Recruiting for Japanese EMI Programs: Insights From Online Job Posts

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As English-medium instruction (EMI) programs at universities in Japan have grown and developed over the past 20 years, the approach to recruiting faculty members to teach classes in English has evolved. This project investigates that evolution, drawing on data covering more than 165,000 jobs advertised on the JREC-IN Portal since 2002. The data shows yearly growth in the number of jobs posted requiring the ability to teach specialized content classes in English, reflecting the growth in the number and scope of EMI programs. A comparison of the EMI-related and mainstream job posts in the data also reveals differing trends in the number of positions advertised by private, public, and national universities, as well as differing trends in different disciplinary areas. The changing prevalence of full-time (tenured), part-time, and term-limited positions is also examined. These trends both reflect previous research on and offer new insights into the development of EMI programs in Japan.

過去20年間、日本の大学における英語による教育（EMI）プログラムが成長・発展するにつれて、英語で授業を行う教員の採用アプローチも変化してきた。本稿では、2002年から2021年までにJREC-INポータル上に掲載された165,000件以上の求人情報をデータセットとして利用し、その変化を調査した。その結果、英語による専門的な内容の授業を担当できることを条件とする求人が年々増加し、英語による教育が明らかに進展していることがわかった。また、私立大学、公立大学、国立大学それぞれにおける求人数や分野別の傾向、および常勤、非常勤、任期付きの各ポジションの求人比率の変化傾向についても明らかになった。これらの傾向は、日本におけるEMIプログラムの発展に関する先行研究や共通認識を網羅的に捉え直すと同時に、新たな知見を提供するものである。

Over the past few decades, English-medium instruction (EMI) programs have become a common feature of the higher education sector in Japan. More than 40% of Japan's nearly 800 universities now offer specialist content classes taught in English (MEXT, 2021). Much of the research on EMI in Japan has focused on faculty members - their attitudes towards EMI implementation (Galloway et al., 2020), the challenges they face and the strategies they employ (Toh, 2020), and the support available to them (Bradford et al., 2022). However, there has been little research on the actual composition of the EMI faculty body. In fact, some early research argued that Japanese universities would face severe challenges implementing EMI on a large scale due to a lack of faculty members with the balance of language proficiency, specialist knowledge, teaching skills, and motivation required to face the challenge of EMI (Burgess et al., 2010; Jon & Kim, 2011; Kuwamura, 2009).

Despite these early worries, Japan has established EMI programs in a wide range of university settings and across the disciplinary spectrum and has somehow found the faculty needed to operate the programs successfully. Some attribute this to the rising number of Japanese faculty members with overseas credentials and more widespread recruitment of international faculty members (Ishikawa, 2011), others note the importance of foreign language-teaching faculty moving into EMI roles (Kuwamura, 2018; 2019), and others point to Japanese faculty members taking on EMI classes as an additional, peripheral responsibility, not always by choice (Brown, 2017). However, in reality, a clear image of who is teaching in EMI programs in Japan has yet to emerge. As Yamamoto and Ishikura (2018) argue, "We need a clearer vision of how instructors are chosen, assigned, or hired to understand what is happening on the ground" (p. 74).

This study attempts to provide such a clearer image. Drawing on more than 165,000 job openings posted on the JREC-IN academic job posting portal, this study examines hiring trends in EMI programs, comparing them to the trends in the higher education sector as a whole. The data tells a story of initial uncertainty, rapid expansion, and growing maturity among EMI programs in Japan.

The Current Study

The current study followed a two-step procedure. First, the raw data for this project was provided by the Japan Science and Technology Agency (JSTA), which operates the JREC-IN Portal, an online hub for academic job postings in Japan. JREC-IN is known in Japan as the "de facto standard for academic job seeking" (Kawashima & Yamashita, 2016, p. 789) and is "the biggest and virtually the only portal service that aggregates recruitment information on academic research-related personnel in Japan" (Ishihara-Shineha, 2021, p. 52). The JREC-In data used in this study consists of information for 193,055 positions advertised by universities in Japan between January 2002 and July 2021. With non-teaching jobs (post-doc researchers, career support staff, executive-level positions, etc.) removed, the sample consists of 165,739 job posts. Of these, 12,718 posts, approximately 7.5% of the total, were identified as being related to EMI by a keyword search conducted by JSTA before the data was provided to the researcher.

