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# FORESTRY EDUCATION IN ENGLISH: INSTRUCTORS' VIEWS ON EMI FOR CHINESE STUDENTS[1]

*ABSTRACT:* The ongoing globalisation of higher education has led to the ever-increasing use of English as a medium of instruction in a range of disciplines, including forestry. An adapted Google Forms survey investigated the perceptions of professors teaching forestry to Chinese students in English at the Faculty of Forestry in Belgrade in the autumn term of 2024/2025. The questionnaire examined instructors' views on communication and comprehension challenges in English faced by the students and their behavior in the EMI classroom, as well as teachers' own preparedness for EMI and related needs. The results reveal limited understanding of English among Chinese students, their frequent use of translation tools, and difficulties with communication in class, listening, and subject-specific vocabulary. To combat these challenges, teachers have taken steps to simplify their language and slow down the teaching pace, while also expressing a need for more EMI training. Perceptions on cultural differences and student engagement differ, pointing to the need for the application of intercultural strategies in addition to improved language skills to handle the complexity of teaching in international contexts.

*Keywords:* English as a medium of instruction (EMI), forestry education, Chinese students, teacher perceptions, language barriers.

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# STAVOVI NASTAVNIKA O NASTAVI ŠUMARSTVA NA ENGLESKOM JEZIKU ZA KINESKE STUDENTE

*APSTRAKT:* Trenutna globalizacija visokog obrazovanja utiče na sve češću upotrebu engleskog jezika kao jezika nastave u različitim disciplinama, uključujući i šumarstvo. Prilagođenom anketom putem Gugl upitnika ispitana je percepcija profesora koji su predavali šumarstvo kineskim studentima na engleskom jeziku na Šumarskom fakultetu u Beogradu u jesenjem semestru 2024/2025. godine. Upitnikom su utvrđeni stavovi nastavnika o izazovima u razumevanju i komunikaciji na engleskom jeziku kod studenata, njihovom ponašanju u učionici i pripremljenosti samih nastavnika za nastavu na engleskom, kao i njihovim potrebama u vezi sa njom. Rezultati pokazuju ograničeno razumevanje engleskog jezika kod kineskih studenata, čestu upotrebu prevodilačkih alata na času i poteškoće u komunikaciji u učionici, slušanju kao jezičkoj veštini i upotrebi stručnih termina. Kako bi se prevazišle te poteškoće, nastavnici su pojednostavljivali jezik i usporavali tempo časa, a izrazili su i želju za dodatnom obukom za držanje nastave na engleskom jeziku. Stavovi o kulturnim razlikama i angažovanju studenata variraju, što ukazuje na potrebu da se uz unapređenje jezičkih veština primenjuju interkulturne strategije, kako bi se uspešno savladala složenost nastave koja se odvija u međunarodnom kontekstu.

*Ključne reči:* engleski kao jezik visokoškolske nastave (EJVIN), obrazovanje u šumarstvu, kineski studenti, percepcija nastavnika, jezičke barijere.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The worldwide globalisation of universities reveals a clear trend that institutions of higher education (HEIs) are now competing internationally. Well-known HEIs are striving to be at the forefront of this internationalisation, focusing on recruiting international students and developing international curricula (Galloway et al. 2017: 4). Staff and student mobility has expanded to include the mobility of programmes with innovations such as online learning and MOOCs (Barbosa & Neves 2020: 28), while cross-cultural cooperation remains a crucial concept in higher education (Klaassen & de Graaff 2001: 282).

As higher education has internationalised, English medium instruction (EMI) has emerged as a prominent global educational phenomenon of the twenty-first century (Aizawa et al. 2023: 838), and the use of English as the *lingua franca* of instruction is seen as "the most significant trend in educational internationalisation" (Chaplle 2015:1). EMI is commonly defined as "the use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English" (Dearden 2014: 2). The more traditional Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), which emerged in the 1990s, shares some similarities with EMI (Aizawa et al. 2023: 838).

However, CLIL is essentially a pedagogical approach to teaching English as a second language (L2), aiming to teach both language and content (Đorđević & Blagojević 2019: 155), whereas EMI does not focus on students' language development (Aizawa et al. 2023: 838).

In the academic year 2010/11, 46 European countries entered the Bologna Process giving European university students the opportunity to pursue their studies in other countries (Kim 2014: 2). The growth of EMI in higher education has been recorded worldwide and measured most systematically in Europe (Macaro et al. 2018: 47). Regarding the number of English-taught programmes, the Netherlands was the leading country with 1,078 programmes and a growth of 39.3%, while Germany, Sweden, France and Denmark were not far behind (Wächter & Maiworm 2014: 16).

Higher education in Asia and Middle East countries has mirrored the growth of EMI in Europe (Nunan 2003: 600–604). In China and Japan, governments have been supporting the use of EMI at both private and public, state-funded universities (Macaro et al. 2018: 49). A clear example of rapid EMI growth can be found in South Korea, where in 2006 the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST) adopted an EMI policy for all classes (Kim 2014: 3). While EMI is well-known and accepted at European universities, it is relatively less so in the Middle East and North Africa (Alhassan et al. 2021: 1). Limited research has been conducted on EMI in Africa and Latin America, probably due to its lack of growth (Macaro et al. 2018: 50).

Following these global trends, the Serbian Ministry of Education has significantly advanced the internationalisation of higher education by approving over 150 degree programmes taught in English or other foreign languages, mainly at public universities in the fields of medicine, engineering, and IT. Certain social sciences and humanities can also be studied in English at private universities (Đorđević & Blagojević 2019: 156). The Erasmus+ and mobility projects are fully supported by the government to promote the internationalisation of Serbian higher education, with the enactment of the Higher Education Law in 2018 approving English as an official language of instruction, and reinforcing Serbia's integration into global higher education (Đorđević & Blagojević 2019: 156).

