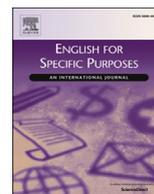




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From the Editors

Challenges in implementing English-medium instruction: Perspectives of Humanities and Social Sciences professors teaching engineering students

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ABSTRACT

Science and Engineering universities have been at the forefront of a recent drive to cultivate the global competitiveness of Korean higher education through English-medium instruction (EMI). This study investigates how professors teaching Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) in this local context envision an EMI policy and the roles of the local language by means of questionnaires and interviews. Furthermore, this study identifies the types of support needed for improving EMI in a non-English context. The quantitative data were collected from more than 80 percent of the HSS faculty members of three major Science and Engineering universities in Korea, followed by subsequent qualitative interviews with nine of the respondents. The results show that while generally supporting the internationalization of higher education, the participants perceived their lack of autonomy from selection to implementation of the policy as a serious problem. Interestingly, the local language was perceived as crucial to practicing the HSS disciplines and to conducting their professional roles. These findings illuminate contingencies of an EMI policy bound by a local context which include a shared understanding of the influences of an instructional language on teaching HSS subjects.

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1. Introduction

For the past decade, higher education institutions in non-English-speaking Asian countries have seen rapidly growing internationalized competition on their campuses. Internationalization of higher education (HE) in this non-English context has often been initiated and implemented mainly to fulfill requirements for educational reforms and to restructure the HE community. The intense global competition has resulted in a trend for English-medium instruction (EMI) and an increase in the number of international students and faculty in the HE institutions of South Korea (hereafter, Korea) (Byun et al., 2011; Choi, 2012; Hwang & Ahn, 2011; Kim & Tatar, 2017; Piller & Cho, 2013). EMI has expanded as a result of two major external motivators. On the one hand, the number of courses offered in EMI has been used as an index of internationalization of an individual institution (Byun et al., 2011), a major category for annually publicized university rankings. On the other hand, since 2004, the Korean government has granted financial support to universities adopting an EMI policy. As a result of this

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governmental top-down policy enforcement, Korean HE institutions have seen a 700 percent growth in the international population over the 10-year span between 2003 and 2012, with 104,262 registered international students as of 2016 (Ministry of Education, 2016).

In a way, EMI illustrates the deeply rooted importance attributed to English proficiency in many non-English Asian societies, including Korea (Park & Lo, 2012). The EMI policy creates an unusual immersion environment in an English as a foreign language (EFL) context. As English is learned in a place where it is not typically used in ordinary communication, this policy enforces the use of English and provides ample opportunities for non-native local students' English use along with the learning of subject areas in the classroom. Learners situated in this second language learning environment may be motivated to develop better English proficiency (Kim, 2002; Kirkgöz, 2005; Witty, 2008). However, the learning outcomes reported in the previous research are not entirely positive. EMI has often been criticized for its negative effect on students' acquisition of subject knowledge, coupled with a lack of evidence for improvement of English proficiency (e.g., Chang, 2010; Cho, 2012; Hou, Morse, Chiang, & Chen, 2013; Jensen & Johannesson, 1995; Kahng, 1999; Manakul, 2007; Manh, 2012).

As part of the ongoing rigorous investigation of EMI policy in a non-English-speaking context, researchers now note the significance of extending the scope of the research and scrutinizing the different views of various stakeholders, such as teachers and learners in EMI classrooms (e.g., Cho, 2012; Evans & Green, 2007; Hou et al., 2013; Kim, Kweon, & Kim, 2017; Kim, Tatar, & Choi, 2014; Liu, Chang, Yang, & Sun, 2011). As for non-native English-speaking teachers, EMI creates various challenges that need to be addressed. Students' lack of English proficiency is frequently noted as a problem with teaching subjects in EMI interfering with classroom management and delivery of course content (Choi, 2012; Kim & Tatar, 2017; Ó Laoire, 2012; Sampson, 2012; Tatzl, 2011). Teachers' experience of various problems connected with EMI influence their perceptions of instructional goals and constraints in this teaching and learning context, which in turn significantly influence their teaching practices (Phipps & Borg, 2009; Wilkins, 2008). Therefore, it is important to examine their attitudes toward the changing context resulting from an EMI policy (Pease-Alvarez & Thompson, 2014; Yang & Gao, 2013).

Despite the spread of English to the Korean HE market, research on localized views on EMI is still at an initial stage. In particular, there has been much less of an emphasis on how EMI is viewed and practiced by instructors from different disciplines including Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS). This study focuses on the professors teaching HSS subjects to students majoring in Science and Engineering. This HE context is of particular significance, since an increasing number of Science and Engineering students are being admitted to Korean universities. Frequently described as the pioneers of internationalization of HE, several major Science and Engineering universities of Korea have been at the forefront of this policy (Kim et al., 2017). However, professors teaching HSS courses, ranging from literature studies to history and contemporary arts, may have rather different attitudes toward EMI from their counterparts in other disciplines (Bolton & Kuteeva, 2012; Hyland, 2013; Kuteeva & Airey, 2014). It is, therefore, timely to investigate how professors in the academic disciplines of HSS perceive EMI and define the roles of the local language, and what support they need to implement EMI policies in practice. The following three specific research questions guided this study:

- (1) How do professors who teach HSS to Science and Engineering majors perceive an EMI policy in the local context?
- (2) In what ways are the roles of English and the local language defined in their teaching practices?
- (3) What support would be necessary to improve the teaching of HSS subjects in EMI?

By investigating what the situated enforcement of an EMI policy means to the professors, the present study will broaden understanding of EMI in a non-English HE context. The study will also provide information on how to design effective HSS curricula in that context.

2. Review of related literature

2.1. Teachers' perception of EMI

Previous researchers have increasingly attended to the close relationship between teachers' interpretations of contextual constraints and their instructional decisions and practices (Phipps & Borg, 2009; Wilkins, 2008). Context-related factors which teachers need to respond to include expectations from institutions, social norms of interaction in class, curriculum, workload, and the availability of resources. Given the substantial influence of teachers' perceptions of these factors on their practice, it is crucial to examine how a context is defined and perceived by the teachers (Chacón, 2005; Khong & Saito, 2014; Tam, 2012).

A new policy on the medium of instruction clearly has a profound effect on a learning context and affects instructors' classroom teaching, and ultimately students' learning outcomes (Khong & Saito, 2014; Tam, 2012). During the transition to a new medium of instruction, teachers often hold misconceptions about its purpose, such that the new language is practiced in their classrooms merely as a code-switching device (Tam, 2012). Some recent studies of Korean professors' attitudes toward EMI enumerate difficulties with implementing the policy in the classroom (Cho, 2012; Choi, 2012; Kim & Tatar, 2017). For example, in a study of professors at a private university in Korea (Choi, 2012), the participants acknowledged an EMI policy as a natural response of Korean HE to the era of globalization. At the same time, they identified several external factors behind the national obsession with EMI, such as university rankings and the evaluation parameters associated with these ranking

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