

# English-medium instruction in (neoliberalized) higher education: Questioning some assumptions

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## Abstract

The neoliberalization of higher education (HE), which began in earnest about three decades ago, and the global spread of English, which began earlier, together have motivated an exponential increase in the number of universities worldwide offering English-medium instruction (EMI) as a key part of their internationalization policies. Against this backdrop, the organizers of this conference have posed a series of important questions regarding EMI in HE: (1) What is the role of LSP teaching and research?; (2) How can academics expand their international and multidisciplinary networks?; and (3) How can educators best prepare future graduates for complex multilingual and multicultural work and study environments? In my view these questions are based on assumptions that seem, at first glance, commonsensical, but which, on closer examination, begin to seem problematic. Regarding question (1), there is the assumption that EMI in HE must (and perhaps should) exist (how else, if not, can we talk about the role of such instruction and research on it?). Regarding question (2), there is the assumption that academics should expand their international and multidisciplinary networks (how else, if not, can we talk about how they can do so?). Third and finally, regarding question (3), there is the assumption that HE educators should prepare future graduates for complex multilingual and multicultural work and study environments (how else, if not, can we talk about how educators can prepare students for these networks?). In this plenary, I will take a contrarian view, questioning these three assumptions, while using them as a jumping off point for a critical consideration of other assumptions that I see as integral to (neoliberalized) international HE in the twenty-first century. In the process of doing this, I will draw on research on STEM EMI lecturers in HE that I have been involved with in recent years.