

# 日本におけるEMI

## —現状と課題—

### EMI in Japan: Current Status and Its Implications

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#### ABSTRACT

近年、文部科学省主導の「グローバル30」や「スーパーグローバル大学創世支援」により、EMI (English as the medium of instruction) をカリキュラムに組み込む大学が増えてきた。EMIの実施は、日本人学生の英語力を上げて「グローバル人材」を育成することと、英語で学んで学位を得ることができる環境を整えることでより多くの留学生を呼び込むことという二つの目的をかなえる形で進行している。その意味においては国の言語政策という極めて政治的なディスコースとして解釈することが可能である。しかし同時に、教育の現場のステークホルダー、特に実際の教室での授業に関わる教員と学生にとってEMIプログラムがどのような意味を持つのか、そして現場でどのような問題が実際に起きているのかについては、まだ十分な検証はできていない。

Public-funded programs such as Global 30 and Top Global University Project have been supporting the growth of EMI (English as the medium of instruction) programs in Japanese universities. The government and the MEXT hope that the implementation of EMI will help Japanese universities become more 'global' in two ways: first, it will help prepare domestic students for English-speaking work place, and second, it will allow more international students to study at Japanese universities. In this sense, EMI movement in Japan can be interpreted as a part of political discourse concerning language policy. However, it is also a pedagogical issue affecting teachers and students. This paper provides an overview of the current state of EMI in Japanese universities and its implications in classroom practice.

## 1. Introduction

Together with economic globalization, English has soared to the status of the global language. Many people around the world now see English as a kind of commodity (Seargeant 2012), and this reflects Bourdieu's view that language serves a form of capital in today's economy (Bourdieu 1991). In fact, the metaphor of linguistic capital employed by Bourdieu seems so deeply seated in people's mind that many do not seem to question the way, and/or to what extent, commercial English language teaching is making profit at their expense<sup>1</sup>.

Against such backdrop, Japanese economic forces are now encouraging their employees to learn English in order to help their companies' global operation and propel financial growth. In response to such trend, many magazines in Japan targeting business people run special features on English language a few times a year. They tell how their readers should catch up with their work places turning into English speaking arenas. Just to give a few examples from 2014 (January-August) alone, "Eigo to keizai [English and Economy]" (January 14), and "Saigo no eigo yarinaoshi [Start studying English again – your final opportunity]" (April 2) were the top features of *Shukan Ekonomisuto [Weekly Economist]*; from *Nikkei Business Associé*, you will find "Zettai tsukaeru eigo [This is all you need to master English]" (April issue), "Eigo benkyo-ho: Jikan ga nakute mo TOEIC 200 ten appu [English studying strategies: How to improve your TOEIC scores by 200 when you do not have much time]" (August issue). These catchy phrases are printed on the covers of the magazines. Other business magazines such as *Toyo Keizai* and *Shukan Diamond* have also been releasing special features related to English language study in recent years.

Such a climate in work place is also impacting how Japanese universities design their programs –

in particular, their English language programs. One of the attempts many universities have come up with is to introduce EMI – English as the medium of instruction - in their curricula. This paper takes a brief look at the current state of EMI chiefly from the government's and concerned universities' official webpages and its implications for teachers and students.

## 2. Response to globalization in higher education: MEXT's initiatives

Globalization and its effect on Japan's economic sphere has been a driving force behind the wash-back effect on Japan's higher education. One area where the government and the industry agree on is that Japan needs more so-called "global-jinzai", or work force who are capable of working in the global (and supposedly English-speaking) economy. In pursuit of the goal, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) made EMI a priority for Japanese universities (MEXT 2009)<sup>2</sup>.

MEXT's decision to promote EMI in Japanese education system can be interpreted in a political discourse surrounding Japan's language planning. It has increasingly intensified its attempt to implement EMI since 1990s, while some may question why it should do so when Japan has never been under colonization by English speaking countries and the Japanese language itself is adequate for studying science and business subjects (Yamagami & Tollefson 2011). The rationale behind this is that "English is the most important international language of science, technology and economic competitiveness and therefore English language ability is essential for individual participation in these areas of 'globalized' human activity and for the economic wellbeing of the society" (ibid. p.16). This sentiment seems to be shared by many universities who wish to present

themselves as international institutions. Yamagami & Tollefson (2011) reveals at how some are doing just that in their online publicity. For example, Tama University's Faculty of Global Studies emphasizes the value of EMI program for preparing their students for those societal demands (ibid. pp. 23-24); Sophia University, which is well known for its emphasis on English, declares its mission "to prepare its students to live in this globalized world" (ibid. p.24), and Waseda University, which ranks well within top ten of Japanese universities in terms of its competitive entrance and the size of the student and faculty bodies, states in its online promotional materials that the main goal of their liberal arts program is to prepare "global leaders in the 21<sup>st</sup> century" (ibid. p.26). In Waseda's liberal arts program, classes are taught in English and one third of the students are from overseas.

