

[Article]

Issues within English Medium Instruction in the Context of Japan's Tertiary Education

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1. Background

In recent decades, more and more universities in non-English-dominant countries around the world have been teaching academic subjects through English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) (Dearden & Macaro, 2016, p. 457; Doiz, Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2013, p.1708; Macaro, 2018, p. 5). Initially, the EMI phenomenon gained prominence primarily throughout Europe, due to the Bologna Process, declared in 1999, under the European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students, also known as Erasmus, one of the aims of which was student mobility and international collaboration (Kirkpatrick, 2014, p. 16) . The number of European tertiary degrees taught in English rose 50-fold in the past eight years through 2017 (Bothwell, 2017, September), and it appears that this “unstoppable train” phenomenon (Macaro, 2015, p. 7) will continue into the foreseeable future.

Universities in Japan got a comparatively late start, but recently began implementing EMI as a result of a directive from the Japanese government (Brown, 2016, p. 419). There is a definite sense of urgency on the part of the government as a result of increased globalization and internationalization, coupled with recent domestic competition among Japan's higher education institutions owing to a low domestic birth rate, and these factors, along with a quasi-market policy, have spurred the perception of a need for drastic revisions (Tsuruta, 2006, p. 61).

In 2009, Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT, 2009a) started a funding project, called Global 30, which involved 13 universities, with the aim of increasing the number of overseas university students in Japan to 300,000. As part of the Global 30 project, universities established new EMI classes, mainly with the objective of attracting overseas students to Japan. In many cases, full-degree English taught programs (ETP) were designed for overseas students and Japanese returnees (Matsutani, 2013, September; Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS), 2009, February). As a subsequent project, MEXT (2014) commenced a similar funding initiative called Top Global University, with the hope of heightening the international compatibility and competitiveness of higher education in Japan, in an attempt to attract more Japanese students than had been the case with the Global 30. Top Global University includes 37 universities and will run until 2023.

(1) Fostering EMI in Japan

Japan's government-underwritten university EMI initiatives have yielded positive results with increasing numbers of overseas students attending Japanese universities. In 2007, overall Japan's schools enrolled 118,498 overseas students (Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO), 2007). That number had increased to 298,980 in 2018 (JASSO, 2019, p. 1), showing the number to have nearly doubled since the projects launched about a decade ago. However, it should be noted that 93.4% of these intakes are from neighboring Asian countries including China, Viet Nam, and Nepal (JASSO, 2019, pp. 3-4)., all of which are countries in Kachru's expanding-circle (Bautista & Gonzalez, 2009, p. 130). Kachru proposed a model of World Englishes in the early 1980s that divided English-using counties into three categories, namely Inner-circle counties where English functions as a first language, Outer-circle countries where English is used in the government sectors or social life, and Expanding-circle countries in which English is learned as a foreign language in schools.

Students from these areas come to Japan, in the main, with the objective of acquiring Japanese language skills and studying content related to Japan, which they expect will help them in the future marketplace (JASSO, 2019, p. 7). Concurrently, the number of Japanese universities implementing EMI has also been increasing, and according to the most recent MEXT survey, conducted from December 2017 to February 2018 (MEXT, 2019, p. 59), the ratio of universities offering EMI courses is 42% (up from 26.3% in 2008), and 5.2% of universities are offering ETPs (up from 1.0% in 2008) . These courses and programs were developed to target foreign students in the first place (Hashimoto, 2018, p. 21), although MEXT (2009b, p. 17) states as follows:

“Amid ongoing globalization, in order to develop an educational environment where Japanese people can acquire the necessary English skills and also international students can feel at ease to study in Japan, it is very important for Japanese universities to conduct lessons in English for a certain extent, or to develop courses where students can obtain academic degrees by taking lessons conducted entirely in English. In Japan, many universities have already established classes taught in English.”

This passage highlights two of MEXT's aims for EMI: (1) increase of English literacy in the Japanese population, and (2) attracting more international students to Japan. Although MEXT did not provide any specific methodologies or models for classes comprising Japanese and foreign students, in accordance with the government's agenda and without even detailed guidelines, Japan's universities began introducing EMI. This watershed revision of Japan's concepts and implementation of English education has not been limited to tertiary education, with changes also occurring in pre-university education. In 2009 MEXT made an announcement encouraging teachers to use the English language when conducting English classes.