The data includes information on each post in the following categories: posting date, type of university (public, private, or national), academic domain[1], job location (broken down by region or prefecture), job rank (lecturer, associate professor, assistant professor, or professor), working conditions (full- or part-time), and work term (tenured or fixed-term). In addition, the EMI-related subset of the data includes information on the posting language (English, Japanese, or bilingual). JREC-IN online posts include additional information including the hiring institution's name, the content of the job, required and preferred qualifications, and application procedures; however, citing privacy concerns, JSTA declined to provide that information.

In the second phase of the project, the subset of EMI-related posts (n=12,718) was compared to the sample as a whole (n=165,739, including both EMI-related and non-EMI posts). The data was analysed to identify descriptive trends and patterns as well as points of comparison.

Recruitment Trends for EMI-related Positions

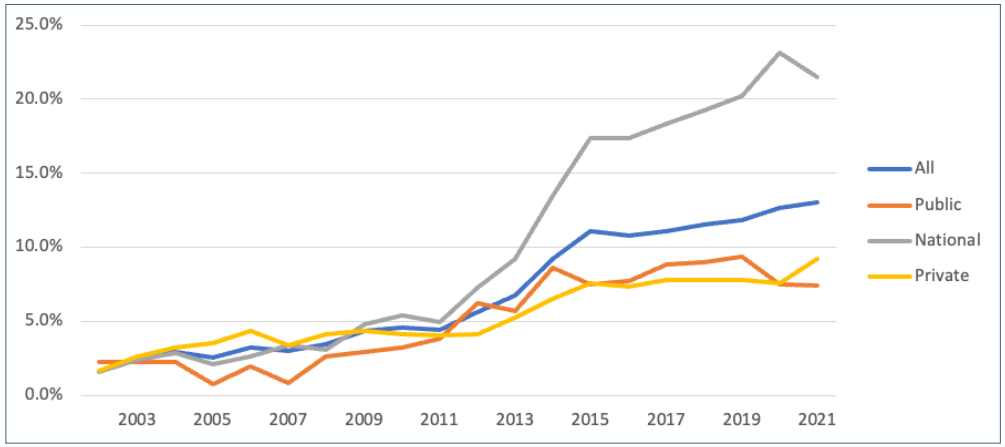
In the sections below, trends and patterns that emerged from the data are introduced and discussed.

Prevalence of EMI-related Jobs Over Time

As can be seen from Figure 1, EMI-related job posts became considerably more common in the period covered by this study. Starting at 1.7% of posts, only 51 available positions, in 2002, the rate increased slowly to stabilize at approximately 5% from 2009 to 2012. Then, there was something of an EMI hiring rush, with a dramatic rise in the number of job posts calling for EMI-related qualifications. The rate rose quickly to more than 11% in just three years and has continued rising slowly since then. As of 2020, 13% of all teaching jobs posted on JREC-IN, 1451 positions, called for the ability to teach courses in English.

Figure 1

Prevalence of EMI-related Job Posts (2002-2021)



While EMI-related teaching positions have become more common, they are not as widespread as is sometimes reported in the literature. Some recent discussions of EMI in Japan imply that the majority of newly hired faculty members are expected to be able to teach in English. For example, Galloway and Ruegg (2022) reported that 57% of open faculty positions in Japan mentioned English-proficiency and called for the ability to teach in English. However, looking more closely, the 57% figure is based on a spot-check of positions available on JREC-IN on a single day, and only covers positions posted in English, which is typically only 10%-15% of the total number of posts at any given time. EMI-related teaching posts have become more common, but contrary to a common perception, they are not yet the majority.

The timing of the rapid increase in EMI-related posts is interesting and it parallels developments in EMI policies and implementation in Japan. In 2009, the government

announced its first large-scale funding scheme aimed at supporting EMI programs, the Project for Establishing University Network for Internationalization, commonly known as the Global 30 Project. This project funded 13 upper-tier universities to create undergraduate and graduate programs taught entirely in English as part of an overall strategy to internationalize the Japanese higher education sector. In 2010 and 2011, 23 such programs were established. In addition, while the government funding supported EMI programs directly at only a small number of universities, it inspired developments at many more. From 2009 to 2015, the number of universities offering at least some of their courses taught in English increased from 194 to 305, with the bulk of this growth being at private universities (MEXT, 2021).

