

## **EMI in the Vocational Sector Research Brief**

**For:** Research into current policy guidelines and stakeholder motivations for English medium instruction (EMI) in the vocational sector in Hong Kong. With mutual agreement, there is room to extend this scope to investigate the available resources vocational institutions have and need to implement EMI effectively.

**Date:** December 2019

### **1 Overview of the British Council**

1.1 The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We work with over 100 countries in the fields of arts and culture, English language, education and civil society. Last year we reached over 80 million people directly and 791 million people overall including online, through broadcasts and publications. We make a positive contribution to the countries we work with – changing lives by creating opportunities, building connections and engendering trust. Founded in 1934 we are a UK charity governed by Royal Charter and a UK public body. We receive 15 per cent core funding grant from the UK government. The British Council has been working with Hong Kong since 1948. In 2018, we marked our 70th anniversary, celebrating 70 years of cultural relations and exchange between the UK and Hong Kong.

[www.britishcouncil.hk/en](http://www.britishcouncil.hk/en)

### **2 Introduction and Background to the Project**

#### **2.1 EMI in Hong Kong Context**

The global spread of English has seen an increase in importance placed not only on English language education throughout the world, but also on education through English. EMI, the use of English to teach subjects in countries where English is not the official language, has become a growing global trend (Galloway, Kriukow and Numajiri, 2017).

In Hong Kong, English is the official second language; offered from Primary 1 – Secondary 6. Traditionally, local schools were designated as either EMI or CMI - this is not the case anymore though schools continue to deliver in their legacy medium of instruction. English medium of instruction (as well as quality concerns in public education) is one of the main drivers of demand for private education. Among the richest 20 per cent of households, 95 per cent of parents pay for extra tuition; 52 per cent of these pay for English tuition.

Despite this, there are still widely held perceptions of declining English proficiency in the SAR, though the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) and the Education Bureau dispute these claims, citing Territory Wide System Assessment (TSA) and Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) statistics. Almost 50 per cent of Hong Kong residents report being able to speak English, according to the 2016 census.

However, feedback from universities and employers suggest that English language ability is still a crucial skill for graduate employability and career progression. Hong Kong students scored an average of 6.49 on the (academic) IELTS examination in 2016, above the global average of about 6.0.

In Hong Kong and throughout East Asia, the enhancement of EMI policy has been driven by many factors:

- Internationalisation
- Top-down drivers
- Transnational Education
- Inward and outward mobility
- Soft power and soft skills
- Quality versus Quantity
- Parent Power and Pressure

Underpinning this is the importance of English Language to facilitate joint programmes and qualifications, development, research collaboration, enable student and faculty mobility and develop a global outlook and connections in graduates.

However, there are many gaps and barriers in successful EMI adoption, such as:

- Lack of structured, systematised approach
- Lack of collaboration resulting in gap between policy and practice
- Lack of English language proficiency in students
- Lack of English language proficiency in academic staff
- Lack of systemic English language support for students

- Lack of systemic English language support for academic staff (lack of CPD on the whole)
- EMI programmes and courses are ad hoc or designed and developed out of context (not needs-based) as ‘one-size fits all’ approach.
- Lack of consideration of other languages and approaches to language reform

Hong Kong is one the four largest markets globally for UK transnational education (TNE), with the UK its main TNE provider by a wide margin. Of the 470 registered education courses in Hong Kong run by non-local providers, 63.6 per cent were offered by UK institutions; Australia controls 12 per cent of the market, while the US, mainland China and Canada hold 14.8 per cent, 4.6 per cent and 0.2 per cent, respectively. TNE providers offer a wide range of sub-degree and professional programmes, of which the UK once more provides the clear majority (76 per cent), with the remainder split between Australia, the US, and China, in order of provision. The success and sustainability of these programmes rely on ensuring students receive sufficient support in developing a good command of the English language.

