

# **English as a medium of instruction – a growing global phenomenon: phase 1**

Interim report  
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# Introduction

There is a fast-moving worldwide shift from English being taught as a foreign language (EFL) to English being the medium of instruction (EMI) for academic subjects such as science, mathematics, geography and medicine. EMI is increasingly being used in universities, secondary schools and even primary schools. This phenomenon has very important implications for the education of young people and policy decisions in non-anglophone countries. Yet little empirical research has been conducted into why and when EMI is being introduced and how it is delivered. What are the consequences of introducing EMI on teaching, learning, assessing and teacher professional development?

The British Council is working with Oxford University Department of Education's (OUDE) research centre, EMI Oxford, on a global scoping research project to try to answer some of these questions. The first phase of the project has been to map the size and shape of EMI in the world today. The full report of phase 1 will be available in November 2014. This report briefly sets out the findings of the research so far.

**The 55 countries that participated in the study\* are:**



Afghanistan	Cyprus	Iran	Netherlands	Sri Lanka
Argentina	Czech Republic	Iraq	Nigeria	Switzerland
Azerbaijan	Estonia	Israel	Pakistan	Taiwan
Bahrain	Ethiopia	Italy	Portugal	Turkey
Bangladesh	Germany	Japan	Qatar	Uganda
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Ghana	Kazakhstan	Saudi Arabia	Ukraine
Brazil	Greece	Macedonia	Senegal	United States
Bulgaria	Hong Kong	Malaysia	Serbia	Uzbekistan
China	Hungary	Mauritius	South Africa	Venezuela
Colombia	India	Montenegro	South Sudan	Vietnam
Croatia	Indonesia	Nepal	Spain	Zambia

\*Surveys were completed by British Council staff in the offices of the above countries and territories. In some cases, experts from those countries were also consulted. In addition the researchers conducted interviews with university teachers in Europe who were participating in three one-week Academic Teaching Excellence (ATE) pilot professional development courses organised by the British Council.

# Findings

The main findings from phase 1 of the research project are:

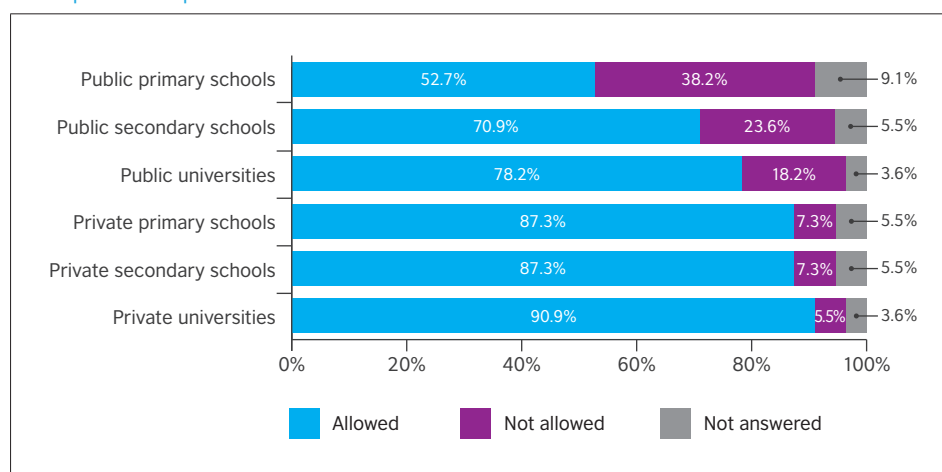
## 1. EMI is a growing global phenomenon

in both public and private education in all stages of education – primary, secondary and tertiary.

## 2. There is more EMI in private education

than in public education at all stages.

**Chart 1: Percentage of schools and universities in the public and private sector where EMI is allowed.**



Exact figures and countries are in the full report.

## 3. EMI is thought to be a passport to a global world

This is a view held by many teachers, parents and students. Policy makers consider EMI as a way to internationalise their educational offer, creating opportunities for students to join a global academic and business community.

## 4. Issues of equality and human rights are associated with EMI

Questions of equality and human rights to education arise. Some countries, e.g. Pakistan, make provision in their education policy to ensure that students from poorer backgrounds can also learn English.

## 5. Official policies and statements on EMI exist

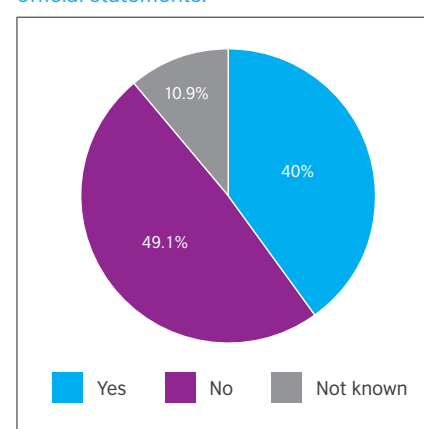
Policies on EMI were found to exist in 40 per cent of countries surveyed and 49.1 per cent said that official statements existed. This result was surprising given the reactions of teachers interviewed who were unaware of any policy.

