Towards a social and epistemic justice approach for exploring the injustices of English as a Medium of Instruction in basic education

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There are millions of children attending English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) government schools for their basic education. The vast majority of these are in countries across the Global South. In these contexts, EMI policy decisions are rarely based on educational arguments while global learning discussions exist with limited engagement with the challenges of EMI. This is despite a significant evidence base that highlights the widespread impact that EMI has both on educational quality and inequalities. A recent British Council position paper suggests that EMI research tends to be descriptive, perceptions-based and lacking in theoretical underpinning. This paper responds to this critique by bringing together critical theories of social and epistemic justice to develop a series of questions that could be used to interrogate the multiple ways that EMI impacts children’s basic education in the Global South.

Keywords: learning; English Medium Instruction; epistemic justice; social justice

Introduction

Following decades of expansion of basic education, there are now millions of children across the Global South who attend primary and secondary schools where the medium of instruction is English (EMI). The decision to adopt EMI can be seen to partly rest on linguistic claims, for example the widely held view among policymakers that the best way to learn a new language is through immersion in that language (Johnstone, 2019). It also reflects policy decisions driven by economic claims that the best way to engage with and compete in the global market is by knowing English, resting on the belief that it is the global lingua franca in the workplace (Erling and Seargeant, 2013). In addition, English can also often be seen as a politically neutral language, particularly in countries of high linguistic diversity (Kuchah, 2009).
While there is a significant and long-standing body of evidence of the ways that EMI significantly impacts educational inequalities, it remains an issue that receives limited attention in global or national discussions of learning (Milligan et al., 2020). For example, it is rarely acknowledged that poor learning outcomes for a child might be due to their misunderstanding of the language of the test and not to their subject knowledge or that poor test results may be due to the language of the classroom acting as a barrier to accessing subject knowledge. We, therefore, can often witness a scenario whereby decisions for children to learn through EMI are made with little consideration for learning and learning discussions exist with limited engagement with the challenges of EMI.

In a significant position paper for the British Council, Simpson (2017:7) has argued that ‘there is little reliable data nor any theoretical underpinning/model for current EMI research, which is mainly descriptive and/or perceptions based’. This paper responds to this critique by bringing together theories of social and epistemic justices (Fricker, 2007; Fraser, 2008; Anderson, 2012) to put forward a series of questions that could be used to interrogate the multiple ways that EMI impacts children’s education in the Global South. Through this, it is hoped that the paper will shine a spotlight on the injustices experienced by learners forced to sink or swim in EMI. In the first section, I outline some of the main challenges that learners face when learning in EMI schools drawing on examples from my recent research and the wider literature. The second section provides an overview of social and epistemic injustice and how these terms have been applied in education. The final section brings these together to present a series of questions that could analyse the injustices of EMI at classroom, school, national and global levels.
The challenges for learners in English Medium basic education

EMI can be defined as the use of the language of English to teach the curriculum in countries where English is not the main language for the majority of the population. While we have witnessed a significant increase in its use in higher education globally (Macaro et al., 2016), its exclusive use at the primary and secondary levels is mainly within the Global South where we find widespread and uncritical EMI adoption (Sah and Li, 2018). Its fast expansion has been shown to be linked to the belief that English is the language for development and integration into a global economy (Erling and Seargeant, 2013). English can also be seen as a ‘neutral’ language (Kuchah, 2009). We therefore see a tantalising concoction of English as both a driver for individual and national economic empowerment and political stability.

The promotion of EMI in the Global South has also been shown to be inextricably linked to the postcolonial condition and the social capital that being conversant in English brings (Milligan et al., 2016a; Mohanty, 2017). In relation to the latter, Erling et al. (2016) clearly show the relationship between the drive for EMI and the boom in low cost private schooling in Ghana and India. Therefore, while the issues discussed in this section clearly hold resonance for any child learning in a dominant and unfamiliar language, the issues related to English are particularly pertinent given the global march towards English as a perceived lingua franca and the associated global power structures that underpin this.

