

**Book Overview and Q&A with David Marsh, Victor Pavón-Vázquez, and María Jesús Frigols-Martín [Review of the Book *The Higher Education Language Landscape: Ensuring Quality in English Language Degree Programmes*, Valencia, Spain: VIU]**

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### **Abstract**

This writing gives a general overview of the book, *The Higher Education Language Landscape: Ensuring Quality in English Language Degree Programmes*, written by Marsh, Pavón-Vázquez, and Frigols-Martín (2013), as well as a general impressions about its contents. It also includes short biographical information about the book authors and a Q&A, where they answer questions about the book and content language integrated learning in higher education.

**Keywords:** Content language integrated learning, CLIL, English-medium instruction, EMI, English language program, Marsh, Pavon-Vazquez, Frigols-Martin

### **Book Summary**

*The Higher Education Language Landscape: Ensuring Quality in English Language Degree Programmes*, written by Marsh, Pavón-Vázquez, and Frigols-Martín (2013) draws on research carried out over a span of fifteen years to produce twenty-six levers that are fundamental to the successful implementation of English-taught degree programs in higher education. In this way it fills an extensive gap in the literature on English-medium instruction (EMI), where a great deal has been published regarding methodologies and good practices within primary and secondary education, but not so much within the context of higher education.

Current internationalization trends are quickly changing this scenario due to the growing demand of universities for guidelines to aid in the process. The authors, through these close to thirty levers, offer a clear set of strategies that could easily fit into the improvement plans of any university where internationalization processes and/or language policy production are concerned, stating them in the form of possible Key Performance Indicators, which are measurable and may be used as a map towards quality international education. The authors themselves define them as a “blueprint for action designed to be adaptable to the environment in which the university operates” (Marsh, Pavón-Vázquez, & Frigols-Martín, 2013, p. 9).

The first chapter covers the first eight levers under the heading Governance & Strategy. In this section, issues such as University Language Policy, Program Objectives and Language Planning, English Language Fluency, Staff Incentives, the Role of Language Specialists, Research, and Learning Technologies are presented. The authors differentiate between language policy and language planning exemplifying policy as the university’s constitution and the plan as the road map. They also advise that program objectives have to be linked to competencies and incentives offered to staff involved in English-taught degree programs to compensate the extra time and effort they have to invest, which may take 300% more time than in their domestic language, according to the authors. Collaboration with language specialists, peers and researchers is a must to ensure quality activities, as is investing in technologies that enable such collaboration.

Levers nine to sixteen form the second chapter on Program Management, with themes such as Student Intake, Voluntary Involvement of Teaching Staff and Coordinated Staff Dialogue, English Language Communication Objectives, Benchmarking Learning Success, Concept Formation, English Language Program Input, and finally, Plagiarism Management. In this chapter the authors highlight that “those universities that internationalize with a clear focus on quality now will be those that will be better suited to thrive” (Marsh et al., 2013, p. 25), claiming an increased importance being placed on the value of higher education and alternative forms of competency-based education as contributing factors. Where staff is concerned, the point is made that involvement in English-taught programs has to be voluntary and coordination within degrees is essential, particularly at implementation. Programs must have clear objectives that include both communication and subject aims, and learning should follow a modular approach that includes continuous assessment and benchmarking. Concept formation is proposed as an important skill for staff to master, as are socio-constructivist methodologies and tasks based on acquiring higher order thinking skills. English language programs are important in universities that offer English-taught degree programs and may be fully integrated, closely integrated or separated from the teaching of subjects, the latter being the least desirable. Detecting plagiarism may pose difficulties for non-native faculty, and therefore providing quality English language detection software is recommended.

Chapter Three is titled Professional Integration and includes levers seventeen to twenty-three, which mostly concern support and cooperation. This section begins with Program Support Staff, continuing on with International Networking, Cooperation & Publishing, Cooperative Ventures, Communities of Practice, Interactional Methodologies, Conceptual Scaffolding, and

Quality Assurance & Accreditation. Here, the book points out that the need for communication skills in English is not reserved only to faculty teaching in such programs, but also required of administrative staff who deal with international students. Lever eighteen purports that “[p]articipation by staff in English-taught degree programmes has been seen by these authors to lead to greater opportunities to network internationally, form collaborative ventures, and open doors for working closely with selected academics from different countries” (Marsh et al. 2013, p. 34). Cooperation can also lead to new ventures being established, which may allow for sharing costs and risks, as the next lever explains. Communities of Practice allow faculty to form groups that may collaborate “to contribute in different ways to the emergent creation and success of teaching and learning outcomes” (2013, p. 37). Digital literacy is behind the lever on Interactional Methodologies, which according to the authors may maximize interactivity and foster peer-learning. Scaffolding is important in language-related learning as it provides necessary cognitive support structures that may be decreased as the learner progresses, and Quality Assurance and Accreditation measure performance and offers external acknowledgement of standards.

