

English-medium instruction (EMI) teachers' lived experiences and continuing development in multilingual and multicultural contexts: an editorial

Rui Yuan^a and Xuyan Qiu^b

^aFaculty of Education, University of Macau, Macau, People's Republic of China; ^bDepartment of English and Communication, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong, People's Republic of China

Abstract

There is a universal consensus that effective English-medium instruction (EMI) experiences depend on high-quality EMI teachers with pedagogical competence, reflective abilities, as well as a sense of mission and commitment to student learning in EMI environments. However, currently, while much has been discussed about the linguistic and pedagogical aspects of EMI, relatively limited attention has been paid to EMI teachers and their perceived needs and lived experiences in multilingual and multicultural settings. This special issue responds to such a gap by curating and presenting a series of research studies focusing on various aspects of EMI teachers' inner worlds, including their identities, emotions, and agency. It also showcases practical initiatives implemented at the institutional level or through bottom-up collaborative efforts, which seek to enhance EMI teachers' professional competence. Based on the introduction and analysis of these papers, we provide a tentative discussion of an "effective" EMI teacher, pedagogically, socio-affectively, and spiritually. Directions for future research are also outlined for this budding and promising line of inquiry at the intersection of teacher education and applied linguistics.

Introduction

Acknowledging English's role as a global language and driven by the swift pace of internationalisation of education at different levels, research on English-medium instruction (EMI) has mushroomed into a thriving area of study across various multilingual and multicultural contexts. EMI generally refers to the teaching of academic subjects in English, especially in settings where English is utilised as a second or foreign language (Macaro et al. 2018). At the core of the expanding realm of EMI are an expanding group of content-area teachers who endeavour to fuse EMI with content teaching, regardless of their academic, linguistic, and socio-cultural backgrounds. More recently, the field has come to acknowledge the pressing need for EMI teacher education, evident in a surge of research studies (such as Macaro, Akincioglu, and Han 2020; Pun, Fu, and Cheung 2024; Yuan et al. 2022) that scrutinise the professional obstacles and needs perceived by EMI instructors. Additionally, there have been inquiries and deliberations on effective approaches and methodologies for enhancing EMI teacher competence, encompassing practices like reflective teaching (Farrell 2020) and collaborative classroom-based research with language experts (Macaro and Tian 2023; Yuan 2023a).

However, in a systematic review (Wang, Yuan, and De Costa Forthcoming) that synthesises and analyses the existing literature on EMI teacher development from 2018 to 2022, the findings indicate that EMI teacher development is still in its embryonic stage. Given its portrayal as a hybrid, contested, and transformative enterprise that entails EMI teachers' practical engagement and boundary crossing within and across linguistic, pedagogical, cultural, and psychological domains, there is a pressing need for further research on EMI teacher development at the individual, community, institutional, and socio-cultural levels. Comprising eight research papers and one commentary, this special issue thus contributes to the ongoing discourse and investigation into the lived experiences of EMI teachers, highlighting empirical evidence drawn from a variety of geographical contexts, including Argentina, China, Iran, Spain, and Vietnam. Our objectives are twofold: firstly, to provide a comprehensive overview of the professional realities of EMI teachers, especially those in emerging contexts (see Curle, Rose, and Yuksel 2024) that have received relatively little attention in the international literature; and secondly, to illuminate the complex dynamics of EMI teachers' situated practices and ongoing development mediated by a spectrum of contextual factors. By doing so, our SI can stimulate continuing dialogue and research on this vibrant research area by mapping out new directions for research and practice in EMI teacher education.

A close look into EMI teachers' inner worlds

The major contribution of the SI stems from the collected studies that have provided insights into how EMI teachers think, feel, and practice within complex ecosystems of higher education or school contexts. Situated in a technical university in Spain and employing a narrative inquiry approach, Aguilar-Pérez and Arnó-Macià's study examines the experiential process of three EMI lecturers' identity construction, intertwined with their evolving perspectives on the role of English in EMI, their preparedness and confidence in EMI teaching, as well as their interactions with EMI curricula and university policies. In particular, their findings highlight the power of narrative inquiry, which not only serves as a research methodology in the study but also assists EMI teachers in reflectively exploring how to position themselves regarding language, content, and internationalisation, as well as in adjusting their teaching practices and cultivating their professional identities.

