

## Teaching Content Through the Medium of English: Faculty Perspectives

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### Reference Data:

Bradford, A. (2016). Teaching content through the medium of English: Faculty perspectives. In P. Clements, A. Krause, & H. Brown (Eds.), *Focus on the learner*. Tokyo: JALT.

As we focus on the learner in this volume, it is important to consider the individuals that have perhaps the greatest direct impact on those learners: the faculty members. As universities in Japan internationalize, faculty members are increasingly teaching courses in English. An understanding of faculty engagement in and resistance to English-medium instruction (EMI) is critical to those designing, implementing, and strengthening such programming. This paper focuses on the perspectives of 13 faculty members teaching in undergraduate English-taught programs in Japan, using interview data from faculty members at 3 universities. It contains a discussion on why they chose to become and remain engaged in EMI, including the difficulties they have encountered in their classrooms. The results show a teaching faculty committed to developing the international competencies of domestic Japanese students and highlight classroom diversity challenges that may lead to resistance to EMI.

本論集では、学習者を主なテーマとしているため、学習者に最も大きな直接的影響を及ぼしうる存在である教員について考慮することが重要である。日本の大学の国際化が進むにつれ、より多くの教員が英語による授業を行うようになっていく。大学における英語によるプログラムの編成、実施、強化を担当する者にとって、英語を媒介とする教育(EMI: English-medium instruction)に対する教員の取り組みと抵抗について理解を深めることが不可欠である。本論では、日本の大学において英語を媒介とした授業を提供している学部課程で教鞭をとる教員の視点に焦点を当てる。3大学の教員を対象に行った聞き取り調査の結果をもとに、彼らがEMIに取り組むことを決めたきっかけと、現在もEMIに取り組み続けている理由について考察する。また、彼らが授業において直面した困難についても探求する。調査結果に基づいて、国内の日本人学生の国際能力開発に尽力する教員について説明するとともに、EMIの採用を妨げる要因にもなり得る、教室における多様性の課題について明らかにする。

In a bid to internationalize, higher education institutions (HEIs) in Japan are increasingly introducing English as a medium of instruction (EMI). Currently, undergraduates in Japan can study academic content in English in over one third of Japan's 781 universities, a 49% increase since 2005 (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology [MEXT], 2009a, 2015). Academic faculty members are key participants in higher education internationalization activities (Bedenlier & Zawacki-Richter, 2015; Childress, 2010; Stohl, 2007), and this is even more so in the case of EMI, as EMI cannot take place without instructors willing and able to teach in English. However, research into EMI has shown the challenge that HEIs have in recruiting and retaining faculty members for EMI courses. This is of particular concern in Japan (e.g., Hashimoto, 2005; Tsuneyoshi, 2005). In order to better understand these concerns, this study focused on the perspectives of faculty members teaching in EMI programs in Japan, investigating their rationales for teaching and staying engaged in the programs. It examines some of the difficulties they have encountered.

### Faculty Engagement and Resistance

It has long been acknowledged that faculty engagement is crucial to the success of higher education internationalization activities. More than 30 years ago, after analyzing data from 284 HEIs in the US, Harari (1981) concluded that "the degree of internationalization of a campus is not a function of size, location, or overall budget. In the last analysis it is a function of faculty competence and commitment and of institutional leadership" (p. 29). Yet, some of the strongest resistance to such initiatives can come from faculty members. In 2007, Stohl went as far as to call the faculty the "enemy" of internationalization. Research has shown that faculty resist taking part in internationalization activities due to such factors as a lack of information available regarding how to engage in such activities, policies and procedures that serve to disincentivize participation, lack of support and training for participation, and increased workload and stress factors associated with

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engagement (Bedenlier & Zawacki-Richter, 2015; Dewey & Duff, 2009). As an internationalization activity, EMI has also met with similar resistance.

Research from both Europe and Asia highlights a certain wariness and unease towards EMI among faculty, especially during the beginning stages of its implementation. This unease occurs even in countries where English language skills are generally considered to be high. In Finland, for example, as the numbers of English-language degree programs started to notably increase in the 1990s, researchers found resistance from faculty members (Lehikoinen, 2004). They cited a lack of capacity on the part of the faculty, lack of skills and self-confidence on the part of the students (therefore making them less desirable to teach), and lack of availability of teaching materials in the English language (Tella, Räsänen, & Vähäpassi, 1999). Callan (1998) noted that EMI in Europe is also sometimes met by resistance from faculty as they perceive a risk of ghettoization of the international students.

