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English-medium instruction in the Australian higher education: untold stories of academics from non-native English-speaking backgrounds

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ABSTRACT

The literature on English-medium instruction (EMI) has predominantly focused on contexts where English is not the first language. Little is known about EMI in traditional English-speaking (Anglophone) contexts like Australia, where English is the first language. The highly internationalised Australian higher education has witnessed a growing cohort of foreign-born students and academics, many from non-native English-speaking backgrounds (NESB). Whilst the issue of EMI for NESB students has received increased attention, the EMI-related challenges facing NESB academics have been overlooked. This paper explores communicative and pedagogical challenges and associated strategies of NESB academics as they revealed untold stories about their teaching experiences in this EMI context. It adopts a Vygotsky's socio-cultural theoretical perspective in conceptualising English as a tool academics appropriate to mediate their teaching. A modified EMI competence framework further elaborates the use of English as a pedagogical and communicative tool. Data were generated through individual interviews and survey questionnaire with NESB academics at an Australian university. Findings revealed multiple challenges facing the academics and strategies they applied to adapt English, as a mediational tool, to effectively mediate their teaching. The study has implications for EMI research in Anglophone contexts and professional development and institutional support for NESB academics.

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English-medium instruction; academic professional development; language policy and planning; higher education; Australia; sociocultural theory

Problematising English-medium instruction in higher education

In the current highly internationalised higher education context around the world, English has gained 'increasing dominance as a global lingua franca' (Rigg, 2013, p. 1), a way 'referring to communication in English between speakers with different first languages' (Seidlhofer, 2005, p. 339). This dominance is manifested in the growing phenomenon of English as a medium of instruction, or English-medium instruction (EMI) featured higher education around the globe, as clearly demonstrated in the extant literature (see e.g.

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Dang, Nguyen, & Le, 2013; Dearden, 2014; Doiz, Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c; Macaro, Curle, Pun, An, & Dearden, 2018; Moore & Harrington, 2016; Wilkinson, 2013).

The term 'English medium instruction' commonly refers to:

The use of the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions where *the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English*. (Dearden, 2014, p. 2, emphasis added)

This definition focusing on EMI in non-Anglophone contexts, however, is open to challenge (Humphreys, 2017; Macaro, 2018). Ernesto Macaro (Rigg, 2013), acknowledged that 'we don't yet know what EMI is' (p. 3). Indeed Dearden's (2014) definition does not apply to all EMI contexts, especially the highly internationalised higher education sector in many Anglophone countries, where L1 is English (see also Humphreys, 2017; Macaro et al., 2018). This is understandable when the linguistic landscapes in a globalised world have become harder to define, where 'educational contexts are no longer confined to locations bounded in space' (Dang & Marginson, 2013, p. 143).

For universities, the pressure of globalisation and internationalisation means a need to respond to 'changes in both the language profiles of university populations and the languages of universities' work' (Liddicoat, 2016, p. 231). With the growing role of English as an international language, the push for EMI in the internationalisation of higher education is universities' common response to the need: '(1) to attract lucrative foreign students; (2) to internationalise the profile of the institution and that of its faculty, thereby enhancing its reputation; (3) to encourage student mobility' (Macaro, 2018).

However, as Liddicoat (2016) noted, the impact of the globalisation of the English language is not equal for all universities, highlighting universities in Anglophone countries often showing 'little interest in the linguistic consequences of internationalisation' (p. 232). Interestingly and coincidentally, this seems to be reflected in the landscape of the EMI literature. To date, the EMI literature has predominantly focused on educational contexts where the first language of the majority of the population is not English, closely reflecting Dearden's (2014) EMI definition. Humphreys (2017), in a similar vein to Liddicoat's observation, views this absence of research on EMI in Anglophone countries as equating to 'the implicit assumption that the use of English as the medium of instruction in traditional English-speaking contexts is relatively unproblematic' (p. 93). Together with Humphreys, there is growing research (see e.g. Arkoudis & Doughney, 2014; Johnson, Veitch, & Dewiyanti, 2015; Moore & Harrington, 2016) providing evidence of issues relating to the English language proficiency of the majority of students whose L1 is not English studying at higher education institutions (HEIs) in Australia. This research cautions 'higher education institutions against complacency' (Humphreys, 2017, p. 93) and recommends HEIs in Anglophone EMI contexts attend to EMI as part of their 'core business' (ibid, p. 93). Notably, whilst the voices of the students coming from a non-native English speaking background (NESB) have been reported in the literature (Doiz et al., 2013a), virtually little is known about the experiences of growing cohorts of NESB teachers teaching in Anglophone EMI contexts.

Humphreys (2017) argues for Dearden's original EMI definition to extend to EMI contexts in Anglophone countries on the basis of the growing size of the international student

cohort, the majority of whom come from a non-native English-speaking background (NESB). With the insufficient interest of HEIs in Anglophone countries to attend to linguistic ramifications of the internationalisation of higher education (HE) (Liddicoat, 2016), ‘the lack of consensus regarding what EMI in HE actually is ... adds to the problem of what planning and resourcing should be taking place’ (Macaro et al., 2018, p. 67).

Against this backdrop of EMI research and practice in higher education, this paper contributes to the debate by focusing on an area that has been overlooked – the experiences of NESB teachers, whose L1 is not English, teaching in Anglophone EMI contexts. Specifically, this paper explores the communicative and pedagogical challenges and associated strategies of NESB academics as they revealed their stories of teaching in this EMI context. In so doing, the paper first presents the context of the study, focusing on the EMI context and cohort of NESB academics in the Australian HE sector. This is followed by a combined theoretical framework drawing on Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory and an EMI competence framework adopted to guide the empirical research. After the Materials and Method section, the paper discusses findings and implications for language policy planning as well as professional development and institutional support for NESB academics, and research in Anglophone EMI contexts.

