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## Forum on “The emotional landscape of English medium instruction (EMI) in higher education”

Sara Hillman  
*Texas A&M University at Qatar*

Wendy Li  
*Duke Kunshan University*

Özgür Şahan  
*University of Southampton*

Kari Sahan  
*University of Reading*

Indika Liyanage  
*United International College*

*See next page for additional authors*

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**Author First name, Last name, Institution**

Sara Hillman, Wendy Li, Özgür Şahan, Kari Sahan, Indika Liyanage, Tiefu Zhang, Rui Yuan, Sarah Hopkyns, Christina Gkonou, and Pramod K. Sah



## Forum on “The emotional landscape of English medium instruction (EMI) in higher education”

Sara Hillman<sup>a,\*</sup>, Wendy Li<sup>b</sup>, Özgür Şahan<sup>c</sup>, Kari Sahan<sup>d</sup>, Indika Liyanage<sup>e</sup>, Tiefu Zhang<sup>f</sup>, Rui Yuan<sup>g</sup>, Sarah Hopkyns<sup>h</sup>, Christina Gkonou<sup>i</sup>, Pramod K. Sah<sup>az</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Texas A&M University at Qatar, Doha, Qatar

<sup>b</sup> Duke Kunshan University, Kunshan, Jiangsu Province, China

<sup>c</sup> University of Southampton, Southampton, UK

<sup>d</sup> University of Reading, Reading, UK

<sup>e</sup> Beijing Normal University-Hong Kong Baptist University United International College, Zhuhai, China

<sup>f</sup> University of Electronic Science and Technology of China, Chengdu, China

<sup>g</sup> University of Macau, Macau, China

<sup>h</sup> Zayed University, Abu Dhabi, UAE

<sup>i</sup> University of Essex, Colchester, UK

<sup>az</sup> University of Calgary, Calgary, Canada

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### 1. Introduction

The studies presented in this special issue on the emotional landscape of English medium instruction (EMI) in higher education settings offer valuable insights into the variety of emotions that get entangled in policies, discourses, and practices in local EMI contexts, and the emotional effects of EMI on various stakeholders, such as students, teachers, and administrators. It is also important to contemplate 1) how the research findings can be applied in EMI higher education settings in order to develop more emotionally supportive and socially just (De Costa et al., 2021) EMI environments and 2) how to move forward with the research agenda on emotions and EMI. With these questions in mind, the contributors to the special issue were asked to review one another's studies and briefly respond to the prompt listed below. The prompt was created and the responses organized and edited by Sara Hillman and Wendy Li. The authorship order for this piece was based on the order in which the editors arranged the contributors' responses.

*How can the studies in this special issue be applied in English-medium instruction (EMI) higher education settings and what further research needs to be done?*

### 2. Özgür Şahan and Kari Sahan

English skills have been compared to the “fabled Aladdin's lamp, which permits one to open, as it were, the linguistic gates to international business, technology, science and travel” (Kachru, 1986, p. 1). The supposed power of English to open doors in a globalized world has, in part, fuelled the rise of EMI programmes at universities around the world. However, the extent to which EMI students actually benefit from possessing this ‘fabled lamp’ remains empirically unknown. When we consider research in EMI higher education settings, we see that the focus has largely been on challenges to teaching and learning, classroom practices, and learning outcomes. While this focus on *learning* is certainly an important one – since the quality of learning should not be sacrificed when the language of instruction has changed – research has largely neglected the broader student experience and students' *wellbeing*. Emotions research in EMI higher education settings has the ability to address this by approaching students as people rather than simply as participants. In other words, critical research on EMI students' emotions highlights the holistic and human experience of learning, reminding us that students should not just do well in their EMI classes but *be well* throughout their EMI university studies.

The findings from research presented in this special issue – including Sah's (this issue) work in Nepal and our work in Turkey (Şahan & Sahan, this issue) – have illustrated the mixed emotions experienced by students in EMI programs (e.g., frustration, anxiety,

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [sara.hillman@qatar.tamu.edu](mailto:sara.hillman@qatar.tamu.edu) (S. Hillman).

shame), and they have demonstrated how these emotional experiences are intertwined with discourses of neoliberalism. These research findings can be applied in EMI higher education settings to remind policymakers and teachers alike of the ways in which EMI students can (and often do) feel overwhelmed when being taught through English – and to remind them that students may be less likely to succeed in their EMI courses if they are experiencing emotional challenges and discrimination.

