Why Students Don’t Participate in English Medium Instruction Classes in a Korean University: A Case Study

Gyungsook Jane Lee
(Chonnam National University)


This study critically examines the factors contributing to verbal participation and the achievement of desired learning outcomes in English medium instruction (EMI) classes in a Korean higher education institution. This case study uses mixed research methods including surveys, focus group interviews and peer observations of students and professors of selected EMI classes. This paper has highlighted several factors which influence active verbal participation and the achievement of desired learning outcomes in EMI classes. The research provides a rich understanding of how differences in teaching styles and learning activities significantly affect levels of verbal participation in EMI classes. The findings suggest that in order to achieve desired EMI learning outcomes, it is necessary to examine all of the interconnected elements within the education system, including students, professors, the teaching context, as well as the institutional systems at national and international levels. This research has raised a number of challenges and criticisms concerning EMI courses including the effectiveness of learning of subject content via a foreign language.

Key words: English-medium instruction, higher education, verbal participation, student’s experience, education system

1. INTRODUCTION

The increased adoption of English Medium Instruction (EMI) courses in the tertiary education sector of non-English speaking countries (NESC) and the growing importance of English language competency is directly associated with the globalization of the world economy and the rapid development of information communication technologies. In the

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globalized and international community, the English language becomes a dominant communication tool as a *lingua franca* either through the Internet or face-to-face communication with people who differ in their native languages. In NESC's, such as Republic of Korea (Korea, hereafter), English language proficiency is vital for economic trade prosperity, in preparing future workers for the global labor market, and for cultivating international, social and political environments. Therefore, language choice as a medium of instruction (MOI) in education involves more than just pedagogical issues of ensuring that students acquire the language competency needed for further education and employment.

Language policies in Korea were primarily rationalized within a national framework striving for economic advancement and survival in the competitive globalized economic and political world environment (Byun et al., 2011). Therefore in Korea, the implementation of EMI courses throughout tertiary education policies sought to enhance English language (the language, hereafter) proficiency with the intention to improve students’ language skills in order to prepare citizens for the internationalized labor market as well as to create active global citizens. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that various players in the education system have not been satisfied with the learning outcomes of EMI classes, in particular, professors and students who are most often unsatisfied with their own verbal interactions in the classroom, much less to achieving desired learning outcomes. Thus, this paper explores and investigates the factors which influence levels of verbal participation and interaction in EMI classrooms in a Korean university.

2. EMI CLASSES IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN KOREA

Since 1995, English language has been at the center of educational reform in Korea. The main goal of educational reform was the introduction of an English language policy (Byun & Kim, 2011). The government implemented English programs in order to improve the speaking competency of both students and teachers. In 2004, EMI policies were further extended with a comprehensive strategy, the “Study Korea Project,” which provided financial incentives to universities offering EMI courses (Byun et al., 2011), which lead to a rapid increase in EMI course offerings in higher education institutions (HEIs, hereafter). Performance evaluations by the government of the tertiary education sector such as the “Brain Korea 21 Project (BK 21)” highly influenced the number of EMI courses offered, the results of which were linked to government funding of Korean universities. Over time, new initiatives have been introduced to further increase the English language competency of students and teachers. Graduate students are now encouraged to write dissertations in English irrespective of their field of study so that research findings may be published in
international journals. The recruitment of native English speakers to teach English has become the norm at tertiary education levels. Another aim of the government is to create a research environment with the collaboration of overseas academics in order to enhance the quality of both research and English language competency (cf. Byun et al., 2011).

The increasing role of EMI courses has brought significant changes to HEIs in Korea. Currently, the majority of HEIs require that newly hired professors teach a minimum number of classes in English and that students take a certain number of EMI courses to graduate. Mandates enforcing HEIs to become internationalized by linking financial incentives in the form of government funding to “degree of internationalization” measures have created a number of undesirable outcomes. For instance, the BK 21 Project measures the “degree of internationalization” using indicators such as the ratio of EMI courses to non-EMI courses, the ratio of foreign and exchange students to domestic students, and the ratio of overseas academics from domestic academics. For university funding programs, these performance indicators contribute between 4.3 and 10 per cent of a university’s entire score (Byun & Kim, 2011). Since the measurement of internationalization is largely quantitative, one of the most severe problems is the quality of EMI courses offered today. To qualify for government funding, HEIs focus on improving quantitative criteria including numbers of international students, academics, joint curricular programs and facilities for international students; quantitative criteria which by nature and not by design tend to overlook the quality of programs.