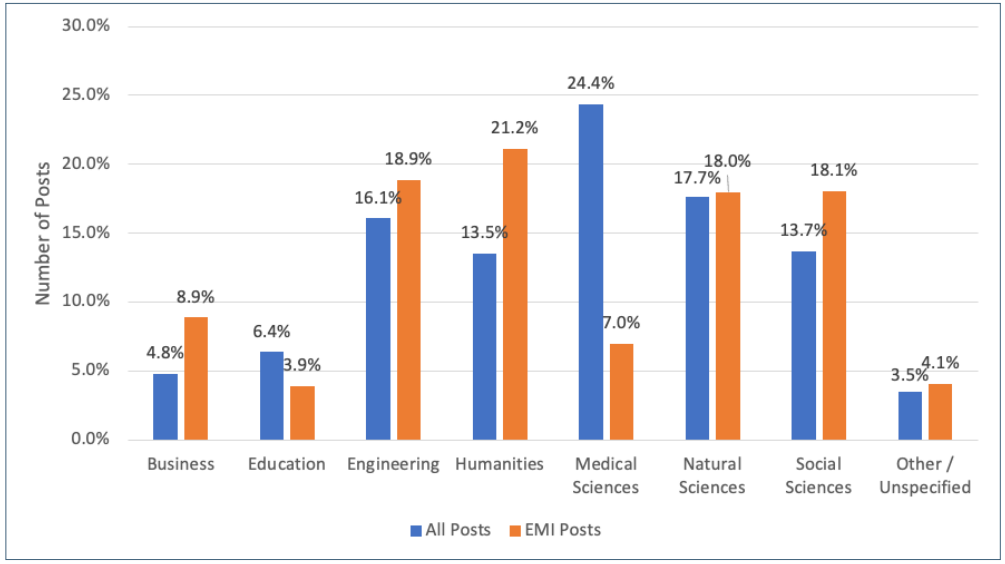
It is interesting to note that the increase in the number of EMI-related posts was not the same at all universities. While public (local, municipal), national, and private universities all showed rapid growth after 2010, the change was most dramatic at national universities where the rate of EMI-related posts peaked at more than 23% in 2020. Even though the overall number of EMI programs increased most at private universities, the number of new EMI-related faculty positions increased much more in relative terms at national universities. This is likely related to the relative prevalence of EMI at National Universities. They were early adopters of EMI and fully three-quarters of national universities now offer some EMI courses, as compared to approximately one-third each of public and private universities (MEXT, 2021). The relative underrepresentation of private universities in the sample may also be related to the trend seen at many private universities to expect existing faculty to take on EMI classes in addition to their previous workload in order to avoid new hiring (Brown, 2015; Kuwamura, 2018).

Prevalence of EMI-related Jobs by Domain

While EMI-related job posts have become more common overall, the posts have been distributed differently across academic domains. First, it is clear from Figure 2 that in the domains of business, engineering, humanities, and social sciences, posts in the EMI-related subset are more common than in the sample as a whole. In particular humanities and social sciences are strongly represented among EMI-related posts while job openings in education and medical sciences are less common among EMI-related posts. This is consistent with earlier research showing a dominance of humanities and social sciences in EMI programs in Japan (Brown, 2015).

Figure 2

Distribution of Posts by Domain



However, looking at changes in the distribution of EMI-related posts over time, we can see a more detailed picture. As shown in Figure 3, in the early portion of the sample, posts in social sciences and humanities together made up more than 60% of all EMI-related job openings. However, as time passed and the total number of EMI-related posts increased, the relative dominance of these two domains decreased and engineering, natural sciences, and business showed an increasing trend. There is considerable fluctuation in the distribution of posts by domain, but the relative positions of the domains have been somewhat stable since approximately 2010. Engineering, humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences each make up approximately 20% of all EMI-related posts, and the remaining EMI-related job openings are divided among medical sciences, business, and education.

Figure 3

Distribution of EMI-related Posts by Domain (2002-2021)

