of pedagogical approaches, and especially digital delivery, including online, hybrid courses and MOOCs, as well as problem-based learning, and demonstrations.

#### **4. Cia Jigang. Fudan University. “EME Programmes: EAP/ESP Teacher Development”**

The research presented shows that students have specific English proficiency weaknesses when it comes to having to read research literature and write papers in their disciplines. This calls for a move from an English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) language support approach to English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP). While English support teachers have in general moved away from English for General Purposes to an EAP approach, 85% said their teaching was not discipline specific. The solution to this can be to identify specific student needs such as making a presentation in their subject, especially in collaboration with the subject teachers. This can be combined with more targeted professional development, conferences and networking for EAP teachers to move them from an EGAP to an ESAP approach to help solve the problems of student English proficiency.

#### **5. Nicola Galloway. Glasgow University. “Strengthening EMI research / From research to policy and practice”**

Nicola Galloway is the editor of the British Council EMHE literature review and made the point that policy-makers in EMHE often have not considered the impact on stakeholders (mainly students and teachers). The impact of EMHE research needs to be measured by the positive effect it has on policy and practice in EMHE, not by the opinions or citations of other academics. Research should be carried out collaboratively with diverse research teams with a variety of skills and backgrounds. These teams should consider from the beginning what effect their work might have on policy-makers and practitioners (usually teachers), who themselves should be involved in the research process, and think about how the implications of the research can be communicated to these stakeholders through strong simple messages. The researchers' focus from the beginning should be on real-world outcomes.

John Knagg FAcSS

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## 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](http://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](http://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.

<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