

## **Mini Research Project Proposal**

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### **1. Title:**

Investigating the Beliefs and Practices of Teachers from Different Backgrounds in Using EMI in Chinese Tertiary Context

### **2. Aims of the Investigation**

As for the three existing types of EMI teachers in China, namely, 1) native English speakers; 2) non-native English teachers, and 3) non-native content teacher, this mini-research project aims to investigate their respective beliefs and practices in using EMI in Chinese tertiary context.

In short, there are three research questions to explore:

RQ1: What are the three types of EMI teachers' beliefs on the role of EMI in Chinese tertiary context?

RQ2: What are the three types of EMI teachers' beliefs and practices on EMI teaching methodology in Chinese tertiary context?

RQ3: What are the three types of EMI teachers' beliefs on institution support in terms of EMI teacher development in Chinese tertiary context?

### **3. The rationale and main conceptual themes for the investigation**

#### **3.1 The rationale**

As higher education (HE) in the world tends to become more opened and internationalized, universities globally are increasingly adopting English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in their courses curriculum and teaching in a large number of disciplines and courses, serving mainly as a means to overcome language obstacles for the international students and for the improvement of international competences of domestic students (Arnó-Macià and Aguilar-Pérez, 2018). With the increasing booming of its economy, China is of no exception. In Chinese tertiary context, the degree of internationalization is listed as one of the integral factors or indicators in evaluating the quality and competitiveness of a university by the state-governing body, the Education Department. Therefore, Chinese universities, especially state-owned ones, take significant effort to promote EMI teaching and an increasing number of teachers are involved into the EMI courses. The EMI teachers in China come from three sources, or have three identities, though in different percentage. They are 1) native English speakers, 2) non-native English teachers, and 3) non-native content

teacher. This means, for the same module or course, it might be taught by one type of them. Due to the essence of content orientation of EMI courses, the majority part of EMI teachers in Chinese universities are the content teachers of different disciplines from different faculties, who are qualified and certificated to teach the modules within one discipline in their own first language, but they are found to be not fully prepared in EMI teaching due to a shortage of English linguistic and pedagogical competence (Dearden and Macaro, 2016) and the reality of emphasizing researching productivity in most Higher Education institutions leads to insufficient concern or support to equipping non-native content EMI teachers with adequate competence (Macaro and Han, 2020). Besides, there are other two types of EMI teachers, though only the minority compared with the first, should not be ignored, because their characteristics and challenges in EMI teaching might be hidden by most content teachers. Therefore, it is of significance to study three types of EMI teacher development through the exploration of teachers' beliefs and practices.

This proposed project study is relevant to this module due to two reasons. First, since EMI is a newly emergent field in EFL setting with the background of HE internationalization in China, this study is supposed to shed light on EMI teacher (whatever the backgrounds) training and development, especially those little-noticed non-native English teachers; Second, previous studies found that teacher beliefs might influence the teacher practices in the classroom and beyond, resulting in either positive or negative consequences, it is significant to unveil what's behind the scene of EMI class from different types of EMI teachers.

## 3.2 Main Conceptual Themes

### 3.2.1 EMI Teaching

Gaining increasing attention, EMI is defined as '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). Although EMI is believed to be content-oriented, the role of English as medium in teaching cannot be underestimated, since 'content learning is deeply embedded in the acquisition and use of language' (Yuan, Chen, and Peng, 2022, p.234). Some research found that the key role language plays in EMI teaching. Heron et al. (2024) argues that practice around language support can provide a way forward in explicating good practice in EMI. However, the beliefs and practices of EMI teachers may vary due to the varieties of English background. Firstly, for above-mentioned non-native content teachers, they often use the lecturing mode of complete knowledge transmission in classroom teaching without or almost without meta-linguistic awareness, worrying about exposing their lack of English proficiency (e.g., in terms of speaking, listening and grammar) in front of students (Yuan, Chen, and Peng, 2022). This problem of unpreparedness or incompetence will have negative impact on both students and teachers themselves (Macaro et al., 2018). Secondly, for the non-native university English teachers who involve EMI teaching, their advantage in English language knowledge and proficiency does help the content transmission,

but their shortage of expertise in the assigned course and content could be problematic. Thirdly, as for those international EMI teachers with English as their native languages, they might encounter different obstacles to localize and meet the course requirements. While recent years have witnessed the increasing focus on EMI related researching, which mainly focus on teaching approaches, interaction modes, and learning outcomes (Macaro et al. 2018), there is found to be a lack of attention to EMI teachers of different types, who play an irreplaceable role in shaping students' EMI learning experience and results (Yuan, Chen and Peng, 2022), which calls for more studies.

### 3.2.2 Teacher Beliefs

Teacher belief is defined by Kagan (1992, p. 66) as 'the implicit assumptions about students, learning, classroom, and the subject matter to be taught' held by teachers. As for the conceptualization of teachers' beliefs, previous research in both language education and teacher education has depicted teachers' beliefs as complex, situated and dynamic, which are shaped and reshaped by their personal histories and situated socio-cultural contexts (Borg, 2015). In other words, teachers' beliefs are formed and affected by multi-faceted factors.

In terms of the correlation between teachers' beliefs and practices, the former is believed to serve as a filter with a powerful impact on teachers' classroom thinking and practice (Borg, 2003) as well as the students' academic outcomes (Sabarwal, Abu-Jawdeh and Kapoor, 2022). However, teachers' practices do not always accord with their beliefs. Borg (2003) found a potential gap between teachers' beliefs and practice, which has a negative impact on their classroom teaching and constant development. The gap may be caused by varied reasons in their working contexts, such as a regulated curriculum, exam-oriented system, information technology anxiety, and limited institutional support (Bai, Wang, and Chai 2019; Borg 2015). The potential problem caused by this gap is that when teachers' practices are contradictory with their beliefs, they are likely to suffer frustration and depression, which may make them less-motivated and committed, resulting in negative professional development, especially within the HE context of 'publish-or-perish' (Yuan, 2017).