There is a significant body of literature that has shown the ways that EMI impacts children’s learning, particularly when learners transition to EMI during primary school (e.g. Nomlomo, 2008; Clegg, 2019). This research shows that many children struggle not
only to learn English but also to access content across the curriculum, with many of these studies focusing on Maths and Science classrooms (e.g. Adler, 2006; Probyn, 2009; Msimanga & Lelliott, 2014). The impact on children’s learning is clear with links made to low learning outcomes, reading and writing ability, high failure, repetition and dropout rates and low learner self-esteem (see Milligan et al., 2020). Clegg and Simpson (2016) explain how the majority of learners’ ability in English is often too low for them to use the language effectively across listening, talking, reading and writing activities. The consequences of this is that children often are not able to understand what the teacher is saying and do very limited talking in classrooms in English.

Studies have also shown the relationship between EMI and inequalities with particular groups of children more profoundly impacted than others. Sah and Li (2018: 120) present a striking critique of EMI in Nepal by juxtaposing the widely held beliefs of parents and students that EMI will enable quality education and economic empowerment with the reality of EMI in practice. They convincingly argue that:

the rosy picture of EMI education as an equalizing tool for the poor and marginalized populations was a superficial promise with a subtractive process of language education. In fact, switching the MOI, without enough preparedness, contributed to a comprehension crisis in content learning, low proficiency in both English and Nepali, and loss of mother tongue for the students, resulting in wider achievement gaps between the rich and the poor.

These findings are widely supported in the literature with children from lower socio-economic groups, rural remote areas, including those from non-dominant groups, and conflict-affected areas particularly identified as being negatively impacted by EMI (Dryden-Peterson, 2015; Rao, 2017; Yi and Adamson, 2019). Studies have also highlighted the positive relationship between mother-tongue education and girls’ learning
(Benson, 2005), but there is currently limited evidence for any negative impact that EMI has specifically on girls.

In recent research in Cameroon and Rwanda, I have clearly seen the impact of learning in English on both educational quality and inequalities. Cameroon has 280 languages, alongside the official languages of English and French as well as the widely spoken Pidgin English (Takam and Fasse, 2020). Parents can choose for their children to attend either a French or English Medium School, whether living in the Francophone or Anglophone part of the country, with the other language a taught subject. Children learn entirely in English or French from the first day of walking into a primary school classroom. Kuchah (2009) has argued that such an immersion approach is based on the country’s postcolonial condition and the belief that these are neutral languages for achieving national integration and unity. In a country which is witnessing increasing levels of unrest and violence, it is thus, an interesting case study for how language of instruction decisions are overtly political.

The impact on educational quality and inequalities was starkly seen in our qualitative study with year five and six learners in EMI schools in Yaounde (Kuchah et al., 2020). Our research showed translation as the most widely used learning strategy. Children primarily asked their peers to translate what the teacher was saying and classroom observations clearly depicted children concentrating on picking up the vocabulary rather than engaging with curricular content. The consequences are that no sustained group work was observed in any of the eleven classes with teachers using ‘safe talk’ and note-writing on the board to convey curricular content. Children are, thus, struggling to access the curriculum and have limited opportunities for language development. While these
findings are consistent with studies from across the continent, the striking observation made by the researchers who observed lessons was the amount of time and resource spent simply on translation. To reconfigure the language as a problem-right-resource conceptualisation by Ruiz (1984), what we see is that English is a problem that learners need to overcome rather than a resource to support their learning. Another clear finding from this study is that access to additional resources, particularly those in the home, that can support translation and other strategies, was seen by learners to support this learning. There are clear implications for fairness given that access to resources such as books and computers are limited to those that can afford them.

Another example from my recent research comes from Rwanda. While the Rwandan linguistic landscape appears less complex than Cameroon with three official languages – Kinyarwanda, English and French – and the increased use of ‘KinyaFranglais’ (Niyomugabo, 2012), it has been widely argued that the language-of-instruction policy is similarly grounded in political and economic motivations (see Pearson, 2014). The shift from French to English as the medium of instruction from primary four is firmly rooted in the post-conflict political landscape and the perception of English as the language of development (Samuelson and Freeman, 2012). As Sibomana (2020: 2-3) has argued, 'the decision seems not to have considered the starkness of the teaching and learning dilemma: learners attempting to grasp concepts through a language unknown to most of them and in which most teachers lacked the necessary proficiency.'

