Trilingualism in Hong Kong: A World Englishes Framework for EMI English Teachers in University

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ABSTRACT

With the rise of multilingualism and the use of a local variety of English in Hong Kong, the current article proposes a framework for EMI teacher training for university teachers (*WEMTT-Framework*) to expose them not only to a theory of World Englishes but also a practicum of teaching in multilingual settings. Even though Hong Kong has been regarded as a trilingual (Cantonese-English-Mandarin) city where English is taught as a second language, the EMI teaching in Hong Kong is still highly exonormative-oriented. With an increasing number of studies revealing the possibility of EMI teaching with the help of multilingual and World Englishes elements, the current paper also explores how World Englishes and multilingualism help in the present EMI teaching environment. The framework and the discussion are not only applicable to Hong Kong but also places with similar multilingual settings, thus expanding to many Asian cities with colonial backgrounds. The paper ends with a call for action from educators and researchers to work on the implementation of teacher training and carry out further studies in different settings.
Keywords: trilingualism, World Englishes, teacher education, EMI, Hong Kong English

Introduction

English-Medium Instruction (EMI) has been implemented in Hong Kong, especially for universities, for decades since the colonial period (Coniam & Falvey, 2018); during that colonial time, many of the classes were conducted in English, with Cantonese, the L1 of Hongkongers, used as an auxiliary language in the classrooms (Evans, 2016). Since the handover in 1997, Hong Kong has slowly developed from a bilingual society to a trilingual one because of its increasing contact with mainland China (Chan, 2019). The contact between the three languages – English, Cantonese and Putonghua – has triggered a new form of code-switching in the region that is found under various contexts, including classrooms (Chan, 2020). Despite the rapid change in the linguistic environment, the teaching of English in Hong Kong was found to be relatively "traditional" – English teachers, from primary school teachers to university lecturers, strictly follow the exonormative rules set by the British back in the colonial period, and these were all partly related to that fact that English teachers in Hong Kong hold a generally negative attitude towards Hong Kong English, the local form of English in the region, alongside other educational factors such as curriculum design and its washback effect (Chan, 2016/2017).

With increasing interest in the World Englishes paradigm, educators suggest teachers to teach students the importance of appreciating different varieties of Englishes (Hu, 2017); Hong Kong English (HKE), which has been well-documented for decades (Hansen Edwards, 2019), should also be considered as a legitimate English variety locally and perhaps globally. As Macaro et al. (2018) stated, there is a huge need for EMI research for higher education in Asia, and it is clear that the demand for such research is increasing, especially for practitioners and educators. Therefore, in the current paper, a theoretical discussion on EMI teachers' training, particularly for teachers in university, will be provided. Expanding from the Chan's studies on teachers' attitudes (Chan, 2016/2017) and trilingual code-switching behavior (Chan, 2019), a theoretical framework showing how EMI teachers at the university level should deal with a bi-/trilingualism context will be outlined, with practical implications to the fields of English education, teachers' training, and education policy.

The current paper will be structured in three parts. A brief introduction to the EMI situation in Hong Kong will first be introduced, followed by a literature review of the trilingual movement and HKE research, to set the ground for discussion. Then, the need for a teacher training program focusing on the changes of linguistic situations related to trilingualism and HKE will be discussed, with a theoretical framework suggested for EMI teachers in the university. At the end of the paper,

implications of the proposed framework related to English language teaching (ELT), teacher training and education policy will be stated.

EMI Teaching in Hong Kong

The medium of instruction (MOI) has been constantly changing throughout the past several decades in Hong Kong. Therefore, before the discussion of EMI teaching in Hong Kong, this paper begins with an overview of the language policy in the city.

When Britain colonized Hong Kong, it brought formal English teaching to the city through missionary schools in the late 1800s and early 1900s (Evans, 2016). English was the only official language in Hong Kong's early colonial period, and carried a privilege in the colony until 1974 when the British colonial government granted Chinese (Cantonese) status as the co-official language after a social movement for the rights of Chinese citizens and the Chinese language (Lau, 2020). However, since the economy of Hong Kong was rapidly developing in the late-colonial period, with the help of multiple British companies together with the early onset of English in the colony as the official language, English gained a special status in both public domains and the government sector. As such, Tay (1991) noted that "English is the language of power while Cantonese is the language of solidarity" (p. 327). English has been widely used as the formal language in workplaces, government, and education, yet Cantonese is the major daily language and home language for most of the local population (Evans, 2016). This mixed-language situation gave rise to not only Cantonese-English bilingualism among Hongkongers but also unique code-switching behaviors among English, Cantonese, and Mandarin (Chan, 2019).

