The Journal of Asia TEFL

Pedagogic challenges of English-Mediated Instruction in the Korean EFL Context

Given Lee
Pai Chai University, Daejeon, South Korea

Christiaan Prinsloo
Seoul National University, Seoul, South Korea

Introduction

In 2012, Kang brought the proliferation of English-mediated instruction (EMI) in Korea to the attention of the international readership of *English Today* when she questioned the phenomenon in an article entitled *English-only Instruction at Korean Universities: Help or Hindrance to Higher Learning?* Kang's inquiry was timely because in 2011, EMI accounted for 30% of all courses offered by universities in the Seoul metropolitan area and 10% of all courses offered outside Seoul. Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST) went as far as to mandate its entire curriculum to be taught in English (Cho, 2012). The dramatic increase of EMI courses in Korea is partly due to the globalization and internationalization of higher education, especially in the science, technology, and engineering (Kim, 2014).

In an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) country, an EMI language policy puts content professors under tremendous stress (Butler, 2005; Byun, Chu, Kim, Park, Kim, & Jung 2011; Cho, 2012; Kang, 2012) because EMI (in this context) refers to the teaching of content courses in English by a content specialist whose native language is not English. While some researchers have reported positive effects of EMI on students' English ability and content learning (Joe & Lee, 2012), other scholars noted above have criticized the compulsory implementation of EMI policy at Korean universities. For example, Kang (2012) argued that the enforcement of EMI is ineffective because many Korean content professors and students were ill prepared for the language demands and pedagogical strategies necessary for EMI. Today, five years after Kang's caution, many EFL countries, including Korea, affected by the globalization and internationalization of higher education grapple with the challenges of EMI (Dang, Nguyen, & Le, 2013; Huang, 2016).

This study responds directly to Kang (2012) as it identifies and discusses several key issues that currently manifest in EMI university classrooms in Korea. Such response can only be given following a brief recollection of the data sources and analyses of EFL content professors' EMI lessons that revealed the issues and challenges of EMI pedagogy. The study concludes with several pedagogical implications for the improvement of EMI in EFL contexts.

The Study

In recent years, many Korean universities have responded to the implementation of EMI by creating Centers for Teaching and Learning (CTL) to support EMI professors' English and pedagogical needs through workshops and private consultations. Both authors have been affiliated with the CTL of one of Korea's leading universities and presented workshops and conducted numerous consultations from which the data for this article emanates.

Workshops focus on a blend of language-related issues that enable content professors to develop student-centered approaches, thus creating more classroom interaction and participation. The CTL has offered primarily two streams of workshops and a separate individual consultation. The first stream currently caters for workshops on two topics (i.e., effective teaching and interaction strategies for content teaching as well as writing for publication). On average, workshops attract 25 attendees, 70% of whom are doctoral candidates and part-time instructors. The second stream is a microteaching workshop that requires a 10-minute participant teaching sample with live feedback during the workshop. Two to three microteaching workshops are delivered each semester to approximately seven EMI professors.

The individual consultation consists of three parts: Firstly, the CTL video-records a 50 through 75-minute long lecture by an EMI professor. The recoding is then analyzed by one of the authors (in the capacity as teaching consultants) who write a comprehensive lecture report on relevant topics, such as overall impressions, teaching methodology, language, and delivery. To conclude the process, the EMI professor meets with the teaching consultant for an hour to discuss teaching strengths, challenges, and strategies for improvement. Depending on CTL budgetary constraints, the authors conduct approximately 10-13 consultations per semester. The consultations for this study were requested either voluntary or for promotional purposes. In sum, those professors who requested individual consultations were not necessarily the same attendees of the workshops.

A purposive sample of 15 consultations was selected from EMI professors in the natural and applied sciences, technology, and engineering. Disciplinary field, EMI experiences, English study, and work experience in English determined inclusion in the sample. The 15 content professors in our sample had all taught EMI courses for more than three semesters, earned advanced degrees in English-speaking countries, published in English, and communicated in English on a daily basis. In this respect, it is fair to say that they are competent English speakers. Also, it is expected that professors with more EMI experiences and high levels of English ability would likely teach EMI lessons with more interactive approaches (Vinke, Snippe, & Jochems, 1998). Based on our observations during workshops, lecture analyses, and consultations with EMI content professors, the present study responds to the challenges anticipated by Kang (2012) and identified by the authors through their work with the CTL.