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1 At the time of writing, the Rwandan Education Board have suggested that English will become the medium from Primary one.
The Improving learning outcomes through language supportive textbooks and pedagogy project sought to develop innovative materials that could better support primary 4 learners in Rwanda who have recently transitioned from learning in Kinyarwanda to English (Milligan et al., 2016b). Initial exploratory observation, interviews and learner language tests showed that almost all learners in rural and remote schools had no access to English outside the classroom. It was also found that there are significant issues with learners’ engagement, English proficiency and grasp of the curricular content. Primary four textbooks, designed to be language accessible and to enable language development through a range of reading, writing and speaking activities, offered support to learners which resulted in significant improvements in learner participation, engagement and test scores. A striking finding from this study was that the improvements in test scores and engagement levels were seen across all learners. This study highlights the huge potential that exists to better support learners who are learning in a second language (L2) if policies can reflect that children are learning in a language with which they have limited familiarity. As Clegg (2019:89) passionately argues, ‘we educate children in L2 effectively elsewhere…it’s just that we don’t do it in SSA [Sub-Saharan Africa]’.

Across the literature discussed in this section, it is evident that wider educational decisions contribute to the ways that EMI disadvantages learners. For example, we often see that curricular language demands far exceed learner language ability. Readability analysis of textbooks used from primary four in Rwanda shows that the vocabulary and sentence structures are more difficult than comparable textbooks used in the UK (Clegg and Czornorwol, 2015). This is just one example that suggests that education policies are not only failing to recognise that learners are learning through an additional language but further disadvantages learners through overambitious and misguided policy choices. This
is further compounded by other issues such as overambitious curricula, challenges of teacher confidence and English ability and learner absenteeism (Benson, 2005; Simpson, 2013). Language-of-instruction is, thus, one cog in the education system, and as Cummins (2009) has argued, it is important that changes in language-of-instruction are not seen as a panacea. However, it is evident that more attention needs to be paid to the many ways that learning in English, or another dominant language, impacts on the educational experiences and outcomes of millions of learners globally. For more attention to be paid, it is my contention that we need better ways to understand and analyse how learning in English contributes to educational inequalities. In the next section, I introduce relevant concepts of social and epistemic justice that together have the potential to provide an analytical framing for exploring these injustices of EMI.

**Different forms of injustice**

As I have argued with colleagues elsewhere, much of the existing debate on the use of EMI in postcolonial countries tends to be highly polarized (Milligan et al., 2016a). On the one hand there is a dominant and economist view which we often see held by policy makers across Sub-Saharan Africa. Here, the use of English is positioned as essential for success in the labour market and a (widely challenged) view that the best way to achieve this is through early and complete immersion in English (e.g. Euromonitor, 2010). This is highly problematic in that there is very limited engagement with the actual realities of EMI classrooms and the impact that EMI has on educational inequalities.

On the other side of the debate, exponents of mother-tongue based education advocate education in the mother tongue as a human right. These scholars argue convincingly for mother-tongue based education for a minimum of six years, seeing it as both essential for
pedagogical reasons and to support the maintenance of wider language rights in and through education (e.g. Prinsloo, 2007; Benson and Kosonon, 2015; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2016). While this body of literature contributes to EMI research by presenting a powerful argument against the use of EMI in basic education, such a rights-based approach is limited in its analysis of EMI. A rights discourse which highlights the importance of a right to mother tongue education does little to help us interrogate the daily experiences that EMI represents. Furthermore, as Tikly (2016:412) powerfully argues rights-based approaches ‘may appear too homogenising in their implications for addressing the complex linguistic needs and identities of diverse groups in multilingual, postcolonial settings.’ The focus on the individual and their right to an education can also depoliticise a policy decision that may hinder particular groups of children more than others.

In the rest of this article, I will argue that shifting the focus to critical conceptualisations of both social and epistemic justice enables an deeper exploration of what is happening for individual and collective groups of children in current schooling practices where learning in EMI is their reality. I will argue that these particular theories, grounded in relational and collective struggles for justice, can come together to help us to interrogate the different and multi-scalar types of injustices that EMI represents in basic education classrooms.

**Social injustice**

Discussions of social justice in education have tended to focus on distributive justice in terms of equality in the distribution of social goods to enable more economic parity. Swift and Brighouse (2008), for example, put forward the proposition for ‘levelling down’ to bring about redistribution across the population. *Redistribution* is also a central tenet of
Nancy Fraser’s social justice model. For Fraser, redistribution of resources is needed to counteract the economic injustices (or maldistribution) that come about not just for individuals but also crucially for particular groups in society.