The mixed-language situation has been even more complicated when it comes to the MOI at schools of different levels. For the MOI of primary schools, interestingly, while Evans (2016) mentioned that all primary schools in Hong Kong have always used Cantonese/Chinese as the medium of instruction (CMI), Wang and Kirkpatrick (2015) stated that local primary schools have not had a commonly agreed-upon MOI because the policies from the government have always been only applicable for secondary schools. However, as they mentioned, there were both EMI and CMI primary schools in the 1980s. The same complex situation always goes with the MOI of secondary schools, as Evans (2016) mentioned, "the issue of language policy at secondary level has been the subject of considerable research, debate, and controversy in recent decades (p. 36)." The changes in policies in past decades have resulted in the discussions in much research in recent years (e.g. Cheng, 2020). Before the handover from the British government to mainland China in 1997, 90% of the secondary schools were EMI; yet, after 1997, since the

government promoted a "Mother-tongue Policy," a split between schools of CMI and EMI occurred between 1998 and 2009 (Evans, 2016). It was not until 2009 that the government executed a "Fine-tuning Policy," which allowed schools to choose between CMI and EMI in individual subjects based on the needs of their students, and in turn, created more undefined grey areas in the MOIs of secondary schools in between EMI and CMI (Tse et al., 2021). These complications regarding MOIs in primary and secondary schools remain the ongoing debate among educators in Hong Kong (Danidelewicz-Betz & Graddol, 2014).

Compared with the mixed situations in primary and secondary schools, the MOI in tertiary education in Hong Kong seems to be stable at first glance. Among the eleven degree-awarding universities in Hong Kong (eight of them were funded by the Government's University Grants Committees and three of them are funded externally[1]), only two of them listed themselves as bilingual and trilingual; and for the rest, the only default MOI has always been traditionally set as English (Chan, 2022). However, even if the MOI in higher education has always been English, the execution of the MOI policy is another story. While most of the lectures in higher education in Hong Kong are conducted in English, it was discovered that the major language that is used outside lecture rooms—like during a consultation session with local tutors, lecturers and technicians—has always been Cantonese, the L1 of the local students (Evans, 2016). One of the possible reasons for such a mismatch between the policy (English is used as the MOI all the time) and execution (English is used in lectures and Cantonese is used for communication) is that the current policy largely ignores the fact that bilingualism and trilingualism have been emerging in the society. Several recent language attitude research studies in Hong Kong, like Chan (2019), showed that local linguistic features (like code-switching) and local varieties of English could act as identity markers for locals, which also provides solidarity towards a society.

In Hong Kong, the MOI policy for higher education has seldom taken code-switching and HKE as parts of the bi-/ trilingualism into concern, which, ironically, the language policy in Hong Kong has been "Biliterate and Trilingual (Biliterate in reading and writing English and Chinese; Trilingual in speaking Cantonese, English and Putonghua)." However, by investigating the implementations of the Biliterate and Trilingual policy, it is clear that the policy focused on boosting the Chinese and English proficiency separately, without taking the contact between the two languages into concern; the execution of the policy, including recruiting more native English teachers (NET), setting up benchmark tests for all language teachers, promoting English enhancement programs, etc. (Evans, 2016) has seemed to suggest that the bi-/ trilingualism, according to Hong Kong government, is just two

individual languages putting together. It is important to state that, instead of improving the proficiency of different and separate languages, bi-/trilingualism is the celebration of the results of language contacts, which, according to Gorter and Cenoz (2017), "can be seen as ideological artifacts that are socially and politically constructed…(that) soften the boundaries between languages (in education)" (p. 238). The result of language contacts, including code-switching and HKE, should therefore be part of the language policy. However, since there is no currently available resource for such a bi-/trilingual policy, there is no way to start working on a new policy regarding the issue. The framework that is suggested at the end of this paper could therefore be an initiative for such a proposal to promote a bi-, tri- or multilingual learning environment.

Trilingual Movements in Hong Kong and Hong Kong English

In Bacon-Shone et al.'s (2015) language demographic studies in Hong Kong, nearly 60% of the younger Hongkongers aged 15 to 24 claimed to be trilingual in Cantonese, English, and Putonghua. Trilingualism has been on the rise in Hong Kong among teenagers and the capability of speaking three languages has created a new form of language phenomenon. Chan's (2019) studies on code-switching in Hong Kong reported that even though code-switching in the city has been regarded as between Cantonese and English, the close contact with mainland China and the government's active promotion of the "Biliteracy and Trilingual Policy" seem to have paved the path for the movement from bilingualism to trilingualism in Hong Kong in the past several decades.

