



Chinese International Graduate Students' Perceptions of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) Courses at a Korean University

Yong-Jik Lee

Woosuk University, South Korea

Robert O. Davis

Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, South Korea

Yue Li

Woosuk University, South Korea

Introduction

With globalization and internalization, many countries are experiencing more diverse student populations in higher education. (Jon, 2009; Jon & Kim, 2011). Especially, Asian governments, such as South Korea, China, and Japan, are promoting initiatives to internationalize higher education (Song & Bae, 2018). One of the significant trends is the recruitment of international students (Yonezawa & Shimmi, 2016). This internationalization trend is widely implemented in Korean higher education due to the demographic changes, a low birth rate, and a dramatic decrease in the university-aged domestic students, as well as promoting the position of Korean research universities in the world university rankings (Jon, 2009; Jon & Kim, 2011).

South Korea has recently reported a rising number of international students, according to a survey from the Korean Ministry of Education. Overall, about 160,165 international students were registered in Korean higher education in 2019 (Ministry of Education in Korea, 2019). Among the diverse population of international students, Chinese students are the majority group consisting of 55.1 % (68,184 students) of the entire population of international students (Ministry of Education in Korea, 2019). Especially in the graduate programs in Korean universities, Chinese students are currently studying abroad in Korea to receive graduate degrees because it is necessary for them to promote their future occupation status. Some Chinese graduate students already have university positions as lecturers; thus, earning a Ph.D. degree could help them become tenure-track professors in the near future.

According to a report from the British Council and Oxford University, English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) is defined as "The use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the L1 of the majority of the population is not English" (Dearden, 2014, p. 4). Since the 2000s, the Korean Ministry of Education (KMOE) has strongly advocated the global trend of teaching English as the Medium of Instruction (EMI) from elementary to higher education (Kym & Kym, 2014). In alignment with this advocacy, many Korean universities have adopted various policies to expand EMI courses, either mandatory or optional for university students who majored in many different disciplines



(Kim et al., 2017). These EMI courses aim to train Korean English Language Learners (ELLs) to become fluent English speakers of professionals in workplaces. Also, EMI courses are offered to prepare Korean ELLs for a study abroad experience in English-speaking countries, such as the US, Australia, and the UK (Joe & Lee, 2013).

Although previous studies reported the pros and cons of implementing EMI courses in English Language Teaching (ELT), it is crucial to contribute to the existing literature and provide pedagogical implications with diverse ELL populations. In this regard, this report examines Chinese international students' perceptions of EMI courses at a Korean university. This report specifically explores how Chinese graduate students perceive EMI courses focusing on 1) university faculty's EMI teaching methods, 2) English language proficiency, and 3) satisfaction with EMI courses in a Korean university.

Literature Review

Students' Perceptions of Faculty's EMI Teaching Methods

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of students' perceptions in regards to the university faculty's EMI teaching methods (Chang, 2010; Inbar-Lourie & Donitsa-Schmidt, 2020; Kim et al., 2017; Yukawa, 2016). For instance, some studies have focused on the effectiveness of native or non-native English teachers' EMI teaching. Inbar-Lourie and Donitsa-Schmidt (2020) researched Israeli higher education institutions to elicit students' perceptions regarding desired EMI lecturers' qualities. The findings revealed that the preferred EMI lecturer is not necessarily a native English speaker. Instead, the authors found that desired EMI lecturers should be highly proficient in English, be subject matter experts, be able to simulate an international learning experience, display effective teaching pedagogies in both content and second language, and be familiar with the students' local language and culture.

In relation to incorporating students' L1 during EMI courses, Kim et al. (2017) examined engineering students' perceptions of EMI and L1 use in three Korean universities. The results showed that most of the survey participants believed that EMI should be maintained but with changes in the schools' mandatory policies. The students, regardless of academic department, were supportive of L1 use in EMI classes; approximately 90% of the respondents from each school believed that the L1 should be used to facilitate their learning in EMI courses. Yukawa (2016) also found a similar result. The author concluded that students' L1 use was related to students' academic and English levels, and students' attitudes were positive, especially when they are allowed to use translanguaging practice in EMI courses (Tai & Wei, 2020).