Context of the study

Whilst the issue of the English language as means of communication for NESB international students in the global academic environment in Australian higher education has received increased attention (see e.g. Arkoudis & Doughney, 2014; Humphreys, 2017; Johnson et al., 2015), the challenges and demands facing educators, especially those from NESB and English as an Additional Language (EAL) backgrounds, in teaching and supervising students in English-medium instruction (EMI) in Australian higher education have been overlooked.

English-medium instruction in the internationalised Australian higher education

Australia has been considered as an EMI context (see e.g. Fenton-Smith, Humphreys, & Walkinshaw, 2017) ‘on the basis that a substantial proportion of its HE population consists of international students whose L1 is not English’ (Macaro et al., 2018, p. 46). As Australia’s largest services export, contributing \$35.2 billion to the economy in 2018 (Australian Government, 2019a), Australian international education enrolled a total of 876,399 international students in 2018 (Australian Government, 2019b). Nearly half of this population studied in higher education, and the majority are NESB students (ibid). As at March 2019, 59% of all international students in Australia come from the top five countries including China, India, Malaysia, Nepal and Vietnam (Australian Government, 2019c), whose L1 is not necessarily English, with the exception of a number of students from India and Malaysia. Despite studying in an English-speaking country, the large number of NESB international students tended to mingle together, and to ‘live, study, and work with others who speak their native language’ (Humphreys, 2017, p. 94), and ended up having little contact with domestic students (Gribble, 2014).

The issues relating to English as a medium of instruction at Australian universities were first raised in a 2006 report into Australia's skilled migration policy (Birrell, Hawthorne, & Richardson, 2006; Birrell, 2006), focusing on international students migrating to Australia. The report identified students' 'deficits' in 'English language communication skills', which were not addressed by education institutions (Moore & Harrington, 2016, p. 387). This led to changes to the laws and regulations informing the higher education sector, focusing on how Australian HEIs address English language standards of their international students. Two key government documents include the '*Good practice principles for English language proficiency for international students in Australian universities: Final report*' (Australian Universities Quality Agency, 2009), followed by '*Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011*' (TEQSA, 2011). The former, as the name reveals, include ten principles regarding the importance of English language development in university education. The latter focuses on assessing outcomes of higher education, including English language outcomes of international students. Consequently, academic language and learning support in Australian HEIs has been provided to students by academic language and learning advisers¹ (Moore & Harrington, 2016). In 2012, the ten principles for English language proficiency for international students were developed into the six English language standards for higher education, applied to all HEIs in the Australian Higher Education sector (Association for Academic Language & Learning, 2012).

Although originally targeting international NESB students, the policy framework has been advocated to apply to *all* students, with a focus on the need to develop students' 'communication skills', rather than 'language proficiency' associated with second language learning and thus implied for NESB students (Moore & Harrington, 2016; see also Arkoudis, Harris, & Kelly, 2015; Arkoudis, Baik, Bexley, & Doughney, 2014). Moore and Harrington (2016) maintain that English language support at Australian universities is 'increasingly relevant to domestic students', thus making the issues raised 'highly germane to English-medium higher education internationally' (p. 385). This, according to them, is because of Australia's increasingly culturally and linguistically diversified population (Murray, 2013) with many domestic students coming from an EAL background. At June 2016, 28.5% of the Australian resident population was born overseas, with the UK, New Zealand, China, India, the Philippines and Vietnam being the top countries of birth (ABS, 2017).

In the internationalisation of Australian HE, the growing literature on students' English language proficiency and communication skills, and changes to the related laws and regulations demonstrate increased attention to addressing issues relating to EMI for students. Due attention to EMI related issues facing the growing cohorts of NESB educators in this context, nevertheless, has not been recorded yet.

Academic mobility in Australian higher education and NESB teachers

In the internationalisation of higher education, alongside with the increasingly diverse university student population, the Australian academic sector is regarded as 'highly globalised', with great academic mobility, indicated from high levels of both outbound flow of academics seeking jobs overseas and inbound flow of foreign academics seeking employment in Australia (Balasooriya, Asante, Jayasinha, & Razee, 2014, p. 122). The demographics of the Australian higher education sector is seen to reflect the contemporary

Australian society, with academics coming from many diverse culture and language backgrounds (Le, 2015). In 2006, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 40.5% of Australian university academic staff were born overseas (Hugo, 2008). Of the total foreign-born academic staff, 45.5% come from Asian countries (ibid), the majority of whom assuming an EAL background.

Although Australian universities have two core functions of teaching students and conducting high quality research, there are tensions between these two functions (Productivity Commission, 2017). Due to the universities' 'established cultures' and the importance adhering to research for universities' international rankings (ibid, p. 2), which as a means to attract international students, 'universities tend to give pre-eminence and prestige to their research functions' (p. 13). According to a report by the Australian Government's Productivity Commission (2017), the majority of academic staff are employed for their research capabilities and 'have less intrinsic interest in teaching' (p. 13). Although this finding might be contested, 'research performance continues to be seen as the primary source of job satisfaction, status and reward in Australian universities' (Probert, 2015, p. 2). Although NESB academics are hired for their research capabilities, which are very often evidenced by publications in high ranking journals in English, teaching through English-medium instruction requires a different set of skills and capabilities not all have developed. Given the diversified student cohort above mentioned, the challenge of teaching in the Australian HE context for NESB academics is similar to what Macaro describes as 'putting across the meaning of a difficult concept in a language that was not your own and through a language that was not the first for the students themselves' (Rigg, 2013, p. 3).