National Standard 12.4 applied in the accreditation of the international Master's degree programme *Forestry and Natural Resources Management* at the Faculty of Forestry in Belgrade required all EMI instructors to demonstrate their competence for teaching in English by submitting proof of English proficiency: a language certificate at C1 level (e.g. Cambridge Advanced Certificate in English or

IELTS), a completed university degree in English, a semester-long mobility abroad, giving invited lectures at international conferences or working as a guest lecturer giving lectures in English.

Although these EMI instructors are not language specialists, their perceptions reveal how English is used in actual EMI classrooms, unlike formal language tests. In spite of the fact that, in most cases, students' scores on standard language proficiency tests can be a predictor of their ability to meet EMI requirements (Aizawa et al. 2023: 837), other factors may play a role in how they cope with the challenges in the EMI classroom. In their research on how accurately teachers can judge student characteristics, including language ability, Urhahne and Wijnia (2021:1) empirically demonstrate that teachers sometimes may overestimate student achievement on standardised tests, while in-class interactions can provide additional accurate insights into students' abilities. In addition, in a study on the effect of EMI on students' success and motivation, Yilmaz Virlan and Demirbulak (2020: 83) note that students who scored low on English proficiency placement tests sometimes outperform expectations in EMI settings.

EMI instructors observe student performance in disciplinary contexts and their difficulties in coping with academic writing or speaking, while also providing relevant support measures. Recent research (e.g., Macaro 2018; Galloway & Rose 2021; Kamasak & Sahan 2023; Alanazi & Curle 2024) has investigated EMI instructors' perceptions of the English challenges faced by their students in several countries, resulting in EMI improvement strategies. Several recent studies (Alhamami 2023; Almusharraf et al. 2023; Kamasak & Sahan 2023; Wenjyn et al. 2023) have shown that EMI instructors often identify specific language challenges, such as vocabulary, comprehension, and academic writing, which in turn influence how they adjust their instruction. For example, Almusharraf et al. (2023: 2) noted that engineering instructors in South Korea observed "students' limited vocabulary, slow reading speeds, and poor oral comprehension when using English in EMI courses", and at engineering faculties in Turkey, Başıbek et al. (2014: 1823) found that "lecturers believe that learners are not proficient enough to learn subject matter in English."

Despite the increasing focus on EMI, limited research has been conducted from the perspective of Serbian engineering professors, and particularly EMI instructors working with Chinese forestry students. Commonly studied issues include students' English proficiency and related needs, instructors' own language needs, and EMI classroom strategies. These concerns are widespread and overlap with the focus of a study on Korean engineering EMI instructors' perceptions,

investigated using a questionnaire developed by Kim (2014: 29). This questionnaire was modified and used in our study at the Faculty of Forestry in Belgrade (Appendix).

Building on recent research in this field, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. Do the instructors believe that Chinese students have sufficient ability to cope with communication and comprehension challenges in English in their EMI classes?
2. How do the instructors think these students can be supported to improve their ability to cope with perceived English challenges to participate more effectively in EMI classes?
3. How do the instructors think their own English could be improved for more effective EMI teaching?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### *2.1. Students' English ability and EMI challenges*

Recent research has suggested that insufficient English proficiency among EMI students is one of the major obstacles to effective EMI implementation (Hu et al. 2014: 23; Chapple 2015: 4), which can also have detrimental effects on the quality of education (Macaro 2018: 179). A study by Aizawa et al. (2023: 837) investigated the English language proficiency thresholds that undergraduate Japanese students need to reach in each academic language skill (i.e., reading, listening, speaking, and writing) to meet EMI requirements. Researchers found that scores on the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) can reliably predict the difficulties that students will face in all academic language skills, and students with higher proficiency levels encountered fewer problems. TOEIC scores were converted to CEFR levels, and at the B2/C1 level, students began to experience fewer linguistic challenges associated with EMI in writing and listening (Aizawa et al. 2023: 851). However, other factors, such as prior knowledge, motivation, and the classroom environment, played a major role in how easily they coped with the international business course (Aizawa et al. 2023: 853). Finally, EMI lecturers need to recognise the language-related challenges, adjust their teaching accordingly, and provide learning space and time outside class to give less proficient students the opportunity to learn and revise (Aizawa et al. 2023: 856).

Examining the effectiveness of EMI for Chinese undergraduates, Lei and Hu (2014) investigated its impact on students' English proficiency and attitudes towards learning English in an undergraduate EMI programme. The results indicated that EMI did not significantly improve English proficiency or influence students' attitudes towards learning English, whereas intensive English listening and speaking courses in the first year did (Lei & Hu 2014: 122), which is an important insight, especially for ESP teachers. This study raises concerns about the quality of EMI in Chinese higher education and highlights the need for further research, new evaluation methods, and a thoughtful approach by educational policymakers.

Kim (2014) examined the views of 48 South Korean engineering professors on students' English abilities and needs in an EMI course, as well as their own language needs. The EMI instructors acknowledged that students often lacked sufficient English skills, but were reluctant to support expanded English language teaching (Kim 2014: 15). Similarly, although the professors themselves recognised the need for additional training in English, they were unwilling to take further steps due to their busy schedules and critical views of the school's EMI policy, which, when mandatory, can put considerable stress even on the brightest students and most experienced teaching staff (Kim 2014: 20).

### *2.2. EMI instructors' perceptions of students' English ability*

Many recent studies (e.g., Alhamami 2023; Alanazi & Curle 2024; Jia et al. 2023; Kamasak & Sahan 2023; Wang et al. 2025) focus on EMI instructors' perceptions of how well students cope with English, with insights leading to practical improvements in the EMI classroom. For example, in a study by Alhamami (2023: 11), EMI instructors in several countries expressed concern about the role of students' English proficiency in EMI and how it complicates their teaching. The feedback forms the basis for changes in EMI teacher training, language support, and strict language-proficiency policies requiring students to achieve high test scores to enter the EMI programme.