To sum up, various studies have shown that faculty's EMI teaching methods are one of the critical aspects of understanding students' perceptions of EMI courses (Chang, 2010; Inbar-Lourie & Donitsa-Schmidt, 2020; Kim et al., 2017; Yukawa, 2016). Also, several studies have reported that when the faculty allow ELLs to practice code-switching and incorporating students' L1 usage in EMI, ELLs' perception and content learning could be much more positive as opposed to strictly limited L1 use in EMI courses (Kim et al., 2017; Tai & Wei, 2020; Yukawa, 2016).

EMI on Students' English Language Proficiency

Previous studies have documented the relationship between EMI and students' English language proficiency (Chang, 2010; Corrales et al., 2016; Huang, 2015; Jiang et al., 2016; Williams, 2015). For instance, Corrales et al. (2016) explored students' perceptions of EMI courses. Study findings showed that ELLs have the opportunity to use the target language in authentic communicative situations and can enhance their technical vocabulary knowledge. In addition, students build self-confidence when using the language and become aware of their capacity to use English to learn content. Also, they were more willing to engage in communicative tasks in English.

Chang (2010) evaluated the implementation of EMI at a university in Taiwan. The author specifically

focused on students' responses to the EMI subject courses, the influence of EMI on the students, difficulties that students encountered in their EMI courses, and their English language learning needs. The results showed that most of the students responded that EMI helped them improve their English language proficiency, especially in terms of listening. Similarly, Huang (2015) investigated students' perceptions of the EMI courses in terms of their learning motivation, learning anxiety, and learning achievement. The author found that (1) most students were motivated to take EMI courses to strengthen English language ability and professional knowledge, and (2) most students agreed with the effectiveness of EMI courses.

These studies have documented that EMI could promote students' English language ability and proficiency, especially in listening and reading (Chang, 2010; Corrales et al., 2016; Huang, 2015; Jiang et al., 2016). However, if ELLs are not able to fully comprehend the content in EMI due to their low level of English proficiency, EMI might not be as effective as intended (Chang, 2010; Corrales et al., 2016; Huang, 2015; Jiang et al., 2016; Lee & Davis, 2020). Some studies have shown mixed results of how EMI impacts ELLs' language proficiency, which needs to be further investigated with a diverse student population in ELT (Chang, 2010; Corrales et al., 2016; Huang, 2015; Williams, 2015). However, students with lower proficiency in English could benefit from moments of code switching to their native language to scaffold the lesson (Alfehaid, 2018).

EMI on Students' Satisfaction

Previous studies have reported the close relationship between EMI and students' satisfaction (Byun et al., 2011; Chu et al., 2018; Karakas, 2017; Kym & Kym, 2014). For instance, Chu et al. (2018) assessed both local and international students' satisfaction in an EMI undergraduate international business program. The study recruited 278 students (171 local and 97 international) and assessed their satisfaction with program management, interaction with peers within the program, and cultural diversity. The results indicated that both local and international students were satisfied with students' ability to communicate in English during class, the content of courses, and the level of internationalization of the college.

Karakas (2017) explored Turkish students with EMI in the context of higher education. The analysis was done by computing descriptive statistics, and content analysis addressed EMI in terms of satisfaction with (1) teaching, (2) content English, (3) their institutions, and (4) their English language policies and practices. The results showed that the majority of the students were satisfied with EMI. Specifically, most students were pleased with their linguistic competence and subject-matter expertise, as well as being EMI students at their institution.

Kym and Kym (2014) examined students' satisfaction with EMI in a Korean university. The participants were 364 Korean undergraduate students who enrolled in 11 different EMI courses. The results showed that students' overall level of satisfaction and ability to comprehend was significantly different according to the instructor's native language status, background knowledge, and study abroad experiences. In this regard, Byun et al. (2011) suggested three critical aspects of the implementation of EMI courses: 1) the students' and the instructors' language proficiencies, 2) the varying demands of different academic subjects, and 3) a facilitative body that can support this implementation. Williams (2015) also argued similar findings based on a systematic review of EMI research. These studies indicated that without considering the above aspects, the implementation of EMI might not have a positive outcome (Byun et al., 2011; Williams, 2015).