The initiative, implemented in 2013 (MEXT, 2009c, p. 87), generated a lively discussion at the Science Council of Japan (2016, November), where committee members questioned the feasibility of using English to teach English at the pre-university level.

(2) Overview of the History of English Education in Japan

EMI is generally regarded as a European phenomenon. Although Japan's recent government push for widespread implementation of EMI is driven by factors such as a determination to remain competitive with global educational trends, and to counter the potential negative impact of Japan's low birthrate, EMI, as a concept, is actually not new to Japan. During Japan's modernization in the wake of the Meiji Restoration (1868), English played a significant role in the radical transformation of society, politics and commerce. As far back as 1872, the first Minister of Education in Japan, Arinori Mori, unsuccessfully advocated for the use of "Simplified English" as the national language of Japan (Muto, 2004, p. 90). He also sent students abroad in order to promote modernization and westernization (Imura, 2003, p. 288). In 1877, at the first national university, the University of Tokyo, English was the medium of instruction in all subjects covering advanced western knowledge on technology, science, architecture, and medicine (Fujimoto-Admson, 2006, p. 266). At the time, foreign teachers were a major element in the teaching of special subjects (UT Forum 21, 2001, p. 6).

However, around the end of the 1880s, students who had been sent by the government to western countries returned to Japan and reverted to the Japanese language to teach their acquired knowledge. This led Japanese citizens to believe that English was no longer a necessary instrument for gaining access to western knowledge (Imura, 2003, p. 84). Since that time, the grammar-translation method of teaching, a method in which grammar is analyzed and words are translated into one's

own language, has been dominant in Japan's English education, despite attempts to replace it with a variety of communicative approaches and teaching methods. Unlike other Asian countries, such as Malaysia and Singapore, where English was chosen as the medium of instruction as a political compromise instead of choosing Chinese or Malay, there was a practical need for most people to learn English. In 2000, Japan's prime minister at the time, Keizo Obuchi, proposed making English the country's official second language as one of Japan's goals for the 21st century. The proposal was not implemented, but Japan continues to seek ways to use English to instruct academic subjects.

2. Definition of EMI

The global emergence of EMI blurred the lines between EMI and English language learning as separate subjects (Knagg, 2014, p. 23), and also between EMI and other teaching approaches. Each country and university has their own instruction regimes, so EMI practices are heavily context-dependent (Walkinshaw, Fenton-Smith & Humphreys, 2017, p. 5). Macaro (2014, p.29) suggests the clarification of EMI by positioning it on a continuum, facilitating comparisons with other teaching approaches, such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), Content-Based Language Teaching (CBLT), Immersion, English for Special/Specific Purposes (ESP), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), and English Language Teaching (ELT). Figures 1 and 2, below, show that the aims of each approach are either "Language dominant;" focusing on a student's English language and/or a specific register and lexical set, or alternatively, "content-dominant;" geared to the acquisition of subject matter and/or the ability to operate in a specific language use situation. Note that ELT and EMI are at opposite ends of the continuum.

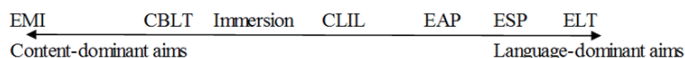


Figure 1

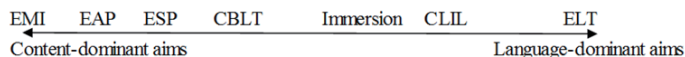


Figure 2

Figure 1. and Figure 2. The comparison approach. Reprinted from “Defining and Researching English Medium of Instruction: The Need for Clear Thinking and a Clear Research Agenda,” by Macaro, E., 2013, *The Role of English in Higher Education: Issues, Policy and Practice*, p. 29.

Airey (2016, p. 73) also provides a similar language-content continuum, as can be seen in Figure 3 below.

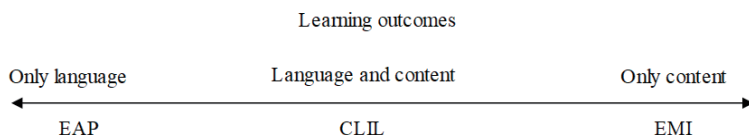


Figure 3 The language / content continuum. Reprinted from “EAP, EMI or CLIL?” by Airey, J., 2016, *The Routledge handbook of English for academic purposes*, p. 7.