Two major newspapers—Joonang Ilbo (University Ranking Team, 2010) and Chosun Ilbo—publish university rankings annually, including a “degree of internationalization” measure which compares HEIs both domestically and in the wider Asia region. The publication of HEI rankings draws more attention to major universities for the perceived “internationalization” of their institutions (Byun et al., 2011; Byun & Kim, 2011; Kang & Park, 2004; Piller & Cho, 2013). While the number of EMI courses has increased rapidly with rising government funding incentives and the publication of rankings in the mass-media, there is significant criticism and debate about the quality of EMI courses from both the HEI community as well as the general population.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

John Biggs, a pioneering academic in the field of learning and teaching in higher education introduced the Systems model of teaching and learning using the theory of interacting ecosystems. Adapted from von Bertalanfly (1969), Biggs (1993) developed the ecosystems model which regarded the education system as a set of interacting ecosystems:
change to any one component will, depending on the state of equilibrium already achieved, either effect change throughout and thereby create a new equilibrium and hence a new system, or the changed component will be absorbed, the system reverting to the status quo. (p. 75)

This education ecosystem consists of several linked micro-systems in the tertiary context: student systems, classroom systems, institutional systems and community systems. Firstly, the student system operates at the individual level as the information processing mechanism with perceived task requirements, motivational states and abilities. Secondly, the classroom system consists of students, the teacher and the teaching context, where students and teachers interact together to achieve desired learning outcomes. The equilibrium engages teachers’ perceptions of student competencies and curriculum requirements, setting of learning activities, students’ perceptions of task requirements, setting processes and learning outcomes. In this context, where disequilibrium exists, adjustments will occur (Biggs, 1993). For instance, when a student’s perception of task requirements does not correspond with the teaching processes, poor learning outcomes will result. Thirdly, the institutional system itself contains subsystems at department and faculty levels, and each face potential for improvement or as Reid (1987) considers as more likely, “impeding enlightened practice.” Lastly, the community system refers to historical, political, government, and legacy constraints forced into HEIs; measures that often resonate down the chain to the classroom level. Biggs (1993) argues that each subsystem, attempts a steady state of equilibrium both internally between its own components, as well as with all surrounding systems, in particular, the direct subordinate/superordinate systems. (p. 77)

Therefore, although professors are primarily concerned with the teaching micro-system, each individual professor must operate within university administration structures, and the university administration will in turn conduct the university micro-system in conjunction with the Ministry of Education at the national level. This hierarchy of systems could be relevant to any education system across the world, which ultimately affects the nature of HEI classrooms.

The systems property (Biggs, 1993) suggests that three sets of factors must be taken into consideration when accounting for the limitations, causes and quality of teaching and learning in classrooms. The first factor is the normal causal path connecting individuals and institutional factors with students’ learning processes (Biggs, 1989). The second is the interaction between internal components within the micro-system in question, for instance, in the case of the classroom, the effects and interactions between students and teacher
components (Biggs, 1993). The third factor is the interaction between systems, particularly those adjoining micro-systems including policy makers, institutions, departments, teachers and students. It may be possible that classrooms influence institutions and faculties, but it is more likely that the lines of force will run from the larger to affect the smaller systems according to Biggs. He argues that the concern between the systems and non-systems views of higher education is seen in the difference between the deficit model and interactive learning and teaching.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many studies have attempted to explain the reluctance of students to participate in EMI classes in NESCs from different perspectives. The explanations take two forms: the deficit perspective and the difference perspective. Firstly, the deficit approach views poor learning to be the result of an absence of a component in the student, the teaching, or in a process or action in which students have been trained. Deficit views are divided into student and teacher factors. From this view, numerous studies indicate that a low level of English language competency of students is the major factor for non-verbal participation in EMI courses (Chen, 2003; Cheng, 2000; Davison & Trent, 2007; Erling & Hilgendorf, 2006; Flowerdew, 1998; Jackson, 2002, 2005; Maiworm & Wachtet, 2002; Morita, 2004; Tsui & Tollefson, 2007).