Professional development and preparation for NESB teachers in EMI contexts

Whilst support for NESB students in Australia has been provided, as previously mentioned, resulting from increased research and understanding, and hence legal advocacy, the case with NESB academics is not the same. In a recent systematic review of EMI in higher education, Macaro et al. (2018) highlight a concern of the lack of preparation to teach and lack of professional development opportunities commonly expressed by EMI academics. Macaro et al.'s review reveals an 'absence of a benchmark of teacher English proficiency in HE' (p. 56), 'virtually no parameters ... to identify the competence of a teacher to teach through EMI' (p. 67) and simply teacher preparation programmes in EMI in HE not existing (p. 56). Considering the significance of the issue, Macaro and collaborators recommend that 'probably the greatest amount of planning and resourcing needs to go into university teacher preparation and professional development' (p. 67). In a similar vein, Tran and Le (2018) also reveal a lack of teacher professional development for the internationalisation of higher education in Australia.

Indeed, the extant research on EMI in non-Anglophone tertiary contexts has reported on various challenges and strategies for NESB academics, who teach using EMI in tertiary contexts where English is not a native language (see e.g. Doiz, Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2013c; Helm & Guarda, 2015; Klaassen & De Graaff, 2001; Wilkinson, 2013). In terms of EMI challenges, previous studies mainly raised problems related to the intelligibility of NESB academics' spoken English, the lack of appropriateness and

effectiveness of their language behaviours, issues in structuring the content and limitations in employing strategies to compensate for their language deficiencies (Ball & Lindsay, 2013; Hoekje & Williams, 1982; Klaassen & De Graaff, 2001; Wilkinson, 2005, 2013). Whilst considerable insights have been obtained about NESB academics in these settings, little is known about the growing cohort of NESB educators working in Anglophone countries, where English is a native language, like in Australia. In fact, with regard to EMI-related issues in the traditional native English-speaking contexts, EMI literature has been largely confined to a paucity of works on international teaching assistants at the U.S. universities (see e.g. Bailey, 1984; Turitz, 1984).

Similarly, knowledge about EMI strategies is also largely dependent on studies conducted in non-native English-speaking countries (Ball & Lindsay, 2013; Im & Kim, 2015; Wilkinson, 2005) and research on international teaching assistants (ITAs) (Shaw & Garate, 1984; Williams et al., 1987). Except for Shaw and Garate (1984) who explicitly mention the role of ‘university pedagogy’ in improving EMI delivery by ITAs, current research mainly focuses on language and communication skills related strategies. This study aims to contribute to our understanding of the professional learning of EMI academics by exploring the challenges and associated strategies of NESB academics teaching in an Anglophone EMI context.

Theoretical framework

In investigating the communicative and pedagogical challenges and associated strategies of EMI academics, the study adopts a combined theoretical framework: Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory to conceptualise English as a tool academics appropriate to mediate their teaching and a modified EMI competence framework to elaborate on the use of English as a pedagogical and communicative tool (Figure 1).

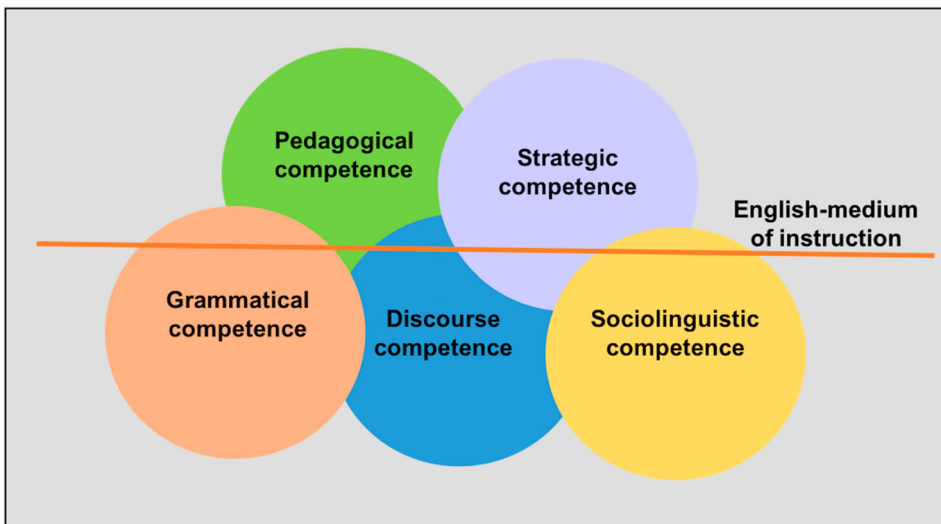


Figure 1. An adapted communicative and pedagogic competence framework for examining NESB teachers’ teaching in EMI contexts (Dang & Vu, 2017).

Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory & language as a mediational tool

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory recognises the central role of culturally constructed tools and artefacts, in the context of social relations, in mediating human forms of thinking and development (Vygotsky, 1978, 1981). Vygotsky saw

the transformation of elementary [mental] processes into higher order ones [such as learning to teach in an EMI context] as possible through the mediating function of culturally constructed artefacts, including tools, symbols, and more elaborate sign systems, such as language. (Lantolf & Appel, 1994, p. 6)

Building on Dang et al.'s (2013) work on EMI in a non-native English-speaking tertiary context in Vietnam, the present study adopts a Vygotsky's socio-cultural theoretical perspective in conceptualising English as a mediational tool academics appropriate to mediate their teaching and supervision of students in higher education. This conceptualisation is consonant with Baldauf's (2012) argument on EMI that individual agency, including those of teachers and learners, is significant in implementing EMI policies. According to Vygotsky (1978), we, human beings, use labour and tools to act on the environment, including the conditions under which we live. Through this process we also transform ourselves. Language is considered an important culturally constructed tool in this process (Vygotsky, 1981).