In South Korea, faculty responses to internationalization and EMI are reported to be often “lukewarm” (Kim & Choi, 2010, p. 224) and “negative” (MacDonald, 2009, p. 51). A government push to expand EMI in Korean higher education in the mid-2000s resulted in mandates that new hires teach at least some courses in English and raised concerns about excessive faculty workloads and inadequate numbers of English-speaking professors (Byun & Kim, 2011). Cho (2012) found that over half of the faculty members he surveyed taught in English only because it was mandated by their university and given the opportunity, even more would discontinue their involvement with EMI. Reasons given included difficulties in delivering course content effectively through English and increased class preparation time. Furthermore, it has been pointed out that in South Korea, domestic faculty members are often not treated as *international* by their governments, institutions, or students, despite having international educational and work experiences and teaching and publishing in both the native language and English (Palmer & Cho, 2011). Palmer and Cho felt that the South Korean scholars in their study had to prove themselves as international scholars, but their foreign counterparts were bestowed the status based solely on their citizenship.

In Japan, workload has similarly been noted as a reason for resisting EMI. It has been estimated that it takes four to five times more effort for Japanese professors to teach in English than in Japanese, and EMI courses do not carry with them extra credit weight to exempt faculty members from other duties (Tsuneyoshi, 2005). Furthermore, Hashimoto (2005) found that faculty members complained that conducting the classes in English required too much effort for international students who were seen to be coming to Japan only to “have a good time” (p. 14) and that implementing an EMI program only for

international students was unfair to other students. She found that when coordinators ask faculty members to teach on a short-term EMI program “they all run away” (p. 14). It is noted that these studies refer to short-term EMI programs, designed for visiting international students established before recent government initiatives to promote internationalization of higher education for domestic Japanese students (e.g., the Project for Promotion of Global Human Resource Development implemented in 2012). However, more recent research indicates that faculty resistance to EMI is ongoing: “Where there was demand for expansion [of EMI programs], lack of resources was sometimes an issue. In particular, a lack of qualified, experienced and willing faculty limited expansion” (Brown, 2014, p. 56).

Given the difficulties in finding faculty members to teach in EMI programs, it is helpful to understand the motivations and attitudes of those that do. This paper is focused on the opinions of faculty members working in three newly formed EMI programs in Japan to find out why these key contributors choose to engage with EMI and to examine some of the difficulties they encounter in their classrooms so that HEIs may better target future recruitment efforts and increase faculty retention. This is particularly important in Japan in light of the current growth of EMI.

### The Study

Interview data were gathered from 13 full-time faculty members at three Japanese universities. The universities are large institutions that had all been identified by MEXT as leading universities that would “function as core schools for receiving and educating international students” and promote internationalization as part of its Project for Establishing University Network for Internationalization or Global 30 Project (G30; MEXT, 2009b). Therefore, at the time of data collection, they had all recently established undergraduate degree programs taught entirely in English (hereinafter English-taught programs, or ETPs, to contrast with EMI, which can refer to instruction of any duration carried out through the medium of English). The ETPs each enroll approximately 10 to 20 new international students per year and allow domestic students to take EMI classes within the program.

The faculty participants were all teaching academic content in English in social science ETPs. Two came from an English for academic purposes teaching background; the others were content specialists. They included both male ( $n = 11$ ) and female ( $n = 2$ ), Japanese ( $n = 7$ ) and non-Japanese ( $n = 6$ ) participants, and one participant was a nonnative speaker of both Japanese and English. Seven of the participants had received their highest degree outside of Japan, and 11 considered themselves to have an “international outlook.” The

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semistructured interviews were conducted in a conversational manner to allow for flexibility to pursue emerging information.

#### Rationales for Engagement

Faculty members teaching in the ETPs in this study entered their programs via three different routes. Some (the minority) were employed directly to teach on the programs. Others were asked, or, perhaps more accurately instructed, to teach on the programs by their supervisors. Others volunteered to teach on the programs. In most cases, the courses that each faculty member teaches are based on their research strengths and not specific program needs. One faculty member described how less-than-able professors might be hired into an ETP:

Sometimes we don't have anybody in our department who can do that [subject] so then they'll find somebody else, sometimes from outside just part-time, but sometimes from another department and I think that's where you start to run into problems . . . people from other departments seem to be problematic. (Faculty member 4, Institution A)

Only one of the three programs in this study employed a new cohort of qualified faculty members specifically to handle the core teaching needs of the ETP.

