

## English-Medium Instruction in Japanese Universities: History and Perspectives

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English-medium instruction (EMI) is a growing trend in Japan, but it is not entirely new. This paper surveys the history of EMI in Japan to provide insight into the current context. In the Meiji era, as Japan was establishing its first higher education institutions, EMI was the norm, with most university posts occupied by foreign academics. However, by the end of the 19th century, English shifted from the medium of instruction to an object of study. Following World War II, EMI reemerged, though it was not widespread until the 1990s when it became part of efforts to diversify the international student body and maintain parity with partner schools abroad. EMI now has a dual role, both attracting international students and serving domestic students as a part of global *jinzai* strategies. Though EMI is spreading quickly, it is limited, serving a minority of students at approximately 40% of universities in Japan.

日本では、英語による教育 (EMI) への人気が高まりつつあるが、この人気は突然振って湧いたようなものではない。本論では、日本におけるEMIの歴史を調査し、現在の状況への手がかりを提供する。明治時代に日本の高等教育の先駆けともなった学校が次々と設立され始めると、EMIが一般的となり、大学の授業は外国人数員が担当するのが通例となった。しかし、19世紀末までには、英語は教えるためのツールから学習の対象という位置づけに変化する。第二次世界大戦後の日本では、再びEMIが脚光を浴びたが、日本中に広まったのは、1990年代になってからのことだった。この頃のEMIは、大学内での留学生数の増員と多様化を実現し、海外の協定校と均衡を保つための取り組みでもあった。21世紀に入ると、優秀な留学生へのアピールだけでなくグローバル人材育成戦略の一環として国内の学生の需要に応えるという二つの役割を果たすことになる。急成長しつつあるEMIではあるが、実施している機関はいまだ限定的で、EMIの授業を受けている学生は国内大学の約40%にしか満たない。

English-medium instruction (EMI) is a growing trend in higher education all over the world as more universities are using English as a teaching language in specialist content classes. As the British Council recently reported, higher education is in the midst of a “world-wide shift from English being taught as a foreign language to English being the medium of instruction” (Dearden, 2015, p. 2). In Europe, for example, the Bologna Process strongly encouraged student mobility, leading to the number of programs taught in English increasing by a factor of 10 between 2000 and 2008 (Wachter & Maiworm, 2008). In Asia as well, both government policy and market forces are prioritizing internationalization of higher education, driving rapid growth in the number and scale of EMI programs. Governments see internationalization in general, and EMI in particular, as a route to maintaining or improving economic competitiveness. Increasing student mobility rates are also driving universities to provide EMI as a platform suitable for a wide range of students (Ghazarian, 2011; Kirkpatrick, 2011). In Japan, the number of universities offering EMI has grown by more than 50% in the past decade (MEXT, 2017), and many universities are expanding existing EMI programs (Brown, 2016a).

Although EMI is widely implemented in Japan, there is often not a shared sense of direction among program stakeholders. EMI implementation is often ad hoc, and programs suffer from a lack of communication and collaboration (Brown, 2016a), leading to a lack of a shared understanding of the purpose and goals of EMI (Chapple, 2014; Ng, 2017; Toh, 2016). Faculty members and program leaders are often in a position of deciding for themselves what their program is trying to accomplish, sometimes without a good understanding of the national context that is actually driving the implementation. To provide context for stakeholders working on EMI developments, this paper explores the history and current status of EMI in Japan. Although it is now spreading quickly, the current boom is not Japan’s first experience with EMI. In fact, this can be said to be the fourth wave of EMI developments in Japan, with earlier waves in the Meiji era (1868-1912), following World War II, and in the 1980s and 1990s.

## The Meiji Era

In Japan, the use of a foreign language as a medium of instruction in higher education is almost as old as higher education itself, with Chinese, Dutch, and English used as academic languages alongside Japanese in some of the earliest higher education institutions. EMI, in particular, briefly flourished in the 19th century with foreign faculty teaching at newly founded universities. As part of the Meiji government's push to modernize and westernize, 3000 specialists in a wide variety of fields were brought to Japan as advisors and teachers (Fujimoto-Adamson, 2006). Although the majority of them were experts in military affairs or applied fields such as civil engineering, more than half taught in fields that would now be known as the humanities or social sciences (Marshall, 1992). These foreign specialists formed the backbone of higher education in Japan in the 1870s and 1880s, teaching classes in law, literature, science, and medicine in English, French, and German.