Research Questions

Although previous studies reported the pros and cons of implementing the EMI courses in ELT, it is crucial to contribute to the existing literature and provide pedagogical implications with diverse ELLs' populations, such as international students in Korea. In this regard, this report examines international Chinese graduate students' perceptions of EMI courses at a Korean university. This report specifically

explores how Chinese international graduate students perceive EMI courses focusing on 1) university faculty's EMI teaching methods, 2) English language proficiency, and 3) satisfaction with EMI courses in a Korean university.

Q1: How do Chinese international students report professors' EMI teaching methods after taking EMI courses?

Q2: How do Chinese international students report their English language proficiency after taking EMI courses?

Q3: How do Chinese international students report their satisfaction after taking EMI courses?

Methodology

Research Context and Study Participants

The current study was conducted at a private university located in the southwest region of South Korea. The university in this study has several graduate programs that consist of diverse international graduate students from China, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, and others. Among graduate programs, two departments conduct EMI courses; one department is a general education department consisting of 60 Chinese graduate students, and the other is a culture and content department consisting of 20 Chinese graduate students who are pursuing master's and Ph.D. degrees. Graduate students were taught by two native Korean speaking professors who received their Ph.D. degrees in the United States.

Study participants were between 27 to 47 years old, and their time in the programs ranged from first year master's students to third year Ph.D. candidates. There were 12 male students and 68 female students in the EMI courses. Out of 80 participants, 5 students reported having official English language test scores from ETS, such as TOEIC and TOEFL. Out of 80 participants, 5 students had a previous study abroad experience before coming to Korea for graduate programs. The purpose of studying abroad for Chinese graduate students is to promote their job status in the future. For example, before studying abroad in Korea, they were lecturers or non-tenured track assistant professors in various Chinese universities. But after they earn Ph.D. degrees in Korean universities, they will be promoted to a tenured track position or hold a better position in Chinese higher education.

Survey Instrument

An online survey through Qualtrics was developed based upon previous studies investigating university students' perceptions and satisfaction of EMI courses (Byun et al., 2014; Joe & Lee, 2013; Kim et al., 2017; Kym & Kym, 2014; Lee, 2014). Extracting relevant items from the existing literature, the research team modified questions to fit into the current research. A total of 18 items were finalized, consisting of 16 rating-scale questions and 2 open-ended questions. Specifically, 1) seven items related to study participants' personal and background information, 2) four items related to faculty's EMI teaching methods, 3) four items related to students' English language proficiency, 4) two items related to the students' satisfaction of EMI courses, and 5) last two open-ended questions focused on students' opinions and suggestions for effective EMI courses.

Data Collection and Analysis

Informed Consent Forms for study participants were provided before they participated in the online survey. The survey was conducted in the last week of the 2020 Fall semester (December). Out of a total of 80 Ph.D. students, 57 completed the semester-end survey. For the purpose of quantitative data analysis, SPSS 25 was used to calculate the descriptive statistics.

Results

A total of 57 graduate students were surveyed on their perceptions and evaluations of the EMI course format at the end of the semester. See Table 1 for the questions and descriptive statistics for the EMI course survey.

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics for Survey Questions

	Question	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Percentage
Faculty Evaluation	1. How well did the professors prepare the lecture?	4.61	0.86	
	2. How well did professors structure the lesson?	4.58	0.82	
	3. How well did the professors use appropriate content for the class?	4.72	0.56	
	4. How would you rate your professor's ability to conduct EMI courses?	4.42	0.86	
Language Ability	1. How did EMI impact your English improvement?	3.81	0.83	
	2. How did EMI encourage your motivation towards learning English?	4.00	0.96	
	3. What areas did you improve the most?			
	3a. Listening	27		47%
	3b. Speaking	9		16%
	3c. Reading	14		25%
Effectiveness & Willingness	3d. Writing	5		9%
	3e. Other	2		2%
	1. How would you rate the effectiveness of the EMI curriculum?	4.32	0.66	
	2. How would you rate your willingness to take EMI courses again next semester	4.37	0.70	

Q1: How do Chinese international students report Korean professors' EMI teaching methods after taking EMI courses?