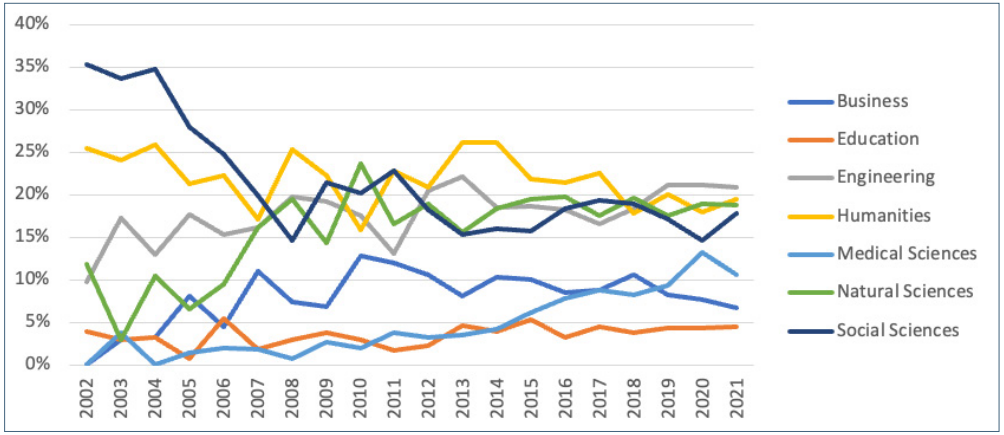


Table 1

Distribution of Posting Language by Domain

Domain	Bilingual	English	Japanese
Business	5.04%	2.12%	92.84%
Education	2.99%	1.80%	95.21%
Engineering	2.04%	0.83%	97.13%
Humanities	7.40%	8.25%	84.35%
Medical Sciences	1.80%	0.11%	98.09%
Natural Sciences	2.45%	2.01%	95.54%
Social Sciences	5.83%	4.00%	90.17%
Other / Unspecified	8.70%	3.09%	88.20%
Total	4.5%	3.4%	92.1%

It should be noted that the decline of EMI-related social sciences and humanities posts is mirrored in the sample as a whole. Looking at all job posts, we see social sciences and humanities making up 20% and 15% of all posts respectively in 2002, but those rates dropped to 14% and 11% by 2006. Rather than an actual change in the job market, these decreases may reflect changes in how JREC-IN was used. The service was launched in 2002; however, it was not immediately adopted as the standard recruiting tool for universities. The prevalence of social sciences and humanities in the early data, may simply reflect those domains being early adopters of the new service.

Another interesting point of comparison among domains is in the language in which job openings are posted. JREC-IN allows jobs to be posted in Japanese, in English, or in both languages. Among EMI-related posts, the dominant language is Japanese. A total of 92.1% of EMI-related job openings were posted in Japanese only, 3.4% were posted in English only, and 4.5% were posted bilingually (see Table 1).

Looking at differences in the posting language by domain, we can see that in most domains, jobs were posted in Japanese only at rates consistently over 90%. Even though the teaching responsibilities are in English, fewer than 8% of openings for EMI-Related jobs were posted with an English-speaking audience in mind. Assuming that the posting language reflects the target audience, this indicates that universities are primarily recruiting Japanese faculty members who can teach in English, or international faculty members who are able to operate in Japanese and may already be in Japan.

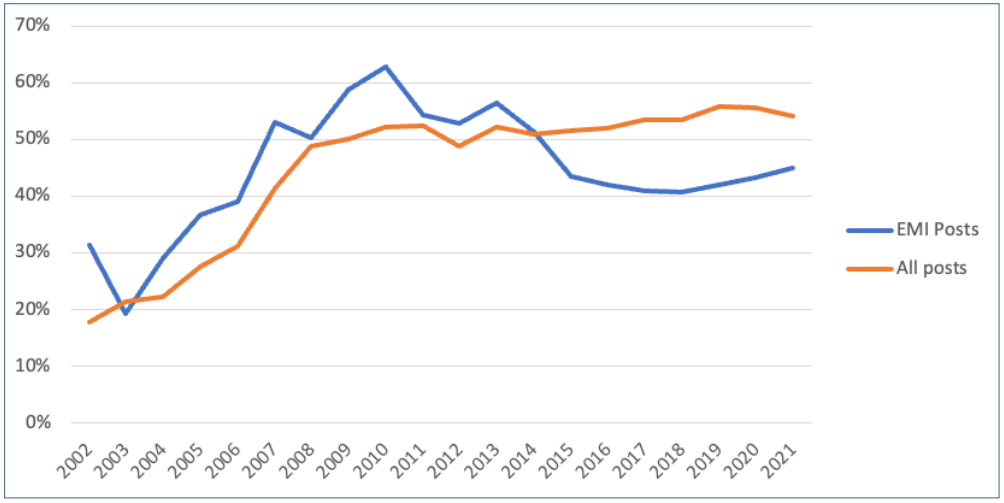
Only humanities posts follow a different trend, with 8.2% EMI-related posts in English and 7.4% bilingual, which is considerably higher than in other domains. This is indicative of two possible trends. First, previous studies have shown that many universities have implemented EMI programs by repurposing English-language classes or encouraging their English as a foreign language (EFL) faculty members to take on new responsibilities in teaching content classes (see for example, Kuwamura, 2019). The prevalence of EMI-related posts in the humanities may reflect universities posting in English or bilingually to recruit faculty members for jobs that are primarily EFL-related with some EMI courses as additional responsibilities. However, it may also be that at least some of the different results for the humanities may be due to false positives in identifying EMI-related posts. If the keyword searches used to identify EMI-related posts included EFL-related posts inadvertently, they would appear in the humanities.