Many studies also showed similar results, where students with low English language competency did not find their learning experience effective (Kang & Park, 2004, 2005; Kang et al., 2007; Kim, 2009). Under this view, once a teacher has identified a student’s lack of English language skills, a typical solution would be to provide English language programs (Maiworm & Wachtet, 2002; Wachtet & Maiworm, 2008) to close this “deficit.” This perspective overlooks the fundamental causes of the lack of English language competency by attributing these deficiencies to individual students, families and communities. Therefore, solutions informed by the deficit model fail to deal with the problems within institutions or society that discourage the performance of certain students. The view also fails to acknowledge the relationships between students’ previous schooling practices and past learning experiences, and the socio-political factors that shape these efforts and its outcomes.

Secondly, a teacher’s deficit of language competency is blamed for student non-participation. Many studies suggest that a lecturer’s language incompetency prevents students’ full understanding in EMI courses (Chang, 2010; Kennedy, 2002). Professors’ limited language proficiency has raised concerns in EMI courses in various studies (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Horwitz & Young, 1991; Jackson, 2002, 2005),
especially when teaching students from Asian educational backgrounds (Byun et al., 2011; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Flowerdew & Miller, 1995; Kennedy, 2002; Kang et al., 2007; Kang & Park, 2004; Kim, 2008; Kim, 2006; Lee, 1999; Morita, 2000, 2004; Tsui, 1996). For instance, a study conducted by Davison and Trent (2007) at a Hong Kong University found that one of the major factors of non-verbal participation in EMI classes was the inadequate teaching skills of lecturers for whom English was not their native language. English language incompetency also includes pronunciation issues which frustrate students who experience difficulty to converse with their teachers in English. Due to weak English language competency, Chang’s (2010) study in a university in Taiwan, found that lecturers preferred to allow students to listen to pre-recorded lectures instead of attending class. These studies directly blame teachers who have insufficient English language proficiency for teaching, and who also fail to meet minimum expectation standards of tertiary courses including content coverage in EMI courses. However, it is unlikely that a native speakers’ English proficiency alone, without proper teaching and management skills would be fully sufficient to achieve desired learning outcomes.

Under the difference perspective, “individual differences” are characteristics or traits that differ between individual people. “Individual differences” focuses on broader dimensions that are applicable to the entire population and that discriminate between people (Snow, Corno, & Jackson, 1996). Airey and Linder (2006) found that lecturers from NESCs were less likely to interact with students in their classroom and with other colleagues; cover less teaching material (Kalssen & Gaaff, 2001; Vinke, Snipple, & Jochems, 1998); possess poor improvisational ability and exhibit minimum capabilities to lecture content clearly and accurately in the target language (Olsen & Huckin, 1990; Vinke, Snipple, & Jochems, 1998). These studies claim that to enable student verbal participation in English across EMI courses in HEIs, it is essential for pedagogical issues to be acknowledged and investigated (Davison & Trent, 2007).

The review of literature demonstrates that many complex factors are closely integrated within teaching contexts since the deficit and difference view both fail to recognize the reality of the whole situation: a learner and a teacher as part of a complex system of interacting forces. This complexity necessitates an integrated theoretical framework to achieve desired learning outcomes in EMI classes in order to link individual and social aspects of learning in EMI courses including students’ perceptions, prior learning experience, perceptions of professors, in addition to broader external factors including, departmental, institutional, political and community pressures. This paper argues that with any attempt to improve the quality of learning and verbal participation in EMI classes, it is necessary to examine the education system as a whole, rather than looking at each micro factor in isolation.
5. RESEARCH METHODS

This case study is a sub-set of a larger research project, and consists of a variety of mixed research methods including the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data. The “case study” method is recognized as being ethnographically rich, affording access to the subjective reality of peoples experiences and useful in ways beyond the scope of theories and statistics (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). Data collection methods included focus group interviews for both students and professors, peer-observations and surveys of students as well as official documents from the university. Multiple research methods capitalize on the strengths of each approach and offset their different shortcomings, providing more comprehensive insights into the study questions and going beyond the limitation of any single approach (Dörnyei, 2007; Tashakkor & Teddlie, 1998). Admittedly, mixed methods with a case study approach is time consuming and can yield large amounts of information, which is both highly subjective and difficult to categorize. Despite these drawbacks, the advantages of discovering the otherwise unheard and unimagined remains the basis of the inclusion of a case study approach for this research.

