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The incentivisation of English medium instruction in Chinese universities: policy misfires and misalignments

<https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2021-0181>

Received November 13, 2021; accepted November 13, 2021; published online December 2, 2021

Abstract: The growth of English medium instruction (EMI) in higher education in China over the past two decades has been promoted via implicit and explicit policies that aim to incentivise activities associated with the creation of English-taught courses and programs. This study investigates the components of such incentivisation schemes. It also explores how incentivisation policies are being implemented by policy arbiters, EMI programme directors, and EMI teachers. Data were collected from two sources: 93 institutional policy documents on EMI provision collected from 63 Chinese universities, and 26 interviews with senior university staff at a selection of eight Chinese universities. Results revealed that incentivisation policies focused on increased workload weighting for EMI courses, greater access to career development opportunities for teachers, increased monetary rewards, and dedicated financial support for creating and delivering courses. A comparison of policy and practice revealed areas of policy misfires and misalignments. EMI teachers considered the workload incentives insufficient and were not primarily motivated by financial rewards, but rather chose to teach in English for professional, academic, and personal intrinsic rewards; many viewed EMI at the core of their teacher-researcher academic identities. The paper concludes with recommendations to better align incentivisation policies with the driving forces attached to EMI in China.

Keywords: Chinese higher education; EMI driving forces; English medium instruction; higher education policy; incentivisation

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1 Introduction

1.1 EMI as an internationalisation agenda

The Chinese higher education sector has undergone extensive internationalisation in the past decades, which has laid the foundation for the rapid growth of English taught courses (Zhang 2018). *Internationalisation* as a concept in the higher education literature has been evasive, being equated with *Englishisation* in East Asia (Galloway et al. 2020). Recently, de Wit and Altbach (2021) described internationalisation both as a concept and a “strategic agenda”, acknowledging it as a “a relatively new, broad, and varied phenomenon in tertiary education [that] during the past half-century ... has evolved from a marginal activity to a key aspect of the reform agenda” (p. 1). Inherent aspects of the internationalisation reform agenda are efforts to improve mobility, to broaden experiences, to standardise qualifications, as well as to increase English medium instruction (EMI). But such standardisation assumes a distinctly Western conceptualisation of the internationalisation of higher education that conflicts with Chinese conceptualisations (Liu 2020; Lo and Pan 2020; Mok 2007). While de Wit and Altbach (2021) highlighted arguments that the concept is a Western one that perpetuates colonialism and neoliberalism, we find that a global contextualisation of higher education that informs the development of EMI can be achieved where local contexts are part of the construction, rather than ignored in a full adoption of Anglo-Saxon educational practices and “aphasia of non-Western peripheries” (Liu 2020: 231).

EMI is an umbrella term used to refer 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” (Macaro 2018: 19). Although other definitions of EMI exist, Macaro’s (2018) characterisation of EMI is applicable to the context of China, where EMI is rapidly expanding at universities that are charged with leading the internationalisation of higher education. Within an East Asian context, the attractiveness of EMI is that it “can be seen to kill two birds with one stone, giving students a chance to increase their English proficiency skills and enhance their academic progress in other subjects at the same time” (Galloway et al. 2017: 6), although the extent to which EMI achieves these dual benefits is questionable (see Macaro et al. 2018 for a review of research).

1.2 Push/pull factors for EMI

While there has been little research on incentivisation of teaching in EMI programmes, there has been considerable research exploring the push and pull forces

associated with EMI programme creation and development. In Europe, the drivers of EMI are noted to include: increasing participation in higher education exchange programmes; increasing the attractiveness of programmes to local and global staff and students; recruiting more international faculty and students; and responding to the increasing presence of English in academic research (Coleman 2006). A seminal survey of English taught programmes in European universities reported the following motivations driving EMI: attracting foreign students; making domestic students more ready for global job markets; generating tuition fees (Wächter and Maiworm 2004). A follow-up survey 10 years later, added the following additional drivers: improving mastery of English for students; better classroom interaction due to smaller class sizes; increased mobility, employability and opportunities of studying in an intercultural environment for students (Wächter and Maiworm 2014). More recently, a survey of National Agency respondents in 19 European countries revealed the following benefits of EMI at the bachelor-degree level: financial benefits for the institution and the local economy; more internationalised classrooms; improving the quality of education; and attracting talent to the institution and the local economy (Sandström and Neghina 2017).

Research into the push and pull factors driving EMI in Europe largely echo those observed in China, but with slight differences in importance. One study of top-down national and institutional policy documents, supplemented with fieldwork, revealed “dominant institutional and personal beliefs accorded high values and prestige to the English language through associating it inexorably with such national/institutional and personal benefits as internationalization, career prospects, and access to educational opportunities in Anglophone countries” (Hu et al. 2014: 28). A more recent study by Galloway et al. (2017) surveyed 579 students and interviewed 28 teachers at East Asian universities—including seven Chinese universities. Findings revealed the biggest bottom-up factors driving the demand for EMI were that students wanted to improve their English, and increase future opportunities for employment and study abroad (Galloway et al. 2017).