Prevalence of EMI Job Postings by Work Term

The rate at which fixed-term employment contracts are offered in the higher education sector in Japan has risen dramatically. In 2002, 82.3% of job posts were for tenured positions (i.e. permanent positions without a fixed term limit). However, in 2021, the situation had changed and more than half of posts, 54.1%, were for fixed-term positions. As can be seen in Figure 4, the rate of fixed-term positions rose very quickly in the five-year period from 2004 to 2009. At the same time, there was a parallel, though much less dramatic, increase in the number of posts for part-time positions[2]. In 2002, only 3.7% of posts were for part-time positions but by 2009, that had risen to 9.8% and the rate has been approximately 10% consistently since then.

Figure 4

Prevalence of Posts for Fixed-term Positions



The increase in fixed-term and part-time positions corresponds to the beginning of dramatic reforms in the higher education sector introduced by the government in the early 2000s. At this time, national universities were converted to public corporations and became notionally independent from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). In addition, changes to labor laws opened the door for more short-term and part-time work in higher education. These changes reflected the rise of neoliberal thinking in the higher education sector, which put a new emphasis on efficiency in the management of universities (Bousquet & Nelson, 2008). This drive for efficiency meant an increase in hiring teaching staff to whom the university owed no long-term commitment and who had no decision-making power in the university community. At the time, these changes were greeted with a mix of optimism about streamlined and more competitive universities and fear over Japanese universities being "reshaped in the image of American higher education", and the "casualization of academic labor" (Finkelstein, 2003, p. 21).

Among EMI-related posts, the number of fixed-term positions increased at the same time but even more dramatically. The rate of posts for EMI-related fixed-term positions peaked at 62.8% in 2010. This is partly related to the overall trend of rising fixed-term employment in academia, but it is also connected to a tendency for early EMI programs to be partially or wholly dependent on short-term external grant funding. These grants offered funding for hiring new faculty and staff but only for the length of the funding cycle (Brown, 2017).

While the rate of term-limited positions among EMI-related posts was higher than in the sample as a whole until 2014, it is actually lower now. In 2014, the fixed-term rate for EMI-related positions fell below 50% and it has been in the range of 40% to 43% since then. By contrast, the fixed-term rate in the sample as a whole has been between 52% and 54% during that time frame. The fact that EMI-related positions are actually less likely to have a fixed term belies the common, but perhaps out-of-date, narrative in the literature that EMI programs in Japan are largely staffed by part-time or non-tenured faculty members who are marginalized or tokenized on their own campus (see for example Brown, 2019).

However, when we look at how fixed-term positions are posted, we may see a different story. There is a considerable difference in the trends in posting languages between fixed term and tenured positions. We can see in Figure 5 that EMI-related jobs posted in Japanese only are much less likely to be a fixed-term position. Starting in 2015, the rate of EMI-related fixed-term posts in Japanese has been fairly stable, ranging from 39.4% to 42.4%. In the same time frame, there was much more fluctuation in the rate of posts in English, which ranged from a low of 63% to a high of 78.9%.