The studies starting from the 1980s recorded bilingualism in Hong Kong after decades of colonization and EMI education. For example, Luke and Richards (1982) described bilingualism in Hong Kong as "societal bilingualism," in which bilingualism was only limited to a small number of people based on education or civil domains (p. 51). Bolton and Kwok (1990) later claimed that bilingualism in Hong Kong ranged from "marginal bilingualism" to "ambilingualism (fluent bilingualism)" with "functional bilingualism" in between; however, they estimated that fewer than 6% of speakers reached full bilingual competency and only 30% of speakers had the limited bilingual capability under familiar contexts in work or study reaching "functional bilingualism" (p. 149). These earlier studies showed that bilingualism in Hong Kong in the early 1980s was a limited idea that was only confined to a limited number of Hongkongers. A decade later, Bolton (2005) stated that the number of Cantonese-English bilinguals had increased significantly over the years and, later in Chan's (2019) survey of over 100 university students, most self-identified as bilinguals and trilinguals, thus

bilingualism already became widespread among them. Interestingly, in a language attitude and identity study done by Lai (2001), over 52% of the informants started to relate their identity to trilingualism, which was double those who answered bilingualism (25%). Li (2018) also suggested that bilingualism in Hong Kong is common and trilingualism has slowly emerged in society.

The bi-/trilingualism situation in Hong Kong is not the sole result of language contact between Cantonese and English; HKE has also immerged because of the unique language situation in Hong Kong. Many studies on HKE in the past decades have yielded a rich foundation for phonetics (e.g. Chan & Chan, 2021; Hansen Edwards, 2019), phonology (e.g. Hudson et al., 2022), morphosyntax (e.g. Wong, 2017). Scholars also extended the studies to language attitudes (e.g. Chan, 2016/2017), intelligibility (e.g. Hansen Edwards et al. 2018) and English learning (e.g. Chan, 2020). The results of these studies showed that despite having unique phonetic and syntactic features, the intelligibility of HKE is high to listeners worldwide (Hansen Edwards et al. 2018), and HKE is said to be theoretically suitable for pedagogical application in classrooms (Sewell, 2012; Sung, 2015). However, given the rich body of studies on the subject and sound results on its high intelligibility, there has been few applications of HKE in any of the educational policies in Hong Kong (Chan, 2020). As mentioned in the previous section, the ELT in Hong Kong has been highly exonormative, which is based mainly on the "traditional" norms from British English or American English. It is nonetheless contradictory to the present World Englishes paradigm in which, despite being different, varieties of English should be valued and treasured, especially since communication among ESL speakers has been predicted to be more frequent than ever (Bolton, 2005). The understanding of different varieties of Englishes, including the speakers' local variety of English, should therefore be valued and perhaps taught for the sake of easing worldwide communication. Sung (2018) concluded from his study on the perception of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in Hong Kong that there have been positive attitudes towards different English varieties and ELF communication. The more positive perceptions towards ELF could potentially pave the path for a World Englishes-based language teaching.

From the perspectives of teachers, training for ELT teachers is therefore in high demand, as it may potentially benefit students and teachers in different ways. One way to achieve it is to incorporate local elements, including linguistic features and culture, in one's teaching practice may enhance the learning and teaching because of the solidary that is being built with the local elements. This view is supported by Creese and Blackledge (2010), who encouraged the use of bilingual teaching in classrooms for a more

localized teaching scheme that may benefit all stakeholders. However, teacher training of such kind is rare in the present moment in the field (Sifakis & Bayyurt, 2015), although studies on the local variety of English and bi-/trilingualism have been carried out for decades. Therefore, in the following part of this paper, a teacher training framework is suggested for teachers at the university levels to help build up awareness towards multilingualism and World Englishes for EMI teachers. The *World Englishes and Multilingualism Teacher Training Framework* (the *WEMTT-Framework,* hereafter) is not only applicable for the Hong Kong context but also applicable for places where bi-/trilingualism takes place. It is also worthwhile to note that the discussion here does not only restrict to English teachers but all teachers in general as EMI is the mainstream in Hong Kong. However, since ELT plays an important role in teacher education especially in ESL environments, the framework is built upon the concept that English teachers would be the first among the other teachers to receive such training as a trial.