Results

Issues and Challenges of EMI

The association between ineffective EMI and lack of English command by EFL content professors is documented comprehensively (Airey, 2011; Byun et al., 2013; Dang et al., 2013; Kang, 2012). Empirical data on EMI instructors and lectures in European contexts revealed several linguistic issues, including pronunciation, slow speech rate, and the reduced use of expressions and clarity (Vinke, 1995; Vinke et al., 1998). Indeed, the professors in our sample also demonstrated several linguistic issues, including flat, mis-, and mumbling pronunciations, uncommon accents, unspecified pronouns, and the omission of articles. However, these issues were found to be inconsequential in delivering course content comprehensibly. Instead, based on the sample of this study, we argue that Korean EMI content professors seem to exhibit more teaching methodological issues than linguistic challenges. All the professors in our sample employed teacher-centered and content-driven approaches, as opposed to the student-centered and

interactive approaches advocated by the CTL. Klaassen (2001) also reported similar observations about EFL content professors' EMI lessons at Dutch universities. He examined the relationship between lecture intelligibility, language competency, and pedagogical approach. Unlike common assumptions that a lecturer's language ability is critical in EMI, he found that the effect of language was temporal; a lecturer's ability to structure student-centered classrooms was much more important than a lecturer's language competence.

In the following section, we present the consequences resulting from teacher-centered and content-driven approaches, namely reduced interaction and participation, lack of and ineffective questioning, and absence of group work.

Reduced Interaction and Participation

Scholarship unequivocally supports that learning without active participation and interaction is not conducive to consolidating learner knowledge and stifles learning experiences (Wesche & Skehan, 2002). However, Short (2002) stated that many content professors in East Asian countries tend to approach their teaching with content-driven instruction and feedback in the target language, which could be very difficult even for native language (L1) speaking students. Without exception, the EMI professors in this study unanimously employed teacher-centered and content-driven instruction to impart knowledge. To this end, they delivered their courses primarily with the aid of Power Point slides (Flowerdew, 1993). While professors were explaining slide after slide in detail, the students had to sit quietly and listen to the lengthy lectures (Lee & Traynor, 2013). As accounted for in Table 1, on average 90% of the class time was devoted to formal lecturing.

TABLE 1
Number of Questions per Lecture in Relation to Time Spent Lecturing

Professor	Length of lectures	Time spent lecturing	% of time lectured	Number of questions
P1	50	45	90	3
P2	65	60	92	2
P3	50	44	88	2
P4	60	56	93	2
P5	75	70	93	3
P6	70	65	93	3
P7	75	68	91	2
P8	50	43	86	2
P9	50	45	90	2
P10	75	67	89	3
P11	50	44	88	3
P12	50	43	86	2
P13	50	46	92	3
P14	75	68	91	2
P15	50	44	88	2

As a result of the unanimous application of teacher-centered and content-driven approaches, interaction (e.g., student-student interaction and teacher-student interaction) and student participation in class activities were minimal, which could be considered as a cause for the lack of questioning opportunities.

Lack of and Ineffective Questioning

Questions have been known as essential pedagogical tools to construct learner knowledge and create interaction and participation (Nunan, 1987); however, the EMI professors in our sample rarely used questioning techniques. As outlined in Table 1, in some cases, for example P2, the lecture continued for 50 minutes without pause. In other cases, for instance P5, there were three simple, terse questions during the entire 75-minute lesson (e.g., 'Any questions?'). The questions took only two or three seconds. All the professors in the study used similar teaching techniques: they either neglected asking any questions or

limited them to one or two questions after lengthy lecturing. They rarely utilized any particular questioning techniques to create a context during which the students could engage the topics deeply. Through experience we can confirm that the lack of questions for such an extended period undermines learning as students' attention can easily wane.