Although the perceived drivers of EMI are generally understood, few studies have systematically explored incentivisation schemes for promoting EMI in Chinese universities. However, some studies have explored these schemes at the institutional level. For example, in the study by Hu et al. (2014) their focal (case study) university had several incentives to encourage faculty to teach on EMI programmes, including favourable calculations of workload, some material rewards, and increased “symbolic” recognition. Some teachers in this study viewed the workload and material rewards as insufficient to compensate for the extra work required to create and teach EMI courses, but recognised the symbolic distinction as personally and professionally important. Other professors in the study complained that the incentive scheme could have a negative and demoralising effect

on those teachers who were unable to teach on EMI programmes. The focus of the study by Hu et al. (2014) was not primarily on incentives, so little more than these general impressions and effects of these policies are understood. This gap in knowledge necessitates a closer inspection on how EMI teaching is currently incentivised by Chinese universities, and what stakeholder responses are to different types of incentivisation.

2 Background of the study

2.1 Internationalisation of Chinese higher education

In governmental policies, EMI programmes are heavily linked to the aims of achieving internationalisation in Chinese higher education (Hu et al. 2014). Starting from 2001, the Chinese Ministry of Education (MOE) issued a series of policies to encourage universities to develop EMI programmes or “bilingual education” (*shuangyu jiaoxue*, 双语教学), as a means to facilitate the internationalisation of university curriculum, teaching, and learning (e.g. Ministry of Education 2001, 2007). Although Chinese universities initiated EMI provisions later than many of their European counterparts (Hu et al. 2014), the expansion of EMI provision in Chinese higher education has been swift, propelled by top-down internationalisation strategies that are backed by policy and financial support (Zhang 2018). Even as early as 2006, the effect of these bilingual education policies was clear, with evidence that a majority of top Chinese universities had already developed EMI courses (Wu et al. 2010).

In the higher education sector, the government-led and most influential internationalisation strategies started with Project 211 and Project 985 in the 1990s. The two projects aimed at building world-class universities and enhancing the quality of higher education and research in China (China Academic Degrees and Graduate Education Information 2009, 2012). In total, 116 universities were designated as “211” universities, 39 of which were also “985” universities which were considered of higher standing than “211” in terms of funding and reputation (China Academic Degrees and Graduate Education Information 2009, 2012).

In the 2010s, the new Double First-Class Programme replaced the Project 985 and Project 211 (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance and National Development and Reform Commission 2017; State Council 2015). The Double First-Class Programme has two targets, as indicated by the term “double”: building first-class universities and building first-class disciplines. It designated 42 universities as Double First-Class Universities (DFCUs) and 465 Double First-Class Disciplines (DFCDs) at a further 95 universities (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance and National Development

and Reform Commission 2017). Among the 42 DFCUs, 36 are Class-A Double First-Class universities (those considered more prestigious) and six are Class-B Double First-Class universities (those considered less prestigious) (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance and National Development and Reform Commission 2017). Universities are stratified in terms of funding, resources, reputation, and status: universities selected in the Double First-Class Programme enjoy more privileges and higher prestige than those excluded from the scheme; DFCUs are allocated with more resources and considered of higher status than DFCDs; among the Class-A DFCUs, nine leading universities have formed a “C9 League” that are regarded as the most elite grouping of universities and China’s Ivy League (Allen 2017; Liu 2018). The “C9 League” distinction is not affiliated with the Double First-Class Programme stipulated by China’s MOE.

This stratification and subsequent inequalities are also manifest in EMI provision in the Chinese tertiary education sector (Hu et al. 2014). Chinese universities in different groupings vary in their institutional policy-making and implementation of EMI (Rose et al. 2020b), so policy research into EMI in China should ideally account for this variation. This study addresses this need by sampling the different types of universities to present a more comprehensive picture of the EMI provision in Chinese higher education.

2.2 Incentivisation for university teachers in China

Incentivisation as part of a neoliberal internationalisation-of-higher-education agenda requires careful investigation, as increased focus on English may be poorly rationalised (Liu 2020). In their study investigating the balance of teaching and research in UK higher education, or the “teaching-research nexus”, McKinley et al. (2021: 1038) explain, “As universities respond to the incentives of the enterprise era, innovation, and especially innovation that is uncritically linked with student employability, is refocusing priority.” Such innovation outside the Anglosphere usually points to a focus on English output and EMI. Chinese universities provide two types of incentive measures for EMI: one for offering EMI courses (e.g., increased funding, staffing and materials) and one for EMI teachers (e.g., favourable workload adjustments, career opportunities, and monetary rewards) (Rose et al. 2020b).