Words and concepts such as 'global', 'international', 'diversity', and 'multicultural' are liberally used in websites of newly founded universities such as Akita International University (founded in 1998) and Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (founded in 2000)<sup>3</sup>. Globalization – or internationalization<sup>4</sup> – of these universities is particularly pronounced in the makeup of their student bodies. In short, they have a large number of foreign students and teachers who may not be fluent in Japanese. At Akita International University, where all classes are taught in English, 56 percent of the faculty members are from overseas and as of May 1, 2013, they have 132 foreign undergraduate students (12 full degree program students, 120 exchange students) in comparison to 735 Japanese students, accounting for approximately 15 percent of the entire undergraduate students. Ritsumeikai APU, which offers 80 percent of the classes in English-Japanese bilingual settings, has 2,500 foreign students to 3,245 Japanese students, which means that approximately 44 percent of the students are from overseas.

In passing, we note that, both Akita International University and Ritsumeikan APU have just been approved to take part in Top Global University Project, along with Waseda University (Asahi Shimbun, September 27, 2014). It is a MEXT-led project aiming to help Japanese universities achieve world-class status by providing public funding, and a total of 37 universities are now eligible to receive the fund of up to 500 million yen (\$4.57 million) annually over the next 10 years<sup>5</sup>. What this suggests is that, being able to convince the government that they are promising global institutions, is one of the essential strategies to win public assistance now.

As illustrated above, EMI is now an important issue in Japan's language policy. It can be interpreted as political discourse. However, EMI is also a pedagogical issue, which affects every educational institution, every teacher and every student. As politicians and business leaders cry for the need of Japan's globalization – both in its business and educational sectors – the tension between the political and the pedagogical spheres over the implementation of EMI practice increases. The next section illustrates how EMI are being implemented in Japanese universities.

### **3. EMI in Japanese universities**

The following section looks at the prevalence of EMI classrooms in Japanese universities and their functions in higher education institutions. It also shows several patterns of undergraduate EMI in Japan. Since the introduction of EMI heavily relies on MEXT initiatives and government funding, how the government and the MEXT are promoting EMI is also mentioned here.

#### **3.1 EMI classes: its prevalence and dual functions**

How prevalent is EMI in Japanese universities? According to MEXT, as of 2006, there were 227

universities, out of around 960 institutions, offering some kind of EMI classes (MEXT 2006, cited in Brown & Iyobe 2013). The fact that close to one-fourth of universities have EMI courses may seem to suggest that EMI is not a rare situation in Japanese universities. However, a closer look tells a different story. There were only five universities as of 2006 that were offering fully English-taught degree programs: Akita International University, Sophia University, Waseda University, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, and Tokyo Christian University (MEXT 2006). Only one faculty each from the universities was offering English-only degree, with the exception of Ritsumeikan APU, where both their faculties offered full-degree EMI programs. This suggests that the majority of the EMI classes are only partially integrated into 'regular' degree programs for Japanese students who make up most of the student body. In other words, a vast majority of EMI classes have been designed at different universities in order to, as MEXT puts it, "foster human resources who can positively meet the challenges and succeed in the global field" (MEXT 2009, cited in Brown & Iyobe 2013) once they have acquired desirable English skills.

As mentioned earlier, EMI is recognized as a key to globalizing Japanese universities by MEXT, which informs that "[a]mid 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 in where students can obtain degrees by taking lessons conducted entirely in English (MEXT 2009, cited in Brown & Iyobe 2013).

The above quote indicates that EMI classes in Japanese universities are assigned two different functions: one, to encourage Japanese students to

study in an English-speaking environment so they are better prepared for the globalized working conditions, and two, to establish degree courses where foreign students can take classes without having to worry about their Japanese language proficiency. When Prime Minister Fukuda gave a speech before the Diet on January 28, 2008, stating that "[t]op quality students do not exist in abundance, so countries in Europe, America, Asia and Japan are competing to get [such students] as a scarce resource", he must have been acutely aware of the need for EMI in the second category. In order to promote EMI for international students, the government has been running the Global 30 program, along with the Top University Project mentioned earlier. Global 30 is a funding scheme to promote EMI programs designed to attract international students (Global 30, n.d.). The idea for the so-called Global 30 program was born in 2008 out of the government's plan to increase the number of international students to 300,000 by 2020. Thirteen universities have been selected to participate in the program. The official website of the Global 30 promises that:

With the introduction of the "Global 30" Project, the best universities in Japan are now offering degree programs in English.