Chinese graduate level students had high satisfaction with the faculty in the EMI course format. Students gave high ratings for their professors' ability to prepare lectures ($M = 4.61$, $SD = 0.86$), to structure lessons ($M = 4.58$, $SD = 0.82$), and to use appropriate content for the class ($M = 4.72$, $SD = 0.56$). Although not as high as the other assessments, students still rated their professors' ability to conduct EMI courses ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 0.86$) with high confidence.

Q2: How do Chinese international students report their English proficiency after taking EMI courses?

Chinese graduate level students had above average evaluations on the impact of EMI on their English improvement ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 0.83$). Concerning motivation to learn English, students' evaluation of motivation was slightly higher ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 0.86$), but below the average evaluations given for the faculties' ability to deliver EMI courses. Students studying in EMI courses surmised that EMI courses primarily helped listening (27%), reading (25%), and speaking (26%).

Q3: How do Chinese international students report their satisfaction with EMI courses after taking EMI courses?

Chinese graduate level students provided high ratings for the effectiveness ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 0.66$) of the EMI curriculum, and were willing to take courses again next semester ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 0.70$).

Discussions and Implications

This report explored international students' perceptions of EMI courses at a Korean university. Specifically, this report examined how Chinese graduate students perceive EMI courses regarding 1) faculty's EMI teaching methods, 2) English language ability, and 3) satisfaction with EMI courses. Quantitative findings indicated that students were highly satisfied with their professors' abilities to construct and deliver EMI courses, even though the professors themselves were second language users that had only studied for graduate degrees in America. Many of the participants in this research had not taken EMI classes before, so preparing and studying for a class presented in English only was a new experience for many of the students. Therefore, the faculty ratings are supported by research that has indicated those international students with lower-level English ability, and little experience with English instruction, are more satisfied with more in-depth content knowledge than the nativeness of the instructor (Inbar-Lourie & Donitsa-Schmidt, 2020).

The ratings for language ability might also be related to students not having much experience with EMI course deliveries. When asked what area of English improved the most, almost half of the students reported higher improvement in the ability to listen. Similar studies have indicated similar findings. Yeh (2014) showed that a large majority (77%) felt their listening improved from EMI course design. Likewise, Kim et al. (2017) surveyed students to find that the highest percentage of improvement was gained in listening ability. Thus, for language ability, this study supports research that has found EMI courses help students with their ability to improve their listening.

Finally, the quantitative data for effectiveness and willingness to continue to participate in EMI courses was high. Huang (2015) suggested that the teaching quality, and the ability to design courses to lower anxiety levels of lower-level students, could be a main factor in students' assessment of effectiveness. The professors in this study provided students with materials to study before class, a flipped learning model, which may have prepared students for the learning experience they were to encounter. Students in this study provided the faculty with high ratings on faculty evaluations, and along with the flipped nature of the course design, this research supports Huang's (2015) suggestion that teacher quality and design could increase the effectiveness of the course. Thus, this may explain why more students indicated a willingness to participate in future EMI courses.

The Authors

Yong-Jik Lee is an assistant professor in the Education Department at Woosuk University. His current research interests include EMI (English as a medium of Instruction), foreign language education, and educational technology.

Department of Education
Graduate School, Woosuk University
Jeollabuk-do, 443 Samnye-eup, Samnye-ro Wanju_Gun, South Korea
Tel: +82 632901854
Mobile: + 82 1091084480
Email: fhlyongko@woosuk.ac.kr

Robert O. Davis is an assistant professor in the Department of English Linguistics and Language Technology at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies. His current research interests involve how to design instruction and multimedia environments to help second language users learn.

Department of English Linguistics and Language Technology
Hankuk University of Foreign Studies
107 Imun-ro, Dongdaemun-gu, Seoul, 02450, Korea

Mobile: + 82 1024471975
Email: red1020@gmail.com

Yue Li is a Ph.D. candidate at Woosuk University in South Korea. Her current research interests are Korean education, Korean language learners, and Korean language education as a foreign language.

Department of Education
Graduate School
Woosuk University
Jeollabuk-do, 443 Samnye-eup, Samnye-ro Wanju_Gun, South Korea
Email: ly1229620@gmail.com

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