The conceptual lens of teacher identity has also been applied to Lo's study, which focuses on EMI teachers in school contexts in Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland. Theoretically underpinned by Wenger's identity construction framework and relying on data gathered from co-planning meetings, lesson observations, and interviews with the teachers, the study sheds light on the tensions and success experienced by the participants in the process of becoming 'language-aware content teachers', an ideal identity they conceived to be pivotal in their classroom teaching. Evident in the teachers' identity construction experiences is a wide array of individual factors (such as previous training and experience in language teaching) and environmental factors (including school curriculum and expectations), among which the external support provided by the research team proved to be instrumental in enhancing the EMI teachers' subject-specific language awareness and teaching competence. This finding attests to the cognitive dimension of teacher identity development, building upon their accumulated knowledge, expertise, and experiences in supporting their sense-making regarding what and how to teach in specific subject domains (Yuan and Lee 2016).

In Li and her colleagues' qualitative study on a university-based EMI teacher in a Chinese university, they made a meaningful attempt to investigate the process of identity transformation from an emotional perspective. The focal participant, Ling, a recent PhD graduate who began her career as an assistant professor tasked with teaching in English, experienced an emotional rollercoaster marked by excitement about her new role, exhaustion in balancing teaching and research, and apprehension about meeting the dual demands of language and content instruction. In contrast to the traditional view of seeking a unified and stable teacher identity, the study argues for the need to conceptualise teacher identity as a multi-faceted and contextually driven notion, which exists in a constant state of fluidity and tensions, imbued with dynamic emotions.

Recognising the importance of emotional discourse in understanding and supporting the professional development of EMI teachers, Nazari and De Costa presented an Iranian case, which delves into the concept of emotional labour and the coping strategies of EMI teachers in their everyday work. Emotional labour, viewed as a socio-political construct, offers substantial explanatory power in helping researchers unravel the complex ecologies within which EMI teachers operate, encompassing classroom, institutional, and sociocultural dimensions. Within this multifaceted system, various stakeholders – such as students, colleagues, and institutional authorities – place different demands on EMI teachers' classroom teaching and academic research, and these demands substantially contribute to the establishment and reinforcement of specific emotional rules and norms that influence their cognitive and social engagements, as highlighted by Yuan (2023b).

A recurring critical theme across the four studies is the mediating influence of teacher agency, a concept explicitly examined in Dang et al.'s research within the context of Vietnamese higher education. Adopting a cultural-historical theory (CHT) perspective, the study introduces the term 'transformative agency', which refers to the process enabling the dialectic between the individual and his or her situated social and institutional practices. In other words, individuals' transformative agency emerges from their subjectivities and deliberate actions in response to new demands, both shaping and being shaped by the external environment. In the context of EMI teaching, the study illustrates that participants demonstrated their transformative agency through intentional actions such as aiding students in grasping subject content and developing critical thinking skills, employing translanguaging purposefully in EMI, and adjusting pedagogical and assessment approaches to cater to students' shifting learning needs.

Apart from the aforementioned qualitative inquiries, the SI includes one quantitative study that

delves into the psychological landscape of EMI teachers by collecting data from 107 participants across various Chinese universities. The study sheds light on the intricate dynamics related to EMI teachers' job satisfaction, specifically focusing on the interactions among self-efficacy, burnout, and language proficiency. Its distinctive contribution lies in the structural model, which not only delineates the connections between various psychological factors but also offers insights into the underlying mechanisms with practical implications for educational policies and teacher development initiatives in EMI environments.

