

## DOCTORAL THESIS

# University Teachers' Perceptions of English Medium Instruction in a Sino-UK Transnational University in China

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## ABSTRACT

With higher education being more internationalized, both English medium instruction (EMI) and transnational universities have been the outcomes in the current tertiary education in China. Previous studies, however, have indicated that EMI practice was not always successful, and perceptions from EMI stakeholders varied. Informed by Spolsky's (2004, 2009) language policy and Gal's (2009) language ideology frameworks, this year-long study investigated the university teachers' perceptions towards a transnational university and its students, EMI practices, and language policy and language support at a Sino-UK transnational EMI university in mainland China. In order to gain a deeper insight into the perceptions of the EMI university teachers in the focal university, the research adopted a case study approach consisting of multiple methods, namely observations, individual interviews, and document analysis. Through data triangulation, a more comprehensive understanding of the issue under study was provided.

The findings of perceptions from EMI university teachers have shown that there was a complex interplay of the three-pronged components in Spolsky's language policy theoretical framework in terms of language practices, language beliefs/ideology, and language management. As transnational universities strive to be more internationalized, EMI was perceived by the participating teachers as a crucial element in teaching, learning and research. Thus, EMI was particularly

emphasized and widely practiced, reflecting the university's aim to internationalize its education. On the other hand, the hardship that the teachers experienced suggested that EMI practices were not without problems. In order to overcome the difficulty in teaching through English, teachers adopted various means to enhance teaching and learning, and these teaching strategies were unique in the EMI classes, echoed with distinctive characteristics of the focal transnational university.

Although the study witnessed the overt and official efforts to manage the implementation in its EMI practices, including language policy and language support, the findings indicate these measures did not always achieve their intended targets. For instance, the restrictive nature of mandated EMI language policy did not take the teaching practicality issue into consideration. After all, it was unwise to deny the pedagogical role of first language (L1) that facilitated teaching and learning in the EMI classes. Findings also reveal that both the university teachers and their students did not receive sufficient language support to complete their instruction and coursework in the senior years respectively. More specifically, there were a large number of second language (L2) content teachers who lacked the linguistic proficiency to successfully deliver EMI classes and, thus, language support should be promoted for them in the hope of enhancing the effectiveness of English instruction. Finally, the study suggested that further fine-tuning of the language policy as well as the adjustments of language support should be made more contextually feasible.

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