Figure 5

Prevalence of Posts for Fixed-term Positions by Posting Language

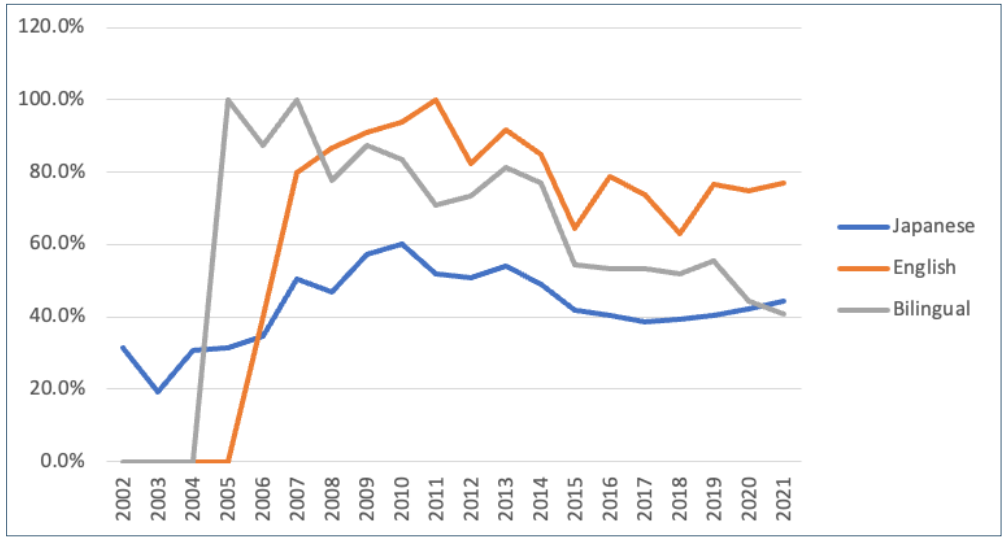
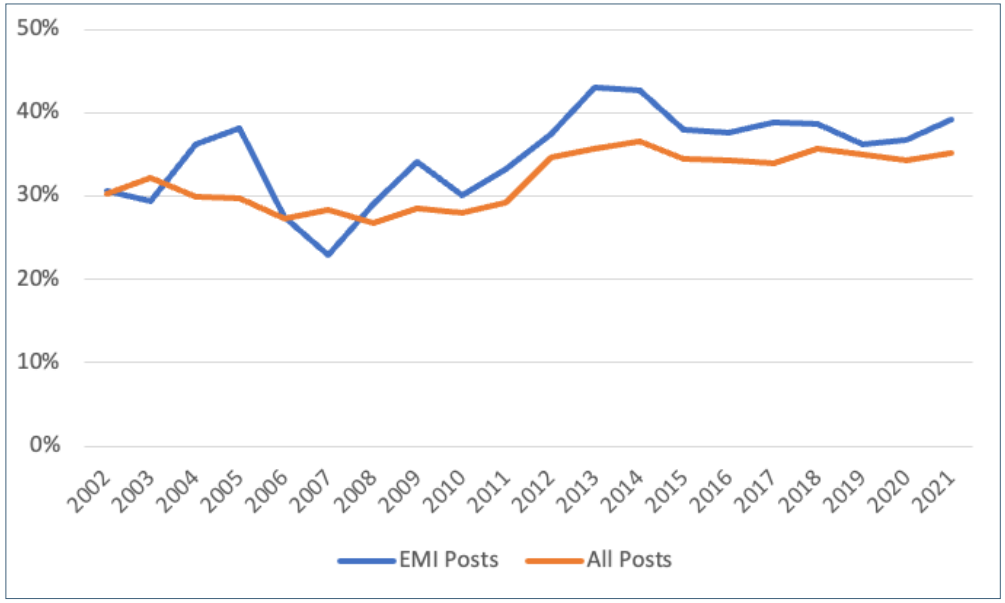


Figure 6

Prevalence of Full-time Posts Targeting Early-career Academics



Prevalence of EMI Job Postings by Academic Rank

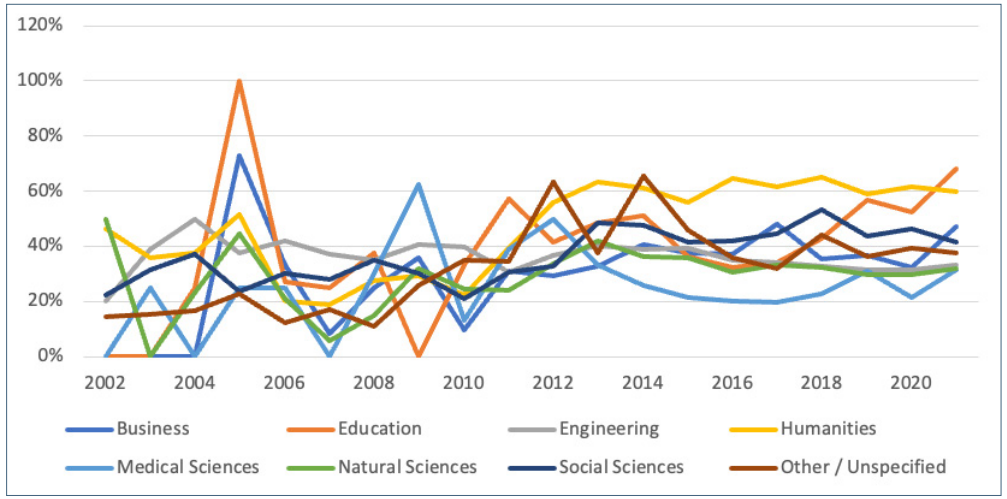
JREC-In posts include information on the starting rank of the position being advertised. Posts are commonly listed in four categories: lecturer, associate professor, assistant professor, and professor. Lecturer and associate professor are lower-rank positions and tend to be aimed at early-career academics, while assistant professor and professor are higher-ranked posts aimed at mid-career and established academics. In the sample, some interesting trends emerge when we look at the posts aimed at attracting early career academics.