5.1. The Research Setting

The research setting is at one of Korea’s major national universities (A University, hereafter), consisting of approximately 25,000 undergraduate and 6,000 postgraduate students. The introduction of EMI courses was a strongly motivated effort to improve the “degree of internationalization” ranking for A University. In the absence of EMI courses, A University’s ranking decreased rapidly; therefore it was necessary to offer EMI courses for the sake of these measurements. Subsequently, since 2008, A University has introduced a limited number of EMI courses into its curriculum, which have gradually increased in number each year. Under such a policy for boosting EMI courses, the number of EMI classes for undergraduate students has increased from 95 in 2008 to 496 in 2012 (A University document, 2013).

Moreover, since 2010, newly recruited professors have been required to sign contracts with a mandatory requirement of teaching EMI courses in at least one subject per semester. Despite the increasing number of EMI courses, there are no English support programs provided neither for students nor professors. There are no minimum English language requirements to enroll into EMI courses and students are able to enroll in any EMI course without any prior English language knowledge. The professors can only stipulate the difficulty of the course in the unit of study outline which informs students that they should have an above intermediate level of English language skills in order to succeed in the EMI class.
5.2. Characteristics of Participants in the Study

This study included seven EMI courses across ten professors who volunteered for the study. While there were a total of ten professors in the focus group discussions, only the courses of five professors (seven classes) who conducted the survey with their students have been included. Table 1 below shows a brief overview of the participating classes and teaching styles, followed by a short introduction to each class to provide context to the study.

Of the ten participating professors, nine received their higher degrees in an English speaking country (ESC) and one professor obtained his higher degree in Korea. Of the seven EMI courses, only Course D, which consisted of three classes, was a compulsory core subject for first year students. The remaining courses were elective units.

• Course A: “Introduction to Politics” – Course A’s professor has been teaching for ten years and this was his third EMI class. The students came from a variety of disciplines, from second year to fourth year.
• Course B: “Introduction to Sociology” – Course B’s professor has been teaching for more than twenty years and has been teaching EMI classes for three years. In previous years, his average class size was roughly thirty students, however this semester saw his class size increase to fifty students. The students came from a variety of disciplines, from second year to fourth year.
• Course C: “International Political Economy” – Course C’s professor has been teaching for three years, and this was his first EMI class. His class was composed of second to fourth year students from various disciplines.
• Course D: “Cross-cultural Communication Strategy” – Course D’s professor has been teaching in an ESC for many years. This was his first experience teaching Korean students in English as this was his first year in Korea. He teaches the same subject to three different classes of first year students, none of whom have any experience learning in English.
• Course E: “Psychology” – Course E’s professor has teaching experience in excess of twenty years, having taught in English for three years. His class size was small, consisting of second year to fourth year psychology students. Due to the small class size, class observations were not conducted for this study.
TABLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course type</th>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Teaching style</th>
<th>Students N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Course A (elective)</td>
<td>Introduction to Politics</td>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course B (elective)</td>
<td>Introduction to Sociology</td>
<td>Student presentation</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course C (elective)</td>
<td>International Political Economy</td>
<td>Lecture/presentation</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course D (core)</td>
<td>Cross-cultural Communication</td>
<td>Lecture, discussion, &amp; mini-presentation</td>
<td>26, 30, 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course E (elective)</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Lecture &amp; seminar</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3. Procedure

Focus group interviews were conducted with participating professors from which a survey questionnaire was subsequently developed for the students. The survey questionnaires were administered distributed and collected by each respective professor at the end of a class session and took approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. In total, 251 questionnaires were distributed amongst seven classes, with 194 (77.3%) surveys returned. This was followed by focus group interviews with students and peer-observations.

5.3.1. Surveys

The survey contained three parts (see APPENDIX): the first part focused on student learning activities in their respective classes, for example, the number of hours spent preparing for EMI classes, reactions towards courses and any difficulties encountered. The second part focused on the impact of English as a MOI on learning the subject contents and English language proficiency. The students were asked about their level of comprehension of, and satisfaction with the EMI classes on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). The last part of the survey focused on the reasons for enrolling in EMI classes, and whether they had taken any extra-curricular activities in order to improve their English language skills. At the end of the questionnaire, open-ended questions were asked to invite extra comments and reflections about EMI courses including personal feelings about the EMI class and any desires for future EMI learning.