By doing this, these universities have broken down the language barrier which was one of the obstacles preventing international students from studying in Japan. A range of courses in a number of fields are offered in English at the universities under the "Global 30" Project.

Global 30: About Global 30

As of September 1, 2014, a total of thirteen universities were chosen to participate in the project, all of which are also among the 37 universities selected for the Top University Project on September 26, 2014. This indicates that the

number of universities offering full-fledged English degree courses has increased from 5 to 27 in less than ten years, and it is possible that the trend continues as long as the public funds are promised for universities offering EMI degree courses as well as EMI classes for Japanese students.

### 3. 2 Patterns of undergraduate EMI in Japan

Brown & Iyobe (2013) examined eight universities to examine how EMI classes were implemented and to identify a range of EMI programs currently running in Japan. They collected relevant information from their promotional materials such as brochures and webpages, in-house documents such as syllabi and faculty development reports, as well as papers written by relevant faculty. They also established contact with fifteen faculty members who were involved in the EMI programs at those universities. Publicly available information and interviews with those stakeholders helped them identify six patterns of undergraduate EMI in Japan: 1) ad hoc, 2) semi-structured, 3) integrated, 4) +α program, 5) English-taught program (ETP), and 6) campus-wide EMI. The first two are not formalized and very often taught by language teachers. The next two patterns often offer more formal programs, and EMI is a “significant part of studies” (Brown & Iyobe 2013, p. 13). ETP is where entire undergraduate degree courses are offered in EMI, while campus-wide EMI is where all, or nearly all, undergraduate classes are taught in English. Campus-wide EMI are often designed for the benefit of the international students.

After examining the percentage of students enrolled in non-degree programs, Brown & Iyobe (2013) conclude that, despite the rapid growth of EMI programs in Japanese universities, EMI appears to attract a limited student body. Among the five universities they examined, the percentage of the students studying in non-degree EMI programs remained somewhere between 1% and

4%. They suggest several reasons why EMI programs are still small: 1) the demand from the students is small, 2) while there is a greater demand, universities do not have enough human resources, or qualified faculty, 3) the university does not want the EMI to take over the entire university because it is, after all, a “Japanese university” and “a lot of the teaching that goes on is still in Japanese” (Brown & Iyobe 2013, p.15). Among the reasons that seem to be hindering the further spread of EMI in Japanese institutions, this paper will later touch upon the lack of human resources.

## 4. Implications: How the classroom environments and the stakeholders are affected

While EMI is still small scale, it is evident from Brown & Iyobe’s data (2013) as well as from recent government-led projects such as Global 30 and the Top Global University Project, that it is not going to disappear from Japanese university curricula. If anything, EMI will expand to echo Japanese industry’s calls for the globalization of Japan’s higher education and the student population. Since EMI in Japan is still in its infancy, there is not a large collection of studies reviewing the effect of EMI in university classrooms and programs yet. However, the implication of EMI practice on the stakeholders in EMI programs – particularly the teachers and the students – should not be underestimated.

### 4.1 EMI or CLIL

Before discussing the practical implications for classroom practices, it is necessary to point out the fact that, while MEXT states that EMI should be implemented in the Japanese education system, there is no concrete definition of what they mean by ‘EMI’. In junior and senior high schools, it

practically means English classes taught in English (MEXT 2014), while for universities they seem to imply the use of English in classes other than those specifically designed to teach English. However, when English is the preferred medium of instruction in class, the goal of the class can be twofold: for the students to learn the content subject and to acquire English language skills necessary to perform in class. This seems to suggest that what MEXT calls EMI may be in effect CLIL – Content and Language Integrated Learning. In fact, unless the EMI classes are part of the English-only degree programs designed chiefly for international students, they are more likely to fall into this category. As such, they are often taught by language teachers (Brown & Iyobe 2013), and the EMI programs themselves are likely to be developed by language teachers (e.g., Sophia University’s CLIL program, as described by Watanabe, Ikeda, & Izumi 2011; Saitama Medical University’s CLIL program, by Sasajima 2013).