According to Airey (2016, p. 73), to the left of the continuum are EAP academic courses with only language learning outcomes, and to the right are EMI courses with only academic content learning outcomes. Language in EMI is “simply viewed as a tool for teaching that may be substituted by another tool as required – the choice of teaching language is pragmatic and not expected to affect the content taught to any great degree” (p. 73). Taguchi (2014, p. 157) also describes EMI as “curricula using English as a medium of instruction for basic and advanced courses to improve students’ academic English proficiency” (p. 157) and English in EMI is “viewed as a

tool for academic study... a by-product of the process of gaining content knowledge in academic subjects” (p. 157). All these definitions elucidate the focus of EMI as “content” without explicit language learning objectives. The definition put forward by Dearden (2105, p. 2) suggests a locational context for EMI: “The use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English” (p. 2). However, Humphreys (2017, p. 95) argues that Anglophone contexts have been eroding opportunities for exposure to English, due to increasing numbers of international students, and thus EMI settings can be found anywhere in the world. Murata and Iino (2018, p. 402) also casts doubt on the narrowness of the EMI definition, and define EMI as “English-medium instruction conducted in the context where English is used as a lingua franca for content-learning/teaching among students and teachers from different linguacultural backgrounds” (p. 404). Macaro, Curle, Pun, An, and Dearden (2018, p. 46) investigated 83 EMI studies using three separate electronic searches for issues of labelling and definition of EMI, and found that it has been used inconsistently and problematically. As Knagg (2014, p. 24) noted, defining EMI has been, and still is “the monolithic fallacy- the assumption that there is not only one type” (p. 24).

3. Issues in EMI Classes

(1) English as a Lingua Franca in EMI Classes

Jenkins (2014, p. 2) defines English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) as “English when it is used as a contact language between people from different first languages (including native English speakers)” (p. 2). The commonality of ELF suggests that those wishing to understand and participate in cross-cultural activities on a global scale will benefit from a basic mastery of English, regardless of their mother tongue. Globally the English language has become the lingua franca, and all indications are that the international reliance on English as a mode for cross-cultural communications will

only increase (Mauranen, 2018, p. 7). According to the latest Ethnologue data (2018, 21st edition), about 744 million out of 1.121 billion English speakers use English as a second language (Simons & Fennig, 2018), and the British Council estimates that two billion people will use or learn to speak English by 2020 (Robson, 2013, p. 20). Belonging to the English-speaking countries, English has been used on a much more equal basis (Knagg, 2014, p. 23). Widdowson (2016) differentiates between “English taught as a foreign language (ETFL)” and “English learned as a foreign language (ELFL)” (p. 216). Widdowson points out the reality that, in general, English ability is assessed based on ETFL not ELFL; however, learners’ language experience is “suppressed in ETFL but is active in ELFL” (p. 219). ELFL is closely related to ELF in essence, and also to the learners’ own reality. Jenkins (2014, p. 26), by clarifying the distinction between ELF and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in the same vein, also argues that the goal of EFL is to communicate with native English speakers by mimicking native speakers, whereas ELF is more oriented toward intercultural communication and strategies. For example, TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) might not be a good indicator of an employee’s ability to succeed globally (D’Angelo, 2018, p. 173). In response to this language dynamic and in step with this expansion of the concept of ELF and globalization, EMI holds a popular position (Dearden & Macaro, 2016, p. 457; Doiz, Lasagabaster &, 2013, p.1708). Nevertheless, the attitudes of students in Japan toward ELF are not necessarily positive, because they believe that the goal of learning English is to acquire or imitate native English (Murata & Iino, 2018, pp. 404-409). It seems inevitable that ELF, in some form, will definitely become the language of higher education (Coleman, 2006, p. 11). Walkinshaw, Fenton-Smith and Humphreys (2017, p. 6) raise the question of whether countries or universities introducing EMI should be emulating any specific native English speaker variant. The answer to this question will likely vary by country/situation, depending on their international relations and situation aspirations. Regardless of such nuances, given that the focus of EMI is on acquiring content

knowledge, or on normalizing cross-cultural conveyance of underlying subject matter content, as opposed to improving English language skills, the quality of English used in EMI classes remains an important matter.