Following Dang et al. (2013), in the present study the English language is one of the mediating pedagogical tools (Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999) used by NESB academics in teaching and supervising students in HE for student learning. Arguably, for NESB academics teaching in Anglophone EMI contexts like Australia, the English language is also a significant, if not the only, means for communicating with their students. Many of their students may not speak any languages other than English. Many others may have an L1 different from the academics' L1 themselves, given the large number of students in Australian HEIs coming from an EAL background. As Liddicoat (2016) puts it, 'the work of universities is fundamentally mediated by language' (p. 231). The question to follow is how NESB academics appropriate this tool over time in mediating their teaching in this EMI context.

EMI communicative and pedagogical competence framework

In their systematic review of EMI in HE, Macaro et al. (2018) call for the need:

to establish whether content teachers have the necessary *linguistic competence to teach through the medium of an L2* and whether there is a difference between general English proficiency and *the competence to teach academic subjects through English*. (p. 38, italics added)

This alludes to the requirements of both linguistic and pedagogical competence for academics to teach academic subjects through English. In this study, to further elaborate NESB academics' appropriation of English as a pedagogical and communicative tool, the study adopts a modified EMI competence framework incorporating both communicative and pedagogical competences (see Figure 1, Dang & Vu, 2017). This framework extends on Shaw and Garate's (1984) principles to include pedagogy in addition to linguistic and communicative components for professional development for ITAs in the U.S. university contexts.

Communicative linguistic competence

Among widely used communicative competence models, including Bachman's (1990) model, this study specifically draws on the communicative competence framework developed by Hymes (1972) and pedagogically adapted by Canale (1983), Canale and Swain (1980) and Savignon (1983) (see Hoekje & Williams, 1982) because of its relevance to this investigation. The framework combines four main areas of communicative competence: *grammatical competence*, *discourse competence*, *sociolinguistic competence* and *strategic competence*.

Grammatical competence sometimes is referred to as linguistic proficiency (Williams et al., 1987). This competence includes academics' pronunciation, enunciation and general comprehensibility (Ball & Lindsay, 2013). *Discourse competence* refers to a range of strategies teachers use to support their teaching delivery. They range from repetition and summarising (Williams et al., 1987) to strategies for structuring one's lecture, such as providing background information, summaries, conclusions, and deviating from a planned structure in response to students' needs (Klaassen, 2001). *Sociolinguistic competence* refers to the socio-cultural aspect of the English discourse, including the ability to use language appropriate to the context of communication (Hoekje & Williams, 1982). This competence also encompasses teachers' ability to build rapport with students through the medium of instruction and their use of inclusive language (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2007). *Strategic competence* refers to non-linguistic strategies to significantly enhance the clarity of teaching delivery and verbal compensatory strategies (Williams et al., 1987). These strategies include the use of: visual aids and graphs (Williams et al., 1987); writing boards to visualise and structure ideas (Shaw & Garate, 1984); and slides and videos (Klaassen, 2001).

Pedagogical competence

The communicative competence framework tends to view teachers' linguistic and non-linguistic strategies to communicate with students in a didactic sense, with 'teaching' often reduced to 'lecturing'. Shaw and Garate (1984) added university pedagogy, although in their adapted framework, teaching was also generally viewed as lecturing. Addressing this shortfall and considering Macaro et al.'s (2018) view on teacher's competence for EMI, this study draws on the scholarship on pedagogical competence to reflect a more holistic view of 'teaching'. Specifically, it draws on Shulman's (1986, 1987) conception of teacher professional knowledge to explore NESB teachers' pedagogical competence (see Figure 1). Shulman (1987) argues for the need for teachers to develop various types of professional knowledge: subject content knowledge (or knowledge about the subject), general pedagogical knowledge, knowledge of learners and their characteristics, and pedagogical content knowledge (pedagogical knowledge to teach specific disciplines). Although Shulman's framework is contestable (Dang & Vu, 2017), together with communicative competence, it provides a comprehensive theoretical framework for exploring the communicative and pedagogical demands of NESB academics teaching in EMI contexts.

Materials and method

This paper is derived from a larger research project using a mixed-methods approach (Creswell, 2014). Data included in-depth semi-structured interviews with 15 exemplary

educators and online survey questionnaire with 186 academics at a leading research-intensive university in Australia. ‘Exemplary educators’ here refer to award-winning academics who were recognised for their outstanding contributions to teaching and research supervision through faculty, university and/or national awards. According to the university’s statistics, in 2017, 57% of the student population at this university were born overseas and 29.8% of domestic students speak languages other than English at home.

Interviewees were recruited through an individual email invitation from the first author based on a list of award-winning educators retrieved from the University websites. The individual interviews, lasting approximately 60 minutes each, were conducted at participants’ nominated time, venue and mode, with several interviews conducted via teleconference. With the participants’ consent, interviews were audio-recorded, and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. The interviews aimed to generate insights into their experiences teaching in EMI contexts, including:

- Experience of teaching and research supervision,
- Key challenges they faced initially when teaching and communicating with students in class and online
- Their experience of having successfully overcome these challenges
- Suggestions of language and pedagogy strategies for teaching in English

The survey including 13 questions, both closed and open-ended, aimed to gather data about participants’ language backgrounds, experiences in EMI, and related professional learning needs. Survey participants chose to participate voluntarily and anonymously by clicking the link to the online Qualtrics survey distributed by their Head of Faculty, who had given consent for the research to be conducted in their Faculty. Of the 10 faculties at the university, academics from eight faculties participated in this research (see [Tables 1](#) and [2](#)). Note that interviews and survey were conducted with academics regardless of language background, both NESB and native speakers of English.

Table 1. Summary of NESB survey participants’ profiles ($N = 34$).