For teachers, policy makers, and other stakeholders, this research underscores that EMI students are not robots – their well-being matters. This point is highlighted in [Hopkyns and Gkonou's \(this issue\)](#) assertion that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to EMI. Rather, EMI policy and practice needs to be responsive to the local context and local needs. [Liyanage's \(this issue\)](#) study reminds us that EMI policymakers (or policy implementors) also experience complex emotional challenges, resulting in a fracturing of the higher education community. Looking forward, research is needed to inform how teachers and policymakers can better respond to these emotional challenges, for example through more inclusive policy and through teacher training programs that are attuned to the emotional complexities experienced by EMI teachers ([Yuan et al., this issue](#)) and students alike. Such programs can empower teachers with the pedagogical skills needed to create linguistically-inclusive classrooms responsive to students' (educational and emotional) needs.

### 3. Indika Liyanage

It is apparent that EMI is an unstoppable phenomenon, and that it can deliver some tangible benefits to some graduates ([Şahan & Sahan, this issue](#)), but with emotional costs ([Hopkyns & Gkonou, this issue](#)). While the genie is out of the bottle, these papers offer some suggestions on how to address and manage some of the emotional issues associated with EMI for students, teachers, and administrators. Acknowledgement of sociocultural and discursive contexts that influence emotions indicates the necessity for EMI programs to be sensitive to local circumstances ([Sah, this issue](#)). The issue of individual entrepreneurial responsibility needs to be countered locally by institutions, accepting their social responsibility for the well-being of community members. Mechanisms are needed to ensure students with understandable desires for learning through EMI are adequately informed prior to enrollment about the demands of learning in an additional language and associated emotional rewards and challenges. Structures need to be established to support students during their study, and students informed during and before enrollment of when, where, and why they should use them.

The same support needs to be offered to teaching staff through continuing professional development based on learning/practice models, supported by structures and processes that support collaborative pedagogical development. This needs to include dialogue between teaching staff and educational leaders at all stages to maximize effectiveness of teaching and learning and to address issues of emotional labour for all involved ([Yuan et al., this issue](#)). In many instances, it could be productive to consider the advantages of alternative pathways to equip students with English proficiency deemed necessary for future employment or study in settings where English is the lingua franca.

Studies presented here were undertaken in settings where the first language of the majority of the population is not English, but research on emotions and EMI must not ignore the experiences of international students who, influenced by discourses of accumulation of linguistic capital and linguistic entrepreneurship critiqued in these papers, experience EMI in English-dominant settings. Are their emotional experiences similar to those uncovered by authors in this collection, or how do they differ, and what are the edu-

cational and personal implications for the considerable number of individuals who pay a premium to access the promise of study in English-speaking institutions which, in many cases, rely on international student fees for much of their operation? Studies informed by the post-structuralist perspective on emotions adopted in this collection can widen understanding of these experiences, and responses to them, by looking beyond the confines of individuals and of classrooms. Likewise, the emotional labour of teaching linguistically diverse student cohorts in HE, and of administering and monitoring their participation in learning and campus life, deserves attention. Investigation of the management of the emotional dimension needs to look at proactive as well as reactive strategies, exploring institutional, structural, and pedagogical avenues that acknowledge the educational significance of emotions and the shared responsibility of their management.

### 4. Tiefu Zhang and Rui Yuan

Our study ([Yuan et al., this issue](#)) depicts the emotional experience of a group of Chinese students enrolled in an EMI teacher education program at a Macau university. Informed by the poststructuralist perspective, the study highlights the emotional vulnerability of students in EMI higher education mediated by a neoliberal and corporatized discourse, as a result of which, individual students' needs, voices, and emotions became sidelined in their learning process. The findings echo the study by [Sah \(this issue\)](#), which sheds light on the role of neoliberal imagination in creating a discourse of mixed emotions among Nepali EMI students.

In light of the research findings, our study sounds a note of caution for higher education managers and teachers about the need to revisit the agenda of EMI, which should serve as more than a marketing strategy to attract potential students, but a full educational experience that supports and sustains students' academic learning and linguistic development. Acknowledging the cognitive and pedagogical complexities (e.g., promoting content-language integration) embedded in EMI teaching ([Yuan et al., 2022](#)), this study alerts EMI educators and policymakers to the complex emotional needs of students and underscores the importance of creating positive emotional environments that can lead to improved learning outcomes. Situated in a pre-service language teacher education program, the findings also reveal the potential of a variety of instructional strategies (e.g., modeling and dialogic reflections) in preparing competent EMI teachers.