In addition, the types of questions raised were also problematic. Most questions in the video recorded lessons could be categorized as declarative tag questions for rhetorical comprehension check. For example, P5 said, '[…] this also as a fully binary tree and if you take both T1 and T2 to be this, you get this one and so on, *okay*?' Similarly, P10 explained, 'in terms of HIV transmission, there are several influencing factors, including cultural factors and social factors, *right*?' This observation was consistent with the empirical evidence of Chang's (2012) analysis of the use of questions across disciplinary communities. In a sample of 15 content professors at a Taiwanese university equally derived from the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences, Chang noticed that out of the types of questions that the professors asked in class, 30% were declarative tag questions. The declarative tag question was neither effective as comprehension check nor as strategy for interaction.

Absence of Group Work

In addition to the lack of and ineffective questioning in teacher-centered and content-driven approaches, group work was also neglected. However, it has become common knowledge in pedagogical scholarship that group work promotes learning and improves academic achievement. It stimulates higher order thinking and knowledge retention more effectively than individual work because students discuss, explain, and negotiate knowledge while performing group activities (Johnson & Johnson, 2000). In small groups, even shy students feel comfortable to voice their opinions (Lee, 2008). Despite the positive effects of group work, the study sample was devoid of group work activities. In fact, during consultations, it became apparent that some EMI professors seemed to question the effectiveness of in-class group work. For example, in a consultation, the first author made the following comments on P 15's video lecture and then met the professor for the consultation:

> *First author:*
> *Written comments:* Instead of trying to explain everything in the textbook on your own, use different strategies to help your students to fully digest the content and increase their critical thinking skills.
> *Oral suggestions in the consultation:* For example, there are many good videos available. Find one on the same content in the textbook chapter and create a list of questions based on the content before class. In class, watch the video together. Then, make groups of 3 or 4 and ask students to answer the questions. While your students are working on the answers, you can visit each group and help their work individually.
> *Professor:* Well, watching a video in class and answering the questions through group work takes too much time. It consumes at least 30 or 40 minutes. Actually, I can explain the content of the video within 5 to 10 minutes. Why do I waste time?

Although professors attend workshops and consultations to improve their teaching, the knowledge that they had learned from the professional development activities has yet to be transferred to their lessons. Because professors are so enmeshed in the traditional lecturing style, there seems to be no room to accommodate effective teaching methodologies identified by Western educators, such as student-centered approaches or cooperative teaching techniques through group work (Kaufman, 2004). In the consultations, both authors made almost identical comments and suggestions on the 15 professors' lessons:

- Prioritize content materials by identifying parts that need emphasis and parts that students can do as self-study based the materials that you create. You do not have to explain all the material.
- Chunk lessons into smaller, comprehensible units. After each main section, include time for

     processing through Q&A or group work sessions.
- Instead of being a controller, try to assume the role of a facilitator, guide, resource, or even tutor in the classroom.

The three suggestions that we provided are not mutually exclusive. When a professor employs a teacher-centered approach, there is little room for student activity and participation, which can reduce any type of interaction in class. As Chang (2012) stated, insufficient knowledge of teaching methodology about the assumption of different teaching roles and utilization of different questioning techniques inhibit classroom interaction and negate different learning opportunities.

Implications and Conclusion

As many scholars (Airey, 2011; Byun et al., 2011; Cho, 2012; Kang, 2012) have noted, in the EFL context, teaching content courses in English is challenging. However, EMI is unavoidable because of the acceleration of globalization and internationalization. Also, given that more universities will demand professors to teach their course in English, it is imperative that the university as a holistic system (which includes content professors, teacher educators, and administrators) collaborates for the successful implementation and execution of EMI programs. To this end, we have identified the following implications as recommendations for EMI in the EFL context: cultivation of an open mindset, professional development on teaching methodology, and consideration of costs.

Cultivation of an Open Mindset

Teaching in English in EFL contexts seems to require a different philosophy about teaching that is closely tied with the language and its culture (Kramsch, 1998). Teaching in Korean, Chinese, or Japanese engenders a Confucian-based teaching philosophy that became embodied in the languages of the Far East (Bradford, 2013). Trepidation toward EMI may hinder the assumption of a new mindset, but it is vital because over 80% of all English teachers globally are non-native speakers of English. EMI content professors in EFL contexts are by proxy non-native English speakers; therefore, ensuring the quality of their language ability and professional preparation are critical issues (Snow, Kamhi-Stein, & Brinton, 2006).