General incentive measures to improve university teachers’ performance in research and teaching are prevalent in institutional policies at Chinese universities. Several studies have reported the existence of research and publication incentives in China (Hvistendahl 2013; Stephan 2012; Vidovich et al. 2007). For several decades, Chinese universities have provided monetary bonuses for

international publications in science and technology disciplines (Quan et al. 2017) – a practice that has spread to other disciplines. An investigation of 172 incentive documents collected at 116 “985” and “211” universities found that by 2016, 84 out of the 116 had university-level incentive schemes for international publications in the humanities and social sciences (Xu et al. 2021). The study identified two types of publication incentives: monetary and career-related ones, which granted publications in designated international journals – largely in English – with larger financial bonuses or higher weightings in career development than most Chinese publications (Xu et al. 2021). In 2020, however, these publication incentives for international publications were discouraged in the latest policies issued by the central government (Ministry of Education and Ministry of Science and Technology 2020; Ministry of Science and Technology 2020). Nonetheless, these incentive schemes have already had considerable influence on how English is used within academic cultures at many top Chinese universities.

Different types of incentives generate different types of impact on university teachers’ behaviours. Liu and Zhang (2010) categorised research incentivisation in Chinese universities into two types: external incentives that come from the outer environment and internal incentives that are intrinsic to the academic work (Liu and Zhang 2010). They argued that internal incentives are “self-motivating”, “steadier”, “more enduring”, and “more effective” (p. 17) than external ones. Interviews with 65 academics and six senior administrators at six Chinese universities revealed that between monetary and career-related incentives, both senior administrators and academics were more aware of monetary ones, which were mentioned as explicit and straightforward. Nonetheless, most academics expressed more concern over the career-related incentives than with the financial rewards, seeing them as essential to their academic reputation, development, tenure, and promotion (Xu 2020; Xu et al. 2021). These findings from the Chinese context echo research on incentive schemes in other contexts. For instance, Morey (2003) found that many academic rewards are of intrinsic value, and “academics consistently report that they are more motivated by intrinsic interests than by material ones” (p. 82).

The link or nexus between research and teaching is crucial for university teachers (McKinley et al. 2021), and especially for those at the crossroads of language education, and applied linguistic research (McKinley 2019). However, existing studies on incentivisation in Chinese universities have largely focused on research incentives, ignoring teaching. There is therefore a lack of literature exploring the scale, structure, and impacts of incentive measures for university teaching – a gap the current study intends to address, with a focus on better understanding the incentives for EMI teaching and course development in Chinese higher education.

3 Data collection

This study investigates the incentivisation of EMI teaching at Chinese universities, by drawing on the analysis of two datasets: 93 institutional policy documents on EMI provision collected from 63 Chinese universities, and 26 interviews with university staff and faculty at eight Chinese universities. The data were drawn from a single, funded study that explored policy and practices of EMI in China (see Rose et al. 2020b). Before data collection, this research was granted ethical clearance from the Central University Research Ethics Committee of the researchers' university, as well as gaining approval from China Education Association for International Exchange, which helped to distribute the survey.

3.1 Institutional policy scanning

The 93 university-level EMI policy documents from 63 universities were collected in July 2019, via searching in the official websites of each double first-class university (DFCU) and double first-class discipline university (DFCD) using two search engines, *Google* and *Baidu*. The search was conducted by a Chinese team member using keywords in Chinese, including each university's name and "English-medium instruction/courses/teaching/curriculum" and/or "Bilingual instruction/courses/teaching/curriculum".

In total, this study identified 93 institutional policy documents from 63 universities, including 44 documents from 22 DFCUs and 49 documents from 41 DFCDs. The documents comprised 78 guidance documents and 15 application forms. Regulations stipulated the aims, requirements, incentives measures, and funding arrangements for EMI programmes. Application forms often accompany regulations and reveal information about institutional requirements for EMI curricula, and therefore were included for analysis. Some universities may have had internal policy documents, which were not accessible publicly, therefore could not be identified in this search. All documents collected were published in Chinese. In this article, some important phrases and sentences from the policies were translated by one bilingual (Chinese-English) author and are supplemented with Chinese pinyin and Chinese characters to increase the transparency and trustworthiness of the translations.

All policy documents were inputted into NVivo 12 for content analysis. The coding process started with open coding to generate codes from the documents. Those codes were then clustered into major themes and sub-themes using a thematic text analysis process as described by Rose et al. (2020a). The coding frame

informed the structure and contents of the Findings section in this article. Findings from this documentary analysis were synthesised with results of the interview analyses.

3.2 Fieldwork

The fieldwork was conducted in September 2019, including interviews with 26 participants at eight universities in four Chinese cities. While five of these eight universities were included in the 63 universities in our policy scan, when then moving to the fieldwork stage, we added three other universities so our sample would cover a range of EMI programmes at different types of Chinese universities. We acknowledge this as a limitation to the study, as the interviews were designed to shed light on the institutional policies (discussed in Section 5 below). The fieldwork institutions included: Two C9 League universities, in two different cities; Two Class-A DFCUs, located in two different cities; Two language-specialist universities, one DFCD and one ordinary; Two transnational universities, one well-established and the other emerging.

