STUDENT PROFICIENCY STANDARDS, ADMISSION CRITERIA, AND LANGUAGE SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

Dr. Kari Sahan

Workshop 2: Improving Students' English

Thursday 13 January

OUR RESEARCH TEAM

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BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

What is English medium instruction?

- EMI refers to **"the use of the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English."** (Macaro et al., 2018, p. 37)

  - Ex: Physics, psychology, or international relations in Taiwan

- EMI is similar to other types of content & language educational approaches but with a key difference:

  - Main focus = content subject

Continuum of approaches to language and content teaching (Galloway & Rose, 2020)

Language → ELT → CBLT/CBI → CLIL/ICLHE → EMI → Content
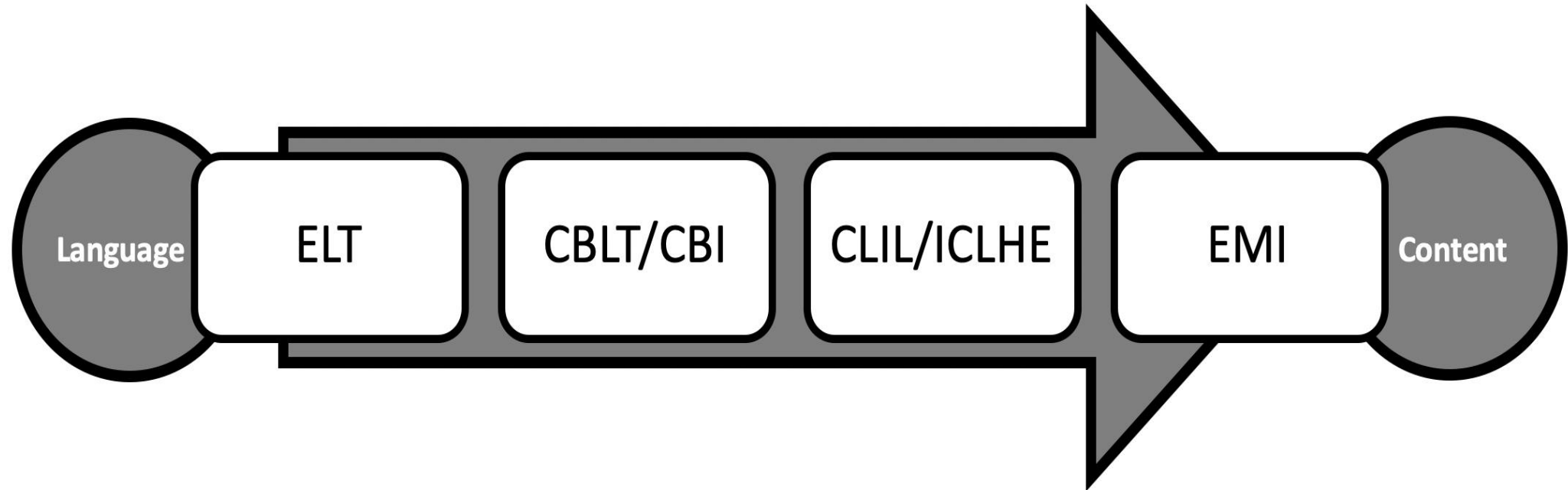
"In EMI courses English is the conduit through which content subjects are delivered: students acquire knowledge of content material while, **ideally, also improving their English language proficiency.** Key to distinguishing EMI from other methods is the ancillary role of English language development—**a side effect of instruction rather than an explicit pedagogical target.**" (Briggs & Smith, 2017, p. 28)

LANGUAGE LEARNING & EMI

Does EMI improve students' English?

- Many institutions see EMI as a quick and easy way to improve students' English proficiency (Hamid, Nguyen, & Baldauf, 2013)

  - **'Two birds with one stone'** (Rose, Curle, Aizawa, & Thompson, 2020)

- However, **"the relationship between EMI and language development is tenuous"** (Rose & Galloway, 2019)

  - Lack of conclusive research on whether or how much students' English improves through EMI study (see Macaro et al., 2018)

STUDENTS' LANGUAGE CHALLENGES

EMI comes with **challenges** for students:

- Different **models** (Macaro, 2018; Richards & Pun, 2021) and **levels of English language support** offered to students (Galloway and Rose, 2021)

- Even with support, students continue to experience **linguistic challenges** (Kamasak et al., 2021; Aizawa & Rose, 2019)

- Access may be restricted to students with high levels of English proficiency, leading to **social inequalities** (Hamid et al., 2013; Sultana, 2014)

Support structures: How to support students? What types of requirements?

DISCUSSION QUESTION

What **English proficiency requirements** (if any) are in place for EMI students in your university context?