Practical initiatives in EMI teacher development

While the above papers included in our SI depict a holistic picture of EMI teachers' inner worlds regarding their identities, emotions, agency, and job satisfaction, two additional studies took a more practical stance, elucidating specific mechanisms designed to promote EMI teacher development. The article contributed by Davinia Sánchez-García presents Mentor-ING, a research-based peer observation EMI teacher education initiative, implemented at a university in Madrid, Spain. By tracking and analysing the evolution of Mentor-ING, which has adjusted its format and content over three iterations to align with the needs of participating teachers, her study emphasises the importance of preparing teachers both psychologically and practically for EMI through cyclical and in-depth reflection and collaboration, which serve as indispensable components for effective EMI teacher education programmes.

Moving to the school context in Argentina, Darío Luis Banegas and Tessa Mearns documented the processes and outcomes of a collaborative action research project involving three teachers in Biology, History, and Literature subjects. The project included workshops on lesson planning and reflection, leading to the teachers' exploratory practices in implementing the pedagogical tool, the Language Triptych, in EMI classrooms. A significant finding from the analysis is the model's strong efficacy, integrating subject-specific language, transactional/classroom language, and language that emerges through learning, which helped the teachers address students' linguistic and cognitive needs concerning their learning and construction of disciplinary knowledge in English. In particular, the emergence of the 'language about learning' dimension stands out as a unique contribution of the study. This new dimension expands current EMI research by underscoring the importance of cultivating students' metacognitive awareness and self-regulation in their learning processes, encompassing language usage, through purposeful and explicit pedagogical interventions – a crucial element of EMI practices receiving increased research attention in recent years (Fung and Lo 2023; Zhou, Bai, and Hao 2023).

Conceptualizing an 'effective' EMI teacher in multilingual and multicultural settings

Drawing from the rich findings presented in the eight empirical papers, Pun offers an insightful commentary for the special issue. In the article, he not only analyses the unique challenges faced by EMI teachers, such as language proficiency gaps, pedagogical complexities, and emotional labour, but he further emphasises the importance of EMI teacher education that goes beyond pedagogical training to include an emotional and identity focus. Echoing his analysis and critique, we also delve into the insightful findings of the studies of the SI and other relevant literature and engage in a tentative discussion on the image of an 'effective' EMI teacher in multilingual and multicultural settings. It is important to note that we use quotation marks around 'effective' to convey that EMI teachers are constantly evolving and refining their knowledge and skills through situated practices. Thus, being 'effective' is more of an ongoing pursuit rather than a fixed achievement. Typically, we view an 'effective' EMI teacher as a dynamic professional who not only possesses essential linguistic and pedagogical competencies but also demonstrates a high level of adaptability, emotional intelligence, and a dedication to continual development despite contextual constraints and setbacks. Below, we further unpack the characteristics of an 'effective' EMI teacher in terms of three crucial dimensions: pedagogical, socio-affective, and spiritual.

Pedagogically, as emphasised by the research of Lo and Dang et al. in the SI, EMI teachers, possessing content expertise, should equip themselves with a robust subject-specific linguistic proficiency and adeptly blend language and content to effectively convey subject matter while enhancing students' English language abilities in the subject domain. Instead of adopting a lecturing, monologic approach, as often observed in EMI classrooms (e.g. Qiu and Fang 2022), teachers are expected to excel in employing a range of instructional methods, ranging from interactive activities to the purposeful use of translanguaging practices (Lu, Gu, and Lee 2023),

ensuring that every student can comprehend and engage with the content meaningfully. In addition to the content and language focuses, EMI teachers should also pay ample attention to students' self-regulated learning, as advocated by Banegas and Mearns' research. This may involve actively guiding students to develop metacognitive knowledge and skills through situation-specific and content-related tasks, aiding them in effectively monitoring and managing their own learning processes. By creating a supportive and encouraging environment, EMI teachers can empower students to take ownership of their learning journey, leading to improved academic outcomes and self-regulated learning competence.