5.3.2. Interviews

Preceding the focus group interviews, students were informed of the rationale of the study. Upon agreeing to participation in the study, students completed a form which
contained open-ended questions designed to prepare participants to reflect on their own learning experiences, and to recall previous learning situations in order to stimulate the group discussion. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, characterized by the use of an interview guide (Bernard, 2002). Questions sought to elicit information on the attitudes and feelings of students studying in English; the difficulties they encountered; the ways in which they dealt with these problems; their feelings and experiences regarding different types of classroom participation; and their expectations of the demands placed upon them in EMI courses.

Focus group interviews with professors met fortnightly and semi-structured interviews were conducted over two to three hours. Questions addressed the professors’ thoughts and perceptions about the EMI course; their impressions of students’ strengths and weaknesses with respect to speaking in different classroom situations; their expectations about the role of students and professors in their courses; and the strategies teachers used to encourage students to participate in EMI classes.

5.3.3. Peer observation

For the peer-observations, four professors of participating classes provided their lecture schedules and were subsequently informed of the intended times and days for their class observations. The observation was unstructured due to the exploratory nature of the study; the purpose of which was to provide an orientation to the teaching context and to focus and further define the problems and issues associated with verbal participation and learning in EMI classes. Each course was observed three times by the researcher, and once by the peers (focus group members observed each other’s class at least once).

5.4. Analytic Framework

The analytical framework for the qualitative data collected was one of discourse analysis, as pioneered by Foucault (1976). Discourse analysis relies upon understanding the details of the discursive fields as indicative of the power and knowledge structures in a society by how they are both produced and maintained. That is, the language which people use to express themselves, and to explain situations which offer insight into the subjectivities of the speakers. As the interviews took place within an academic institution, it is possible that the interviewees do not always answer with honesty, offering general discourses in place of genuine beliefs or experiences. In a class-conscious society, any utterance situates the speaker within a particular stratum of the academic community. Answers may possibly be modified to project a status which the interviewee regards himself/herself as holding, or aspires to hold. This does not mean that these answers should be discounted or analyzed.
for relative integrity, but they should be seen in terms of discourses of convenience, preservation and expediency. The awareness of the individual in his/her use of discourse is not the subject of this study and would prove difficult, if not impossible, to measure.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from professors’ focus group interviews were integrated with the information collected from class observations. Class observations were focused on student’s behaviour, for instance, their interactions in group activities, the way in which they responded to questions, and if students were interested or uninterested, involved or passive, clear or confused.

6.1. Survey Results

The results indicate the existence of four possible reasons for explaining non-verbal participation in class.

6.1.1. Lack of knowledge and understanding of subject content

Overall, the survey revealed students’ self-reported comprehension levels from their classes as very disappointing. As indicated below in Table 2, from 194 respondents, very few (6%) indicated that they were able to understand more than 80 percent of the lecture, and only 21 percent of the respondents felt that they were able to understand more than 70 per cent of the lecture in their EMI classes. Overall, more than half (54%) of respondents reported that they understood less than 60 percent of their EMI classes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 2</th>
<th>The Level of Overall Understanding of the EMI Lecture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of understanding</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 50%</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60%</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61-70%</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71-80%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80%+</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.1.2. Lack of English language skills

While some students were satisfied with their achievement in some English language skills such as small group discussion skills, an even smaller proportion of students were satisfied with their comprehension skills. The survey (refer to Table 3) revealed that 55 per cent of students were satisfied or very satisfied with small group discussion skills following EMI classes. However only 32 per cent of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with their comprehension skills. This raises further questions about the level of participation of small group discussions, if in fact only a low level of participants (32%) reported satisfaction of their comprehension skills. Despite the goal of EMI classes to improve communication skills in English, the data reveals that the classes failed to achieve the desired learning outcomes in spoken English (small group discussion) as only just above half (55%) of respondents were satisfied in this area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 3</th>
<th>Satisfaction of Skills in the EMI Courses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very dissatisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>n 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>n 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject knowledge</td>
<td>n 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General knowledge</td>
<td>n 34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small group discussion</td>
<td>n 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>n 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>n 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>n 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 6.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.1.3. Lack of motivation

In terms of student enrolment, Table 4 shows that 35 per cent of respondents (first year students in Course D) enrolled in the course because it was a compulsory unit. However, the combined proportion of participants in this study who reported that they enrolled into EMI classes to “improve English” (24%) and because they were “interested in the subject” (16%), was greater than the respondents who enrolled the EMI course because of the compulsory nature of the subject. The reasons for enrolment can be seen as a proxy for the
level of motivation that the students have toward the EMI classes, however it was difficult to ascertain the specific relationship between reasons for enrolment and level of class participation.