Despite the surge of research interest in EMI over the past two decades, the complexities of emotions experienced by EMI students across disciplines remain a promising research topic. Below we outline three questions/directions for future research:

1. How are EMI students emotionally supported in their situated programs? Research is needed to identify the forms of emotional support that can contribute to EMI students' classroom participation and learning in multilingual and multicultural classroom contexts. Such a line of inquiry not only can directly benefit EMI students but may also add to EMI teachers' emotional sensitivity and competence, which can help them cope with emotional labour and maintain their psychological wellbeing in their situated work setting imbued with potential emotional rules and power differentials.
2. What effects do emotions have on students' academic outcomes (e.g., in content comprehension and language development)? Longitudinal research is warranted to determine to what extent and how emotions influence student learning achievement in EMI classrooms over time. Since our study alludes to the declining motivation of students in their EMI program, we call for more attention to the mediating role of emotions in learning

motivation, as well as to develop strategies for promoting and sustaining motivation among EMI students.

3. How are emotions experienced and managed in technology-mediated EMI instruction? This is particularly important in the post-COVID era, where technology has become deeply integrated into the educational enterprise. Therefore, it would be necessary to investigate how emotions are experienced, expressed, and managed in technology-mediated EMI instruction, such as online classes.

## 5. Sarah Hopkyns and Christina Gkonou

Our study (Hopkyns & Gkonou, [this issue](#)) has revealed two important takeaways, which we believe have strong implications for EMI in higher education as well as strong potential to inform EMI teaching practices. First, in investigating the nature and impact of emotions towards EMI in such settings, it is important to acknowledge the involvement of all stakeholders in an educational institution: students, teachers, and other academic and support staff. Working together, strong institutional cultures can be built, where a sense of belonging and psychological safety can strengthen learning, teaching and assessment. For this reason, these stakeholders' full spectrum of emotions should be researched and understood, and, by extension, valued. Second, although we recognize that uniformity and institutional or governmental policies often enable more effective functioning of universities, our study has shown that approaches which are unbound from the specifics of individual educational institutions should be respectfully rejected. In the same way that as reflective practitioners, we would make conscious and judicious use of differentiated instruction in our classes, it is worth considering how EMI can be best adjusted to meet the needs and distinct characteristics of different higher education settings contrary to what a one-size-fits-all approach would suggest.

Overall, we feel that the concept of 'belonging' warrants further research within EMI higher education. Does EMI promote the use of English at the expense of the use of students' L1? If students and potentially teachers too feel this way, what impact could this have on how they approach teaching and learning and what emotional experiences would it generate? What balance should be achieved between L1 and L2 usage and what is the role of translanguaging practices in this process? And ultimately, to what extent do students and teachers feel that they 'belong' in the institution? Despite the precarious nature of 'belonging' often caused by EMI and subsequent L1 use, several student participants in our study highlighted the importance of English and EMI in job hunting, achieving career progression or being socially recognized (see also Şahan & Sahan, [this issue](#)). Related to such comments is Sah's ([this issue](#)) intriguing finding that when EMI is not offered, non-EMI students might potentially be faced with discrimination. Further research could, thus, concentrate on emotions generated among EMI and non-EMI students and teachers and their impact on educational policies and practices.

With respect to emotional labor, our study adds a new dimension to emotions generated among teachers whose students have plagiarized. Although in previous research plagiarism caused teachers to labor emotionally in an attempt to process feelings of frustration and disappointment (see Benesch, 2012, 2017), our study showed that some teacher participants sympathized with some of the students who had plagiarized and tried to understand them. We concur with Benesch (2019) in that instead of working towards eradicating any traces of emotional labor, we could use it as a springboard for battling against incompatibilities in the workplace and improving teaching and learning conditions within EMI universities. We feel that future research into the emotional labor of teaching should do just that.

## 6. Pramod K. Sah

An EMI program is an ideological and political space where diverse students' and instructors' languages, cultures, and identities function within some kind of power asymmetry. This implies that students and instructors inevitably undergo various affective experiences, whether in relation to their neoliberal or entrepreneurial desire to join an EMI program (Şahan & Sahan, [this issue](#)) or their sociolinguistic lived experiences while attending the program (Hopkyns & Gkonou, [this issue](#); Sah, [this issue](#)). Therefore, based on conversations with some key EMI scholars, I have elsewhere (see Sah, 2022) presented the focus on "academic and emotional challenges" for teachers and students as one of the critical EMI research agendas (p. 133).

Given the complex and entangled nature of EMI in multilingual contexts, it is important to consider *emotion as a sociocultural and ideological phenomenon* (Benesch, 2012) in research examining emotional dynamics. From the sociocultural and ideological perspective, emotions research should go beyond psychological orientation and considers emotions vis-à-vis power relations in broader social contexts. While EMI researchers should continue documenting the typology of emotions (e.g., negative and/or positive; Yuan et al., [this issue](#)) that stakeholders experience in an EMI program, there should be a greater focus on understanding *how emotions occur in reciprocity with social realities* that also includes hegemonic language policies and their practices at the micro-level (i.e., the institutional level). As Hopkyns and Gkonou ([this issue](#)) demonstrate in their study, emotional experiences are evoked by the intersection of identities (e.g., English proficiency and linguistic background) and language ideologies; emotions are thereby *entanglements*. In an EMI secondary school context in Nepal, I have examined how teachers' emotions are entangled with their ethno-linguistic identities, agency for themselves and their students, and language ideologies that guide their pedagogic and communicative practices (Sah, [forthcoming](#)).