In a study by Alanazi & Curle (2024: 3), students' low English proficiency, particularly in vocabulary and comprehension, is perceived as a major challenge by EMI instructors, who suggest adaptation through simplified language and increased repetition in the EMI classroom. In a study by Kamasak and Sahan (2023: 12), perceived language proficiency is related to students' academic performance, with writing and speaking identified as particularly problematic skills, while tailored preparatory ESP courses are proposed as a solution. Jia et al. (2023) investigate

how EMI lecturers' perceptions of using L1 and English affect their practice and discuss students' proficiency and needs. Some EMI instructors perceive students' language-related difficulties, which prevent them from delivering classes fully in English (Jia et al. 2023: 18), leading to strategic use of L1, modified discourse, and adjusted instructor expectations.

*2.3. Instructors' language needs for EMI and recommended strategies*

When implementing EMI policies, one obstacle is insufficient student proficiency in English, while another is the teachers' own proficiency levels (Aizawa & Rose 2019: 1127). For example, Wang et al. (2025: 28) reveal that many EMI instructors consider their linguistic skills insufficient for teaching in appropriate academic language, and recommend teacher development programmes and discipline-specific institutional support based on perceived needs. In South Korean higher education, Kim (2014: 22) notes that less than 30% of the faculty teaching staff are international, and that many EMI classes are taught by Korean professors without the necessary English proficiency or training in EMI techniques. At the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST), 92.5% of the teaching staff are Korean and face this problem daily. A more supportive approach to EMI is recommended by incentivising English-speaking instructors (Kim 2014: 23). Establishing a language support system that provides editing, training, and workshops is also advised if professors do not resist it, which highlights the need for further investigation into ways to engage more teaching staff in EMI.

Klaassen and De Graaff (2001) investigated the effectiveness of professional development workshops for Dutch EMI instructors at Delft University of Technology by examining their expectations and evaluations of the training. Lecturers in the early stages of EMI implementation gained increased awareness of their environment and greater creativity through the workshops. However, more experienced EMI instructors had already developed their own coping strategies, which made them less open to new ideas and more anxious (Klaassen & De Graaff 2001: 296). The workshops strongly influenced how these lecturers taught, provided students with the necessary support, and facilitated a smooth transition to the new EMI method.

*2.4. English-medium instruction in Serbian higher education*

Although research on EMI in higher education in Serbia is limited, recent studies have provided valuable insights into the topic (Antić & Milosavljević 2014; Popović et al. 2016; Đorđević & Blagojević 2019). While Antić and Milosavljević (2014) examined the potential of methods and strategies used in teaching ESP at the Niš Faculty of Medicine, Popović et al. (2016) investigated students' preferences regarding EMI-taught subjects at the Faculty of Organisational Sciences in Belgrade.

A study examining teachers' attitudes towards EMI was conducted by Đorđević and Blagojević (2019) at the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš. The findings indicated that universities in Serbia lacked formal training programmes for EMI instructors and the structured support necessary to develop both language proficiency and the required pedagogical skills (Đorđević & Blagojević 2019: 156). The study found that junior instructors placed significant value on both linguistic proficiency and teaching methods, while their senior colleagues sometimes underestimated the importance of teaching methodology.

A key step in developing Serbian EMI policy was the implementation of Tempus projects from 2013 to 2016 and from 2019 to 2024. These projects focused on training teachers from the largest state universities in Serbia in EMI. The objective was to help educators improve their English language proficiency and effectively apply teaching methods suited to an international environment, thereby building their confidence and competence. Sixty-two teachers who took the course from 2013 to 2016 reported thorough satisfaction with it, and after four cycles from 2019 to 2024, 611 teachers successfully completed the EMI training, which was a clear indication of the growing interest in EMI among Serbian university teaching staff.

## 3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Based on the Agreement of Cooperation between Zhejiang Agriculture and Forestry University in Hangzhou, China, and the Faculty of Forestry in Belgrade, a group of 32 Chinese students spent the autumn term of 2024/25 at this institution, where they attended a programme consisting of five elective courses from the international Master's Degree Programme in English, *Forestry and Natural Resources Management*, and an additional ESP course, *English for Forestry.*

The elective courses taught in English were: *Forest Plantations, Climate Adaptive Forest Management, Forest Protection, Forest Management Planning,* and *Sustainable Forest Utilisation.* In each course, students were required to pass exams and earn five ECTS credits. The ESP course, *English for Forestry*, was a supporting component of the curriculum designed to help students maintain and further develop their communication and comprehension skills in academic English, as well as to address practical and administrative requirements, such as handling institutional documents (e.g., filling in forms) during student mobility. At the end of the ESP course, students were awarded a certificate of completion. After the programme was completed, a follow-up survey was conducted to assess students' satisfaction with teaching in all courses.

At the beginning of the ESP course, the teacher distributed the Oxford Quick Placement Test (QPT) Version 1 to all Chinese students. This standardised test, developed by Oxford University Press and UCLES (University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate), is widely used by educational institutions to assess a learner's level of English. This is a common procedure at the start of all ESP courses at the Faculty of Forestry, as ESP classes are typically mixed-ability. After testing, the students were divided into low, medium, and high English language proficiency groups. The ESP teacher was interested in the progress of Chinese students and the possible correlation between their placement test results and their scores on the first domain-specific test. More precisely, ANOVA was used to test whether students' English proficiency level had a statistically significant effect on their technical vocabulary test results.

To investigate EMI instructors' perceptions of EMI in this setting, the ESP teachers (i.e., the authors of this study) created a Google Form survey (Appendix) adapted from Kim (2014: 29). In April 2025, the questionnaire was distributed by e-mail to 15 EMI instructors who taught the five elective forestry courses. The academic ranks of the respondents ranged from Teaching Assistant to Full Professor, and their teaching experience ranged from five to 25 years.