At the eight universities, 26 interviewees participated in individual or group interviews. They included four senior managers (vice president, head of academic affairs, head of department), four senior staff at teacher training centre, two senior managers at international student offices, four EMI program directors, and 12 EMI teachers. Except for one interviewee from the US and one from the UK, other interviewees were all from China. Interviews were conducted in English. When interviewees responded in Chinese, immediate interpretation into English was provided by one Chinese-and-English-speaking bilingual researcher. Interviews were transcribed and written up into field notes. The transcriptions and field notes were analysed thematically and triangulated with findings from the policy scans.

4 Findings

4.1 Incentives in institutional policies

The analysis of 93 institutional policy documents revealed a prevalence of incentive measures for EMI provision at Chinese universities. Of the 63 universities identified with policies on EMI provisions (out of 137 DFCUs and DFCDs), 51 of them (81%) provided incentives for EMI courses. They comprised 19 double first-class universities (86% of the 22 DFCUs identified) and 32 double first-class discipline universities (78% of the 41 DFCDs identified).

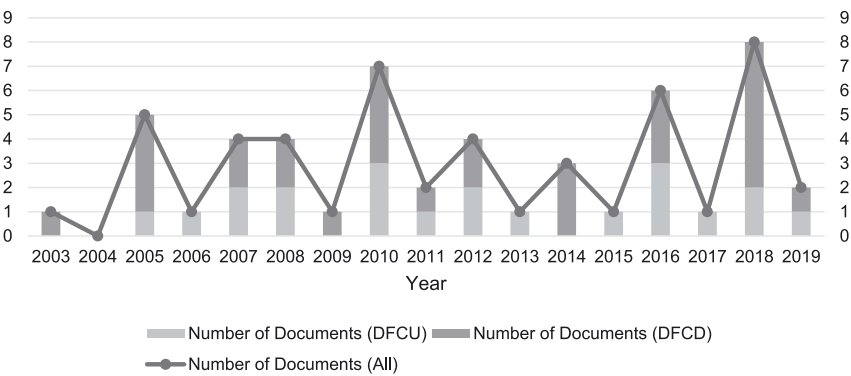


Figure 1: Publication years of documents with incentive measures.

4.1.1 Years of publications

The EMI policy documents in our study were published during the period from 2003 to 2019. The 51 universities published 54 total documents with incentive measures for EMI. Publication years of documents with incentive measures are shown in Figure 1. The number of documents published each year has fluctuated across the past two decades, with two peaks in 2018 and 2010. Some policy documents went through several rounds of revisions over the years; the year used for analysis was the latest year of revision. These results indicate a steady flow of incentive schemes for EMI.

4.1.2 Types of incentive measures

The incentive policies had two major targets of incentivisation: EMI teachers and EMI courses. Table 1 summarises six categories of incentive measures found in the data: “Multiplied workloads calculation” (a favourable adjustment for recalculating workload hours – see 4.1.3 below) (stipulated by 29 universities), career development opportunities (27 universities), monetary rewards (17 universities) for EMI teachers; and funding support (27 universities), teaching assistants (one university), teaching materials (one university) for EMI courses.

Incentives directed at EMI teachers were more widely used and diversified than those incentivising EMI courses. As shown in Table 1, multiplied workloads was the most frequently used incentive measure among all universities (57%) and DFCDs (59%). Career development opportunities were also prevalent (53%). Funding support for EMI courses was most prevalent among DFCUs (63%), but also found in 53% of all universities. These results indicate a majority of incentive

Table 1: Types of incentive measures for EMI courses.

Targets	Incentive measures	Number of universities	Ratio (n = 51)	Number of DFCUs	Ratio (n = 19)	Number of DFCUs	Ratio (n = 32)
EMI teachers	Multiplied workloads calculation	29	57%	10	53%	19	59%
	Career development opportunities	27	53%	10	53%	17	53%
	Monetary rewards	17	33%	8	42%	9	28%
EMI courses	Funding support	27	53%	12	63%	15	47%
	Teaching assistants	1	2%	1	5%	0	0%
	Teaching materials	1	2%	0	0%	1	3%

schemes for teachers focused on professional aspects, whereas a majority of incentives for courses and departments focused on financial aspects associated with EMI.

4.1.3 Incentive measures for EMI teachers

The incentive measure of “multiplied workloads calculation” applied to EMI teachers when calculating their academic workloads (*gong zuo liang*, 工作量) or teaching hours (*ke shi*, 课时) at 29 universities. In China, university teachers need to complete certain numbers of workload hours each term or academic year, and the workload is directly related to annual assessment, salary, and bonuses. Teachers will receive bonuses for extra teaching hours but will fail the annual assessments and receive reduced salaries if they do not meet the minimum workload requirements.