This reliance on foreign specialists was, however, temporary; the government's long-term strategy was to staff the universities with Japanese academics. As the foreign instructors were replaced with domestic graduates or Japanese scholars returning from study abroad, the makeup of the faculty and the language of instruction became predominately, and then entirely, Japanese. For example, at the Imperial University, now the University of Tokyo, foreign academics held two thirds of all teaching posts in 1877. Only a decade later, Japanese faculty held 67% of posts in the sciences and 85% in the humanities, and by the turn of the 20th century, the faculty was entirely Japanese (Marshall, 1992). At the same time, there was an increase in the number of foreign academic texts translated into Japanese and new texts written by the growing number of Japanese scholars. As Japanese became the dominant language of teaching materials and classroom instruction, the position of English changed to become an object of study (Fujimoto-Adamson, 2006; Mulvey, 2017), and it would not reemerge as a medium of instruction for more than half a century.

## Post World War II

A second, albeit very limited, wave of EMI started in the post-World War II period. Amid the dramatic reorganization of life in Japan after the war, Japanese continued to be the dominant language of instruction in higher education; however, a very limited number of EMI programs were established, mainly to serve the needs of the new western expatriate community, for example, Sophia University International Division (now the Faculty of Liberal Arts). The Division was founded in 1949 and offered evening classes to English-speaking students (History of Sophia University, n.d.). The International

Christian University also offered EMI classes from its founding in 1953 (History of ICU, n.d.). In the 1960s the number of EMI programs expanded slightly with some private universities starting short-term programs for incoming international students, essentially semester-abroad programs for students from their partner universities overseas, focusing on Japanese language, art, culture, and society (Horie, 2002).

## The 1980s and 1990s

The 1980s saw Japan seeking to internationalize its higher education sector. The government began encouraging universities to recruit more international students to meet the goal, set by then Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone, of accepting 100,000 international students per year (Umakoshi, 1997; Yonezawa, 2014). However, it is important to note that the internationalization of Japanese universities was not the goal. Instead, this was a foreign-policy effort, with scholarships for international students funded through Japan's Official Development Aid (ODA) budget and directed almost entirely at developing countries in Asia (Ishikawa, 2011; Ninomiya, Knight, & Watanabe, 2009). Most universities in Japan concentrated their efforts on the numerical target and worked towards increasing the number of incoming international students, without actually internationalizing the curriculum or teaching methods (Aspinall, 2013; Paige, 2005). In the early stages of these efforts, EMI played only a minor role; a small number of universities offered a limited range of classes in English for incoming exchange and visiting students. At most universities, the focus of internationalization was providing Japanese-language training and Japanese-medium programs for international students who were almost entirely from Asia (Horie, 2002; Kamibepu, 2012; Ota, 2003).

This period also saw what Mulvey (2017) characterized as a failed attempt to introduce EMI for domestic students, beginning with changes in the laws governing higher education in 1982. These changes allowed for the creation of new full-time, tenured positions for international faculty members. The government's intent was for these professors to be content specialists teaching classes in English for the domestic student body. They were part of a strategy to foster a new generation of bilinguals to meet the needs of the rapidly internationalizing Japanese economy (Mulvey, 2017; Yonezawa, 2014). However, due to resistance from Japanese faculty members and universities themselves, this intent was never fully realized. By the beginning of the 1990s, these newly created positions and the foreign faculty hired to fill them were relegated to language teaching (Hall, 1998).

Although the introduction of EMI for domestic students failed at this time, EMI for international students was expanding. Graduate-school English-taught programs (ETPs)

were introduced at 14 universities in the 1980s. These programs allowed students to earn an entire degree in English without taking any Japanese-medium classes. The number of these ETPs for international students more than doubled in the 1990s (Horie, 2002; Umakoshi, 1997). Although the number of programs grew, the scale was still small, with many of the graduate ETPs accepting fewer than 10 students per year (Hashimoto, 2017).