Hence, emotions do not occur in a vacuum. If EMI researchers approach emotions research through an ideological and political lens, it could help researchers not only to document the ways different stakeholders experience various emotions triggered by other social phenomena, but also to untangle the layered inequalities stemming from "unequal emotions" (Sah, [this issue](#)). Unequal emotions are understood as "a condition of distinction between those whose linguistic and educational resources are recognized as valid and those whose resources are alienated to trigger negative emotions" (Sah, [this issue](#)). My study shows that the dominant institutional practice of recognizing elite English-Nepali bilingualism as a norm, positions students differently in an EMI program, leading some students to experience more troubling emotions than their privileged counterparts (Sah, [this issue](#)). Similar situations of *unequal emotions* might exist, in which, for example, multilingual English-speaking instructors are led to more emotional struggles than so-called native speakers of English, embedded in the ideology of "native-speakerism" (Holliday, 2006).

Among other research agendas of EMI and emotions moving forward, I hope EMI researchers will examine the cases of *unequal emotions* of various stakeholders (e.g., students, instructors, and administrators) in their unique contexts by considering *emotions as entanglements*. Regarding methodology, there seems to be a domination of documenting emotions through self-reported narratives as can be seen in the articles published in this special issue. While self-reported narratives can be one of the best ways to document emotions, EMI researchers can consider documenting emotions through observational data; for example, by observing students' and instructors' verbal and nonverbal displays of various emotions in classroom instruction and socialization.

## 7. Conclusion

The rise of EMI programs in universities around the world has been partly driven by the belief that English language skills can open doors to global opportunities. However, the various emotional effects of EMI on stakeholders have been largely ignored. As Şahan and Sahan in their response point out, research on EMI has mostly focused on learning outcomes and neglected the broader student experience and their well-being. They recommend that teacher training programs be attuned to the emotional complexities experienced by EMI teachers and students, and policy and practice be responsive to the local context and needs. In the same vein, Hopkyns and Gkonou recommend that approaches to applying EMI research consider the specifics of individual educational institutions and caution against a one-size-fits-all approach to EMI. Zhang and Yuan highlight the potential of instructional strategies to prepare competent EMI teachers and create positive emotional environments for improved learning outcomes. Likewise, Liyanage suggests that institutions need to take social responsibility for the well-being of students and teachers, provide adequate structural support to students and teachers, and offer alternative pathways to equip students with English proficiency. Thus, a clear theme from their responses is that EMI policy and practice needs to be responsive to the local context and local needs and establish structures that better support stakeholders.

In terms of a future research agenda for examining emotions within EMI higher education contexts, Şahan and Sahan call for further investigation to determine how educators and policymakers can effectively address the emotional obstacles associated with EMI. Research is needed to implement more comprehensive policies and training programs that acknowledge the intricate emotional dynamics experienced by EMI stakeholders. Liyanage's response calls for more research on the emotional experiences of international students in English-dominant settings and the management of the emotional dimension in teaching linguistically diverse student cohorts. Liyanage emphasizes the need for proactive strategies to manage emotions and recognizes the shared responsibility of emotional management. Zhang and Yuan call for future research to identify forms of emotional support for EMI students, determine the effects of emotions on academic outcomes, and investigate emotions in technology-mediated EMI instruction. Hopkyns and Gkonou suggest that further research is needed on the concept of 'belonging' in EMI higher education, particularly regarding the promotion of English usage at the expense of students' L1 and the role of translanguaging practices in achieving a balance between L1 and L2 usage. They see emotional labor as another important area of research that should continue to be explored, and it could be

used as a catalyst for improving teaching and learning conditions within EMI universities. Lastly, Sah suggests that EMI researchers should focus on understanding how emotions are entangled with power relations and social realities such as hegemonic language policies, and emotions generated among EMI and non-EMI background students. Sah recommends that EMI researchers should strive to untangle inequalities stemming from "unequal emotions" and also that researchers should consider documenting emotions through observational data as well as self-reported narratives.

Ultimately, we hope readers are inspired to delve deeper into examining the emotional landscape of EMI in higher education in order to help educators and policymakers create more emotionally supportive, inclusive, and equitable EMI environments.

## Declaration of Competing Interest

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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