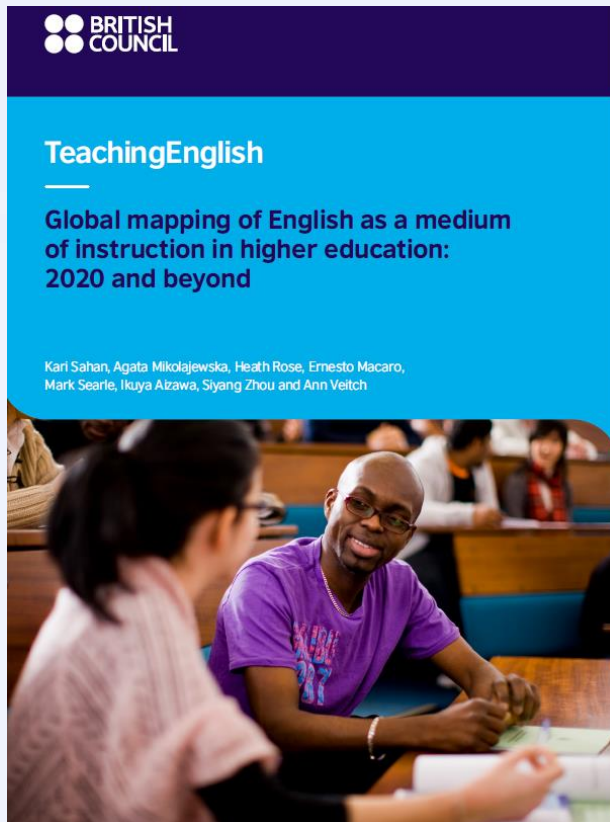## STEPS:

1
Think and make notes on your own

2
Talk to a partner or in a group of 3

3
Share your ideas in the chat

THE STUDY:
AIMS & OVERVIEW

- Main aim: to investigate the current situation with regards to **the introduction and expansion of EMI in HE**

- Focus on emerging contexts: included **52 countries** designated as recipient countries on the Official Development Assistance (ODA) list

- Today: **focus on EMI students**

THE STUDY: METHODS

Stage 1

Country responses
- Open-ended questionnaires distributed to 'informed respondents' of 52 ODA countries – Responses from 45 countries

Stage 2

Website analysis
- Content analysis conducted on HEI websites, with a sample of two HEIs per country – in total, 104 HEI websites from 52 countries

Stage 3

Survey of key players analysis
- Online survey distributed to key institutional players at HEIs in the 52 ODA countries – Responses from 227 universities in 42 countries

COUNTRY SAMPLE

Countries (N=52)

- British Council and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) priority countries

- Selected to represent the diversity of countries on the ODA recipient list

- Included a range linguistic landscapes and socio-cultural contexts

Included Countries

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Figure: Countries included in the sample
*Map is licensed under CC-BY-SA 4.0

FINDINGS:
MAIN THEMES

English proficiency requirements

Language support

International students

ENGLISH PROFICIENCY REQUIREMENTS

WERE THERE ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY REQUIREMENTS?

- **English language proficiency requirements** were fairly common

- **Stage 2:** Admission criteria reported on websites (n=96; 92.3%)
  - 54.8% included an English proficiency requirement for *all* EMI programmes
  - 7.7% had an English proficiency requirement for *some* EMI programmes

- **Stage 3:** Survey responses reported English language requirements for:
  - All undergraduate students (n=107, 51.7%)
  - Some undergraduate students, e.g. international students (n=25, 12.1%)
  - No requirement for UG (n=72, 34.8%)

WHAT TYPES OF REQUIREMENTS?

- Requirements were **university- and context-specific**

- Stage 2 & Stage 3:
  - **International exam scores**, e.g., IELTS or TOEFL (*most common*)
  - In-house exams
  - Secondary school scores (e.g., in Sub-Saharan Africa)
  - English part of entrance exam (e.g., Ukraine, Thailand, Tunisia)
  - Showing a CEFR level
  - General requirements, e.g. 'good English'

WHAT EXAM SCORES?

- International exam requirements varied across HEIs:
  - Score range: IELTS 4.5–7.0 and TOEFL iBT 56–100 *(Stage 2)*

  - *For example*: **Bandung Institute of Technology in Indonesia** appeared to require exam scores of TOEFL iBT 56+ and IELTS 5+ from postgraduates, while the **Lebanese American University in Lebanon** required applicants to submit scores of TOEFL iBT 80+ and IELTS 6.5+.

- Generally, minimum English proficiency level required was B1 or B2 for UGs

WHAT EXAM SCORES?