#### Benefit to Japanese Students

By far the most oft-cited reason for faculty engagement was that of the benefits that EMI brings to domestic Japanese students. Of note, as the programs in this investigation were designed under the G30 mandate, the ETPs were expected to cater to international students. Therefore, the professors in this study conceive EMI classrooms as spaces where international and domestic students study together. These EMI programs differ from the many in Japan that target domestic students (Brown, 2014). Still, despite a focus on international students as an impetus for founding the programs, international student numbers are small and many faculty members prioritize the needs of their domestic students. Faculty members said that they wanted Japanese students to have the opportunity to take courses in English and mix with international students as they have little chance to do that in their everyday lives. One professor remarked that his major reason for teaching in the ETP is that he is

very sympathetic with the students, the Japanese students who would like to study in English, but it is very tough for them just to go to the United States. First of

all, many of them should not [sic] be accepted by the American universities. And University A is a sort of middle-rank university . . . so the normal standard student of this university would not have the chance to get any lecture in English. (Faculty member 1, Institution A)

He continued that he felt “a sense of mission” to provide these opportunities, although he is not sure “if this really has the effect on as many students as [he would] want.” Faculty members reflected upon their own backgrounds studying internationally when they spoke of the intercultural skills and friendships that are gained through studying alongside students from other nations. An overwhelming feeling among faculty members was that students should be prepared to deal with the globalized world and the presence of international students in classrooms would help to achieve that. These international students would expose domestic students to the heterogeneity of society and domestic students would learn new ways of thinking and learning.

The emphasis on domestic students contrasts to early government policy statements (e.g., MEXT, 2009b) and critical analyses regarding the establishment of ETPs (e.g., Burgess, Gibson, Klaphake, & Selzer, 2010). These stated that EMI was being introduced to attract international students. However, the provision of international experiences for domestic students aligns with current government thinking. With the government's 2010 New Growth Strategy, policy focus shifted from inbound international students towards domestic Japanese students.

#### Benefit to International Students

Perhaps surprisingly given the G30 mandate to educate international students, the benefits that an EMI education in Japan can bring to international students were not often given as reasons for engagement with the ETPs. Faculty members at only one university talked about helping international students, along with Japanese students, to acquire new ways of thinking and learning. They want to expose students to new things and also help international students navigate their international education experience to obtain a fulfilling degree.

One professor at another institution stated that he knew “this program's [idea] was also to have non-Japanese students come to Japan to learn about Japan and then supposedly disseminate it across the world” (Faculty member 4, Institution A), but he did not know how that would work. He personally taught in the ETP because he “was told to do it” and did not see benefit for international students. In fact, he expressed concern about the nature of the degree that ETP students would eventually receive and lamented that there were not enough classes taught in English for the international students to obtain

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a degree that focuses on a coherent specialism. Analysis shows that those working within HEIs are most sensitive to the needs of domestic Japanese students.

### **Personal Benefit**

A number of faculty members discussed the personal benefits that teaching on an ETP can bring. These included opportunities to maintain their own English, learn about different teaching methods through learning by doing, and gain new ways of thinking from the international students. One faculty member explained,

Japanese students have somewhat almost the same direction of thinking, the way of thinking. But if their [international students'] background is different, their way of thinking is different, it quite varies. So that's quite interesting to me. That's a kind of mutual benefit, otherwise I would have quit! (Faculty member 2, Institution A)

One professor also mentioned that teaching on this new type of program was a "re-sume boost" (Faculty member 4, Institution B). Perhaps contrary to expectation, professors in this study placed no importance on financial incentives for remaining involved in the ETPs. Only one HEI offers such incentives and they are small, amounting to about 10,000 yen per EMI course per semester.

### **Benefit to Higher Education in Japan**

At one institution, faculty were very focused on the significance of the ETP for Japanese higher education as a whole, stating that they are interested in making a meaningful contribution to Japan's ability to engage globally. They feel that if Japanese higher education is to survive and thrive, it must be able to communicate internationally. Helping to nurture international skills in their students and enabling scholars to circulate their work in English is one way to do that. For those involved in designing and teaching in the ETP, the program has far-reaching goals to influence the entire university and beyond:

The more we do this, if our courses become more popular, . . . we start getting word about, we get very good student evaluations, people think our program is very good, we start graduating our students, we build up networks etc. this might have implications more broadly within the institution. (Faculty member 2, Institution C)

This professor entered the program with this mindset: "It was pretty clear to me straight away I can make a contribution in not just teaching classes using English, it's actually doing something a bit more than that" (Faculty member 2, Institution C). These

faculty members seek to incite change by raising the levels of educational accountability and quality assurance to compete with education systems internationally.