Teaching on EMI courses was incentivised by calculating one EMI course as 1.1 to 3 times the workload of teaching a Chinese-language course (shown in Figure 2). In some of the documents, universities only stated they would multiply the teaching workloads in calculation without providing specific information how it was calculated. Among the 21 universities with specific rates of conversion, the most common coefficient was 1.5 times, as found at five universities. Four universities differentiated between two levels of EMI courses: courses with EMI elements and whole EMI courses. The workloads were calculated as 1.5 times for

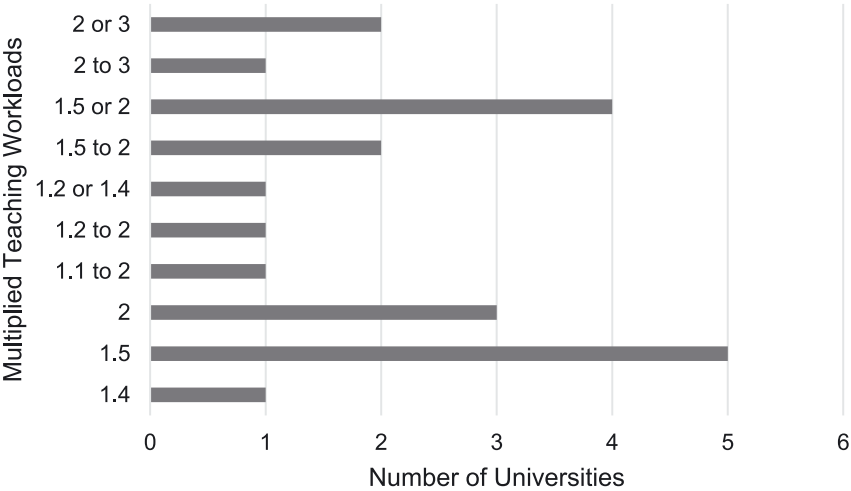


Figure 2: Coefficients for multiplied workloads calculation for EMI courses.

courses with certain EMI elements, and was doubled if the courses were delivered completely in English. South China University of Technology also calculated the development of EMI textbooks as additional teaching workload, by converting every 10,000 characters of the textbook into the equivalent workload of 20 h of teaching.

Incentive measures also involved granting priority status in career development opportunities. At 27 universities, EMI teachers would be prioritised when applying for funded training opportunities in China and abroad (17 universities), teaching awards and assessments (16 universities), and tenure promotion (3 universities).

Universities described the aims of training as to enhance teachers’ language skills and subject knowledge in their discipline. For instance, Dalian University of Technology regulated that teachers who intended to develop EMI courses would enjoy free training by the Human Resources Division of the university to improve their foreign language skills. Each year, the university would also select and fund 6–10 EMI teachers for overseas training lasting 6–12 months, to “improve their English proficiency in communications and practice”, and to let them “learn more about the teaching philosophy, contents, methods, materials, and relevant developments of the curriculum”.

Incentives involving teaching awards comprised two types. The first type was to prioritise EMI teachers in granting honours for teaching excellence, such as the selection of “excellent courses” (*youxiu kecheng*, 优秀课程) at Zhengzhou University and Minzu University, and the evaluation of “Top 100 teachers” (*baijia*

jiaoshi, 百佳教师) at China University of Mining and Technology. The second type was university-level competitions specifically set up for EMI courses, which would grant awards to the winning EMI teachers.

Three universities granted EMI teachers with priority in tenure promotion, which were stated more as general terms rather than explicit rules. For instance, South China University of Technology stated in policies published in 2015 and 2017 that “if all else being equal”, EMI teachers would be “considered first” in tenure promotion. Shaanxi Normal University suggested in a 2018 policy, that EMI teachers not in foreign languages disciplines could be exempt from the test for foreign languages in promotion.

Sixteen universities provided monetary rewards for EMI teachers, under the banner of “teaching allowances” (13 universities) or “bonuses” (three universities). At Chinese universities, teachers normally receive teaching allowances (*jiaoxue jintie*, 教学津贴) as part of their salary for delivering courses. As a form of reward, the allowances for teaching EMI courses would be larger than for teaching Chinese-language courses. For instance, at Jilin University, EMI teachers would get 2.5 times the teaching allowances of a Chinese-language course. At South China University of Technology, EMI teachers would get an allowance based on how the quality of their EMI courses were evaluated: ¥4,000 per course credit if the EMI course was evaluated as “Pass”, and ¥6,000 allowance per credit if the course got a “Distinction”. Three universities provided monetary bonuses (*jiang li*, 奖励) for EMI teachers. The values were: ¥30,000 at South China Normal University in 2018 for delivering a graduate-level EMI course, ¥20,000 at Xidian University in 2008 for a “model bilingual course” accredited by the Ministry of Education, and ¥8,000 or ¥5,000 for an EMI course with “Distinction” or “Pass” at Yunnan University in 2016.