Studies in EMI research often rely on relatively small samples, particularly when focusing on a single institution, discipline, or pilot project. In their study on lecturers' perceptions of EMI in engineering departments in Turkey, Başıbek et al. (2014) focused on the views of seven lecturers, while Dearden and Macaro (2016) interviewed ten higher education teachers to investigate their perceptions of EMI. Galloway, Kriukow and Numajiri (2017) used surveys with sometimes fewer than twenty instructors in their research on internationalisation, higher education, and the growing demand for English. Sahan and Rose (2022) studied EMI at

universities by interviewing between ten and twelve lecturers in some departments, while studies on discipline-specific EMI, such as medicine, engineering, or tourism, often observed between ten and twenty instructors.

Due to the small sample of 15 EMI instructors who participated in our research, the study can be considered a pilot project, highlighting areas for further research and practical improvements in EMI within forestry, an understudied discipline in this context. Although the sample was small, the study provides rich qualitative data through multiple-choice options and open-ended questions.

The questionnaire included three groups of questions, totalling 19. The first group explored lecturers' perceptions of students' abilities to cope with English language challenges in the EMI setting. The second set focused on instructors' perceptions of their own competence and skills for EMI, as well as their related needs. The third set examined instructors' views on cultural differences and student behaviour affecting EMI classroom interactions. The questionnaire combined quantitative elements, such as percentages, with qualitative elements that asked for suggestions, descriptions, or elaborations.

Quantitative data were analysed based on instructors' estimates of the proportions of students in each comprehension class, as well as the diversity and distribution of instructors' responses. Qualitative data were collected, interpreted, and synthesised to contribute to the scholarly discussion on EMI for non-native speakers.

## 4. RESULTS

### *4.1. Students' English ability and ESP in EMI*

The first set of quantitative data enabled the examination of the relationship between the measured English proficiency of Chinese students and their classroom performance as perceived by the EMI instructors.

The Chinese students' English proficiency was initially assessed using the Oxford Quick Placement Test Version 1 in their ESP course. The students were divided into three groups according to their achieved CEFR level: the low proficiency group G3 (A1.2/A2) with 18.75% of the students, the medium proficiency group G2 (B1.1/B1.2) with 56.25%, and the high proficiency group G1 (B2/C1) with 25% of the enrolled students.

The ESP course teacher also asked the students to describe their experience of learning English. A total of 21 out of 32 students had been learning English since the third grade of primary school (age nine), one since the age of six, one

started learning English in middle school (7th grade), and nine students did not specify the grade.

After completing the first three units of the ESP course, the students' knowledge of technical vocabulary was assessed with a 20-question test on technical vocabulary and use of English in a series of exercises, including translation of technical terms from Chinese into English, definition writing, a gap-cloze task, and two tasks combining tenses with a subject-specific text.

A one-way ANOVA and Tukey's HSD post hoc test were used to determine whether there were statistically significant differences in the mean test scores on the technical vocabulary assessment among the three groups of students with different levels of English proficiency (low, medium, and high). The purpose of using ANOVA was to test whether English language proficiency affected students' performance on the technical vocabulary test. The results of the one-way ANOVA comparing the vocabulary test scores of the three groups of Chinese students with different levels of English proficiency are presented in Table 1.

| *Source* | *SS* | *Df* | *MS* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Between treatments | 394.5477 | 2 | 197.2739 | *F=15.86641* |
| Within - treatments | 360.5694 | 29 | 12.4334 | |
| Total | 755.1172 | 31 | | |
| The *F*-ratio value is 15.86641. The *p*-value is 0.000022. The result is significant at $p < 0.05$ | | | | |

Table 1. Results of one-way ANOVA comparing vocabulary test scores of the three groups by English language proficiency

ANOVA is appropriate for comparing means across more than two groups. The dependent variable is the score on the technical vocabulary test administered as part of the ESP course. The *p*-value of 0.000022 is very low and less than 0.05, indicating that the differences between the group means are statistically significant.

The analysis showed a significant effect of proficiency level on test performance, $F(2, 29) = 15.87$, $p < 0.001$. This indicates that at least one group differed significantly in vocabulary test scores, although ANOVA does not specify which groups differ.

Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) test was conducted to determine where the differences lay. The results of the post hoc Tukey's HSD test, that is, the pairwise comparisons of group means for groups G1, G2, and G3, are shown in Table 2.

| ***Pairwise comparisons*** | | $HSD_{.05} = 4.1897$<br>$HSD_{.01} = 5.3589$ | $Q_{.05} = 3.4926$ $Q_{.01} = 4.4672$ |
|---|---|---|---|
| $G_1$:$G_2$ | $M_1 = 16.50$<br>$M_2 = 13.97$ | 2.53 | Q = 2.11 (*p* = .31036) |
| $G_1$:$G_3$ | $M_1 = 16.50$<br>$M_3 = 6.17$ | 10.33 | **Q = 8.61** (*p* = .00000) |
| $G_2$:$G_3$ | $M_2 = 13.97$<br>$M_3 = 6.17$ | 7.81 | **Q = 6.51** (*p* = .00022) |

Table 2. Results of the post hoc Tukey's HSD test (pairwise comparisons)

The higher proficiency groups (B1 and B2/C1) performed similarly (G1 vs G2: mean difference = 2.53 < HSD.05 = 4.19; →not significant). The lowest proficiency group (A1.2/A2) scored much lower than the highest group (G1 vs G3: mean difference = 10.33 > HSD.05 →significant), and also significantly lower than the medium proficiency group (G2 vs G3: mean difference = 7.81 > HSD.05 →significant).

In summary, the results show that the low-proficiency group (G3, A1.2/A2 CEFR levels) lagged far behind the other two proficiency groups, while those two groups did not differ significantly. Although the vocabulary test effectively distinguished lower-proficiency students from higher ones, it may not have differentiated well between the two higher proficiency groups.

*4.2. Quantitative findings*

The instructors' subjective estimates of the Chinese students' in-class comprehension varied considerably. It is important to note that the figures below are based on the instructors' approximate subjective estimates, not directly measured comprehension. On average, 16.7% of students were estimated to have a near-perfect understanding of the lectures (median = 15%), and 32% to perform well (median = 30%). However, a higher percentage of students (47%) were estimated to partially understand the lectures (median = 35%), while the remaining 25% (median = 25%) were seen as having low levels of understanding. The estimated percentages of Chinese students at different levels of perceived comprehension are shown in Figure 1.