## **2.2 Why Vocational Sector EMI as a Research Focus?**

In Hong Kong, EMI in Higher Education is already quite mature as all 8 publicly-funded universities are taught in EMI. Meanwhile, vocational training is perceived as being a part of the new economy, especially given the innovation, agility, and aggressiveness of the sector. Within recent years, the local vocational institutes have been heavily promoting multi-disciplinary EMI as it is an accreditation requirement with the HKCAAVQ. However, little data on the current state of this exists. Via a partnership with the Vocational Training Council, with 13 member institutes and 250,000 students (more than all 8 publicly-funded universities combined), there’s an opportunity to have access to a large and representative sample size of stakeholders. From an inclusion perspective, this will also mean getting access to a broader and more diverse student population that perhaps better represent the youth segment of Hong Kong. We intend for the research to launch and be disseminated at the British Council New Perspectives Conference in late 2020. This will be particularly useful insight for our English and Exams teams, who are also looking at this audience. The research will also address and impact how the British Council positions English as a ‘skill for employability’ in our planned slate of partnership programmes. If we are looking to more widely target providers of sub-degree programmes, then we could also open up the study to members of the Federation for Self-financing Tertiary Education (FSTE).

### **3 Specification**

#### **3.1 Background**

The research will be carried out by a leading research institute (UK or Hong Kong-based) in conjunction with vocational partners in Hong Kong.

#### **3.2 Research Objective**

The study aims to investigate the current state of vocational EMI policy and resources in Hong Kong. It will provide a comprehensive analysis of various vocational institutions' current policies and resources in order to identify strengths and weaknesses and current impact. Recommendations will be made with the aim of improving policy guidelines and ability to implement EMI effectively within the Hong Kong context.

#### **3.3 Rationale EMI Research**

- Research the current state of EMI policy in Hong Kong, and understand the vocational sector's capacity for effective implementation within the context of wider internationalisation goals and priorities, and links to initiatives such as the Greater Bay Area.
- Disseminate research results at a future British Council hosted EMI conference/event.

#### **3.4 Possible Research Questions**

- What are the current government policies and objectives for EMI in the vocational sector in Hong Kong and how are these supported through local policies and implementation strategies? What are the current needs?
- To what extent does current vocational EMI guidance represent good practice? What are the perceptions of vocational institute management, instructors and students?
- How well equipped are vocational institutes to deliver effective EMI courses? If there are no resource limitations, what are the 'needs' and 'wants'?
- Is there a standardised and unified vision of EMI being articulated by different vocational institutes throughout Hong Kong?
- Is there a gap between the policy articulated by vocational institutes and what EMI instructors actually deliver in the courses?
- What are the approaches and forms of EMI currently being implemented in vocational institutions in Hong Kong? For what purposes? How could they be improved?
- How and by whom is quality of EMI pedagogy being defined, evaluated and safeguarded in Hong Kong?
- What are the current instructor/student motivations for EMI in vocational teaching and learning?
- What are the current gaps and barriers for instructors/students in EMI in vocational teaching and learning? How are the instructors/students coping?

#### **3.5 Key Audiences and Research Users**

The potential key audiences and users of this research are:

- Education Bureau

- Vocational institution leadership
- Language department staff/teachers
- Vocational students
- Parents
- Potential UK HE / ELT / vocational sector partners
- School counsellors

### 3.6 Key Deliverables and Timeframe

- Proposal submission by mid-January 2020
- Research grant awarded by 31 January 2020

The research proposal will refine the information presented in the initial proposal to bring greater precision to the planning and design of the research. It will be based on a preliminary review of the documentation and initial discussions with key stakeholders during the planning stage.

- Research report draft by end of March 2020

The research report and presentation should cover the following:

- Rationale and purpose of research
  - Contextual overview of EMI in the vocational sector (global, regional and national)
  - Research scope and questions
  - Research methodology
  - Research findings
  - Recommendations
  - Bibliography
- Research summary presentation (for key stakeholders) by end of May 2020

The presentation should provide a summary of the report appropriate for delivery at a policy round table or conference format.

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