## 6. EMI policies may not be well communicated to teachers

In our Three Countries in Europe research, teachers were overwhelmingly unaware of any policy on EMI in their universities, though they were well aware of a growth in EMI and the importance of programmes such as Erasmus.

*'There isn't a comprehensive policy, more a general trend, not set in stone.'*

**Chart 2: Existence of policies and official statements.**

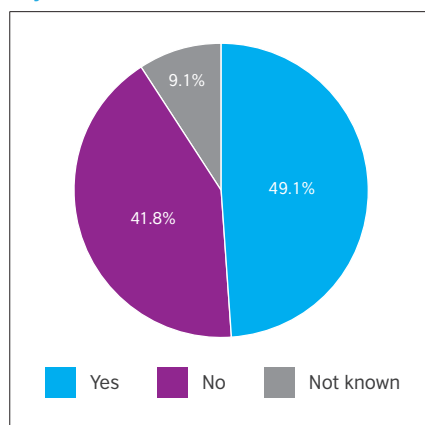


Exact figures are in the full report.

## 7. Different stakeholders have different reasons for EMI

Almost half the countries had statements that set out reasons why EMI was introduced. Reasons stated ranged from developing language learning skills, producing bilingual students, improving knowledge of a target culture and opening up possibilities for students to work and study abroad, through to spreading the country's own culture throughout the world and political reasons of nation-building and aligning a country with English-speaking neighbours.

**Chart 3: Why is EMI introduced: any official statements?**



Statements are included in the full report.

## 8. For administrators, EMI represents internationalisation and survival

Administrators of universities found EMI an attractive proposition for many reasons, including promotion, globalisation and financial survival.

*'For the university central offices it's financial, they want to promote the university more. It's a local university; they want to attract students from abroad.'*

The ability to teach a class of mixed nationalities means that universities can attract high fee-paying international students and produce high-quality research papers in English, helping them move up in the international rankings.

## 9. For teachers, EMI is more idealistic

Teachers' views of EMI were more idealistic: EMI was thought to be a way to improve communication, to exchange ideas and create relations between countries, a way of facilitating world peace. For home students, EMI was seen as a key to success, a way to open doors. Teachers in Europe were very much aware of the Bologna process, which enables movement within European universities. English was considered the new Latin, a world language that could enable movement in academia and business.

EMI was a personal challenge, a way to improve personally and professionally as teachers and advance their careers. Not only students but teachers too can become international in an EMI context.

## 10. EMI is in a state of flux

Nearly 62 per cent of countries reported that they had experienced EMI policy changes over the past ten years. Not all changes are in the same direction: EMI is being promoted, rejected, refined or reversed in different countries. See examples in the full report.

## 11. EMI is being promoted

Countries such as Croatia and Uzbekistan are prioritising EMI to increase international mobility. In Uzbekistan, for example, the presidential decree of 10 December 2012, encourages English to be taught, spoken, and used for business communication at all levels and at any institution, be it journalism, economics or ministry staff.

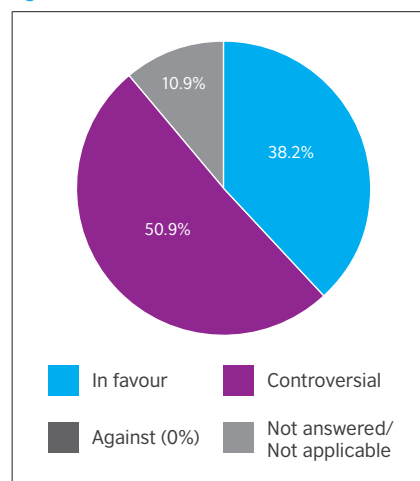
## 12. EMI is being rejected

EMI is a controversial and sensitive issue. Some countries were determined to protect a home, unifying language(s) or education system. Israel, Senegal and Venezuela, for example, were reported as not allowing EMI in public education. In Italy, higher education institutions had fought and won a battle against EMI.

## 13. EMI is being refined or reversed

The EMI situation is complex and mixed trends could be seen in some countries due to political reasons, teacher protests, differences between public and private sectors or fears that students were performing badly. The Hungarian government, for example, was concerned that EMI was affecting only a small number of learners (equal opportunities), and was costly to operate. Qatar, which switched to EMI in public schools and universities during the reform era, reported a possible movement away from EMI. A list of countries with mixed trends is included in the full report.