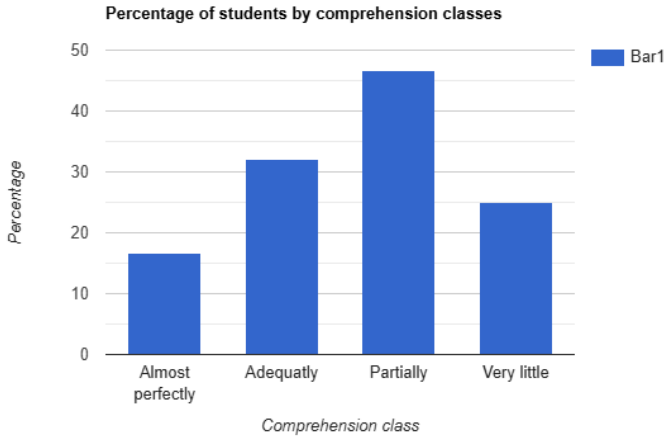


Figure 1. Estimated percentage of students in each comprehension class

These perceptions suggest that only a minority of students appeared to fully understand lectures, while many were perceived to experience varying degrees of difficulty. Variability in EMI instructors' responses regarding the perceived proportions of Chinese students in different comprehension categories is reflected in relatively large interquartile ranges (e.g., 25% for partial and minimal understanding categories), highlighting differences in instructors' perceptions, or so-called group heterogeneity. A boxplot diagram (Figure 2) was used because it provides a clear visual summary of the distribution of instructors' estimates across different comprehension categories. The boxplot illustrates not only the middle value (median) but also the spread of the responses. While responses for the lowest and highest comprehension groups are similar, they are more varied in the middle groups, as shown in Figure 2.

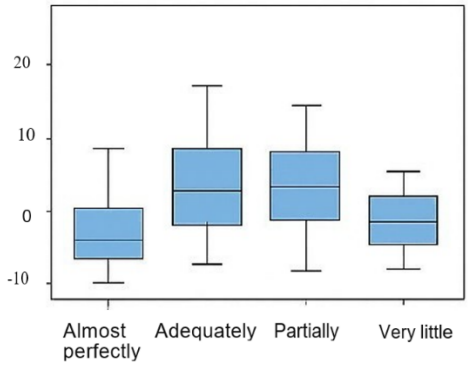


Figure 2. Boxplot of instructors' estimates of students' comprehension

The distribution of responses shows that instructors clearly identified the highest and lowest performing students, as shown in the 'almost perfectly' and 'very little' comprehension categories, where estimates show low variability. However, in the middle categories, 'adequately' and 'partially', it may be more difficult for instructors to accurately distinguish between these students. Additional tools, such as formative assessment, may be introduced to assess students' comprehension more precisely.

All instructors reported having seen students use translation software, such as Google Translate, in the classroom. Based on their impressions, they estimated that around 31% (median = 30) of students regularly used these tools, with estimates of student reliance on translation tools ranging from 10% to 50%. Three out of 15 instructors believed that as many as half of the students used them in class to fill gaps in their comprehension. However, it should be emphasised that these figures are based on incidental observations and subjective impressions rather than systematic data collection providing actual usage rates. Nevertheless, the instructors perceived translation tools as a relatively common form of support in class.

### *4.3. Qualitative findings*

Although EMI instructors who taught Chinese students in English at the Faculty of Forestry are not language specialists, they were asked to provide insights into the challenges these students faced in communication, comprehension, and other English language skills. This may influence the instructional methods they use and lead to recommendations for improved teaching. Although they are not formal assessments of language ability, these perceptions offer insight into authentic language use and can shape teaching practices and policies. Responses to open-ended and multiple-choice questions may provide particularly useful insights into the pedagogical challenges of EMI, while contributing to the scientific discussion on this type of instruction.

#### *4.3.1. Perceptions of linguistic and communicative needs*

There is a consensus among instructors that Chinese students taught through EMI face significant language barriers, particularly in speaking (identified by 83.3% of instructors) and listening (by 100%), while difficulties in writing and reading were noted by about 17% of respondents. Difficulties were noted in their ability to convey ideas clearly during presentations (noted by 33.3% of instructors)

and to use technical terms correctly. From the instructors' perspective, a lack of contextual understanding can be a major hurdle, with three EMI instructors in our research observing 'the lack of understanding of context, possibly due to insufficient basic knowledge of forestry', suggesting that students may struggle with understanding the background of the forestry field. This suggests that Chinese students are dealing not only with language-related issues in EMI but also with a lack of domain-specific knowledge.

The instructors see a need for improvement in students' speaking and listening skills to achieve effective teaching in a multilingual classroom. One instructor pointed out that students have "poor pronunciation and are afraid of making mistakes", suggesting these factors deter some students from speaking out. Furthermore, the lack of proficiency in technical terminology is acknowledged, with three out of 15 respondents listing "insufficient vocabulary", especially "technical terms", as a challenge, indicating that specialised language instruction is necessary.

*4.3.2. Recommendations for enhancing English language instruction*

Although they are not language teachers, EMI instructors understand disciplinary discourse, and their input can ensure that ESP courses address the real academic and professional needs of students. While language teachers provide linguistic expertise, subject instructors contribute insights into terminology and authentic tasks. Curriculum design could be more effective if language and content specialists collaborated to develop relevant and practical courses.

In this study, EMI instructors' recommendations for improving English language instruction for Chinese students fall into two main categories: increasing the number of instructional hours, with 50% of EMI lecturers indicating a need for at least four hours of ESP teaching per week, and tailoring the content to students' specific needs and abilities. The instructors recommend a more nuanced approach by dividing classes into advanced and less advanced groups. Additionally, 33.3% of EMI instructors suggest that the ESP course should integrate short writing tasks to improve students' overall English language proficiency.