World Englishes and Multilingualism Teacher Training Framework

As mentioned earlier, despite the maturity of studies on World Englishes and multilingualism, there has been limited research on how these could be incorporated in teaching pedagogy. One of the limited attempts would be Snow et al.'s (2006) study, in which they first reviewed literatures in teacher training programs and then analyzed the teacher training cases in Egypt and Uzbekistan. They evaluated the training programs in the two EFL settings on various levels, for example, the standardization of EFL teacher qualification, the teaching methodology, and professional development etc. Even though Snow et al. (2006) emphasize the cases under an EFL setting, which is a little different from the World Englishes paradigm[2], they suggested a list of goals for teacher training's preparation to raise ESL teachers' awareness of language diversities, as well as the socio-cultural contexts in a given place. Among the nine goals suggested, three are relevant to the discussion here:

(1) Expose teachers and, ultimately, learners to varieties of English beyond the Inner Circle;
(2) Help to deconstruct the myth of the native speaker and offer participants opportunities to recognize and value themselves as intercultural speakers;
(3) Integrate methodologies that are valued in the local context and reflect students' actual needs and interests.
(Snow et al., 2006, p. 274)

The first one is essential in a framework with influences from World Englishes and multilingualism, because teachers and learners have to understand the diversity of Englishes – not only the traditional norm-providing Inner Circle varieties but also the Outer and Expanding Circle varieties, with an increasing number of speakers worldwide. Providing exposure to English varieties for teachers to enhance their understanding of them is, therefore, a vital element for such a framework. The second point is ancillary to the first point, as it further affirms the concepts in World Englishes that the traditional "native speaker" definition required restructuring because of the increasing number of speakers from the Outer and Expanding Circles. This is especially relevant to the situation in multiple Asian cities where multilingualism takes place; Hansen Edwards' (2017) study on 18 multilingual English speakers in Asia concluded that, given the complex situation in Asia along with the rapid development of English usage (both localized or traditional), "the native speaker construct is being redefined in order to accommodate multilingual proficiencies and language practices" (p. 769). Redefining the native speaker paradigm for teachers and learners may facilitate ELT practices, as according to Chan (2022), EMI teachers who used to suffer from an L2 identity problem may benefit from a curriculum influenced by the World Englishes paradigm. EMI teachers and students in a multilingual setting should be valued as multilingual speakers who have specific socio-cultural backgrounds; apart from the English knowledge they acquire through textbooks, they also possess the localized use of English, which makes them the English speakers who fit in different English-speaking contexts, inter- and intra-culturally.

The last point emphasizes the inclusion of local context into the teaching practices, which is the key to implementing World Englishes and multilingualism teaching best practices. As Chan (2020) suggested, a curriculum that integrates both local and global contexts is beneficial to both teachers and students because the curriculum prepares the participants for an "awareness of the multi-centric nature of the world, which involves people of different cultures and languages that need to be appreciated" (p. 3). The three points are interlinked as (1) and (2) prepare participants for the World Englishes concepts to lay the ground for the teaching process in (3) is the actual implementation of the concepts into practice.

Apart from Snow et al.'s (2006) suggestions, Sifakis and Bayyurt (2015) proposed a teacher training program for ELF-awareness in Turkey and Greece, which they piloted between 2012 to 2013; in their three-phase program, 12 in-service teachers were recruited nationally and asked to undergo theory training, teaching application, and self-/peer evaluation. The teacher training program required teachers to first study extensively on several ELF topics (including the background, the theories, and the tools of ELF,

together with a 66-page long syllabus to read), and then the teachers were conducted a mini-research project on their own. The program ended with self-evaluation and peer-evaluation phase where the teachers could reflect on their learning from this pilot scheme. The result of Sifakis and Bayyurt's (2015) work showed that teachers benefited more from the program and the teachers found the knowledge applicable to real-life practice; however, since their research was based only on a sample of 12 teachers in an EFL setting, their purposed framework may not work well in an ESL Asian setting. Also, since pre-service teachers are also key stakeholders in their own future education and should be the forces that bring innovative ideas into the field of education, it is vital to include pre-service teachers in the framework, as well. Therefore, modified from Sifakis and Bayyurt's (2015) framework, the *WEMTT-Framework* (*Figure 1*) purposed in the paper is specifically designed for an Asian EMI setting in a university, which also includes pre-service teachers.