First languages		Faculties		Academic roles	
Afrikaans	2	Arts	13	Teaching associate	5
Arabic	1	Business and economics	8	Assistant lecturer/ scholarly teaching fellow	4
Bengali	1	Education	3	Lecturer	9
Buhid	1	Information technology	5	Senior lecturer	7
Chinese (including Cantonese and Mandarin)	8	Medicine, nursing and health sciences	1	Associate professor	7
Dutch	1	Science	1	Professor	2
French	3	Total (provided information)	31	Total (provided information)	34
German	4				
Indonesian	1				
Italian	2				
Japanese	1				
Malay	1				
Punjabi	1				
Russian	2				
Sinhala	5				
Total (provided information)	34				

Table 2. Summary of NESB interview participants' profiles ($N = 8$).

First languages		Faculties	Academic roles		
Hindi	2	Engineering	4	Assistant lecturer/ scholarly teaching fellow	1
Mandarin	1	Information technology	2	Lecturer	1
French	1	Pharmacy and pharmaceutical sciences	1	Senior lecturer	2
Georgian	1	Science	1	Professor	4
Indonesian	1				
Malay	2				

This paper draws on the qualitative data from the NESB participants only, including eight semi-structured individual interviews ($n = 8$) and responses of NESB academics to the survey questions ($n = 34$). Demographic details provided by these NESB survey and interview participants are summarised in [Tables 1](#) and [2](#).

The qualitative data from the interviews and survey was coded and guided by the adapted communicative and pedagogic competence framework for examining NESB teachers' teaching in EMI contexts (see [Figure 1](#)). Interview transcripts were analysed line by line using a direct content analysis procedure (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, pp. 1281–1283) with the support of NVivo 11. Descriptive analysis from responses to open-ended questions was conducted to supplement insights from 34 responses to closed-ended questions in the survey. The data analysis shed light on the multiple challenges facing the NESB academics and strategies NESB exemplary educators applied to adapt English, as a mediation tool, to effectively mediate their teaching.

Untold stories of NESB academics: challenges and strategies

The findings reveal that NESB academics held various perceptions about whether and in what ways teaching in EMI could be challenging, and their perceived challenges were more often related to pedagogical competence than communicative linguistic competence. In particular, findings from the interviews with exemplary academics show that to successfully overcome their perceived challenges, these academics drew primarily on strategies to improve their strategic and pedagogical competence.

NESB academics' perceptions of EMI challenges

Challenges related to communicative competence aspects of EMI

Communicative competence includes grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence (see Dang & Vu, 2017; Hoekje & Williams, 1982). The survey descriptive analysis shows that an overwhelming majority (85%) of NESB survey participants ($n = 34$) were confident or very confident in all the four areas of communicative competence. Similarly, almost all the interview participants recalled that they were generally comfortable with communicating in English as their second or third language when first teaching in English in Australia. For example, one academic from India reflected 'Of course, I cannot compare [my English] to the native speakers, but I was not bad' (Interview response), or another academic from Sri Lanka recalled 'I wouldn't say I faced a lot of challenges' when starting teaching in English (Interview response).

Explaining why the English language itself was not considered a challenge, the interviews and responses to open-ended survey questions revealed two main reasons. Firstly, some NESB academics learnt in English as their second/third language from a young age in their home country. They, therefore, were familiar with this language tool, and did not consider it as an obstacle to their communication. Secondly, some academics believed their different English accent or pronunciation only represented variations of English. They did not see their different way of speaking English as a problem, and instead focused more on strategies to mitigate differences between their accent and native speakers' (to be elaborated in the later section). For example, an academic asserted that his/her English pronunciation as a non-native speaker should not be viewed as a problem:

I will never speak a perfect David Attenborough's English. I have my accent, and I don't think this should be penalised (because otherwise it would become discriminatory). (Survey response)

Another academic explained his distinct English pronunciation was only an example of a variation of English in Sri Lanka. To him, English was not an issue and there was only the need to 'adjust' his pronunciation:

I think Sri Lankans have developed their own way of pronunciation. They're pronouncing all the words from the Queen's English, but I guess it's very different when it comes to ... the Australian way of pronouncing things. So ... consciously thinking about your pronunciation and seeing how you can adjust. (Interview response)

Findings from the survey and interviews also consistently reveal that only a very small number of NESB participants found that communicating in English presented an obstacle to their EMI teaching delivery. Preliminary findings about possible challenges related to four aspects of communicative competence have been presented and discussed at length in Dang and Vu (2017). While the findings related to discourse and strategic competence were largely in line with the literature of EMI in non-Anglophone contexts, this study uncovers new insights about challenges in grammatical and sociolinguistic competence specific to this Anglophone EMI context (Dang & Vu, 2017). Given its scope, the present paper elaborates on challenges facing academics in *grammatical competence* and *sociolinguistic competence*, and explains in greater depth the insights that help to extend the literature.

In terms of *grammatical competence*, accent, accuracy in grammar and sophistication in word choice were areas of concern to some NESB academics (Dang & Vu, 2017). Yet given their lived experience in a multicultural Anglophone context in Australia, it is interesting to see how NESB academics view native speakerism and accented English. Overall, they did not perceive possible errors in using English as exclusive to non-native English speakers, and they saw their accented English as differences, not as 'problems'. This view differs from how pronunciation was typically depicted among NESB educators in non-Anglophone EMI contexts, where differed pronunciation is often perceived as problems (Ball & Lindsay, 2013; Klaassen & De Graaff, 2001; Wilkinson, 2005, 2013). For example, one NESB academic responded in the survey that some grammatical challenges should not be solely associated with non-native English speakers:

Since I am not a native English speaker, I do experience challenges in communicating fluently to my students. Two biggest challenges are: being able to respond with a casual joke when appropriate; feeling confident that an expression I've constructed is 100 per cent grammatically correct. Saying this, I've noticed that many English-speaking academics make errors communicating both verbally and in writing, so I guess, *this is not only a matter of having English as a second language*. (Survey response, emphasis added)