4.1.4 Incentive measures for EMI courses

Incentives measures targeted at EMI courses included funding support for courses, an allocation of teaching assistants, and greater access to teaching materials. Funding support was the dominant form of incentivisation, implemented by 53% of the universities. The latter two were each mentioned only once by two different universities.

Funding support (*jing fei*, 经费) for EMI course development was distinct from the monetary rewards for EMI teachers. Funding support was only reimbursable for course-related expenses, while the latter were personal rewards. Among the 27 universities offering funding incentives, the funding could be used for a variety of purposes: purchasing textbooks or teaching materials published in China or abroad, publishing self-edited textbooks by teachers, covering travel expenses necessary for the course development, and covering relevant consumables or

administration expenses. Some grants were distributed as a whole at the initial course development stage, while some were distributed at different stages or upon successful interim and/or final assessments of the course.

The funding value was specified by 15 universities (summarised in Table 2). The highest was ¥40,000 to ¥50,000 at Jinan University in 2012, and the lowest was ¥2,000 at Shandong University in 2005. South China University of Technology also provided funding incentives for developing English-medium master’s and doctoral programmes in 2018, with ¥200,000 for each master’s programme and ¥100,000 for each doctoral programme. Universities without exact funding value information stated that they would prioritise funding for EMI courses over Chinese medium courses. Shanghai Jiaotong University, for instance, regulated that the funding support for EMI courses should be twice that for other (non-EMI) courses.

The allocation of teaching assistants was mentioned by Central China Normal University in an evaluation form for undergraduate EMI courses. Among the full 100 points for the evaluation of an EMI course, five points were dedicated for “departmental policy on course creation and teaching”, which required “the department or faculty to provide active support in terms of funding, the recognition of workload, and the allocation of teaching assistants”. The increased access to teaching materials was noted by Shaanxi Normal University as an incentive measure. The policy document published in 2018 advocated for cooperation between relevant departments to support EMI teaching. The departments included

Table 2: Funding support for EMI courses.

University	DFCU or DFCD	Year	Funding value (¥)
Chang’an University	DFCD	2019	5,000
Nanjing University of Chinese Medicine	DFCD	2018	3,000
South China University of Technology	DFCU	2018	50,000
Wuhan University	DFCU	2018	50,000
South China Normal University	DFCD	2018	60,000
Tongji University	DFCU	2015	12,000
Central China Normal University	DFCD	2014	10,000
Jinan University	DFCD	2012	40,000–50,000
Southwest Jiaotong University	DFCD	2011	10,000
Northeast Agricultural University	DFCD	2009	10,000–20,000
Dalian University of Technology	DFCU	2008	15,000
Renmin University of China	DFCU	2008	20,000–30,000
East China Normal University	DFCU	2007	20,000
Shandong University	DFCU	2005	2,000
Hunan Normal University	DFCD	2005	4,000 or 6,000

university libraries, which were suggested to prioritise EMI teachers' access to teaching materials and reference resources.

4.1.5 Penalty measures

Finally, our analysis of institutional incentives also revealed a “carrot-and-stick” approach at some universities: in addition to the rewards, several universities stipulated punishment measures for quality assurance purposes. One university had incentive measures to multiply the teaching workloads calculation for EMI courses, but also stated that if an EMI course failed the teaching evaluation, the teaching workload would be calculated in the same way as a Chinese-medium course. Three universities regulated that EMI teachers who failed teaching evaluations or had poor teaching performance would be prohibited from delivering EMI courses for one semester or forever. Another university initiated a university-wide evaluation of EMI curricula. The evaluation was based on the reviews by both expert panels and students. If an EMI course failed that evaluation, it would need to make improvements within a certain timeframe or otherwise be terminated.

4.2 Incentives in practice

4.2.1 First-hand insights of institutional policies in practice

While our analysis of policy documents could present a general depiction of what incentive measures were in place (which were solely extrinsic in nature), they could not provide a rich description of how these incentives were implemented into practice, nor how various stakeholders received them. Thus, to further our knowledge in this area, we drew on the interview data where incentives were discussed explicitly.

The interview data confirmed that incentives measures as stated in the institutional policies were being put into practice at our fieldwork sites. For instance, interviews in the Class-A DFCUs confirmed that incentives such as the workload weighting and monetary incentives were being implemented, as the Dean of Academic Affairs Office commented:

We take into account the workload required to teach in English, which requires much more effort than teaching in Chinese. They [EMI teachers] have to work a lot to prepare the courses. Most schools evaluate the performance of the faculty, and credits for teaching in English will be doubled or tripled. If faculty members develop an entirely new EMI course, there will be additional funding of 20,000–30,000 yuan RMB according to the difficulty of developing the courses. (*Dean of Academic Affairs Office, Class-A DFCU*)