### TABLE 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for Enrolling in the EMI Course</th>
<th>Improve English</th>
<th>Core-subject</th>
<th>Recommended by others</th>
<th>Interests in the subject</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>No response</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.1.4. Levels of satisfaction

In Course B, 57 per cent of respondents indicated that they were “satisfied” \((n = 13, 46\% )\) or “very satisfied” \((n = 3, 11\% )\) (Table 5). In this course, 60 percent of respondents had previously attended EMI courses in their prior studies (Table 6). Moreover, this was the fourth EMI course for 20 per cent of the respondents in Course B. Further, 87 percent of the respondents in Course B, C, and E had joined English clubs (student-organized groups to practice English), had overseas experiences or had taken part in extra-curricular activities to improve their English (Table 7). Overall, the findings show that respondents with some degree of prior English language learning or experience were more likely to report their courses as satisfactory.

### TABLE 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Satisfaction</th>
<th>Course A</th>
<th>Course B</th>
<th>Course C</th>
<th>Course D</th>
<th>Course E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very dissatisfied</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EMI enrollment</th>
<th>Course A</th>
<th>Course B</th>
<th>Course C</th>
<th>Course D</th>
<th>Course E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>58.8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>8</td>
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6.2. Results of Focus Group Interviews with Students

Focus group interviews with students provided further insights into student experiences. Some students from Course D expressed great surprise upon realization that the entire class was conducted in English:

When I attended the first class, I was really shocked as the professor only spoke English, demanded us to speak English in the class, and we were not allowed to speak Korean. (Student 5)

Such statements indicate that students were not expecting to learn the subject content in English, and it was a shocking experience for them. Further, many students were confused with the instructions given in English by the professor, with one student saying:

The professor assigned us homework, but it seems that everyone speaks differently. So I hope when she give us homework or important notices, she speaks in Korean. (Student 2)

Students indicated that they had to actively check or ask their peers in order to understand what professors were asking of them:

If I am uncertain about what I have heard in the class, I will ask the person next to me to clarify. Sometimes, they tell me the wrong things as they themselves did not fully understand. At other times, my peers ask me for clarification about instructions, and when I answer, other peers tell me that I was wrong. This causes a lot of embarrassment. (Student 3)

These students confirmed the findings from studies which attribute the major factors for non-verbal participation in EMI courses to the incomprehensibility of lecturers who have a
low level of English language competency (e.g., Davison & Trent, 2007; Erling & Hilgendorf, 2006; Maiworm & Wachter, 2002; Morita, 2004; Tsui & Tollefson, 2007) which supports the “deficit” perspective of the students.

On the other hand, some students also reported that they were happy with the class, owing to the opportunities provided for English-based discussions. They also enjoyed the presentations in the class, even developing a sense of pride and achievement:

I like this class, because we can talk and discuss in English. We can also present in English as well. (Student 4)

When I spoke to my friends about this class…I tell them we study in English; speaking, presentations and assignment, everything in English…they seemed to envy me. (Student 7)

These statements highlight that students with different levels of English competency have dichotomous EMI class experiences; where learning difficulties can cause frustrations for some, other students are capable of finding enjoyment in the same environment. These findings show that the deficit perspective overlooks the fundamental causes for the lack of verbal participation of students by localizing the problems within individual students themselves (Maiworm & Wachter, 2002; Wachter & Maiworm, 2008) rather than the surrounding institution system.

Many participants reported that they often did not understand the English or the contents of the lecture given by their professor. Further, many more mentioned that the designated textbook was very difficult to read and understand. One student said:

…the textbook was very hard to read and was not easy to understand. One page of reading took a long time to read because I spent a lot of time finding the Korean meaning of words in the dictionary. (Student 10)

The statement also confirmed the prevalent discourse which blames the students’ weak comprehension skills for non-verbal participation in classes (Chen, 2003; Cheng, 2000; Davison & Trent, 2007; Kalssen & Gaaff, 2001; Vinke, Snippe, & Jochems, 1998):

We just sat there and listened to the lecture. We were busy copying the notes from the lecture slides. Most of the time, we didn’t understand the lecture, but I think it was also listening practice in English as well. (Student 9)

One cannot expect any interaction or meaningful discussion during class if students fail
to understand the content of the lectures given. This is directly linked to students’ low level of English competency, leading to the failure of meaningful reading or understanding of prescribed readings, ultimately leading to a failure of understanding in the class.