To another NESB academic, having a non-native English-speaking background was a strength compared to English-native speaking academics: 'Because I teach a subject where 90 per cent of the terminology derives from Latin, I am probably in a better position than English-native speaker teachers' (Survey response). Academics' perception of their differences in communicating in English also pertains to how they positioned themselves in a multicultural institution and society setting. For example, according to another academic, the variations in how NESB academics speak English should be regarded as a matter of diversity, not a problem:

I think it is important to underline that universities should be cosmopolitan environments, with many people having different cultures and accents. Being English non-native speakers should be not discriminated. (Survey response)

Regarding *sociolinguistic competence*, the socio-cultural considerations in language use (Hoekje & Williams, 1982), findings reveal that the ability to draw on socio-cultural knowledge to interpret and understand local, native speakers of English emerged as a prominent challenge to NESB educators. This could be regarded as a distinct challenge adhering to teaching in an Anglophone EMI context, as compared to a non-Anglophone EMI context. This has been largely under acknowledged in previous EMI studies.

Compared to NESB academics in non-Anglophone EMI settings, NESB academics in Australian HEIs are more likely to have English native speaking students in their class, though it is not always the case in the internationalisation of HE in Australia. Some faced a challenge in interpreting local students' colloquial language. Lacking the ability to understand their students' English language presents a hindrance to 'mutual understanding, meaningful interactions and rapport between NESB educators and students' (Dang & Vu, 2017, p. 122). Elaborating on this challenge, one NESB academic explained:

Another challenge I had was when I started to speak to the students ... Students have another way of speaking slightly different, as adults or other teachers ... As opposed to just having a normal conversation with other adults who actually make a little bit of effort with me to make sure that everything is really perfectly understood, students don't make this effort and just talk the way they talk with their friends (Interview response).

As revealed, the sociocultural challenge in communicating in English was mainly about understanding the English spoken by domestic students. The difficulty in deciphering colloquial language became more complex in the classroom context when NESB academics received less 'assistance' from students than other groups of interlocutors such as colleagues and friends in clarifying the meanings of the messages.

Sociolinguistic competence refers to the socio-cultural aspect of the English discourse, closely linked to the context of communication (Hoekje & Williams, 1982). Communicating in English across cultures in the Australian HE context can present a challenge to NESB academics, as an NESB academic thoughtfully reflected:

When people learn a language they actually learn a different culture. English, the way they pronounce things or write essays or opinion pieces and so on, it comes with a different type of culture ... The part that I learned also when I came to Australia ... many communication problems people face, and many misunderstandings people get, especially when it is across cultures. (Interview response).

The excerpt shows the academic's awareness of the importance of cultural understanding when utilising English as a communication tool in Australia. It also suggests the role of sociocultural settings in EMI research. Given the great international mobility of academics in Australia (Balasooriya et al., 2014) and worldwide, EMI research should extend to Anglophone countries, and the reality of NESB academics facing distinct challenges in EMI due to sociocultural competence related obstacles in these contexts.

Challenges related to pedagogical competence aspects of EMI

In light of Shulman's (1987) three dimensions of teacher professional knowledge, the findings showed that knowledge of learners and teaching pedagogy were two main areas of pedagogical competence that NESB academics in this EMI context might find challenging, especially at the beginning of their teaching experience in this context.

Firstly, as mentioned previously in the findings related to sociolinguistic competence, some NESB academics in an Anglophone EMI setting might find it challenging to understand the student cohorts due to language and cultural differences. It was complex given the diverse backgrounds of not only domestic but also international students, who do not necessarily share the same language and culture with NESB educators. As explained earlier, deciphering colloquial language by local students posed a challenge to NESB academics. A number of survey responses also identified challenges in understanding international students' English, motivations and classroom engagement behaviours.

Secondly, whilst only five out of 34 survey respondents indicated a lack of confidence in their teaching pedagogy, the interview data showed that pedagogical challenges were common among the majority of NESB academics when they started teaching in Australia. This could result from 'particularly different teaching methodologies in Asian/other countries compared to Australia' (survey response). Another academic recalled the biggest challenge when he first taught in Australia after many years teaching in India was related to the rubric assessment practice:

I was never exposed to the marking rubrics ... That's where I had a problem initially, but not mainly as part of my language. I used to not have that kind of marking rubric, and then I just arbitrarily used to mark them [students' submissions] ... That really shocked the students because until then, perhaps my predecessor was using a marking rubric maybe with marking criteria. Since I did not have criteria, then all of the students came kind of retaliation mode, saying, 'No. You cannot do this in whatever way you think.' I admitted to them, 'I have teaching experience, I have this, but back in India, that's how I used to do marking.' (Interview response)

The interview excerpt illustrated a common 'blind spot' in EMI, that is, the problem that NESB academics might have in EMI might not necessarily be language-related. In this case, it was the differences in 'teaching cultures' or 'the education system' as the academic above put it. This finding supported the caution against overemphasis on educators' language use in determining students' learning (Grift, Meijerb, & Salm, 2012; Klaassen, 2001).

The current study did not intend to explore the correlation between teaching experience and perceived pedagogical challenges. However, the interview data suggested many academics early in their experience in EMI in Australia, despite their prior teaching experience elsewhere, tended to face challenges in terms of pedagogical competence. Academic interviewees alluded to their ability to have overcome these challenges as they gained more teaching experience in this context. The transition from one education system and teaching culture to another could present NESB academics with challenges in adapting their EMI to new expectations and practices. As such, they were required not only to appropriate their language but also their pedagogical knowledge as a tool for effective EMI delivery.