(2) Role of First Language (L1) in EMI

Although one of the main tools for globalization is deployment of the English language (Doiz, Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2013, p. 1407), some postulate that globalization might become nothing but “an entrenchment of the English language as an instrument of power and of an English-speaking world view as the only legitimate perspective through which the world can be viewed and interpreted” (Trevaskes, Eisenclas, & Liddicoat, 2003, p. 5). This militates consideration of how one can or should implement English usage without heightening the risk of being Anglicized in one's mental constitution; i.e., “without being brainwashed by the linguistic routines” (Phillipson, 2006, p. 67).

This concern yielded the long-term EU objective that all citizens should be able to communicate in two languages in addition to their mother tongue (European Commission, 2006, p. 56) . There is controversy over this issue in Japan as well. For example, Se (2015, p. 203) asserts that an unnecessary hierarchy by English dominance exists in Japan. Further, over 90% of Japanese citizens are concerned about the danger of corruption of the Japanese language (Shioda & Takijima, 2013, p. 22) , and there is debate about whether that corruption might be attributed to English language and/or *Katakana*, the phonetic system mainly used for loanwords (The Agency for Cultural Affairs, 1993). Englishization, a social phenomenon where English exerts influence (Tam, 2009, p. v.), or loss of domain for L1 (Doiz, Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2013, p. 11) is not new, but one of the current characteristics of a global world (Yoshino, 2014, p. 1).

There have been more fundamental advocates of the separation of language in education as “two solitudes” (Cummins, 1994, p. 73), and debates on whether translanguaging, a process of bilingual supportive scaffolding practices (Doiz, Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2013, p. 213), or code-switching are either “contamination” or “cross-fertilization” in classes containing Japanese and foreign students (Blackledge & Creese, 2010, p. 203). However, in reality, in Japan, languages other than Japanese are hardly ever used. Whereas in Europe a large number of studies are conducted in English, in Japan most coursework is done and written in Japanese (D’Angelo, 2018, p. 172). After they graduate, Japanese students may not even use the English academic terminology they acquired. In addition, as Mulvey (2018, p. 42) points out, another challenge is that university students with limited vocabularies who take EMI courses might lose the opportunity to learn basic academic knowledge, as well as missing out on the nuances of interactions among students and teachers. Thus, emphasizing English in higher education may increase the cognitive load demand and decrease their creativity (Wilkinson, 2013, p. 11). Swain and Lapking (2013, pp. 122-123), drawing upon Vygostky’s sociocultural theory, suggest three general guiding principles for L1 in immersion class: (1) L1 should be allowed in collaboration or private speech to help learners’ understanding of complex concepts, but English should be encouraged, (2) teachers should make their expectations clear and work to create a supportive environment, and (3) “use of the L1 should be purposeful, not random” (p. 123). It is entirely possible that EMI may even lead to better understanding of academic disciplines from different cultural or linguistic perspectives than L1 (Kuramura, 2018, p. 274). Interestingly, Japanese people might have a positive image of bilingualism, mainly associating it with Japanese who possess a high level of English speaking skills (Hashimoto, 2013, p. 19). MEXT (2009d), however, does not make it clear whether developing bilingual students is one of the goals of English education in Japan. In fact, in most cases, overseas students in EMI in Japanese universities do not need Japanese language skills and they can miss

out on opportunities to fully immerse themselves in their educational experience in Japanese, including meaningfully communicating with Japanese students. In addition, many overseas students taking EMI course work will emphasize their English studies rather than Japanese and therefore miss out on some of the benefits of studying in Japan.

(3) EMI Teachers

A critical step for investigating EMI in Japan is determining what kinds of EMI teachers will be needed. One year before MEXT launched the Global 30, MEXT officially and clearly, without any extra suggestions or criteria, encouraged universities in Japan to hire (1) Japanese faculty members who have experience of studying abroad; and (2) foreign faculty members. However, determining appropriate qualifications may require more specific guidelines than those offered at present. In general, university teachers do not necessarily have certain pedagogical knowledge or even a teaching philosophy when they embark on their careers. There is a commonly held view that university teachers “teach the way they were taught” (Halpern & Hakel, 2003, p. 37). In some cases, teachers who have learned overseas attempt to just imitate the Western style of instruction in English (Jon & Kim, 2011, p. 166).