Figure 1

The World Englishes and Multilingualism Teacher Training Framework (The Wemtt-Framework)
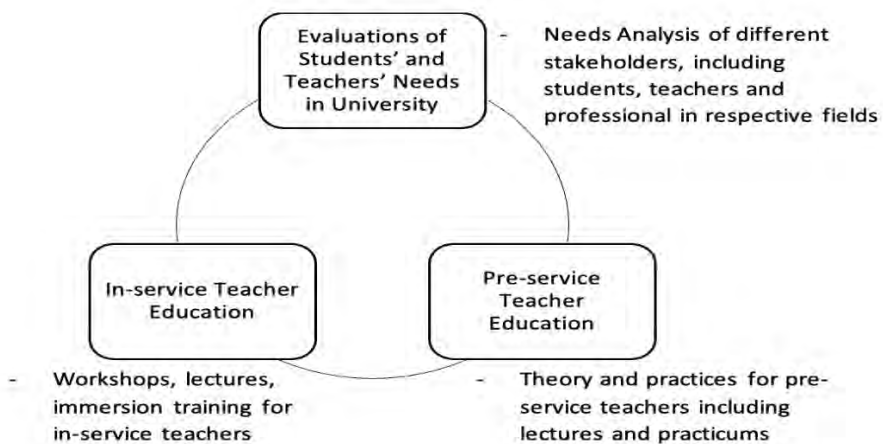
There are three dimensions in the *WEMTT-Framework*: (i) evaluations of students' and teachers' needs in university; (ii) in-service teacher education; and (iii) pre-service teacher education. All three dimensions correspond to four different parts of the field of education.

First, there should be an evaluation of students' and teachers' needs before the implementation of multilingualism and World Englishes curricula. EMI teachers in university face an ever-changing environment when

compared with their counterparts in primary and secondary schools because they handle English education for a variety of majors in university, which requires them to catch up with the changing needs from different fields. However, there has always been an imbalance between what students need and what English teachers teach (Eslami, 2010). Therefore, need analysis is an important step in the framework for teachers to really understand what students need. The traditional kind of needs analysis requires an assessment from the learners' perspective (Lytle, 1988); however, needs analysis on different stakeholders in the field may also be beneficial to students' and teachers' teaching.

It is recommended that evaluation forms should be sent to students to see how multilingualism is viewed and valued; at the same time, evaluation should also be done with stakeholders with the professionals in their respective fields. For example, for English courses with business majors, EMI teachers should consult the teaching staff in business departments for the real education needed on English usage, as well as business leaders in the respective fields for what is needed in the real-life setting. The benefit of having a need analysis from students, teachers, and other stakeholders enables EMI teachers to have a better view of how English is needed for students' views and from the industry, which further helps teachers in modifying the curriculum with World Englishes or multilingualism concepts (for instance, the needs of English communication with English speakers within Asia). That is, to prepare the students for their future jobs with suitable English ability, especially in understanding and acknowledging different varieties of English. This is particularly applicable in Asian contexts when communication among different English varieties has caught the attention – for example, Japan (Hino, 2018) and Korea (Lee, 2019). To achieve these needs, teachers' training in World Englishes knowledge for both in-service and pre-service teachers is needed.

According to Sifakis and Bayyurt (2015), a teacher's in-service training for the ELF paradigm involves theory, practice, and evaluation. This is mostly true, even for the current World Englishes-based *WEMTT-Framework*, except there should be also an immersion practicum for teachers. ELF has undoubtedly been gaining the momentum in Hong Kong, especially when studies have shown that Hongkongers' awareness to ELF has increased (e.g. Sung, 2018). This would therefore require a framework on educating teachers who are familiar with ELF and/or World English concepts. In the current framework, it is suggested that in-service teachers attend a theory section periodically to stay updated on World Englishes and multilingualism theories

and situations. Workshops, lectures, and talks should be organized for teachers to understand how English is perceived and adapted into different cultural contexts, and later on, a closer examination of how English is used in the given society (in this case, Hong Kong). Immersion for teachers is suggested because it is needed for them to know how English is used in places with similar contexts, for example, from Hong Kong to Singapore. As Mangubhai (2005) stated, an immersion experience is useful for teachers to deliver better teaching, as they learn the cultures from both contexts, which enriches their cultural understanding. Although these ideas seem to be ideal, they could be implemented with the help of the government, the university, and professional organizations. For example, the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR), as a government body that advises the education field in Hong Kong, had cooperated with universities for different immersion programs in English-speaking countries[3]. It is not difficult for related authorities and organizations to hold similar programs to other places and workshops from time to time as a part of professional development for in-service teachers.