Unfortunately, in our sample, even in follow-up consultations, it was clear that EMI content professors were not convinced of the benefits of the workshops and consultations and thus failed to make the transition from teacher- to student-centered teaching. This finding suggests that EMI content professors and teacher educators should rethink their approaches to professional development education. A radical adoption of interactive and participatory approaches may be too aggressive; hence, as first step, teacher educators should inculcate an open mindset among EMI content professors. As a transitional measure, Adamson's (1990) suggestion of a methodological hybrid of traditional teacher-oriented teaching and student-centered interaction could suffice.

Professional Development on Teaching Methodology

In the Asian EFL context, EMI seems to have awoken a dichotomy between traditional teaching approaches and the methodologies associated with teaching in English because one could argue that "[w]hile acquiring a linguistic system, language learners [and teachers] adopt behaviors, values, and relations associated with language" (Huang, 2016, p. 29). Korean EMI content professors may be experts in their respective disciplines, but they have not adopted the 'behaviors' and 'values' or teaching practices and methodologies (e.g., student-centered approaches and cooperative teaching techniques) propagated by Western mainstream educators (Kaufman, 2004).

Contrary to Kang and a chorus of scholars (Airey, 2011; Cho, 2012; Dang et al., 2013; Kang, 2012)

who identified insufficient English proficiency among EFL content professors as the main culprit of the failures of EMI, our findings point toward methodological issues, instead. The teacher-centered mindset (a possible remnant of the Confucian hierarchy) and excessive reliance on content-heavy Power Point presentations constitute the main methodological challenges of EMI. The teacher-centeredness of their lectures was exacerbated by an overwhelming sense of responsibility to cover all the textbook material in class. For example, P14 made it clear during follow-up professional development sessions that he could not implement a more student-centered pedagogy because lecture time would not allow it. Therefore, since it is in the best interest of the university as a whole, we recommend that EMI content professors receive systematic professional development on teaching methodology either through workshops or private consultations by a CTL, not randomly requested by professors once or twice a year.

Financial and Human Resources

Implementing EMI in Korean higher education is costly. Because of CTL budgetary constraints, the number of workshops and individual consultations is limited. In our case, 10 lecture-style, two or three micro teaching workshops, and 10 through 13 consultations were offered per semester. CTL has to secure the financial and human resources to expand the number of workshops and individual consultations and also to create different kinds of workshops, such as intra- and inter-departmental collaborative projects about effective EMI teaching. Also, as Byun et al. (2011) and Kang (2012) suggested, rather than unilaterally enforcing EMI courses without adequate preparation, we recommend that universities should consider offering a variety of transitional types of EMI courses, such as full- and semi-EMI courses, from which professors and students could choose. These EMI courses could be systematically phased into the curriculum as EFL professors and students grow more comfortable with an English educational environment.

Future Direction

In this study, two of the main members (i.e., professors and the CTL) of the EMI trichotomy received our attention. However, the student population as third member has yet to deserve much attention in EMI research, except for the few studies noted above (e.g., Joe & Lee, 2012). Before entering university, Korean students devote more than 10 years studying English, mostly within the Korean educational setting and mediated largely in the Korean language, yet their English proficiency is still well below the OECD average. Kang (2012) claimed that 'The positive effects of using the first language do not only apply to student learning, but also foster the students' positive attitudes toward their first language and their learning experiences […]' (p. 32). While education in the first language may promote positive attitudes, Korean students belong to a globalizing community that is heavily dependent on English. As she also noted, many Korean families send their children to study abroad; however, most ordinary Korean families cannot afford educating their children in foreign countries. Therefore, Korean universities should respond with more effective EMI to prepare Korean students adequately for their participation with and entry into the globalized and international community. Longitudinal studies could identify how EFL students who have received EMI lessons in the EFL higher education context function in the globalized, international community.

Acknowledgement

The Authors

Given Lee is currently working as an assistant professor at Pai Chai University in Daejeon, South Korea. Her research interests include L2 students' writing and feedback, innovative pedagogy, as well as narrative inquiry-based learning.

College of General Education
Pai Chai University
155-40 Baejae-ro, Seogu
Daejeon, 35345, South Korea
E-mail: givenlee@pcu.ac.kr

Christiaan Prinsloo is an Associate Teaching Professor at Seoul National University. His transdisciplinary research interests straddle education, linguistics, literature, and law.