Ng (2017) investigated four Japanese local universities and analyzed the factors which impaired their EMI implementation efforts, focusing particularly on university management issues. His research consisted of semi-structured interviews with each university Dean and/or director of language centers, and he identified three major factors that constrain implementation of EMI, (1) “availability of teachers,” (2) “English proficiency of students,” and (3) “an inadequate sociolinguistic environment to sustain the learning of English” (p.66). Among these three factors, a particular obstacle is the scarcity of teachers, an obstacle often overlooked in the initial phase of EMI implementation in Japan (p. 67).

Due to the scarcity of EMI qualified faculty members in Japan, there is often either language or subject matter deficits on the instructor side. Teachers with good English ability may not be specialists in the underlying subject matter. Conversely, subject matter specialists may have no teaching experience using English language appropriate for classroom (Bradford & Brown, 2018, p. 5). Nor does Japan have sufficient English-proficient teachers who are willing to teach EMI classes (Bradford, 2013, p. 226; Yamamoto & Ishikura, 2018, p. 74). Of further concern is whether enough foreign scholars are impaneled at universities in Japan (Rappley & Vickers, 2015, November). Thus, grafting this new mode of instruction, EMI, onto the existing teaching cadre of Japan presents a serious challenge.

4. The Role of Collaboration in the Implementation of EMI in Japan

Finding the best modes of implementing EMI in Japan will inherently call for innovation and experimentation. In this spirit, Iyobe and Li (2018, pp. 225-237) report on their EMI protocol, which is a three-step system taught at a university in Japan. The first stage applies EAP (English for Academic Purposes), the second stage gradually shifts to CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) and finally the third stage implements EMI. In the initial two stages, courses are taught by content specialists and English-language teaching specialists, and then at the final EMI stage, solely by content teaching specialists. Where necessary, additional support comes from an English-language specialist working closely with a content teacher. Gradual shifts from language-focused learning, EAP, to CLIL and on to EMI, would be incomplete without communication and collaboration between language teaching specialists and content specialists. Their research project summarizes a number of issues for institutions introducing EMI: (1) the heavy work load for students causing a high rate of incompletes and failures, (2) the necessity of providing supplementary Japanese texts related to class content in order to assist Japanese students with understanding new concepts, and (3) the use of pair-taught bridge courses to fill in

the gap between language and content which were effective, but were time-consuming for teachers who were paired into one teacher with subject area knowledge and the other approaching the classes from a language teaching background.

Ideally, both teacher and student should interact within the discourses, using the specialized language and curricular elements that govern their academic disciplines. Given the discrepancy between disciplinary knowledge and academic literacies, Dafouz and Smit (2014, p. 405) state two immediate challenges: a need to recognize the discrepancy, and a need to remain aware of the fact that the use of English does not “homogenize disciplines” (p. 405) in line with an Anglocentric model, in particular, the reading materials for EMI. Further, in many cases teachers in EMI programs in Japan hardly have any contact with the English language teaching faculty (Brown, 2016, p. 422), and there are many differences between their priorities for course learning outcomes.

Creese (2005) investigated limitations to co-teaching models at London bilingual secondary schools and found that “the problem is that the discourses underpinned by ideologies at institutional and societal level come to endorse certain pedagogies and relegate to the background others that need attention” (p. 612). In short, this shows that inviting broader participation in the instructional settings might cause some limitations in EMI settings. Further development of EMI requires fundamental curriculum reforms and changes in mindset as it is not only a matter of the language and content, since assessment and learning support before and after class all need to be considered as well, as do the campus environment and the entire classroom culture (Takagi, 2018, p. 68).

5. Conclusion

Historically, Japan has not embraced external linguistic influences. It has remained

a largely monolingual nation, rarely conceding to extra-territorial linguistic trends. However, Japan's internal linguistic orientation now seems on the verge of transitioning to a more internationally-focused model, with the call for change coming from the Japanese government itself, in the context of an increasingly interconnected social/commercial global environment. Japan is on the threshold of retooling its education systems to foster multilingualism and heightened international connectivity. EMI will be an important component in this paradigm shift, but there remain significant challenges. No single model can be used as a global standard (Pennycook, 2012, p. 138), as each culture and locale has unique needs, and that certainly holds true in Japan. Further, despite the rising popularity of EMI, there is not yet definitive evidence of the extent to which it improves either content learning and/or English learning (Macaro, 2018, p. 38). Nevertheless, EMI programs do attract students from abroad, in line with the objectives of MEXT. More importantly, its adoption in Japan signals that the country is ready and willing to rise to the new challenges inherent in an increasingly globalized world.

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