The second dimension to Fraser’s model recognises the cultural injustices that arise through status inequalities for particular groups of individuals in society. To address this, Fraser argues for cultural recognition, particularly within institutions that shape societal perceptions. This relational approach to thinking about social justice calls for a promotion of group differentiation. In 2003, Fraser added a political dimension to her social justice model through the concept of representation in the locus of decision-making. For Fraser (2008: 282), the three dimensions need to be considered together, since there is ‘no redistribution or recognition without representation’. The three dimensions, thus, come together to enable a socially just society where ‘all the relevant subjects have no entrenched social obstacles that in a structural way prevent them from participation in terms of parity or equality – whether this is participation in formal and informal political and public spheres, institutions, life, in civil society, in the life of associations, in family life, in labour markets, in fact in any and all of the major institutional arenas that are important in society’ (Fraser, 2011:303).

When first writing in 1995, Fraser argued that the political left in the United States had prioritised the politics of recognition over redistribution and challenged the uptake of both to enable transformative social justice (Fraser, 1995). Fraser has responded to critiques that redistribution and recognition are competing aspirations by defending her position that ‘justice today requires both redistribution and recognition…[through]a two-dimensional conception of justice that can accommodate both defensible claims for social
equality and defensible claims for the recognition of difference’ (Fraser 2003:9). A more substantial critique of her model comes from scholars including Young and Butler who are critical of the dichotomisation of cultural and economic claims (in Fraser, 2008). Fraser (2000:107) goes some way to responding to these critiques by highlighting the interplay between cultural and economic injustices:

By understanding recognition as a question of status, and by examining its relation to economic class, one can take steps to mitigate, if not fully solve, the displacement of struggles for redistribution; and by avoiding the identity model, one can begin to diminish, if not fully dispel, the dangerous tendency to reify collective identities.

However, the critique stands that the complexity of both understanding and being able to respond to multiple and often ontologically competing forms of injustice is not fully explored in Fraser’s work. This can also be extended to the intersections with representation and the ways that those who are economically and culturally marginalised can be positioned in a way that makes it difficult to participate as epistemic equals.

Fraser’s bivalent (and later trivalent) social justice model has been increasingly used within the field of education. Keddie (2012) provides an excellent overview of the ways that redistribution, recognition and representation can be understood in the educational context and I do not seek to replicate these here beyond highlighting a few key points. The first is that redistribution in terms of education recognises the inequitable distribution of both the material resources of schooling, such as qualified teachers, teaching and learning materials, the school environment, and the economic gains possible through education. This helps us to be able to conceptualise that material benefits are not fairly distributed both for quality schooling and through quality schooling. Recognition policies have tended to focus on the content of what is taught in schools and universities with
some scholars (e.g. Ndofirepi and Gwaravanda, 2018) calling for more attention to be paid to which knowledges are valued and privileged within curricula. Crucially, as Keddie (2012:268) highlights, recognition policies have often sought to redress educational underachievement, and by consequence, the maldistribution of gains possible through education for marginalised groups. A recent article by Block (2018) offers another important contribution through a powerful critique of language education research which he argues does not do enough to attend to issues of recognition and particularly redistribution. By framing language education research in Fraser’s bivalent approach, Block (2018:15) encourages a challenge to not only ‘the discriminatory policies and practices that often (though crucially, not always) position bi/multilingualism and bi/multilinguals in a negative way, but also the capitalist system that condemns so many children to lives of poverty or relative poverty, as class hierarchies are continually reproduced across a range of institutions.’

Representation is the area that is perhaps least well applied to the educational sphere. Where it is used, it tends to be in relation to discussions of decision-making in policymaking and whose voices are heard in the formulation of new policies. For example, Tikly and Barrett (2011) have considered representation of teacher and parent in educational policymaking. Kuchah (2020) argues, instead, for the importance of inclusion of children’s voices to enable participatory justice. The issue of whose voices are heard in educational decision-making is an important one to consider given the widespread critiques of national policymaking (Tikly and Barrett, 2011). However, what appears to be absent from many of the applications of Fraser’s model in the field of education is an understanding of who gets to participate in decision-making within the classroom. There is a large body of evidence that shows that participatory teaching and
learning methods are widely promoted in teacher training across Sub-Saharan Africa but often not used in practice because of a range of restraints including overloaded curricula and class sizes (e.g. Wadesango, Hove & Kurebwa, 2016). This leaves some important questions: whose voices are heard in the classroom? Which children are given the opportunities to speak?