NESB academics' insights into strategies to overcome EMI challenges

Findings revealed that to overcome their initial challenges, exemplary NESB educators predominantly drew on a range of pedagogical strategies, whilst also acknowledging the use of other strategies to compensate for perceived limitations in grammatical competence (Williams et al., 1987).

Student-centred EMI strategies

Wilkinson (2005; cited in Wilkinson, 2013, p. 15) maintained that a student-centred approach is the go-to approach for EMI because it can benefit both teachers and students. Wilkinson argues the students would rely less on their teacher's linguistic competence as they become active in the learning process. In this respect, Dang and Vu (2017) briefly mentioned NESB educators' strategies to understand students: thinking like the students, identifying students' learning needs and adapting teaching to accommodate diverse student cohorts (p. 124). This present paper expands on the discussion on student-centred EMI strategies. Findings reveal that exemplary educators found 'understanding students' learning needs' and 'connecting with students' critical in their success in EMI. These strategies reflect the dimension of knowledge of learners and their characteristics within Shulman's (1987) teacher professional knowledge.

NESB academics regarded *understanding students' needs* as a critical EMI strategy. When asked to give advice to new NESB colleagues starting to teach in Australia, the exemplary NESB educators recommended getting to know students via formal and informal methods. Formally, they said, it was important to set diagnostic tasks early in the programme and to be aware of what students had learnt previously. This would be helpful especially if the NESB educators are not familiar with the Australian secondary education system or with the education system in countries where the international students come from. Informally, according to them, it would be useful to maintain informal conversations with students at the beginning of the lesson or during the break to gain insights into students and elicit their feedback.

NESB exemplary educators also considered *developing connection with students* as key to effective EMI. In the example below, the interviewed academic asserted teaching is relational. Viewing the English language as a tool, to this academic, how this tool is appropriated to build 'human connection' matters:

the language is a barrier at some stage because 'this is not the exact right word etc.' *the whole connection with the student is completely beyond the language.* It's really human connection as

opposed to ‘have you got the exact right word to express exactly what you want’. It’s very much about connecting with them on a human level. (Interview response)

Finally, findings also showed NESB academics found it important to acknowledge the diversity of student cohorts regarding their learning needs, abilities, English proficiency, learning styles, intelligences, etc. They found it equally important to adjust their communication of the content in English accordingly to best reach the diversity of students, verbally and nonverbally.

Appropriating English as a tool to teach technical or abstract contents

Findings revealed a range of strategies relating to communicative competence (such as discourse competence and strategic competence) (Williams et al., 1987) and pedagogic competence (Shulman, 1987) in appropriating English as a medium of instruction (Figure 1) to scaffold students’ learning of technical or abstract concepts and nuances.

Some common strategies NESB academics adopted to scaffold student learning include: deliberately introducing basic subject content before introducing more complex content; or adjusting their language used in the lesson, starting with simple or plain language before introducing jargon. Whilst NESB academics thought their ability to use ‘sophisticated language’ was not their strength compared to native English speakers, the pedagogical strategies exemplary NESB educators recommended hinted that this was not necessarily a limitation. For example, interviews with exemplary academics suggest that it would be more effective to avoid ‘big, technical words’ and start by using lay language that everyone could understand to explain a concept.

Findings revealed another strategy NESB academics adopted was explaining technical or abstract concepts through analogies, real-life examples, media news, and experiences relevant to students’ background. As such, the new concepts could be contextualised and easier for students to understand. For example, one academic explained his strategies and their benefits:

I pause for a minute and then explain to them what it is in the context of... In a simple layman’s language, and then I correlate to some of the real-life situations. That gets a photographic memory into their minds. (Interview response)

The data also showed that using teaching aids was a common strategy, also fitting the strategic competence (Williams et al., 1987). NESB academics shared how teaching aids were utilised to enhance EMI delivery:

It’s critical that your PowerPoint is well-developed, organised and explicit with what it is you want the students to know ... I actually use lot of visual aids to teach the students, to make them understand. White board has been the key tool I’ve been using most of the time in my tutorials ... White board markers are very useful for explaining concepts, drawing and explaining. You can rub out. You can restart the whole conversation again if the students are not able to follow you. (Interview response)

Fewer words, more visuals, and talking around the visuals ... If you write too many things on your slides, you will spend so much time just reading the slides, rather than getting the contents across. (Interview response)

Academic participants also elaborated on the use of slides, videos and animations, screen projections, white boards, handouts, models, kits, and simulation tools as the teaching

tools that mitigate potential difficulties in using the English language tool to communicate. The general principle recommended was that teaching aids should be audience/student-oriented and that educators spoke *with* the teaching aids and walked students through the use of these tools.

As illustrated in the interview excerpt mentioned earlier, voice techniques, i.e. effective use of pauses could also help NESB academics communicate with ‘clear language’ (Klaassen, 2001, p. 85) as they appropriated this tool in EMI.

Building self-efficacy in using English as a mediational tool

A number of NESB academics believed it was necessary for them to continue building their English proficiency and efficacy in using English for communicative purposes in EMI. Findings from the survey reveal that NESB academics suggested several ways the university could support them in their related professional development. For example, some suggested a formal programme to improve their English proficiency, to gain peer feedback on the effectiveness of their communication, and to have opportunities to observe classes delivered by exemplary educators.

In-depth interviews with exemplary educators revealed that their ongoing self-driven efforts to polish their English proficiency seemed crucial to their success in overcoming initial challenges in EMI. For instance, an academic reflected on his own strategy to adjust his pronunciation to bridge the differences between his spoken English and other variations of English:

When I pronounce certain words, if I see that the person does not get it or does not understand, I would actually see how they pronounce it. I would write the word to them and say: ‘This is what I’m saying,’ and then I will ask: ‘How do you pronounce this?’ Then I will listen to that and I will try to adjust myself there ... Compared to people who speak other languages ... Listen to the news and see how they pronounce it ... It’s general practice ... *Consciously thinking about your pronunciation and seeing how you can adjust.* (Interview response, emphasis added)

The excerpt highlights NESB educators’ self-efficacy in appropriating and developing their English as a mediational tool (Vygotsky, 1978) in EMI.