Table: Test scores required for entry to *undergraduate* EMI programmes (Stage 3)

Test	Mean score reported	Minimum score reported	Maximum score reported	CEFR equivalent of mean score
TOEIC	625	500	750	B1
TOEFL iBT	68	30	100	B1
TOEFL PBT	454	213	550	A2
IELTS	5.5	3.0	7.0	B2

A2   C1

STUDENTS: WHAT ABOUT POSTGRADUATES?

- Overall, similar **types of requirements** for PGs but PG requirements **generally higher** than UGs:

  - *For examples:* **International Black Sea University in Georgia** required an English proficiency level of B1 for Bachelor programmes, B2 for Master's programmes, and C1 for PhD programmes.
  - *For example:* **Ramkhamhaeng University in Thailand** required a minimum TOEFL score of 65 for UGs (B1) and 75 for PGs (B2).
  - *For example:* **Al-Farabi Kazakh National University in Kazakhstan** required PGs to submit language scores for admission but not UGs

- Generally, minimum English proficiency level required was B2 for PGs

  - Range: IELTS 3.0–7.0 and TOEFL iBT 30–90 *(Stage 3)*

ENGLISH LANGUAGE SUPPORT

IS LANGUAGE SUPPORT OFFERED?

- **English language support** was also fairly common
- **Stage 2:** English language support for students reported on about two-thirds of the HEI websites (n=68; 65.4%)

Type of support	% of HEIs	Examples
Preparatory or intensive language courses	24%	Turkey, Zimbabwe
General English or skills-based courses	32%	Pakistan, Malaysia
Academic language courses	22%	Botswana, Jordan
Optional language center resources	16%	Kazakhstan, China
Optional paid courses	4%	Ukraine
Exam-based language courses	2%	Vietnam

o Nearly half (n=43; 41.3%) offered local language support for international students

HOW WAS LANGUAGE SUPPORT OFFERED?

- **Stage 3:** The most common forms of language support for students were:
  - In-session language classes (71.8%)
  - Self-access study resources (e.g. language lab, supplementary resources; 66.1%)
  - Preparatory English courses before starting university studies (48.0%)
  - A writing center (25.6%)
- Regional differences: **self-access support** was relatively more common in East Asia

- Other forms of language support reported by respondents included:
  - External language tutoring (e.g. China)
  - Access to university libraries (e.g. Uzbekistan, Argentina, South Africa)
  - Teaching assistants (e.g. Zimbabwe, Bangladesh)
  - Speaking club (e.g. Kazakhstan, Brazil)

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ENROLMENT

WHAT ABOUT INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS?

- **Stage 1**: About half (n=22) respondents reported substantial numbers of international students in their country, **generally from neighbouring countries**

- **Stage 2**: 65.4% of HEI websites had an international students' page

- **Stage 3**: 75.0% of HEIs had international students on EMI programmes
  - Mainly (or *only*) from regional/neighbouring and other ODA recipient countries
  - Average = 16.2% of students on EMI programmes were international students
- However: at 24.9% of HEIs, international students **< 1% of students** on EMI courses
  - At 50.3% of HEIs, international students **< 2% of students** on EMI courses
  - At 8.3% of HEIs, international students > 50% of students on EMI courses

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Student proficiency criteria:

- Generally B1/B2 for UGs
- Slightly higher for PGs
- About 1/3 of HEIs reported no ELP requirement
- Vary across HEIs

Language Support:

- Variety of support options offered
- In-session & General English/skills-based courses most common
- Self-access resources relatively more common in East Asia

International students:

- Mainly from neighboring countries
- Many programs had relatively low levels international students (<2%)

KEY TAKEAWAYS

For students' language assessment:

- Most HEIs had a form of language proficiency assessment in place, often requiring an international English language exam score
- However, **the appropriateness of this threshold needs to be examined:** Do students still experience language-related challenges above the threshold? (see Aizawa & Rose, 2019; Aizawa et al., 2020)
- And **the appropriateness of this type of assessment needs to evaluated:** Do these exams reflect students' language needs in EMI? (see e.g., Dimova, 2020)

KEY TAKE-AWAYS

For international student enrolment:

- The majority of international students on EMI programmes tended come from **neighboring countries**

- And at many HEIs international students comprise **a relatively small proportion** of students enrolled to EMI programmes.

- These findings **challenges assumptions of EMI and the internationalization of HE:**

  - EMI is *not necessarily* associated with attracting international students

  - Most EMI programs tend to cater to **predominantly local students**

CONCLUDING REMARKS

- **More research is needed** on appropriate assessment methods and thresholds for measuring students' English language proficiency for EMI
- **More support is needed** on EMI programs, even after students have met admission criteria
- **There is no one-size-fits-all model** of EMI: HEIs should determine what works best in their unique context

THANK YOU
FOR LISTENING

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