Figure 6 shows the prevalence of full-time posts targeting early-career academics (lecturers and associate professors). The number of early-career posts grew from 2010 to 2013 and then stabilized at approximately 35%. The EMI subset roughly follows the trend of the sample as a whole; however, with the notable exception of a drop to 23% in 2007, the rate at which EMI positions target early-career academics is slightly higher than in the sample as a whole. In 2013, amid the so-called EMI hiring rush mentioned above, the rate of EMI positions targeting early career academics reached a peak of 43%.

Looking at the breakdown by domain (see Figure 7), we can see some variety in the sample. There is considerable fluctuation in the early sample but by 2010, the trends are relatively stable. We can see that science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields tend to recruit early-career academics for EMI-related positions at a lower rate than other domains, mostly in the 30% to 33% range, but dipping as low as 22% for Medical Sciences in 2020. Humanities, Education and Social Sciences posts target early-career academics at a higher rate, in the range of 40% to 50% for social sciences and 60% to 68% for humanities and education. These trends are roughly similar to the sample as a whole where STEM fields are recruiting early-career academics at a rate ranging from 31% to 33% for medical sciences to 35% to 38% for engineering and natural sciences. For education and social sciences, 42% to 59% of posts are aimed at early career academics, while the rate is higher, 62% to 66%, for humanities.

Figure 7

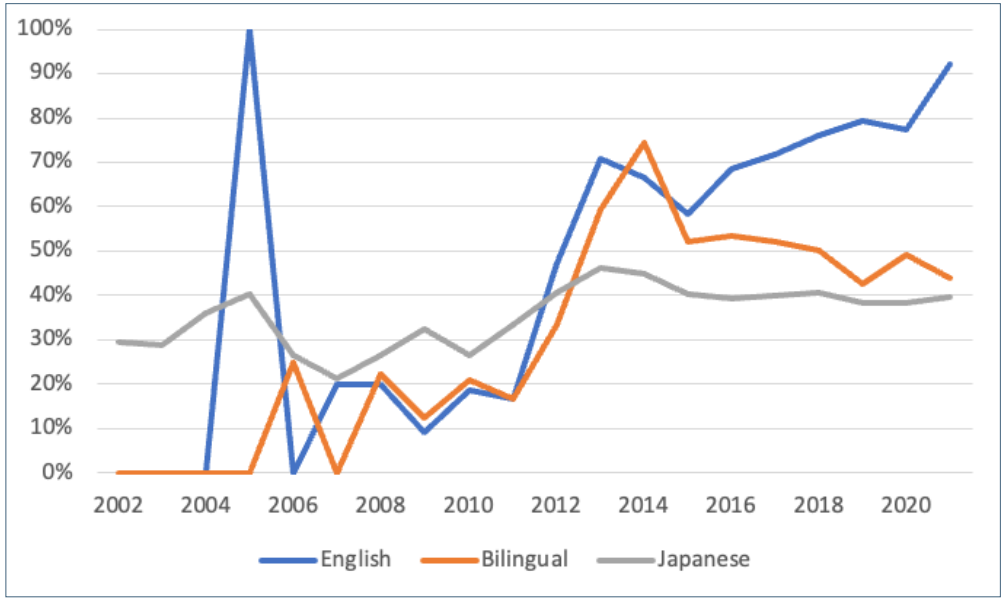
Prevalence of Posts Targeting Early-career Academics for EMI-related Positions



We can also see an interesting trend when we compare the number of posts targeting early career academics by the language in which they were posted. From Figure 8, we can see a clear difference. Approximately 40% of EMI-related posts in Japanese are for the lower-rank positions targeting early-career academics. This rate has been stable since 2015 and is similar to the rate for the sample as a whole. The rate for positions posted bilingually is somewhat higher, approximately 44% in 2021, down from a peak of 74% in 2014. While the rate for bilingual posts is declining and approaching the rate of the sample as a whole, the rate for posts in English only is continuing to climb. It has been over 60% since 2013, and in 2021, 92% of EMI-related posts in English were for lower-rank positions or early-career academics.