The final chapter of the book, Participatory Learning in Media-rich Environments, discusses Digitalized Learning Environments, Social Media, and Studio and Virtual Environments, which correspond to levers twenty-four, twenty-five, and twenty-six. In this last section of the book, authors explain how English-taught degree programs that work with digitalized learning environments hold significant advantages in that they allow for “[t]ailoring and personalizing learning of content with English language and conceptual scaffolding” (Marsh et al., 2013, p. 42). In the next two levers, they go on to accentuate the opportunities for students to interact with peers and experts through social media and give free range to their natural digital literacy in virtual environments.

### **Impressions**

This book clearly fills a great gap in the literature concerning English-taught degree programs, their quality implementation, and their role in building the way towards good practice in responsible internationalization. It becomes an extremely useful tool for Higher Education Institutions to systematize English-taught degrees through its twenty-six lever framework. However, its comprehensiveness makes for a somewhat complex tool, which some may find overwhelming to comply with, particularly at the initiation stage. Therefore, it may be advisable for institutions who wish to use it as a reference, to plan several stages of implementation, introducing a set of previously established priority levers at first.

The fact that some levers overlap to some extent may make it possible to fuse several into one, making it slightly more achievable. It would also be helpful to have access to the studies the book draws upon, particularly to those institutions engaging in much needed research within the field. Regardless of these minor critiques, this publication offers much needed knowledge regarding how to go about ensuring quality in English-taught degree programs in a thorough, step-by-step manner.

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## About the authors

### David Marsh

Born in Australia, educated in the UK, and currently based in Finland, Dr. David Marsh is an author, researcher, teacher, and advisor in the field of multilingual and bilingual education, having worked on European Commission projects, for corporations and for governments worldwide. Dr. Marsh has carried out ground-breaking research in the area of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) as well as on innovation in English-Medium Instruction.

Dr. Marsh has published widely; he is co-author of *Uncovering CLIL* (2008), *Content and Language Integrated Learning* (2010), and co-editor of *Quality Interfaces: Examining Evidence & Exploring Solutions in CLIL* (2012). He is author of *The CLIL Trajectory: Educational innovation for the 21st Century iGeneration* (2013).

### Víctor Pavón Vázquez

Dr. Víctor Pavón Vázquez is an academic at the University of Córdoba (Spain), where he coordinates an innovative program of professional development for academic staff and teachers in schools, who are involved with education through the medium of English. As an author, researcher, and lecturer, he is active in education development programs in Europe and beyond, focusing on research and development for capacity building of higher education, and subsequent competence building of staff to support organizational internationalization processes as part of the objectives of the European Higher Education Area.

### María Jesús Frigols Martín

María Jesús Frigols Martín (DEA) is an author, teacher, researcher, and consultant on Content and Language Integrated learning (CLIL), currently holding the position of Head of Institutional and International Relations and the Languages Department, and coordinator for CLIL Studies, at the Valencian International University (VIU). She is closely linked to the design and evaluation of European educational development work, and from 2007-2010 she coordinated an international team leading to the development of the European Framework for CLIL Teacher Education (EFCT) for the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) of the Council of Europe. She is also co-author of the award-winning book *Uncovering CLIL* (2008). Her current research interests include the development of technologically advanced learning environments in higher education as one pillar of the globalization of higher education.

## Q & A with the Authors

**Q1:** What lessons learnt from CLIL in primary or secondary school environments can be applied to the tertiary sector? Are the levers you mention in your publication applicable to a variety of educational sectors?