**Chart 4: Public opinion: in favour, against, or controversial?**



Explanation in the full report.

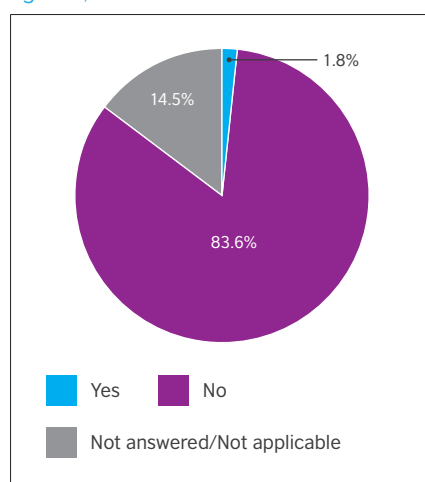
## 14. EMI is controversial in public opinion

EMI was thought to be controversial in the public's opinion for political and pedagogical reasons including the desire to protect national languages and cultures, and a lack of clearly thought through policies. EMI could be divisive and create inequality. Concern was expressed that not all teachers were competent or able to teach through EMI with a possible generation gap; older teachers not able to teach through EMI. Students might suffer too, finding it too demanding to learn many languages and not able to fully comprehend the academic input.

### 15. Lack of EMI qualified teachers

83 per cent of countries responded that they did not have enough qualified teachers. This is a huge cause for concern.

**Chart 5: Public opinion: in favour, against, or controversial?**



Exact figures are in the full report

### 16. Lack of clear guidelines on how to deliver education through EMI

Although 27 per cent of countries have some guidelines about how to teach through EMI, 60 per cent do not have any.

### 17. Lack of teaching resources

Difficulties were found resourcing EMI exams, securing the appropriate number of qualified teachers and providing the learning materials and textbooks.

### 18. Lack of guidance on code-switching

76 per cent of countries have no written guidelines specifying whether or not English should be the only language used in the classroom. Principled code-switching could be very beneficial in an EMI situation.

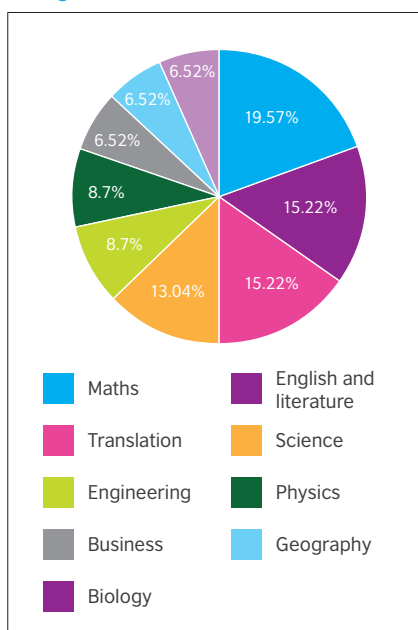
### 19. Use of home language

Questions abound as to the use and future of the home language. Given the lack of qualified EMI teachers, the home language may well still be being used most of the time in a supposedly EMI context. Or, if English only is being used, and a teacher is not proficient, what effect does that have on learning? What will happen to the home language if English becomes the language of learning? Examples of countries where guidance is given as to the use of the home language are included in the full report.

### 20. Subjects that are taught through EMI

Guidance is given in some countries as to which subjects should be taught in English, but the basis for that decision is not yet clear. Maths, English literature, translation, science, engineering, physics, business, geography, biology, agriculture, chemistry, arts, history, medicine, international relations, regional studies and religious education were all quoted as subjects taught through EMI.

**Chart 6: Subjects taught/assessed in English**



### 21. Exams and assessment are a problematic area in EMI. Exams were an issue for teachers

Lectures were sometimes in English while exams were in L1 due to university policy, student pressure or the law. Teachers expressed the need to be able to write exams and learn how to write a clear and comprehensive test in English. Many questions are raised: what language should exams be in? What form should they take? Do teachers have a sufficiently high level of English to write and mark exams? What is being assessed: the English or the subject content? See Rea-Dickens\* – *English medium examining of school subject knowledge: perpetuating social and economic exclusion* – for an example of how teaching in the home language and assessing in English may lead to failure for the majority of learners.

### 22. Age at which EMI starts

Traditionally, students have learnt English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at school, i.e. English in its own right as a subject. At what point should EMI take over from EFL, with English becoming a vehicle or medium of instruction of another academic subject and not the sole objective or even the objective at all? Some policies set out which subjects were to be taught through EMI and at what age EMI should start. See examples of policies in full report.