6.3. Results of Peer Observations and Focus Group Interviews

Peer observations provided further insights into contributing factors affecting verbal participation in EMI classes. The observations revealed that the type of pedagogy and learning activities are significant factors in fostering active communication. EMI classes were conducted using three distinct teaching methods: lecture-centered, presentation-centered and a combination of lectures, presentations and discussions. The lecture-centered course describes a structure where the professor presented his lecture slides with detailed lecture content written within. The slides were comprehensive, being filled with text and images with the intention of aiding student understanding. The professor focused on delivering the prepared lecture while the students were fully occupied taking notes from the screen. There was no interaction and no questions asked between the students and lecturer during the seventy-minute lecture. In this type of teaching context, there is little chance to expect any interactions between the professor and students as well as between students themselves. During the interview, in response to the question, “How do you know whether your students have understood the lecture?” the lecturer replied:

I never know about student responses…I have no time to check whether students have understood me, I am busy reading out my prepared lecture notes without making any mistakes. (Professor A)

For the presentation-centered class, each class commenced with group presentations lasting sixty minutes, with each student presenting for about twenty minutes. The presentations were well prepared and the presenters seemed satisfied with their performances. However, despite presenters putting much effort into the presentation, the audience was largely not engaged in the presentation. At the beginning of the presentation, the class was alert and exhibited interest; however, the audience appeared to lose attention as the presentation progressed. The audience seemed to be concentrating on everything other than the presentation; reading books, writing personal notes, talking with their peers and being distracted by their mobile phones. After the presentation, the presenters invited questions from the class, however no questions were raised. Questions were finally asked following persistence from the professor; however, the questions were simplistic and superficial. With no further questions asked, the class concluded and no feedback was given to the presenters by the professor or students. During the focus-group interviews, this professor
was very proud of his class, stating that the class was very popular amongst students, however he admits:

One of the difficulties is giving useful feedback and responses in English. If the presentation involves critical theoretical debates, the problems are worse [due to poor English skills]. (Professor K)

The professor’s statement supports the discourse of the deficiency of professors’ English language proficiency, found in a variety of studies (Chang, 2009; Davison & Trent, 2007; Kang et al., 2007). Another professor highlighted the various levels of English proficiency amongst students which impacted the level of individual student learning, saying:

…generally, leading the class with group presentations seemed successful but one of the problems is the wide gap in English language expression ability amongst students. (Professor K)

A professor also commented:

They [students] are more interested in increasing English speaking opportunities….They usually join the course with their own purpose and even if they do not speak English well, then they try to express their ideas whenever they have the chance. (Professor N)

These statements suggest that many students, in light of the absence of any university language support programs, actively sought to improve their English through these EMI courses.

The class which was a combination of a brief lecture, small group discussions, large group discussion and mini presentations had a seating arrangement different to the rest of the classes observed. Students were seated in a semi-circle, meaning all class members could see each other. The class commenced with a revision of the previous class. The professor asked a series of questions and students discussed their answers with the person next to them, and students presented their answers to the whole class. After two students presented their answers, the professor started the lecture and after fifteen minutes, the professor provided several questions on a lecture slide and assigned each question to pre-organized small groups. Each group was instructed to discuss their assigned question in Korean for two minutes and in English for eight minutes. After the group discussion, each group presented their answers to the class and a class discussion commenced. It appeared that the class was very active and everyone seemed to enjoy the learning activities. It was
clear, however that not all students were actively involved in the group discussion. Some students appeared anxious and distressed, and a number of students did not participate in the group discussions at all, even in Korean. After each group leader presented their group’s answer, a class discussion began, however some students seemed to try to avoid being questioned by avoiding eye contact with the professor. While the class appeared to provide good opportunities for students to actively participate in the class, the class structure seemed more beneficial to students who already possessed sufficient English language skills. In this class, students who did not possess sufficient language skills were less likely to participate in class activities.