**A1:** There are marked differences in primary, secondary and tertiary education both as sectors and across countries. We are in the midst of the biggest global change process facing all of these sectors for over a century. It is only recently that the pressure on higher education

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to embark on wide-scale transformation has become acute. Experiences from the primary sector are relevant to the secondary sector, just as those of secondary are relevant to tertiary. This is in recognizing that education is not just about teaching and instruction, but rather in how we create and sustain profound learning environments.

The main lessons to be learnt are about change management. For too long, centuries in some cases, change at all levels has been incremental – tinkering – a bit here and a bit there. The main lesson learnt from primary and secondary education is that change needs to be systemic. To heal the patient you don't treat one physical disorder without treating the body and mind as a whole. This requires a double-direction process which is driven by shared understanding of what top-down administration declares, and what grassroots teachers believe can be achieved.

If we want to innovate, and introducing CLIL as a dual-language educational experience is potentially highly innovative, then we need to challenge the status quo. This is often easier said than done, but when we change the language of instruction we have an opportunity for this action to open up windows of opportunity for a range of constructive and timely change, and this has to go deep into the system to be successful.

Another lesson that can be learnt is that the decisions and actions that are taken to integrate content and language in higher education, whether at the organizational and curricular level, or at the teaching level, will gradually and inevitably change the educational reality, as it has been proved that CLIL may be one of the main drivers for change in schools.

Content and language teacher collaboration, the way academic content is accessed and used, class dynamics..., there are a number of significant dimensions that are positively affected by the integration of content and language at the tertiary level just as in primary and secondary education. Tertiary education often operates with a high degree of autonomy, whereas schools tend to be more centrally governed, and this is a major difference between these sectors.

The levers we describe are applicable to higher, vocational and professional education as a whole. Some are also applicable to primary and secondary education but often in different ways.

**Q2:** Is there a benchmarking tool to measure the failure or success of EMI programs at university? What are the effects of EMI on student performance versus non EMI cohorts?

**A2:** EMI is English Medium Instruction. CLIL is Content and Language Integrated Learning. EMI may or may not be CLIL. CLIL may or may not be EMI. Some training entities in the public domain approach EMI through a monolingual perspective and focus on the ability to speak and use the English language as the predominant competence targeted in training programmes. Others view EMI in the same vein as FMI (French), GMI (German) or SMI (Spanish) and aim for success through strengthening linguistic competence alongside

methodological knowledge and skills. These latter skills are often lacking in higher education environments.

*Ensuring Quality in English Language Degree Programmes* was produced as a benchmarking tool specifically to enable and measure degrees of success when implementing EMI courses and programmes. It was created so as to be read by differing people in higher education in order to be used as a benchmarking tool. We don't know of any others of this type. We do know, however, that in some countries trans-regional and trans-national university institutions are considering developing benchmarking tools, which may, or may not be similar to those in this publication.

The effects of EMI on student performance in different environments can be found on a continuum from negative to positive. But the same applies to non-EMI student performance. When implemented well EMI can be found to bring added value. When implemented poorly then the outcomes may be worse than education in the first language of the environment.

**Q3:** Could you mention some examples of good EMI practice in higher education institutions, not only in Europe, but also other parts of the world?

**A3:** There are good examples of EMI practice in countries such as Australia and Singapore where higher education has served the interests of students with different linguistic backgrounds for a long period of time. Quality has probably resulted from recognition of the need of the system to respond to the challenge. Equally good examples can be found in specific institutions, and/or faculties within institutions globally.

**Q4:** How does the “lonely professor” get support? Where can they start networking?

**A4:** Any academic needs to consider why they would want to become involved with EMI to a greater or lesser extent in their lives. One of the drivers may be professional development. The starting point for such people could be in seeking out international expert networks that are involved with research, development and teaching through the medium of English.

From a more local perspective, teachers need to be supported in their own universities. The elaboration of an organisational language policy and the identification of clear objectives are measures that do their part to reinforce their role and performance in EMI. Teaching staff also need to be provided with incentives and with a solid training programme adapted to their needs. Networking with other colleagues in other universities is essential, as in establishing a network of collaboration between language departments.

**Q5:** At the very end of your book, in the post-script, you mention that the levers presented could be used within a KPI (Key Performance Indicator) framework. Which of the 26 levers would you say are priority to define as KPIs?

**A5:** At the outset it would be Levers 1-3. These are the language policy, objectives, and

action plans. At a later stage other levers become more significant such as Lever 18 on international networking, cooperation and publishing.

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