### **Possible Reasons for Resistance**

Although a study into the rationales for faculty engagement in EMI cannot explain the perspectives of those who do not participate in such programs, it can hint towards the reasons why faculty members might resist involvement. A number of study participants spoke of challenges in the classroom relating to the differing linguistic abilities and academic backgrounds of students. Classrooms in this study consisted of mixtures of domestic Japanese, Japanese returnee (those who have completed the majority of their schooling overseas), long-term international, short-term international, and exchange students studying together. Faculty members stated that it is challenging to plan effective courses and pitch the instruction at the correct level. For example, they spoke of alienating students with more advanced English skills if they teach to the lower level group. They also feel frustrated trying to get everyone involved when students with both passive and participatory behavior styles are present in the same classroom. Faculty members report that if they use English 100% of the time, the content they can deliver to students might be as much as 50% less than it would be if the lecture were given in Japanese to Japanese students. One faculty member commented that he was "not sure whether these are fair circumstances that the students really receive" (Faculty member 5, Institution B).

Referring again to student skills, but also to instructor linguistic abilities, another faculty member described how a native Japanese-speaking colleague experiences his English-taught classes:

He can't cover as much materials in English as he can in Japanese and so he's having to trim the syllabus. And I think he views that primarily as because he doesn't speak English at the level that he would like to be able to teach in, but equivalently, the Japanese students that are enrolled in the class can't keep up at anything like a native English-speaking speed, let alone ingesting the concepts, so in that sense . . . the question is how do we keep the level of classwork and education and the content of the courses and curriculum at the same level, while accommodating this extra additional difficult hurdle, that's the hard part. (Faculty member 2, University B)

Issues related to the faculty members' own linguistic skills were, however, not voiced strongly by participants in this study. In fact, most participants did not feel that their own English abilities created challenges in the classroom. When lack of English skill was mentioned, faculty members referred to other professors, stating that they have heard



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student complaints about others and surmising that some do not want to teach on ETPs because of their English. Of course, without direct observation or student feedback of these professors' classrooms, it is impossible to discern if the faculty currently teaching on the ETPs really do not experience difficulties related to their language use.

Study participants mentioned that the above classroom challenges did increase their workloads, but not to the extent that has been suggested in earlier Japanese studies (e.g., Tsuneyoshi, 2005). These workload increases were related to changes in pedagogical practices because of increased classroom diversity rather than difficulties related to English language skills. Interestingly, the largest workload increase was reported by a native English speaker who is now teaching a course for which he does not have formal qualifications or specialist content knowledge. Despite these difficulties, the study participants overall were positive about their ETP classrooms, stating that student exposure and adjustment to mixed classrooms and nonnative English classroom discourse comprise part of the 21st century skill set that these professors hope to develop in their students. However, it is not difficult to imagine that these circumstances are enough to turn faculty away from attempting to teach in an ETP.

Support for faculty members teaching in English is offered by two of the HEIs. At one institution, ETP faculty meet regularly to discuss issues with the courses, and at the other, faculty members may apply to attend a 2-week communication studies faculty development program in the United States. This program is, however, often not taken advantage of by those who might need it most. Professors reported that native English speakers and Japanese who have completed degrees in the U.S. and want to return are most likely to sign up for the opportunity. It is unclear as to whether faculty development for EMI affects motivation for or resistance to engagement.

### Conclusions

Without knowledge of what motivates faculty members to engage with EMI, HEIs cannot hope to successfully implement and expand their programs. This paper has described faculty members teaching on ETPs as a group focused primarily on developing the international competencies of and raising educational quality for domestic Japanese students. This is occurring despite the initial G30 mandate upon which these programs were founded, which emphasized education for international students. The faculty members in this study see international students as key to helping domestic students learn essential skills. These results suggest that as Japanese HEIs continue to introduce more EMI programming, they should consider how to involve both international and domestic students in their plans. Doing so may encourage more faculty to become involved. Simul-

taneously, HEIs should not lose sight of the benefits that EMI programs can bring to the faculty members themselves; opportunities to improve language and intercultural skills could possibly be potential selling points that HEIs could use to attract faculty to EMI.

Challenges do exist for faculty members in EMI classrooms, and these challenges create potential barriers to participation. In particular, learning new pedagogical practices to cope with classroom linguistic and cultural diversity increases faculty workload. Ways of supporting faculty to minimize workloads should be further investigated. Also, it must be acknowledged that the faculty members who participated in this study all teach in ETPs and so are likely more positively oriented to the idea of EMI than are those who choose not to become involved. As a next step in finding out how HEIs in Japan can better recruit and retain faculty members for EMI courses, the perspectives of those currently resisting EMI should be explored.

### Bio Data

**Annette Bradford** is an assistant professor in the School of Business Administration at Meiji University, Tokyo. Her current research examines the internationalization of Japanese universities, with a particular focus on English-medium instruction, and the benefits these efforts can bring to national policy objectives.

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