At the undergraduate level, in the mid-1990s, national universities began developing short-term EMI programs, similar to those already in place at some private universities, for incoming exchange or visiting students (Kamibepu, 2012; Ota, 2003). These programs were developed in response to government pressure to increase the diversity of international students on campus and also as a response to the growing number of Japanese students studying abroad, which increased by more than 500% in the 1990s (MEXT, 2015). As more Japanese students went overseas for semester or yearlong programs, the issue of parity became important. Partner schools were not willing to accept exchange students if the Japanese universities could not reciprocate by offering suitable programs for their students. Because of the considerable language barrier for entering Japanese-medium programs, universities turned to EMI to solve the disparity.

## The 21st Century

At the end of the 1990s and beginning of the 21st century, EMI began to take on a new role as images of internationalization of higher education changed in Japan (Ishikawa, 2011). The internationalization of higher education is now more closely linked to fostering Japan's competitive position in the world economy. Instead of offering the benefits of Japanese education to students from developing countries, universities now work to actively recruit top-quality candidates who can help to improve their competitiveness (Hashimoto, 2017), especially at graduate schools where the incoming international students can help drive the research agenda of the universities.

This desire to attract more, better qualified students led to an expanded role for EMI. The number of graduate-level ETPs grew rapidly, and new ETPs for undergraduate students were established. Smaller scale English-medium undergraduate programs were also created at some universities. Much of this growth was supported by the government's 2009 Project for Establishing University Network for Internationalization, commonly known as the Global 30 Project. This project, aimed at internationalizing universities in Japan and thereby increasing their competitiveness, funded EMI programs at 13 universities. Together, these 13 universities established 33 undergraduate and 153 graduate ETPs, mostly for international students. The efforts of the Global 30 universities also inspired implementation or expansion of EMI programs at many

universities not directly supported by the government funding. In all, the number of universities offering EMI programs grew by 50% in the decade between 2003 and 2013, with most of the growth seen in private universities (MEXT, 2016).

At the same time, the Global 30 universities were establishing their ETPs for international students, and EMI also began to take on a more significant role for domestic students. Under the New Growth Strategy announced in 2010, the government's priority for internationalization shifted from increasing the number of incoming international students to developing international programs for domestic students. Therefore, the idea of fostering globally capable human resources, or global *jinzai*, became central to the discourse on higher education reform in Japan (Yonezawa, 2010). The definition of global *jinzai* is multifaceted and somewhat vague, but it is associated with improved language proficiency, especially in English, international competencies, and cultural understanding. EMI for domestic students is strongly tied to global *jinzai* initiatives. EMI stakeholders often report this as the driving force behind their programs (Bradford, 2015; Brown, 2016a).

## The Current Situation

According to the most recent available figures, 305 universities, more than 40% of the total number of universities in Japan, offered some EMI as of 2015 (MEXT, 2017). Currently, EMI has a dual role in Japan, serving both international and domestic students. For international students, the short-term programs for exchange and visiting students continue to be important, and the number of ETPs for full-time students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels is growing. This current growth is thanks in part to the government's Top Global University funding scheme, which supports EMI and other internationalization efforts at 37 universities. Despite this growth, however, EMI still serves a minority of international students in Japan; most are studying in Japanese-language or Japanese-medium programs. EMI programs for domestic students are also growing. In fact, in a recent nation-wide survey (Brown, 2016a) a majority of EMI programs reported that their student body was predominantly or entirely domestic. For domestic students, EMI typically makes up only part of their degree program, a complement or supplement to their mainstream, Japanese-medium classes. ETPs catering to domestic students are still rare in Japan.

There is a wide variety of models of implementation for EMI programs in Japan. Brown and Iyobe (2014) characterized EMI programs into one of six types depending on how the programs were organized and implemented. The most common program types were ad hoc or semistructured, with several uncoordinated EMI courses offered.

Integrated programs, with EMI courses forming an essential part of students' studies in a given department, were somewhat less common. Another less common EMI strategy was the *plus-alpha-type* program. Here, EMI courses are offered across the university and serve the needs of students from all departments, rather than those studying a given major. The EMI courses are considered an add-on to the students' core studies rather than an integrated part of a departmental program. The fifth program type was a full-degree ETP in which students can earn an entire 4-year degree in EMI without taking any Japanese-medium classes. Undergraduate ETPs are still quite rare in Japan, available at only approximately 30 universities as of 2015 (Brown, 2016b). The final, and least common, program type, seen in only a handful of cases, was the full-campus model, in which the entire university uses EMI.