Several EMI instructors also recommended participation in extracurricular activities, such as joining established clubs to socialise with Serbian students (67% of instructors identified this as a good option), faculty sections (65%), or the faculty choir (50%), as an effective way for Chinese students to improve their English language proficiency. EMI instructors observed that extracurricular engagement in activities where Chinese students use English can help address the

difficulties they face in everyday communication and integration into the academic community, which can limit their participation and confidence.

*4.3.3. Instructors' self-perceived language needs*

The instructors were not formally tested in this research, and their input is based on self-assessment and classroom experience. As part of the accreditation for the international master's programme, they were required to provide evidence of English proficiency, and their comments in this research reflect on their professional practice.

The qualitative data reveal instructors' perceptions of their own English language proficiency and pedagogical needs. All respondents (100% of the interviewed EMI instructors) acknowledged room for improvement in their English proficiency, identifying the use of classroom-specific expressions (50%), clear presentation skills (50%), and participation in discussions (33%) as particularly challenging areas, along with academic and technical writing (17%). One noted, "The more oral and written communication I have with my colleagues from other countries and the more I read, the better I get."

EMI instructors suggested several methods for improving their English, such as self-study (e.g., using the ELSA or Grammarly applications) (60% of them), attending professional conferences (60%), or formal training (e.g., preparing for the Cambridge CAE or IELTS exams) (60%). Finally, it is clear that the instructors are aware of the need to continue learning and to use English more effectively as part of their professional development in EMI contexts.

*4.3.4. Cultural and interactional dynamics*

While 33% of the instructors believed that cultural factors did not affect their interactions with students, around 17% of them thought that cultural aspects influenced them to some extent. Students were described as being slightly (by 66.7% of instructors) to moderately engaged in the classroom (by 33.3%), with some interactions characterized as reserved, suggesting possible cultural differences in classroom participation norms between China and Serbia.

Instructors reported using strategies to adjust their teaching methods to meet the needs of students who are non-native speakers of English. Most of them deliberately, either significantly (66.7%) or moderately (33.3%), modified their speech tempo, vocabulary, and presentation style to adapt to students' language limitations, which aligned with best practices in EMI.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Challenges in coping with EMI may arise from insufficient English language proficiency (Sultana 2014: 14), and scores on English tests can predict challenges in EMI programmes (Aizawa et al. 2023: 837). Notably, only 25% of Chinese students in EMI-taught courses in our research were at the B2/C1 CEFR level, which is generally considered suitable for university entrance across Europe (Carlsen 2018: 88). The first ESP test revealed statistically significantly lower scores for the lowest English language proficiency group (A1.2/A2), which accounted for 18.75% of the class. This supports the notion that lower-proficiency students face considerably more burdensome linguistic challenges in EMI (Aizawa et al. 2023: 840). However, no statistical difference between the results of the medium (B1) and highest proficiency groups (B2/C1) aligns with the finding of Aizawa et al. (2023: 840) that even students at this higher level (B2/C1) may still be disadvantaged in terms of linguistic challenges in an EMI setting.

ESP courses organised alongside the main EMI courses may be particularly effective when their content is well integrated, as lower-proficiency students require more targeted language support (Rose et al. 2019: 2151). This finding highlights the importance of the ESP course at the Faculty of Forestry, which can enhance students' self-efficacy in preparation for content learning in the L2. Some universities in Saudi Arabia have organised preparatory English programmes (McMullen 2014: 131), and Galloway and Ruegg (2020: 2) emphasise the need for additional support for both language and academic skills in EMI settings. Future research could investigate whether better results in EMI are achieved if the ESP course is delivered in advance, rather than simultaneously with EMI courses.

Around 25% of Chinese students in our study were estimated by their EMI instructors to have low levels of comprehension in class, which aligns with the findings of Kim (2014: 22) at KAIST in South Korea, where 28% of graduate students taught through EMI were seen as having difficulties with the skills required to understand classes delivered in English. The reason may be instructors' pronunciation, accent, or intonation, and some EMI instructors, such as Dutch engineering professors studied by Vinke (1995: 54), view English courses as an opportunity to improve their own language skills, including pronunciation.

Consistent with many recent studies (e.g., Alanazi & Curle 2024; Alhamami 2023; Jia et al. 2023; Kamasak & Sahan 2023; Wang et al. 2025), which focus on EMI instructors' perceptions of how well students cope with English, EMI instructor participants in our research reported that students face challenges in

coping with English, which may limit their engagement in lectures and disciplinary tasks. Insights from EMI instructors can inform practical improvements, particularly in the listening comprehension of Chinese students, as all EMI instructor respondents identified listening as a skill needing improvement.

In our research, the distribution of instructors' responses regarding their students' in-class comprehension shows that their estimates align on the highest- and lowest-achieving students, demonstrating their ability to identify those who need immediate support. As Aizawa et al. (2023: 856) suggest, rather than imposing entry barriers to EMI studies for lower-proficiency students, better language support systems should be implemented to prepare them for content learning.

The estimated strong reliance of students on translation tools used in class (up to 50%) in our study supports Chapelle's (2001: 1) claim that everyday language use in the 21st century is closely connected to technology, with important implications for applied linguistics and second language acquisition. Unsurprisingly, a large number of students observed in our study used technology to fill gaps in class comprehension.

Although some linguistic and communicative needs of students were identified across all language skills in our study, speaking and listening were found to require the most urgent improvement, particularly in the areas of clear presentation and technical vocabulary. This aligns with the findings of Kim (2014: 18) at the South Korean KAIST institute, where EMI instructors aimed to enhance graduate students' writing and speaking skills, with an emphasis on discussion and presentation. EMI instructors in our research also highlighted students' insufficient knowledge of fundamental forestry concepts as a possible obstacle to EMI, since prior content knowledge can facilitate learning through EMI (Aizawa et al. 2023: 853). Additionally, students' performance in reading tasks may be affected by their lack of knowledge of technical terminology (Aizawa et al. 2023: 840).