Are EMI and CLIL two different things, or are they essentially the same thing? CLIL is defined as “a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and the language” and its focus is “not only on content, and not only on language” (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh 2010, p.1). By contrast, it is difficult to find a concrete definition of EMI. Since EMI has a wide spectrum when it comes to how English is actually employed in classrooms and who are enrolled in the program (see Brown & Iyobe 2013), it would be fair to suggest that EMI and CLIL overlap to a certain point. As Watanabe, Ikeda, & Izumi (2011) claim, each institution should come up with its made-to-order CLIL program, which inevitably means that there are many kinds of CLIL/EMI programs and there cannot be one single model or definition for EMI. The ambiguity of what EMI programs may be suggests some practical problems when deciding

the course goals and the responsible faculty.

## 4.2 Staffing issue

Brown & Iyobe (2013) suggested that one of the reasons why EMI programs are still small in number is because there are not sufficient number of qualified faculty members to deliver EMI classes. When the EMI program in question is positioned as a language program, the teaching is usually the responsibility of language teachers who are English native-speakers; when it is regarded as a content-oriented program, Japanese and foreign content-specialists tend to teach the class. Either way, EMI classes are going to be demanding for the teachers, as “they require a mix of specialist knowledge of content, language skills, and teaching experience as well as willingness to take on a greater workload than either an L1 content class or a language class would normally require” (ibid. p.16). In fact, Sasajima (2013) described how much effort his colleagues had to put into to make EMI work at his institution over several years. Staffing EMI programs, therefore, can be a serious practical problem.

The recent surge in EMI classes also means that many universities are hiring new teachers. And when Japanese universities hire new faculty members, they often do that on limited-term contracts. As Brown & Iyobe (2013) claim, it can be an obstacle in attracting quality candidates and can also lead to high turn-over rates. This, in turn, can “lead to long-term instability for the program as a whole” because the maintenance, as well as the institutional memory, of a coherent curriculum may well be “compromised” (ibid. p.17). As one of the interviewees in their study attests, “Every time the faculty turns over, the program dies. Everything [they] bring to the program they take away with them. There is nothing left behind; it’s completely undone. There is nothing to guide the incoming staff, so the program dies. It’s very tenuous” (ibid.



p.17).

In short, practical staffing issues include the problem of finding sufficient qualified teachers necessary for in program development.

### 4. 3 Language choice

It is interesting – and possibly troubling – that there is no concrete guideline given by the MEXT, or by any other organization or institution, regarding which model or variety of English should be used in EMI classrooms and, more importantly, which should be attained by students. Even the detailed handbooks on how-to's of CLIL composed by Sophia University (Watanabe, Ikeda, & Izumi 2011, Izumi, Ikeda, & Watanabe 2012) and Sasajima (2011) do not specify any preferred models to be adopted in CLIL classrooms. Many would agree with Kirkpatrick's position that it is most sensible to adopt ELF – English as a lingua franca – model under such circumstances (Kirkpatrick 2006), but classroom practices are not always straightforward. The idea of nativespeakerism still prevails in Japan (e.g. Seargeant 2009, Miura 2009, McKenzie 2013, Hashimoto 2013). A majority of English language teaching/learning materials are predominantly American (Miura 2009), and most Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) that the students would have met during their secondary education are from Inner Circle countries such as the United Kingdom or Australia. Does this mean that the students should strive to acquire native-like skills when they speak and write as well? Alternatively, if non-native English speaker teachers are to teach a CLIL or an EMI class, should they tell the students to speak like them or to repeat after some recordings of native speakers' speech? As Jenkins illustrated, pronunciation is arguably the most sensitive of all language skills non-native speakers are expected to acquire (Jenkins 2007). To complicate the matter even further, students have not usually been exposed to

the concept of ELF or World Englishes. It is possible that an EMI program has to start from teaching students just those concepts.

It is also notable that guidelines on the use of Japanese in classrooms are not always consistent. For example, while Watanabe, Ikeda, & Izaumi (2010) say that when the teachers can use the mother tongue of the students, they can use the language when necessary in order to help students' understanding (p. 52), their actual course syllabus for Academic English course stipulates, "When you are in class, please **use English only - our official language**" (ibid. p.166, bold original). This syllabus itself, however, comes in a bilingual form: while most of it is written in Japanese, the first section, Course Description, is all written in Japanese (ibid. p.165).

In his research on Malaysian schools, Martin (2005) illustrated how government's official English Only policy can be unrealistic and impractical and how code-switching is actually happening in classrooms. Whether code-switching should be regarded as a problem or a necessary classroom management strategy requires a lengthy discussion on its own right, and it is one of the important aspects when implementing EMI.