**Epistemic injustice**

Fricker’s conceptualisation of epistemic injustice has a lot to contribute to discussions of injustices in EMI schooling. For Fricker (2007:1), an epistemic injustice is ‘a wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower or as an epistemic subject’. It has only recently been given significant attention within the education literature (see Kotzee, 2017; Walker, 2018; Ndofirepi and Gwaravanda, 2018; Nutbrown, 2019) which is perhaps surprising given the fact that knowledge is ‘the essence of education’ (Kotzee, 2017:348). Fricker identifies two key aspects to epistemic injustice: testimonial and hermeneutical. While they are often discussed separately, they are intertwined and as Medina (2012:206) notes, ‘testimonial insensitivities and hermeneutical insensitivities converge and feed each other’.

*Testimonial injustice* focuses around a credibility deficit which is when a hearer discounts the credibility of someone’s testimony because of systematic identity prejudice against her social identity. The injustice occurs in how something is (or crucially is not) heard rather than in what is being said. Here, there are clear links to Fraser’s identification of status inequalities (Fraser, 2008). *Hermeneutical injustice*, on the other hand, relates to the injustice that occurs in relation to how someone is able to speak and explain their experience in a way that can be understood. Fricker defines this as an intelligibility deficit.
Fricker has been critiqued for failing to account for the ‘material conditions fuelling epistemic injustice’ (Walker, 2018: 13); a gap which can be addressed by bringing Fraser’s concept of redistribution into discussion with ideas of epistemic injustice. A broader critique of Fricker is the focus on how knowledge is shared rather than what knowledge is shared; here the writing of de Sousa Santos (2015) and Bhargava (2013) points to a conceptually different form of epistemic injustice. For Bhargava (2013: 414), we need to see epistemic injustice in postcolonial settings as ‘a form of cultural injustice that occurs when the concepts and categories by which people understand themselves and their world is replaced or adversely affected by the concepts and categories of the colonizers’. Ndofirepi and Gwaravanda (2018) apply this idea to the epistemic injustice in African universities where they argue that there is a lack of equity between different ways of knowing. Of particular relevance for the context of basic education in the Global South are the links to epistemic violences involved in what knowledge is deemed valid within the school curriculum (de Sousa Santos, 2012). Such analysis can be extended to the very notion of a global learning crisis which is couched in assumptions that the only valid form of learning is that which happens in formal schooling and can be measured through national and global tests (Sriprakash et al., 2019).

While Fricker tends to focus on the individual exchanges of epistemic injustice, Anderson (2012) takes forward the theory to the structural contexts of social institutions, including within education. Anderson (2012:166) highlights, for example, how hermeneutical injustice can be understood as a structural injustice because particular groups have been ‘prejudicially marginalised in meaning-making activities’. Anderson offers three clear structural causes of group-based credibility deficits: differential access to markers of credibility, ethnocentrism and ‘shared reality bias’. Across these, there are evident
implications for education. Anderson highlights how education is one of the key markers of credibility. We can see this very clearly in a study by Esch (2011) which explores how teachers in Cameroon defined themselves and the role that language played in this arguing that the long-term effects of the imposition of ex-colonial languages are that it is only in these languages that the teachers felt they could assert valid knowledge. What is particularly significant in Anderson’s argument, and demonstrated by Esch (2011), is the assertion that an initial structural distributional injustice (inequality of opportunity to quality education) can generate the structural epistemic injustice whereby a speaker is not given credibility because they are not deemed to be educated. Crucially, the perception of how educated someone can rest on their proficiency in English irrespective of how much expertise in a specific area of knowledge they may have. Medina (2012) adds an important contribution here through his discussion of perpetrators as victims of hermeneutical injustice as their narrow-mindedness is itself a consequence of structural inequality manifesting in the case of policymakers in ill-informed policies resting on a ‘shared reality bias’.

Another important contribution to the growing body of literature related to epistemic injustice and education comes from Nutbrown (2019). His main claim is that in the UK ‘curricula and pedagogic styles should aim at developing the cognitive and linguistic capacities, and the intellectual virtues – the sensitivity to language, integrity in communication, responsibility and consistency in epistemic judgement – that allow students to talk and learn successfully in dialogue with others’ (Nutbrown, 2019:4). This argument helps shift the focus to classroom practice and the knowledge of specific concepts that children can demonstrate and from which they can infer to other concepts (Derry, 2018). While his argument does not specifically refer to children learning outside
of a first language, there are clear ways that we can consider this argument in the context of English medium classrooms, particularly through the importance placed on talk and participatory approaches to promote epistemic justice.