However, fieldwork data with EMI teachers revealed that in practice, teachers' biggest concern was the increased workload associated with EMI course creation and delivery. Teachers considered the policy incentives insufficient, given the time-consuming nature of delivering EMI courses. Faculty in the C9 League universities stated that such incentives were not enough. They described the monetary bonuses as "a very small amount of money" and "not reflective of the immense amount of work required to create an English taught course compared to a Chinese taught one". This is best illustrated by a teacher's statement below:

They [the university] are adding courses instructed in English. The administration encourages the faculty member to create EMI courses at the beginning of every year. We offer a very small amount of money for this, but I don't think it is enough. Because for non-English speakers, it takes a whole lot of time to prepare the courses in English and a whole lot of effort. So, the compensation is definitely not enough. (*Lecturer in International Relations, C9 League University*)

4.2.2 Misalignment with incentivisation policies

Although creating and teaching EMI courses was the source of difficulty for many teachers, in this study we wanted to know what EMI teachers actually thought of the policy incentives, which were extrinsically-motivating, and how much their practices were influenced by the incentives. The fieldwork data revealed that most faculty were motivated by the intrinsic value of teaching and research, but we were particularly interested in the extrinsic motivations of the incentive measures (i.e., rewards or penalties). Ultimately, the intrinsic clearly outweighed the extrinsic. Interviewees in nearly all the universities (six out of the eight) expressed a professional and academic incentive to create the EMI courses, such as wanting to teach in English for themselves and their students, rather than for the external rewards stipulated in the policy documents. When asked about the motivation for creating EMI courses, a teacher replied:

We can get paid a little bit more but not substantially higher. For me, I don't want to give up opportunities to practice English. If I give up those courses, then I could speak Chinese for the whole year. Another motivation is that it is very enlightening speaking to international students. Sometimes we are so used to our daily life. But for international students, they can be very insightful, and they can tell their stories. From them we can reflect on our social life. That is part of Sociology. (*Professor in Sociology, C9 League University*)

Interviews did reveal some extrinsic motivation for EMI when it came to the dynamics of the teaching-research nexus and the incentive of promotion. In many of the fieldwork universities, research and publications in the English language

were encouraged. For instance, a Professor in Business at one of the DFCUs emphasised that “if you want to get promoted and be a professor you need to do research” and revealed that credits for international journals were equivalent to around four times that of domestic ones. In addition, teaching in English was also encouraged. The professor noted:

There are more opportunities if you publish in international ones. Both teaching or research in English is encouraged, and we pay extra money for teaching in English or research. (*Professor in Business, Class-A DFCU*)

As many of the EMI teachers conduct research and publish in the English language, teaching in English aligned with their language demands and could facilitate their research. In return, conducting research in English could also support their teaching of EMI courses.

5 Discussion, implications and conclusions

Our study has revealed several key findings concerning the incentivisation of EMI in Chinese universities. These can be summarised as the following:

- More than half of the EMI policy documents surveyed in the current project contained incentivisation measures for creating and/or teaching EMI courses.
- These incentive measures targeted either the teachers themselves or the courses they taught on.
- Incentivisation policies aimed at EMI teachers focused on increased workload weighting for EMI courses, greater access to career development opportunities, and increased monetary rewards.
- Incentivisation policies aimed at EMI courses were mainly in the form of dedicated financial support for creating and delivering courses, however in many cases this funding was subject to positive outcomes of course evaluations.
- Teachers did not consider the workload incentives as sufficient to compensate for the increased time and difficulties associated with creating and teaching EMI courses.
- Teachers were not primarily motivated by financial rewards, but rather chose to teach on EMI courses for the intrinsic rewards associated with teaching in English, and teaching to a diverse international student population.
- Teachers viewed EMI as an activity at the teaching-research nexus, where English was used in their subject discipline both for teaching and for publishing internationally.

These findings raise several discussion points, which have implications for future EMI policy and language planning. Before moving to these points, we return to the acknowledgement of an important limitation of the study, namely the addition of three universities for the fieldwork stage that were not included in the policy scan. We emphasise the purpose of the interviews was to shed light on the institutional policies, so the inclusion of universities for which the policies were not analysed is problematic. However, this was a necessary adjustment, as it was a result of completing the policy scan that we recognised the need to add these three universities for better range coverage of EMI programmes at different types of Chinese universities. Such changes to sequential qualitative research plans do happen as it is difficult to predict outcomes of each stage. Future research in this area should keep this in mind to minimise such a limitation.

5.1 Redressing policy misfires in targeting difficulties

One issue that emerged from the findings is a need to critically redress current incentives in accordance with the difficulties associated with creating and teaching EMI courses. Our systematic survey of incentive schemes in policy and practice concurs with the findings of previous case studies in China that the methods of incentivisation currently in place are seen as insufficient compensation for the extra workload EMI courses place on teachers (Hu et al. 2014). In our fieldwork, our interviewees were not predominantly motivated by financial incentive rewards, which they positioned as a “tiny amount of money”, however they did view workload incentives as an important indicator of the additional time that EMI takes. However, the workload calculations in most policies (*Mdn* = 1.5 times a Chinese taught course) was viewed as insufficient to capture the extra workload that EMI course creation and delivery takes. Thus, we would recommend that, rather than offering monetary incentives, adaptations be made to current incentive schemes to offer more attractive EMI workload models. A recommendation to move away from financial incentivisation also aligns with research into the incentivisation of other areas of academia, which has demonstrated academics are not driven primarily by financial rewards attached to academic activities (Xu 2020).