Socio-affectively, EMI teachers should exhibit emotional intelligence by adeptly managing their own emotions and responding empathetically to the diverse emotional needs of their students (Sah 2023). Of particular significance are their heightened self-awareness of and abilities in addressing the emotional labour intrinsic to EMI teaching, mediated by the classroom, institutional, and socio-cultural ecologies as illustrated in Nazari and De Costa's study. This is particularly crucial for university-based EMI teachers, who have to juggle various demands regarding teaching, research, and publishing, prescribed by shifting and potentially conflicting institutional policies and norms (Manan and Hajar 2024; Yuan 2023b). In light of the multifaceted challenges of EMI learning in relation to language proficiency, subject matter, and classroom dynamics (Pun, Fu, and Cheung 2024), EMI teachers should consider leveraging the rich linguistic and sociocultural tapestry within their classrooms. By demonstrating a sincere curiosity about their students' diverse backgrounds and perspectives and implementing an inclusive teaching approach, they can create an emotionally safe and supportive space for students' content and language learning in specific disciplines (Hillman et al. 2023). However, this may not come along easily owing to the limited training and support EMI teachers receive in their work contexts. Consistent with the results of Sánchez-García's study, EMI teachers need to actively seek out learning resources and engage in collaboration with professionals including subject experts and language specialists, e.g. via. Joint lesson planning and classroom-based research (Wang, Yuan, and De Costa Forthcoming; Yuan 2023a), which can serve as an empowering and inspiring source for their classroom innovations and reforms.

Spiritually, EMI teachers need to engage in critical and profound reflections on their professional existence, which form the foundational pillars of their identities, agency, and resilience. From the studies of Aguilar-Pérez and Arnó-Macià as well as Li et al., it is evident that transitioning into and embodying the role of an EMI teacher is not merely about changing the language of instruction; instead, it involves a complex and demanding process of self-interpretation and self-negotiation. Particularly for an 'effective' EMI teacher, it is essential to cultivate a deep understanding of why they are involved in EMI, what personal and professional dispositions should be integrated into their EMI practices, and how they can refine and enhance their teaching effectiveness over time (Dang, Bonar, and Yao 2023). These self-inquiries are closely intertwined with the vision they uphold regarding where and how to move forward in classroom teaching and curriculum development, which inherently connects to the individuals they aspire to be – their ideal identities in EMI classrooms. With a heightened metacognitive understanding of their own identities through introspective and philosophical reflections, they are likely to become resourceful and resilient in navigating future challenges and changes in EMI practices (Farrell 2020).

Conclusion and future directions

Situated at the intersection of teacher education and applied linguistics, research on EMI teachers has only recently begun to gain momentum compared to other areas of EMI research, such as language attitudes and usage. Our special issue offers a timely viewpoint on this emergent subject. However, given the crucial role of EMI teachers in curriculum development and classroom instruction, alongside the pedagogical and socio-political intricacies embedded in EMI, we believe more systematic research is urgently needed to stimulate the research dialogue and add new knowledge about the lived experiences and reality of EMI teachers in different socio-cultural contexts. For instance, while we made a meaningful attempt to conceptualise an 'effective' EMI teacher in the above section, in-depth investigations can be carried out to examine pedagogical, socio-affective, and spiritual dimensions individually and how they may interact with each other in supporting EMI teachers' professional practice and continuing development. A critical stance is also welcome to question and challenge these dimensions and arguments raised in this piece or to add new dimensions to the tentative framework based on empirical research findings in specific disciplinary, institutional, and social contexts. In addition, as pointed out by Curle, Rose, and Yuksel (2024), the prevailing focus in current EMI literature has been on applied linguistics,

sometimes neglecting alternative disciplinary perspectives. Similar observations have been echoed in our SI, and we thus join forces in calling for interdisciplinary collaboration and theoretical exploration in future studies on EMI teacher development across various institutional and socio-cultural contexts.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