Discussion and implications

This is one of the first studies exploring the experiences of NESB academics in teaching in an Anglophone EMI context. The findings have implications for EMI research, professional development for NESB academics, and language planning policies in the internationalisation of higher education in Anglophone countries.

The findings first elucidate EMI phenomenon in HE. Previous EMI research has reported on the perspectives of NESB academics in non-Anglophone tertiary contexts (e.g. Doiz et al., 2013c), and those of the international teaching assistants at the universities in Anglophone contexts, mainly the US (see, e.g. Hoekje & Williams, 1982; Shaw & Garate, 1984). The findings in this EMI context in Australia add to our understanding of what ‘EMI in HE actually is’ (Macaro et al., 2018, p. 67), encompassing contexts not traditionally considered as EMI due to the increasingly internationalised nature of the HE sector. The EMI context here reflects closely the position of English as a ‘global lingua franca’ (Rigg, 2013, p. 1), with English being the means of communication between speakers

with different first languages (Seidlhofer, 2005). The conceptualisation of this EMI context is nicely captured in what one academic sees as ‘cosmopolitan environments, with many people having different cultures and accents’, given the high level of academic mobility in Australia (Balasooriya et al., 2014) and the diverse student cohorts.

The NESB academics’ stories reveal the complexity of EMI in this Anglophone HE context, where the focus goes beyond language. This finding echoes a view suggested by Grift et al. (2012) and Klaassen (2001) that teaching pedagogy ‘is a more important determinant of students’ content learning than “near-nativeness” in English’ (Klaassen, 2001, p. 82). Interestingly, the majority of the participants, including all the interviewed exemplary academics and 85% of the surveyed participants, did not perceive any ‘problems’ with their English language. Unlike in previous research in other EMI contexts where EMI issues facing NESB academics are typically depicted as problems, academics in the current study did not see ‘obstacles.’ Rather they saw ‘differences’ especially in the accent and pronunciation between varieties of English, in the category of grammatical competence (Ball & Lindsay, 2013). Their perspectives reflect a ‘World Englishes’ (Kachru, 1992) view, rather than the simplistic native and non-native speakers binary. This resembles the view of the university as a cosmopolitan environment and demonstrates an appreciation for the linguistically diverse landscape in the internationalised Australian higher education.

Findings reveal inseparable links between linguistic communicative competence and pedagogical competence for exemplary NESB academics in this EMI context. Whilst a few participants reported challenges in understanding their domestic English native-speaker students’ colloquial language or in cracking a joke appropriately, NESB academics’ challenges were not boiled down to a lack of linguistic competence. This is important to note as 29.8% of the domestic student population here speak other languages than English at home. Furthermore, one academic talked about ‘the whole connection with the student is completely beyond the language’ (Interview response). Findings indeed show that exemplary NESB academics appropriated English language as a mediational tool (Vygotsky, 1978) for learning and teaching purposes. The strategies they reported as attributed to their success in teaching in this EMI context predominantly aim to enhance their pedagogical competence. In appropriating English as a pedagogical tool (Grossman et al., 1999), they emphasised the need to adapt to their students as audience and objectives of the learning and teaching process. Here, the appropriation of this tool is clearly for a purpose, neither general nor arbitrary. For example, interview data showed a strong focus on a learner-centred approach, such as through scaffolding student learning of technical or abstract content. This finding in this Anglophone EMI context is in line with Wilkinson’s (2013) assertion that a student-centred approach is crucial for EMI success in non-Anglophone HE contexts. Although more research would be needed, this study has responded to Macaro et al.’s (2018) call by establishing that ‘the competence to teach academic subjects through English’ (p. 38) mattered particularly in this EMI context when it comes to engaging with the linguistically diverse student cohort.

Through the exemplary NESB academics’ stories, findings highlight the importance of teacher agency in EMI implementation. These academics drew on various pedagogical strategies to overcome their initial challenges to teach effectively. They strived to connect with their students and improve their pedagogical competence. Their agency is also demonstrated in their efforts to adapt linguistic competence, such as improving

their pronunciation, to communicate better. This finding supports Baldauf's (2012) argument that teachers' agency is significant in implementing EMI policies. It also highlights the role of human agency in appropriating tools to change the environment, and, through the process, change ourselves (Vygotsky, 1978).

Understanding how EMI is played out in the internationalised HE context from the NESB academics' perspectives, findings have implications for institutional support and professional development for this cohort. Common support mechanisms at Australian universities for this cohort, if any, tend to focus on improving their English language proficiency or communicative competence (Dang & Vu, 2017). The findings suggest that whilst such focus may be beneficial for the small number with limited linguistic competence to improve their English communication, it would not be sufficient for supporting NESB academics to teach effectively. Professional learning to enhance academics' pedagogical competence would be crucial, especially for those early in their exposure to EMI context in Australia, even when they may have prior teaching experience elsewhere. This should encompass pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987), especially in understanding students and learning, and knowing strategies to teach technical contents. It is also paramount to create an environment which supports academics exercise their agency in response to the challenges in teaching in such contexts. The combined institutional support and academics' self-driven professional development would be important to enhance their competence.

Finally, by revealing the complexity of EMI in the internationalisation of the Australian HE, featured by the cosmopolitan environment and diverse linguistic landscape, the study has potential to contribute to informing language planning policies in the Anglophone HE to address the needs of all involved to achieve positive EMI experiences and outcomes.

Note

1. See Moore and Harrington (2016) for the full policy framework for English language proficiency (ELP) in Australian higher education.

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