Figure 8

Prevalence of EMI-related Posts Targeting Early-career Academics Compared by Posting Language



Limitations

In this study, the original data was made available by JSTA at the end of 2021 upon the request of the researcher. At this point, it is necessary to acknowledge some possible limitations of that data. First, it should be noted that the JREC-IN system has been upgraded and reorganized several times, in 2005, 2007, 2011, and 2014, and the possibility of inconsistencies in the data over time, though unlikely, cannot be discounted (Kawashima & Yamashita, 2016; Yamashita & Kawashima, 2015). Also, in the first few years after the service was launched in 2002, JREC-IN slowly developed and grew in popularity. As such, the number of job openings posted on the site was considerably lower from 2002 to approximately 2005. Therefore, there may be some uncertainty and fluctuation in the sample in these early years, especially in the much smaller subset of the sample covering EMI-related posts. It is also important to note that the data covered in this study is related to recruitment but does not reflect actual hiring decisions or staffing.

It is also important to note two additional limitations related to the data that was not available to the researcher. JREC-IN provided the information as outlined above; however, the specific information in the categories of Job Title, Content of Job, and Qualifications was not available. Due to this limitation, the EMI-related subset of the sample may include some false positives, in which posts for jobs related to teaching EFL are misidentified as EMI-related. While every attempt was made to limit false positive by precisely defining the key terms used to identify EMI-related posts, some EFL positions being included in the sample cannot be ruled out, and it was not possible to confirm individual job contents or qualifications. In addition, since the Content of the Job information was not available, it was not possible to verify for any given post if the ability to teach in English was listed as a requirement, or simply as a preferred characteristic of an ideal candidate. Also, it was unclear if any given post was for a job teaching mainly or entirely in English, or one where EMI classes were a peripheral or additional responsibility.

Conclusion

Drawing together the trends seen in the JREC-IN Portal data, we can see a relatively clear picture of EMI programs in Japan emerging. While the subset of EMI-related job openings posted in English being skewed towards term-limited and lower-ranked positions does lend credence to the concerns over isolation and tokenization of international faculty expressed by some critics (see for example Brown, 2019; Toh, 2016) the overall picture emerging from this study is an optimistic image of EMI as a mature, stable part of the higher education sector. The rapid growth of EMI seen in the early 2010s has stabilized and since 2015 and approximately 40% of universities offer undergraduate EMI programs. The hiring trends, or at lest the job posting trends, also show a clear movement towards stability in EMI programs. The number of job openings requiring the ability to teach in English rose rapidly but is now consistently between 12% and 13%, and many of those openings are for full-time, tenured posts aimed at established academics. The rate at which EMI-related posts were for lower-ranked positions was higher early on but has fallen to be roughly consistent with the sample as a whole. And, and even more strikingly, the rate at which EMI-related posts are offered as term-limited positions is now actually 10% lower than it is among the sample as a whole. These trends strongly imply that EMI is now a well-established aspect of higher education.

Looking to the future, we see hints of continuing positive trends. While the data set ends halfway through 2021, there were no indications up to that time of changes in the trends in response to the Coronavirus pandemic. While restrictions on incoming international students have been a challenge for EMI programs at many universities, it appears that this is being viewed as a temporary setback and it is not, at least at this time, affecting hiring trends or long-term plans. This is consistent with MEXT policies which call for a return to pre-pandemic levels of both inbound and outbound study abroad by 2027 (MEXT, 2022).

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1. JREC-IN allows posts to include up to six main- and sub-domains. These were sorted into 7 broad domains based on the definitions provided by the American Academy of Arts & Sciences (n.d.).
2. Part-time positions are very common in academia in Japan but they are often arranged through personal connections or direct introductions rather than being opened to the public. Thus, the JREC-IN data likely considerably underreports the number of part time positions.

Bio Data

Howard Brown is a professor in the Department of International Studies and Regional Development at the University of Niigata Prefecture. He has researched EMI-related issues in Japan for more than a decade. His current research interests include the long-term stability and sustainability of EMI implementation, and the post-graduation outcomes of EMI students.

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