**Discussion: Injustices and EMI**

So, how can these different conceptualisations of justice help us to explore the case of English medium schooling? By bringing together ideas of redistribution, recognition and epistemic justice, we can critically explore the ways that EMI impacts on children’s learning and contributes to what Anderson (2012:172) calls epistemic democracy - ‘universal participation on terms of equality of all inquirers’ - echoing Fraser’s articulation of parity of participation. Such universal participation can be considered both within education (particularly in the classroom) and through education (including learning outcomes and transition to higher education and the labour market). Distributional, recognitional and epistemic injustices not only interrelate but clearly build upon each other to negatively affect such universal participation through initial structural injustices that generate epistemic injustices (Anderson, 2012). In this section, I first consider EMI in relation to each of the forms of injustice in turn, before moving to a series of questions that could be used at the school, national and global levels.

The policy claims that education can enable equal opportunities and social mobility are not new ones; nor are they restricted to countries in the Global South. At multiple points in the post-independence era, we have seen the promise of free education for all learners (e.g. Sifuna, 1990). The very notion that every child has a right to a good quality basic education presupposes a redistributive model, at least in theory, founded on equality of opportunity. However, these can often be critiqued as an educational redistribution
fallacy. As Kuchah (2018:45) has argued convincingly in the context of Cameroon “the discourse of equal opportunity, social justice and EFA, as manifested through English medium education … is still very much a rhetoric and … actually make[s] the opportunity of access to English medium primary schools an act of injustice against the poor”.

There are also clear examples of a distribution deficit in terms of the broader support structures and resources needed to enable quality education. These include the number of qualified teachers (Stromquist, 2018), access to good learning support materials (Milligan et al., 2019), safe learning spaces (Schwandt & Underwood, 2016) time and resources to do schoolwork at home (Smith and Barrett, 2011), and the quality of English language teaching (Aduwa-Ogiegbaen & Iyamu, 2006). This evidence is also unequivocal in its conclusions that this contributes to educational inequalities in learners’ access, experiences and outcomes, for example based on where a child lives, what gender they are and the socio-economic status of their families. While many of these are broader than language issues, these factors all contribute to poor learning environments which can manifest the challenges that learning in a dominant language represents. Furthermore, some of the issues can be seen to be specific to EMI. For example, the research on multilingual children’s resources in Cameroon discussed above (Kuchah et al., 2020) clearly demonstrated how some learners have access to more language support materials, to help them to develop their English and undertake their homework, than others.

We can, thus, start our interrogation of injustices related to EMI by analysing the ways that different educational resources are distributed and what redistribution could be promoted to counteract the economic injustices of maldistribution. This leads us to a consideration of how individual learners (and collective groups) are differently positioned
and the potential differential support that may be required to address these needs. A clear way that this can be applied to the context of EMI schooling is by recognising the differential access to English for learners outside of the classroom. Many learners will have very limited, if any, contact with English, if English is not spoken at home or in the local community, or they do not have materials (including textbooks and other reading resources) to practice reading in English. These children may need additional support to practice reading, speaking, listening and writing in English at school; this is something which the example of language supportive textbooks in Rwanda discussed above suggests can be an equalising factor.

The evidence that highlights the learning gains that are seen when learners are able to draw on their own languages as a resource in EMI and multilingual classrooms also points to recognitional factors. Here, we can explore the policy decisions which promote a monolingual habitus (Gogolin, 1997) without recognising multilingual realities and the ways that teachers and learners have to adapt to find ways around linguistic barriers to enable epistemological access to the curriculum. As colleagues and I have argued, while it is important ‘to focus on the role of language in facilitating or obstructing learning…language is also a marker of identity and as such can play an important role in influencing one’s self-esteem and confidence, depending on the language(s) one identifies with’ (Milligan et al., 2020). Discussion of recognition in the context of the domination of a single postcolonial language also necessitates interrogation of the ways that other languages and episteme are misrecognised and not deemed to be valid in educational spaces.
Such misrecognition can also be analysed within the context of the epistemic injustices that children face when learning in EMI classrooms. By learning in a language that they have limited understanding of, children could be seen to have an intelligibility deficit through a lack of concepts and language to make their experience intelligible. For example, a child may have limited grasp of particular concepts in the curriculum because they have not been able to engage with the curriculum in the medium of English; yet, they also may have understood the content but they are not able to make their knowledge intelligible in an English-medium examination. Drawing on Nutbrown (2019), an important contribution to potential analyses comes through the interrogation of classroom interactions and the ways that learners are able to engage in sustained dialogue and meaning-making in the classroom. This could also be assessed through looking at how far learners can express complex concepts in English, either in spoken or written format, and in their ability to infer from understanding of those concepts (Derry, 2018).