### 4. 4 Students and their English language proficiency

Japanese university students' English language proficiency level may be one of the reasons why they may not enroll in EMI programs. Consider university A, for example, which is a medium-sized private university in Tokyo. The students are required to take the TOEIC test upon entering the university. Of the 1778 first year students who took the test in 2013, there were only 113 students (approximately 6%) whose TOEIC scores would be relevant to CEFR's B1 level and above (TOEIC scores 550 and above). Although the test scores do not necessarily reflect the students' actual English

language proficiency, it suggests that only a handful of the students would be able to understand familiar topics at school or work and to briefly express their opinions and explain their plans<sup>6</sup>. With such a makeup of students, what kinds of content courses can be taught in English? If, as Coyle, Hood, & Marsh (2010) claim, authenticity and relevance are the key in successful implementation of CLIL that helps motivate the learners, how is it possible make EMI/CLIL programs that are authentic and relevant to, say students who major in Japanese civil laws or nuclear fusion, when their English does not allow them to engage in classroom activities as well as they would in taught-in-Japanese classes?

This dilemma takes us back to the faculty issue. A colleague of mine – an English native speaker – once said, “I can’t teach them the Japanese Constitution, nor Japan’s criminal or civil laws, in English. Those profs with their thick law books can’t teach English.” As stated earlier, it is difficult to find and appoint the best-suited faculty for EMI. The dilemma that teachers and program coordinators face when they have EMI classes with students with low-proficiency in English also leads to other issues such as what kinds of materials to use in class, how much the focus should be about the content and how much about the language, and how much code-switching should be allowed in classrooms.

All these issues make the establishment of EMI programs very complicated. And even when EMI program leaders and other teachers have come up with an EMI program after long deliberations and a lot of labor, their students may not participate in the program unless it is compulsory, fearing that their English may not be good enough for it.

## 5. Conclusions

The number of so-called EMI programs in Japanese universities have been rapidly growing since 2000. The way that EMI is practiced varies

from institution to institution, and while some ‘top’ universities are offering EMI programs designed for international students, many other universities are offering EMI classes in order to serve the domestic student body. These movements are in response to the government’s calls for globalization of Japanese universities by increasing the number of international students (e.g., *Japan Revival Strategies* 2013 announced by Prime Minister of Japan) and preparing Japanese students to be part of ‘global work force’. What appears here is a mutually advantageous relationship between the government and universities which, towards the goal of attracting more overseas students, embrace their image of being ‘international’ (see Hewings 2012 on how universities in non-English speaking countries are using the English language in their curriculum and their webpages in order to promote their ‘international’ outlook).

EMI may well serve the government’s intention to globalize Japanese universities, but it is also true that it is creating tension between the political and pedagogical spheres. Some researchers openly question the wisdom of the spread of English in both academic and business spheres in Japan, arguing that it is would only help English language imperialism (e.g., Torikai 2010 & 2011, Tsuda 2009)<sup>7</sup>. The introduction of EMI in tertiary education has many complex implications when applied in practice. While the government and universities seem to be in a rush to promote EMI programs, it is important to take time to assess the current situation of EMI and its possible problems. This study is a preliminary step to further research that will examine the stakeholders in this longcoming movement, including classroom observation<sup>8</sup> and interviews.

## Notes

- 1 The potential economic size of English language industry including the publishers and



international English test organizations is illustrated by Gray (Gray 2012).

- 2 MEXT's initiative in promoting EMI in Japanese education does not stop at higher education. MEXT's *New Course of Study* guideline (2011) states that English classes in secondary education should be taught in English, which became effective for senior high schools in 2013. In the near future the same will be applied to junior high schools.
- 3 All the data including the student number and make-up of their student body of Akita International University and Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University are taken from their official websites.
- 4 Although the two terms, globalization and internationalization, might well mean two different concepts, they are used interchangeably in this paper.
- 5 MEXT solicited reform plans aiming at globalization between April and May of 2014. They chose 37 universities among 109 applications from 104 universities.
- 6 The reference to TOEIC scores and what they correspond to on CEFRE levels is taken from the official website of the Institute of International Business Communication (IIBC), an official body in charge of administering TOEIC in Japan.
- 7 See Otsu 2006, 2009 for more comprehensive discussions against English language education reform initiated by the government.
- 8 Macaro (2014) emphasizes the importance of observing L2 classroom codeswitching in order to build a theoretical framework that should help policymakers as well as SLA researchers and language teachers.

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