Kudo and Hashimoto (2011) evaluated EMI programs based on the university's approach to internationalization. First, similar to Brown and Iyobe (2014), they found that ad hoc programs with a peripheral place in the curriculum seemed to be the most common pattern of EMI implementation in Japan. Among coordinated programs, they noted that smaller universities might approach internationalization through EMI programs in the undergraduate curriculum. These programs, designed mainly for domestic students, may be integrated into a single department or spread across the entire university. Their final, and smallest, group of universities is large-scale elite universities where EMI and ETPs are seen as a way to attract high-quality international students, especially at the graduate level.

Shimauchi (2012; 2016) analyzed EMI implementation somewhat differently, examining the students served by the programs. ETPs established at large comprehensive universities and funded by government grants normally belong to what Shimauchi called the *dejima* model. *Dejima* is the name of an island in Nagasaki harbor where Dutch traders were isolated during the Edo period from the 17th to 19th centuries. The term now implies isolation, boundedness, and peripheral positioning. In these programs, international students, along with domestic students in international programs, are served by EMI classes, but they are isolated from mainstream campus life and have little interaction with the wider student body. Another program type in Shimauchi's framework is the crossroad model, in which universities develop joint or parallel EMI programs to serve both international and domestic students. For domestic students, EMI makes up a small part of their degree program, with most of their courses delivered in Japanese, and they often study in EMI courses together with short-term international visiting students. Shimauchi's final category, currently the most common type of EMI program in Japan, is called the global citizen model. This kind of program serves only,

or predominately, domestic students and is aimed at using EMI as a tool to cultivate Japanese students as global human resources with international awareness. In this type of program, EMI acts as a kind of virtual study-abroad for domestic students.

The current boom in interest in EMI is, in general, a positive move forward for the internationalization of higher education in Japan; however, care must be taken to see the current growth realistically. The growth of EMI is continuing in Japan as more universities implement programs and expand current initiatives. However, with nearly 40% of universities already offering EMI, the current rapid growth among private universities, many in the second or third tier of the higher education sector, raises concerns that they lack the human resources and expertise to plan and implement EMI effectively. These universities are, in many cases, implementing EMI as a survival strategy amid falling enrollments (Brown, 2014) and often do not have realistic expectations about the level of resources and commitment needed to effectively implement EMI (Chapple, 2014; Ng, 2017; Toh, 2016). In addition, as less prestigious universities, they may not attract students with high enough language proficiency to fully take advantage of EMI.

### Looking Forward: The Future of EMI in Japan

The three previous waves of EMI may have been temporary, as in the Meiji era; been extremely limited, as in the post-war period; or failed, as in the attempt to introduce foreign content specialists in the 1980s. However, Mulvey (2017) argued that the current, ongoing EMI boom is more widespread and more permanent than previous waves. One factor is the 2004 incorporation of national universities, which put more decision-making power in the hands of university presidents and reduced the influence of faculty senates, the main objectors to the 1980s foreign-faculty plan (Mulvey, 2017).

The relationship between universities and the government has also changed. MEXT now has powerful new incentives, both a stick and a carrot, to influence universities, and both have been brought to bear to encourage internationalization and EMI. New procedures make it possible to deny accreditation to universities that are not following MEXT guidelines (Mulvey, 2017), and although overall government funding for universities has fallen, MEXT has shifted more of its budget into selective, competitive grant projects (Yonezawa, 2011), many of which support internationalization efforts. At private universities, market forces are also driving changes. Amid falling enrollments, internationalization and EMI have become powerful recruiting tools for both international and domestic students (Brown, 2014). All these factors combine to give EMI a more integrated position in higher education. Rose and McKinley (2017), for



example, found that at least at the 37 Top Global universities, EMI is less peripheral and is not marginalized in the way previous internationalization initiatives were. Moreover, unlike in previous waves, EMI is no longer a local issue. Japan's initiatives are now part of a widespread, global trend towards EMI. Therefore, although EMI may not yet be part of the experience of most university students in Japan, it is a growing and essential part of the fabric of the higher education sector.

## Bio Data

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