5.2 Aligning incentives and drivers for EMI

Previous research into incentivisation in Chinese higher education indicates that academics are largely motivated by intrinsic and professional driving forces. In a study of academic responses to publishing incentives in China, Xu (2020)

concluded that universities needed to move beyond managerialism and “towards the integration of intrinsic academic values” (p. 87). In terms of EMI incentivisation, Hu et al. (2014) found that teachers recognised the symbolic distinction of teaching in English as intrinsically and professionally more important than extrinsic financial or workload incentives, which stands in contrast to arguments that such incentivisation is enterprise-driven (i.e., extrinsically-motivated; McKinley et al. 2021) but aligns with recent arguments about Chinese conceptualisations concerning incentives and internationalisation (i.e., intrinsically-motivated; Liu 2020). Our study has found that current policies encourage teachers in China self-elect to take on EMI courses, and many do so primarily for professional and academic reasons. That is, most EMI teachers may choose to teach in English for themselves, their university, and their students.

These findings highlight a need to better align incentives with the driving forces of EMI so that incentivisation complements the main reasons universities, teachers and students are turning to English in the curriculum. The study by Hu et al. (2014) claims that there are wide-spread personal beliefs in Chinese higher education that links the value and prestige of English to benefits such as institutional internationalisation, better career prospects, and increased access to educational opportunities abroad. The study by Galloway et al. (2017) revealed that teachers linked EMI to the personal benefits of: improving their own English language competence; publishing internationally, participating in international conferences, increasing their upward career mobility, and participating in a global academic community. Thus, a recommendation for future policy would be to incentivise aspects of EMI that tap into its intrinsic and professional value, such as opportunities for career development (e.g., taking part in free capacity-building and CV-building training opportunities), for staff mobility (e.g., opportunities to take sabbaticals at other universities at home and abroad, or to present at international conferences), and to increase the quality of education (e.g., maintaining opportunities to teach smaller classes).

5.3 Addressing inequity in incentivisation

With any incentivisation policy, the important “elephant in the room” is the potential negative effect they can have on equality, especially those who are unable to take advantage of the rewards offered. Previous research on EMI policy has found that incentive schemes may have a negative and demoralising effect on teachers who are unable to teach in English (Hu et al. 2014). While the EMI incentives revealed in our study aim to bestow benefits on those teaching through English, the negative consequence is that it may disadvantage non-EMI teachers in

terms of bonuses, workload, career advancement, teaching opportunities, and access to grants for teaching, research, and travel.

Incentivisation also increases the linguistic capital afforded to English (and those who use it) in Chinese higher education. As Galloway et al. (2017: 8) note, “the global spread of EMI is perpetuating the stereotype that having a Western-style education is superior and something that is necessary for a successful future”. Mok (2007) warns that internationalisation in Asia (and EMI as part of it) creates a Western-dominated hegemony. Thus, incentivisation of EMI in Chinese higher education may inadvertently give political power to ideologies of Western superiority by granting privilege to the stakeholders engaged in EMI and disenfranchising those excluded from incentivised activities.

5.4 Moving forward: is incentivisation of EMI necessary?

An important next step in research is to explore the effects of incentivisation of EMI on academic identities, cultures, and behaviours. While our research has provided a detailed understanding of the incentive schemes in place, it did not explore the effects of these incentives on EMI activities. Previous research on incentivisation in Chinese higher education on international publishing has revealed quite stark effects on academic behaviours, including resistance and rejection of policies (Xu 2020), but as yet we do not understand the effects of EMI incentivisation. Until such detailed research is carried out, the positive and negative outcomes of incentivisation need to be carefully considered in future revisions of EMI policies.

In order to minimise inequalities between EMI teacher and non-EMI teachers, universities should carefully consider whether financial and promotional incentives are really necessary to stimulate EMI course creation and teaching. If incentivisation is deemed necessary, those focused on incentivising EMI courses (e.g., funds for course materials and teaching assistants), rather than EMI teachers (e.g., personal professional and financial rewards) may minimise these negative consequences. Future policy might instead better balance extrinsic and intrinsic incentives, by focusing on dismantling the challenges associated with EMI course creation to enhance the “pull factors” of EMI, rather than focusing solely on incentive schemes which aim to “push” academic staff towards EMI. These could include diverting funds to more EMI training opportunities, more materials development to lessen the strain on curriculum development, and offering more language support for staff and students to lessen the language-demands on delivering EMI.

Research funding: The study was supported by British Council.

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