Studies that have identified the social and economic capital that parents and learners place on knowledge of English also highlight another important type of epistemic injustice – English, and a particular form of English, as a credibility marker of education (e.g. Mohanty, 2017). As Anderson (2012:171) argues ‘injustices in the distribution of access to credibility markers undermine the epistemic standing of the disadvantaged and block the contributions to inquiry they could have made had they been able to participate on terms of equality with others’. Here, we can analyse a particularly conflicted aspect of EMI as an injustice – the belief that EMI can contribute to economic empowerment when post-educational opportunities may not be impacted by knowledge of English but rather being able to demonstrate a particular form of English. It can, also, be helpful to explore the extent to which this is driven by a shared reality bias among policymakers and other
key stakeholders that they or their families have learnt in EMI and ‘they turned out okay’ with limited consideration of the recognitional and redistributive injustices outlined above. This final point highlights the importance of analysing EMI as part of the ‘larger systems by which we organise the training of inquirers and the circulation, uptake and incorporation of individuals’ epistemic contributions to the construction of knowledges may need to be reformed to ensure that justice is done to each knower, and to groups of inquirers’ (Anderson, 2012: 165). Here, analysis of the policy choices for EMI can also be contextualised within global hegemonic structures and agendas.

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<th>At the school/classroom level:</th>
<th>What materials are distributed to support learning in EMI? (e.g. quality English language learning? language supportive materials) How fairly are these distributed?</th>
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<td>In what ways are non-dominant languages (not) being recognised in EMI classrooms that could support children's’ learning?</td>
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<td>How far can learners engage in ‘meaning-making’ activities when learning in English medium classrooms? How does wider classroom practice (not) support this?</td>
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<th>At the curriculum/policy level:</th>
<th>What values and episteme are privileged in EMI curriculum?</th>
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<td>In what ways are non-dominant languages (not) being recognised in EMI policy that could support children’s learning?</td>
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<th>At the national level:</th>
<th>What values, episteme and languages are privileged in global education agenda and assessments?</th>
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<td>How does EMI contribute to global epistemic (in)equality?</td>
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<th>Outcomes:</th>
<th>How does learning in English lead to certain groups’ poor outcomes and post-education opportunities?</th>
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<td>How is communicating in (a particular form of) English a marker of credibility?</td>
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Table 1: some guiding questions for EMI analysis
Across these three forms of injustice, it is clear that the injustices can play out in interrelated ways from the classroom through to global levels. In table 1, a series of guiding questions are given that could be used to analyse the multiple injustices presented by EMI. These questions are not intended to be exhaustive but rather a starting point from which researchers could develop their own analysis. By using these questions to interrogate EMI, it is hoped that greater awareness can be brought to the role of language in the achievement of equitable and inclusive quality education.

While this can help us to develop a deeper understanding of, and may help us to address, immediate injustice issues of EMI, it is important to note that it operates within pre-existing EMI policy imperatives. Therefore, it could be critiqued for identifying what Fraser (2008: 28) would consider to be affirmative 'remedies aimed at inequitable outcomes of social arrangements without disturbing the underlying framework that generates them' rather than promoting more transformative language education policies. While it is hoped that the questions asked of EMI policy in this article can be used to identify the injustices within existing education systems, it is not intended to solely address such affirmative remedies. Rather, it is hoped that it can be used to demonstrate how leaving learners and teachers unsupported in EMI is a multi-scalar injustice which can be used to not only identify affirmative remedies, but also, at a time of increased attention being paid to the need to decolonise curricula around the world, to strengthen the evidence base to support advocacy for transformative multilingual policies and practices.

References