Students' poor oral presentation skills may result from the difficulties in expressing content and discussing their discipline in English, a challenge acknowledged by Turkish students who rated their discipline-specific speaking as poor (Kırkgöz 2005: 117). Students often struggle with the requirement to write extended texts and meet the strict demands of written assignments at university (Aizawa et al. 2023: 840). Therefore, it is understandable that the instructors in our survey recognised the need to integrate writing tasks into the ESP course.

Instructors' recommendations for improving ESP teaching in our study include both curricular and extracurricular activities. Most EMI instructors (66.7%)

suggested increasing the number of hours of English language instruction per week. This contrasts with KAIST in South Korea (Kim 2014: 1), where, despite students lacking adequate English language skills for EMI, most instructors did not support the expansion of English language teaching.

Another recommendation from EMI instructors in our study was to adopt a more tailored approach in the ESP course for Chinese students and to divide students into advanced and less advanced groups. This is a valuable insight, as the ESP course aims to mitigate linguistic challenges and facilitate content learning in EMI courses (Aizawa et al. 2023: 841), especially for students with lower proficiency.

The recommendation for Chinese students to participate in extracurricular activities aligns with feedback from Chinese students in a follow-up survey on their satisfaction with teaching, in which they highly valued activities such as student clubs and the choir as part of their overall learning experience. Similarly, Aizawa et al. (2023: 855) suggested that difficulties with L2 proficiency can be overcome through motivated student behaviour and increased efforts in out-of-class learning, while EMI instructors at KAIST in South Korea (Kim 2014: 19) recommended group or one-on-one discussions in English, as well as extracurricular writing and speaking support services. These suggestions are consistent with sociocultural theories of language acquisition and the role of social interaction in language development, as learning occurs through collaboration and social support (Vygotsky 1987: 57).

Instructors' perceptions of their own English proficiency and related needs reveal that they all see room for improvement in classroom-specific language and phrases, pronunciation, clear presentation skills, and academic writing. This observation aligns with findings of limitations in the clarity and accuracy of expression among EMI instructors at Dutch universities, which reduced their teaching performance (Vinke et al. 1998: 391).

In addition to self-study applications and formal training courses, the EMI instructors in our study particularly valued opportunities to learn through authentic language use, such as oral and written communication with foreign colleagues and extensive reading. Similarly, Vinke et al. (1998: 392) found that professors who most easily switched from teaching in Dutch to EMI were those who had opportunities to use English in job-related tasks, frequently attended conferences, read professional articles in English, or had spent several months in an English-speaking environment. The instructors' awareness of the need for continuous development in EMI techniques, as expressed in our research, is understandable,

since they are expected to effectively manage their own language deficiencies and address the needs of non-native students (Klaassen & De Graaff 2001: 284).

Classroom interactions of Chinese students were perceived as low to moderate in our study, reflecting mixed instructors' perceptions of cultural influences in the classroom. Confucian educational traditions may have influenced these perceptions, as Chinese students who adhere to them often appear "passive" in large classroom settings (Chan & Smith 2024: 2).

Finally, EMI instructors in our study followed best practices in EMI by adapting class content to suit students' English proficiency levels (Galloway et al. 2017: 33), as they reported deliberately adjusting their speech tempo, vocabulary, and presentation style to address the observed language limitations of Chinese students.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The qualitative and quantitative data obtained in this study reveal the challenges faced by Chinese students and EMI instructors in courses taught at the Faculty of Forestry, as well as the instructors' recommendations and strategies for addressing these challenges.

Findings suggest that targeted ESP courses, such as the preparatory year English programme (McMullen 2014: 131), should be delivered before or simultaneously with the EMI courses, with a strong focus on discipline-specific vocabulary, speaking, and listening, as these were identified as the most problematic areas.

The findings suggest that, for effective ESP, students should be differentiated into at least two English language proficiency groups to provide for specifically tailored courses addressing the language challenges of each group and finally facilitate learning through EMI (Aizawa et al. 2023: 841).

Our research suggests that specialised writing tasks should be offered to help students produce discipline-specific texts, while taking into account the complexity and demands of academic writing in terms of both language and rhetoric, as suggested by Pessoa, Miller, and Kaufer (2014: 151).

Finally, it is suggested that challenges arising from students' cultural backgrounds, such as the perceived low level of classroom interactions, could be addressed through social interaction in extracurricular activities, leading to a more inclusive learning environment.

The insights from this study may contribute to the growing body of EMI research, particularly regarding EMI teaching at engineering faculties and

supporting ESP programmes designed for Chinese students. We hope that, with the increasing number of EMI programmes at the University of Belgrade, this topic will be investigated on a broader scale, as the limited sample size is a constraint of our study.

Although the estimates reported in this study are subjective and based on instructors' perceptions rather than systematically measured data, they offer insights into classroom challenges. Potential bias and the reliance of individual observers on visible student behaviour are possible limitations, but their impressions could serve as a basis for systematic empirical investigations.

Due to the small sample of EMI instructors in our study, the results are not generalisable. However, this pilot study provides specific insight into forestry, an under-researched EMI discipline. As small-scale studies prioritise qualitative depth over broad representativeness, their findings should be viewed as indicative, offering insights to inform larger studies and guide practical improvements in EMI.