There are some studies such as Yuan, Chen, and Peng (2022) studying the EMI teachers who are content teachers from different faculties and disciplines, but the EMI teachers who are native English speakers and non-native English teachers are little noticed. It is worthwhile to focus on distinct types of EMI teachers' beliefs to unveil what's behind EMI teaching and shed light on the developments of distinct types.

## 4. Research Methodology

To consider the two components of research: philosophical assumptions and distant methods and procedures mentioned by Creswell, J.W. and Creswell, J.D. (2023), this study is to understand and interpret the EMI teaching through teachers' beliefs and reported practices, the paradigm of the present research is interpretivism and therefore qualitative research methods will be utilized.

### 4.1 Research Setting and Participants

#### 4.1.1 Settings

L University in the northwest part of China will be selected as the setting of the research. It is one of the top universities in China within list of State 211 Project and 985 Project. Since it is prestigious in its internationally known science and engineering research and teaching, L university has paid constant attention to promoting internationalization and enhancing its competitiveness. It does not only try to attract high-quality international scholars but also offer state-funded scholarships to international students and support domestic students to study abroad. For the past three decades, there were over 4,000 international students enrolled and currently there are more than 700 registered international students. To satisfy the learning needs from both international and domestic students, LU has promoted EMI in different programs at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels over the past years. While it tried to recruit international staff to offer various EMI courses (especially in those China-Foreign cooperative programs), it also encouraged Chinese staff (non-native content teachers and non-native English teachers) to teach using EMI. Thus, LU can serve as a right sample to investigate distinct types of EMI teachers' beliefs within the context of internationalization of higher education.

#### 4.1.2 The Participants

Approximately 10 research participants from three types will be recruited by purposive sampling through the support of the Teacher Development Center of LU, which is responsible for organizing teaching training and researching for its staff. According to Campbell et al. (2020, p.653), purposive sampling is widely used for its 'better matching of the sample to the aims and objectives of the research, thus improving the rigor of the study and trustworthiness of the data and results.' This will be achieved by emailing to invite the EMI teachers, differing in disciplines, professional titles, faculties, work experience, EMI teaching experience and English language background ((native-speaker/ non-native content teacher/non-native English teacher)), to join the study on a fully voluntary basis. The purposes and whole procedure of the study will be informed to all the participants through email.

**Table for Participants Information**

| Discipline | Gender | Professional Titles | Experience of EMI Teaching (years) | Experience of Work (years) | English Language Background (native-speaker/ non-native content teacher/non-native English teacher) |
|------------|--------|---------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|            |        |                     |                                    |                            |                                                                                                     |

#### 4.2 Data Collection and Analysis

#### 4.2.1 Data Collection

There are two phases to collect the data: the first is reflective writing and the second is follow-up interviews.

Phase 1: All the participants will be sent instructions for reflective writing by email. They are asked to write about the following five aspects: 1) their personal understanding of EMI and 2) its possible roles and effects in students' academic learning and English learning, 3) introduction to their course curriculum, 4) description of their regular practices in an EMI lesson, and 5) reflection on the challenges and the support they might need for improving their EMI teaching. This phase will last three weeks so all the participants are expected to reflect in a deeper and calmer way. Both the instructions and reflective writing are written in both Chinese (for non-native content teachers and English teacher) and English (for native English speaker).

Phase 2: Based on the initial reflective writing data, four or five participants will be selected for the follow-up face-to-face conversational interviews. These semi-structured interviews will ask the interviewees to further explain and clarify their reflections and collect the extra answers of 1) their motivations of EMI teaching, 2) their EMI teaching philosophy and featured classroom teaching strategies and practices as well as the 3) their expectations from their stakeholders (e.g., faculty or university). The approximately one-hour-interviews will be conducted at public settings, in mandarin Chinese (for non-native content teachers and English teacher) and English (for native English speaker) and audio-recorded with the permission of the participants. All the interviews will be carefully transcribed.

#### 4.2.2 Data Analysis

Due to the nature of qualitative study, all the data will be reviewed, categorized, and coded, in response to the above-mentioned three Research Questions. To ensure the validity of the research, two coders (the present researcher and another colleague specialized in qualitative research) will conduct data analysis. For the data from native English EMI teachers, their data will be translated into Chinese. Before and during coding the data, a consensus on data interpretation will be reached through the discussions of the two coders (Yuan, Chen, and Peng, 2022).

#### 4.3 Ethical Issues Consideration

The research will be conducted under the ethical guidelines of both British Education Research Association (BERA) and L University. Before the study, an ethical approval from the L University authority, all the participants and their faculties involved will be sought. All the participants are fully voluntary to attend and have the right to end at any time. The personal information of participants and research data (either reflective writing materials or audio-recording files) will be maintained confidentially. Their anonymity will be ensured.

### 5. Proposed Timetable of the Project

The whole mini project is planned to complete within 12 months, which is showed as the following table:

| Planned Phases                                                 | Planned Length (months) |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Literature Review/Research Design                              | 1 month                 |
| Research Consent Application/Participants Selection            | 1 month                 |
| Reflective Writing and Reflective Data Collection and Analysis | 2 months                |
| Interviews and Interviewing Data Transcribing                  | 2 months                |
| Data Coding and Analysis                                       | 2 months                |
| Writing up Draft                                               | 2 months                |
| Draft Revision and finalization                                | 2 months                |

**Note:** it is the tentative table and might be flexible due to the real conditions.

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