Faculty of Liberal Education
Seoul National University
1 Gwanak-ro, Gwanak-gu
Seoul, 08826, South Korea
E-mail: christiaanprinsloo@gmail.com

References

Adamson, H. D. (1990). ESL students' use of academic skills in content courses. *English for Specific Purposes, 9*(1), 67-87.

Airey, J. (2011). Talking about teaching in English: Swedish university lecturers' experiences of changing their teaching language. *Ibe´rica, 22* (Fall), 35–54.

Bradford, A. (2013). English-medium degree programs in Japanese universities: Learning from the European experience. *Asian Education and Development Studies*, *2*(3), 225-240.

Butler, Y. G. (2005). Content-based instruction in EFL contexts: Considerations for effective implementation. *JALT Journal, 27*(2), 227-45.

Byun, K., Chu, H., Kim, M., Park, I., Kim, S., & Jung, J. (2011). English-medium teaching in Korean higher education: Policy debates and reality. *Higher Education, 62*(4), 431-449.

Chang, Y. Y. (2012). The use of questions by professors in lectures given in English: Influences of disciplinary cultures. *English for Specific Purposes, 31*(2), 103-116.

Cho, D. W. (2012). English-medium instruction in the university context of Korea: Tradeoff between teaching outcomes and media-initiated university ranking. *The Journal of Asia TEFL, 9*(4), 135-163.

Dang, T. K. A., Nguyen, H. T. M., & Le, T. T. T. (2013). The impacts of globalisation on EFL teacher education through English as a medium of instruction: An example from Vietnam. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, *14*(1), 52-72.

Flowerdew, J. (1993). An educational, or process, approach to the teaching of professional genres, *ELT journal, 47*(4), 305-316.

Huang, I. C. (2016). Everybody learns English, and so do I: The dominance of English and its effects on individuals. *English Today, 32*(1), 28-34.

Joe, Y., & Lee, H. K. (2013). Does English-medium instruction benefit students in EFL contexts? A case study of medical students in Korea. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher, 22*(2), 201–07.

Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. (2000). *Joining together: Group theory and group skills* (7th ed.). Needham Heights: Pearson Education.

Kamhi-Stein, L. D. (2016). The non-native speaker teachers in TESOL movement. *ELT, 70*(2), 180-189.

Kang, H. S. (2012). English-only instruction at Korean universities: Help or hindrance to higher learning?

English Today, *28*(1), 29-34.

Kaufman, D. (2004). Constructivist issues in language learning and teaching. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 24*(1), 303-319.

Kim, E. G. (2014). Korean engineering professors' views on English language education in relation to English-medium instruction. *The Journal of Asia TEFL, 11*(2), 1-33.

Klaassen, R. (2001). *The international university curriculum: Challenges in English-medium engineering education* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Delft: Delft University of Technology.

Kramsch, C. (1998). *Language and culture: Oxford introductions to language studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lee, G. (2009). Speaking up: Six Korean students' oral participation in class discussions in US graduate seminars. *English for Specific Purposes, 28*(3), 142-156.

Lee, G., & Traynor, K. M. (2013). Two Korean content professors' English-mediated instruction: Issues and use of feedback. *English Teaching, 68*(4), 165-191.

Nunan, D. (1987). Communicative language teaching: Making it work. *ELT, 41*(2), 136-145.

Short, D. J. (2002). Language learning in sheltered social studies classes. *TESOL Journal, 11*(1), 18-24.

Snow, M. A., Kamhi-Stein, L. D., & Brinton, D. M. (2006). Teacher training for English as a lingua franca. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, *26*(1), 261-281.

Stoller, F. (2004). Content-based instruction: Perspectives on curriculum planning. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 24*(1), 261-283.

Vinke, A. A. (1995). *English as the medium of instruction in Dutch engineering education* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Delft: Delft University of Technology.

Vinke, A. A., Snippe, J., & Jochems. W. (1998). English-medium content courses in non-English higher education: A study of lecturer experiences and teaching behaviors. *Teaching in Higher Education, 3*(3), 383–94.

Wesche, M. B., & Skehan, P. (2002). Communicative, task-based, and content-based language instruction. In R. B. Kaplan (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of applied linguistics* (pp. 207-228). New York: Oxford University Press.