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STAVOVI NASTAVNIKA O NASTAVI ŠUMARSTVA NA ENGLESKOM JEZIKU ZA KINESKE STUDENTE

*Sažetak*

Globalizacija visokog obrazovanja utiče na sve veću upotrebu engleskog kao jezika visokoškolske nastave (EJVIN) u različitim disciplinama, uključujući i šumarstvo. Istraživanje u radu sprovedeno je putem prilagođene ankete u formi Gugl upitnika, sa

ciljem ispitivanja stavova profesora Šumarskog fakulteta u Beogradu koji su tokom zimskog semestra školske 2024/2025. godine držali nastavu iz šumarstva kineskim studentima na engleskom jeziku. Upitnik ispituje mišljenje nastavnika o izazovima sa kojima se studenti suočavaju pri razumevanju i komunikaciji na engleskom i njihovom ponašanju u EJVIN učionici, kao i o sopstvenoj pripremljenosti za izvođenje nastave na engleskom jeziku i potrebama u vezi sa tom nastavom. Rezultati ukazuju na ograničeno razumevanje engleskog jezika kod kineskih studenata, čestu upotrebu prevodilačkih alata tokom časa, kao i izražene poteškoće u komunikaciji, posebno u slušanju, razumevanju i upotrebi stručne terminologije. Kako bi prevazišli te izazove, profesori su pribegavali pojednostavljivanju jezika i usporavanju tempa tokom predavanja. Takođe, izrazili su potrebu za dodatnom obukom za izvođenje nastave na engleskom jeziku. Percepcija kulturnih razlika i nivoa angažovanosti studenata na času razlikovala se kod različitih predavača. Nivo angažovanosti studenata, koji je loše ocenjen od strane nekih profesora, ukazuje na značaj primene interkulturnih strategija u učenju i podučavanju, uz paralelno unapređenje jezičkih kompetencija, kako bi se nastava u međunarodnom okruženju odvijala uspešno i efikasno. Izazovi koji potiču od toga što studenti i predavači pripadaju različitim kulturama, kao što je manjak interakcije u učionici primećen u ovom istraživanju, mogli bi se prevazići kroz društvenu interakciju tokom vannastavnih aktivnosti, što bi doprinelo stvaranju podsticajnog i inkluzivnog okruženja za učenje. Saznanja do kojih je istraživanje došlo mogu doprineti sve većem korpusu istraživanja u oblasti primene engleskog kao jezika visokoškolske nastave (EJVIN), posebno kada je reč o nastavi na tehničkim fakultetima i programima na EJVIN-u, kao i kursevima engleskog jezika struke namenjenim kineskim studentima.

*Ključne reči*: engleski kao jezik visokoškolske nastave (EJVIN), obrazovanje u šumarstvu, kineski studenti, percepcija nastavnika, jezičke barijere.

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## APPENDIX

### English as the language of instruction in working with Chinese students: EMI instructors' views on students' and their own English-related challenges

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Name, surname and title of the respondent
   - _____

1a. What percentage (%) of Chinese students almost perfectly understand the classes you teach in English?
   - _____

1b. What percentage (%) of Chinese students sufficiently understand the classes you teach in English?
   - _____

1c. What percentage (%) of Chinese students partally understand the classes you teach in English?
   - _____

1d. What percentage (%) of Chinese students understand very little of the classes you teach in English?
   - _____

2. Have you noticed that Chinese students use apps such as Google Translate for better understanding during classes?
   - Yes
   - No
   - I am not sure.

2a. What percentage of Chinese students used apps in class?
   - _____

3. Which language and communication skills do you think Chinese students need to improve the most?
   - Writing
   - Reading
   - Speaking
   - Presentation skills
   - Listening
   - Other

3a. If you choose 'Other', please specify which skills exactly.
   - _____

4. What is your opinion on awarding a certificate of completion for the ESP course English for forestry (without exam) to Chinese students?
   - It's too much.

- It is reasonable.
- I am not sure.

5. What do you think about the weekly number of English language lessons (3 hours) for Chinese students?
- It is too much.
- Is it reasonable.
- That is too little.
- I am not sure.

6. How many hours of English language teaching per week do you think would be advisable?
- 1 hour
- 2 hours
- 3 hours
- 4 hours
- 6 hours

7. Should academic writing be a mandatory part of the ESP course for Chinese students?
- Yes
- No
- I am not sure.

7a. What writing skills do you think students need the most?
- Writing theses/scientific articles
- Technical writing (projects, reports)
- Other

7b. If you choose 'Other', please specify which skills exactly.
- _____

8. What would you suggest to improve the teaching of English to Chinese students?
- _____

9. What could be offered to Chinese students in addition to teaching?
- English learning club
- Club for socialising with students from Serbia
- Faculty sections or choir
- Other

9a. If you choose 'Other', please specify what exactly.
- _____

10. As an EMI lecturer, can you improve your own knowledge of the English language?
- Yes
- No
- I am not sure.

11. What aspects of your own English language skills do you feel you need to improve?
    - Pronunciation
    - Classroom phrases
    - Presentation skills
    - Asking questions
    - Feedback
    - Discussions
    - Academic writing
    - Technical writing
    - None of the above
    - Other

11a. If you choose 'Other', please specify which aspects exactly.
    - _____

12. How could you progress in English?
    - Self-guided study
    - Applications (ELSA, WordUp, etc.)
    - Conferences/seminars
    - English language course
    - Participation in discussions
    - International projects
    - Cambridge/IELTS/TOEFL preparation
    - Reading of field-specific publications
    - Listening to or reading authentic materials
    - Specialised course (e.g. Coursera)
    - Other

12a. If you choose 'Other', please specify what exactly.
    - _____

13. How long do you think your English improvement activities should last?
    - A day
    - One week
    - A month
    - One term
    - A year
    - Other

13a. If you choose 'Other', please specify how long exactly.
    - _____

14. When is the best time for your English improvement activities?
    - At weekends
    - On working days
    - During summer vacation
    - During winter break
    - Other

14a. If you choose 'Other', please specify when exactly.

- _____

15. What would you recommend to teachers to improve English as a language of instruction?

- _____

16. Do you modify the way you speak in class to adapt to Chinese students?

- Considerably
- Moderately
- No
- I am not sure

17. What language barriers have you noticed in Chinese students?

- _____

18. Do cultural differences affect the interactions of Chinese students in the EMI class?

- Yes, to a large extent
- To some extent
- No
- I am not sure

19. How do you assess the level of engagement of Chinese students in the EMI class?

- Very engaged
- Moderately engaged
- Slightly engaged
- Not engaged