References

- Curle, S., H. Rose, and D. Yuksel. 2024. "English Medium Instruction in Emerging Contexts: An Editorial Introduction to the Special Issue." *System* 122:103262. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2024.103262>
- Dang, T. K. A., G. Bonar, and J. Yao. 2023. "Professional Learning for Educators Teaching in English-Medium- Instruction in Higher Education: A Systematic Review." *Teaching in Higher Education* 28 (4): 840–858. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2020.1863350>.
- Farrell, T. S. 2020. "Professional Development Through Reflective Practice for English-Medium Instruction (EMI) Teachers." *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 23 (3): 277–286. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2019.1612840>.
- Fung, D., and Y. Y. Lo. 2023. "Listening Strategies in the English Medium Instruction (EMI) Classroom: How Students Comprehend the Teacher Input." *System* 113:103004. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2023.103004>.
- Hillman, S., W. Li, C. Green-Eneix, and P. I. De Costa. 2023. "The Emotional Landscape of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in Higher Education." *Linguistics and Education* 75:101178. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2023.101178>.
- Lu, C., M. M. Gu, and J. C. K. Lee. 2023. "A Systematic Review of Research on Translanguaging in EMI and CLIL Classrooms." *International Journal of Multilingualism*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2023.2256775>.
- Macaro, E., M. Akincioglu, and S. Han. 2020. "English Medium Instruction in Higher Education: Teacher Perspectives on Professional Development and Certification." *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 30(1): 144–157. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijal.12272>.
- Macaro, E., S. Curle, J. Pun, J. An, and J. Dearden. 2018. "A Systematic Review of English Medium Instruction in Higher Education." *Language Teaching* 51 (1): 36–76. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444817000350>
- Macaro, E., and L. Tian. 2023. "Developing EMI Teachers Through a Collaborative Research Model." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 44 (10): 1076–1091. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2020.1862131>.
- Manan, S. A., and A. Hajar. 2024. "Understanding English Medium Instruction (EMI) Policy from the Perspectives of STEM Content Teachers in Kazakhstan." *TESOL Journal* e847. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.847>.
- Pun, J. K., X. Fu, and K. K. C. Cheung. 2024. "Language Challenges and Coping Strategies in English Medium Instruction (EMI) Science Classrooms: A Critical Review of Literature." *Studies in Science Education* 60 (1): 121–152. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057267.2023.2188704>.
- Qiu, X., and C. Fang. 2022. "Creating an Effective English-Medium Instruction (EMI) Classroom: Chinese Undergraduate Students' Perceptions of Native and non-Native English-Speaking Content Teachers and Their Experiences." *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 25 (2): 641–655. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2019.1707769>.
- Sah, P. K. 2023. "Emotions as Entanglements: Unpacking Teachers' Emotion Management and Policy Negotiation in English-Medium Instruction Programmes." *The Language Learning Journal* 51 (5): 607–620. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2023.2243954>.

- Wang, K., R. Yuan, and P. I. De Costa. Forthcoming. "A Critical Review of EMI Teacher Development in Higher Education: From 2018 to 2022." *Language Teaching*.
- Yuan, R. 2023a. "Promoting English-as-a-Medium-of-Instruction (EMI) Teacher Development in Higher Education: What Can Language Specialists do and Become?" *RELC Journal* 54 (1): 267–279. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688220980173>.
- Yuan, R. 2023b. "Taking up EMI in Higher Education: The Complexities of Teacher Emotions." *Journal of Language, Identity & Education* 22 (6): 673–681. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2021.1955362>.
- Yuan, R., and I. Lee. 2016. "'I Need to be Strong and Competent': A Narrative Inquiry of a Student-Teacher's Emotions and Identities in Teaching Practicum." *Teachers and Teaching* 22 (7): 819–841. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2016.1185819>.
- Yuan, R., M. Li, J. Peng, and X. Qiu. 2022. "English-medium Instruction (EMI) Teachers as 'Curriculum Makers' in Chinese Higher Education: A Textual Analysis." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 45 (7): 2635–2650. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2022.2061268>.
- Zhou, S., B. Bai, and Y. Hao. 2023. "Orchestrating Listening in EMI University Lectures: How Listening Proficiency and Motivation Shape Students' use of Metacognitive Listening Strategies." *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*.