### 23. Lack of a standard level of English for EMI teachers

Most teachers who were expected to teach through EMI were not native speakers of English and it is as yet unclear what the requirements are with regard to English language competence. Teachers were unaware of a language level, test or qualification for EMI teachers. They had been nominated to teach in EMI because they had been abroad, spoke well or had volunteered. Teachers would welcome a standard level of proficiency in English for EMI.

\* [www.education.ox.ac.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Pauline-Rea-Dickens-presentation.pdf](http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Pauline-Rea-Dickens-presentation.pdf)

#### 24. Is EMI beneficial to students?

It was definitely thought that EMI was beneficial to students and more specifically, that students made progress in English when they studied through EMI.

The students would improve their English by being exposed to it, by having to express themselves and by reading and writing.

*'For sure yes, they will be exposed to more input, relevant input.'*

#### 25. Role of the teacher

Another issue is the changing role of the teacher in an EMI context. EMI teachers firmly believed that teaching English was not their job. They did not consider themselves responsible for their students' level of English. They did not see themselves as language teachers in any way. We may ask how students are supposed to understand lectures and classes if the EMI teacher does not help with their knowledge of English by paraphrasing, by teaching subject-specific vocabulary and technical terms.

*'I'm not interested in their English, I'm interested in their comprehension of micro-biogenetics.'*

If subject teachers do not consider it their job to improve the students' English, whose job is it?

#### 26. Role of language centres and EFL teachers

This raises the question of language centres and EFL teachers and what role they will play in an EMI context. Does EMI signal the end of the EFL teacher?

There was little support for EMI teachers in this study from language centres. English language centres and EFL teachers were unknown to the subject teachers. However, there are examples in France and Spain where language centres within grandes écoles and universities are very supportive in helping lecturers prepare, practise and improve their lectures in English.

#### 27. Professional development

Teachers were found to have limited self-taught or no previous knowledge of the implications of EMI in the class or lecture room. EMI might well involve changing from a teacher-led style to a more interactive dynamic, and yet few teachers had considered the idea that EMI was not simply a matter of translating course material and slides from L1 to L2. Teachers on the ATE courses were aware that they faced language problems when teaching in EMI but were not sure what they were. An EMI teacher in a school or university that has successfully attracted international students is faced with a mixed international class of students, many of whom do not speak the teacher's L1. At the very least, that teacher will surely need to be able to handle the English language, but they will also need to present concepts and ideas to students of various L1s, negotiate input and check comprehension while taking account of all the cultural differences in the room and potentially different language levels. Initial Teacher Education programmes and Professional Development programmes appear to be ignoring the need to have a substantial EMI pedagogy component.

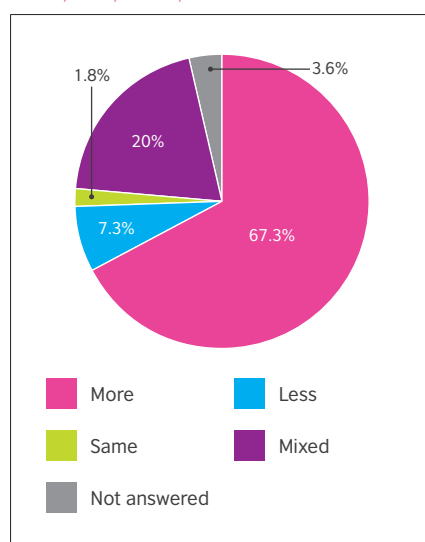
# Conclusion and looking ahead

EMI is continuing to gallop ahead. Some parents see EMI as a way of enabling their children to join a social elite and partake of the benefits that can bring. Pressure on schools and universities in an international market place is great and some teachers see EMI as a challenge for them and a key to success for their students. Some stakeholders remain unsure:

*'Other universities hurry to copy us, but they don't really know what is the objective of this hurry.'*

The future trend in the view of 55 countries is overwhelmingly for more EMI.

**Chart 7: General trend of EMI: more, less, same, or mixed?**



*Exact figures are in the full report*

Research needs to be conducted into levels of English competence that will enable EMI teachers to provide quality instruction, language assessment systems for both students and teachers, whether or not the learning of academic subjects is improved by EMI and how classroom interaction changes as the medium of instruction changes.

The British Council and Oxford University Department of Education will continue researching the developing phenomenon of EMI. Phase 2 will involve studying clusters of countries in more detail to unpack some of the findings made to date. An online global survey 'English Medium Instruction: A Global View of EMI' will investigate the views and opinions of teachers around the world from May to October 2014.

The overarching research aim is to further our knowledge and understanding of EMI crucial for the development of language teachers, EMI teachers and educational materials and assessment development.



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