Apart from training for in-service teachers, the *WEMTT-Framework* focused also on the training for pre-service teachers, which should be stressed here. In research related to pre-service teacher training, the results showed that the effect of pre-service training creates long-lasting changes in teachers' practices (Walters et al., 2010). Preparing pre-service teachers before the beginning of their careers benefits them in different ways, including helping them determine how they should locate their teaching in the future. The training for pre-service teachers includes two parts: Theory and practice. For theory, the university that offers a program for teachers (e.g., education majors or English education majors) should make courses related to World Englishes and multilingualism compulsory for student teachers. The teaching body should evaluate the needs of pre-service teachers periodically, especially on their needs to learn the target knowledge, like what was mentioned in evaluations. By doing so, student teachers will be equipped with knowledge related to World Englishes and multilingualism earlier in their lives, such that later on, they could apply it in the second part—practice. It is common for pre-service teachers to have teaching practicums every year in their studies. It is therefore recommended for them to integrate what they have learned from theory into practice. There should be two rounds of practices—first, a peer evaluation with other student teachers, then practice with real students of different levels in practicums.

The tentative *WEMTT-Framework* here serves as a rough skeleton for educators and scholars to rethink how both in-service and pre-service EMI teachers in a university setting should be educated under the World Englishes paradigm. With more concerns regarding the use of English as a world communication tool, even among ESL speakers, the ways to educate teachers and the way teachers teach have to be restructured to fit the needs of all stakeholders. However, it should also be noted that educators and language teachers should always take social factors, like identity, into concern in their learning and teaching as they are an influential part of language construction. Hansen Edwards' (2019) and Chan's (2018) studies discovered that HKE speakers may consider the use of localized English as an identity marker for being Hongkonger. The recognition of local identity in language teaching may therefore plays a crucial role in the local context. Moreover, the current framework only includes stakeholders within a university setting, which are teachers, learners and perhaps the management levels; stakeholders outside the university, for example, policy makers, leaders from the industries, potential employers, play significant roles in the teacher education within the territory and perhaps outside the territory as well (Macaro et al., 2018).

Implications and Concluding Remarks

In this last part, both theoretical and pedagogical implications of the *WEMTT-Framework* will be outlined. The current framework is certainly a new concept on the theoretical level. While most of the current foci of studies fall mainly on the features of different varieties of English and their intelligibility, as well as how multilingualism has been developing in given societies, there has been a lack of attempts to integrate the findings of these studies into practice, especially regarding how to implement these into teaching. Given that the English-speaking landscapes have been rapidly changing in the past decades, and are expected to continue to change how people in future generations communicate, it is of an urgent need to prepare the next generation for the use of English in an international setting, with regards to the familiarization with, or the sensitivity to, communication with different varieties of English. The current framework can be seen as an initial attempt to blend theory into practice, which links to the pedagogical implication of the current paper. The pedagogical impact of the current framework can be seen from both classroom application and policy making contexts. There is a need for educators and scholars to implement teacher training for multilingualism and World Englishes.

The current framework laid the foundation for teacher educators to work alongside policy makers to create a program that would benefit teachers and prepare them for the challenges ahead. However, since the current paper only provides the groundwork for theoretical discussions, more should be done to ascertain how the program should be implemented in real life, which could potentially include more complex political and socioeconomical situations. Small-scale pilot studies of the current framework should be carried out, like what was done by Sifakis and Bayyurt's (2015), to see how the framework melds with teachers and perhaps other stakeholders outside the university setting, such as the policy makers and the interested groups from the industry. Feedback from educators and teachers should be collected to see how it could be improved or modified before the real launch of the program. At the same time, scholars should work on material development for such kind of program. This teacher training will not be complete without the use of well-designed materials made by scholars.

Therefore, based on the above discussions, a call for action on implementation and material developments for the program is needed. With the collective help of the educators, the program is potentially helpful not only to Hong Kong but also to places with similar linguistic landscapes, where multilingualism and local varieties of English are found. Further studies and actions should be conducted for a better EMI education in university, as well as other education settings, which would hope to bring sights in studies related to trilingualism and teacher education research.

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Endnotes

[1] University Grants Committee (https://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/site/he_inside.html)

[2] ELF scholars tend to find the common features for international communication while World Englishes scholars focus on the varieties of

features that are different from each other; that is, World Englishes is 'variety-based' while ELF is 'feature-based' (Sewell, 2012).

[3] School of Continuing and Professional Education (http://www.scpe.ied.edu.hk/CAP325)

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