6.4. Discussion

The findings reveal that various factors are closely linked to achieving desired learning outcomes in EMI classes. Student factors, teacher factors, classroom factors, as well as institutional factors are closely linked to one another and influence the quality of learning in EMI classes. In the lecture-centered class, Course A, the professor prescribed no learning activities for students, when some opportunity for class discussion or questions may have been beneficial to improve student learning. There was little opportunity for interaction between students and the professor. In this type of teaching context, it is not possible to expect students to improve communication skills in English, except perhaps for listening skills. Improving overall communication skills in English would be difficult in this class regardless of a student’s existing level of English language competency. The presentation-centered classes, Courses B and C were not very different from the lecture-centered class, in that there was limited or no opportunities for class interaction, and where there was an opportunity for student engagement, no meaningful questions were asked. Lack of English language competency in students or lack of content knowledge undermined any opportunity for questions and discussions in classes. In this context, it was difficult for students to achieve verbal communication skills. Students of Course D were required to actively participate in discussions in English, regardless of the level of their English skills. Although the class had various levels and stages of communication activities to stimulate student engagement, they had differing levels of successful student participation and engagement. Course E did not participate in class observation, due to the small sample size of the class.

The systems model is useful in explaining the non-participation or low verbal participation in the EMI classes in this study. The systems model suggests that in order to improve verbal communication in English, equilibrium must take place. That is, the teacher’s perceptions of learning activities required must match students’ expectations of the class, taking into consideration students’ prior knowledge and the overall learning
context. However, this study found that majority of courses failed to provide adequate verbal communication activities for the class, suggesting that the professors did not perceive a need for these activities to achieve student learning. For these professors, preparing and providing language activities for the class are implausible, as they are not trained as language professionals. As such their teaching method for EMI classes simply involves delivering the prescribed course content in English, without implementing additional activities to overcome learning difficulties in a foreign language.

This case study reveals how a considerable mismatch appears to exist between a professor’s desire to achieve student learning, and the actual learning activities actually taking place in EMI classes. For these professors, improvement of students’ communication skills in English while learning subject content is a primary goal. However, disequilibrium exists between the professors’ desired learning outcomes and actual learning activities for students due to various factors interacting with student learning. One of the outstanding factors of the disequilibrium is the fact the professors are not formally trained as language teachers.

This disequilibrium leads to non-existent or low verbal class participation. If students are not learning, the systemic approach considers the problem within its complete context, rather than pointing the blame on factors with a single locus (e.g., lack of English language or study skills). Reid (1987) suggests that rhetoric, resources, technology and the social structure of institutions needs to be mutually supportive, however the direction of the rhetoric and application in the social structure supporting EMI courses is complex.

The rhetoric of the Korean government strongly promotes and encourages EMI courses to HEIs in Korea in order to improve English language competency for students. However, the measurement criterion focuses on quantitative results, rather than qualitative achievements, making it difficult to achieve its intended goal. Disequilibrium exists in the quantitative measurement of “degree of internationalization” and the qualitative goals of students and professors in EMI courses. Quantitative measurements by both government and rankings by major newspapers are one of the significant factors contributing to the poor quality of EMI courses. For individual HEIs, it is necessary to meet the measurement criteria in order to obtain government funding as well as to uphold and improve reputation. The evaluation criterion of both government and university rankings is the primary catalyst contributing to limited verbal participation and failing to achieve the desired learning outcomes of EMI courses.

7. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION OF THE SYSTEMS MODEL

This case study reveals complex interconnected forces contributing to the lack of verbal
participation in EMI classes. The university system neither sets a minimum English language capability requirement nor provides English language support programs for EMI courses, one of the contributing factors of non-participation. In contrast, the university administration strongly promotes and encourages increased numbers of EMI courses in individual faculties by providing various incentives for the departments as well as faculties who are able to successfully do so. This, in turn leads to faculties being pressured to offer EMI courses to meet the demands for university reputation and rankings, as well as to obtain higher remuneration at both the department and individual level.

Despite the Korean government’s aim of improving English language competency for their young citizens through these EMI courses, the measurement criterion set by government, which is strongly linked with financial incentives, is possibly the major factor for not achieving desired learning outcomes. Various learning theories, including the deficit and difference perspective may be useful to analyze, over the initial measurement indicators of the “degree of internationalization” in order to focus on qualitative achievement. Focusing on an assessment of the number of EMI courses offered, rather than assessments of the quality of the learning and teaching in EMI classes contributes to the low quality of learning outcomes in EMI courses in HEIs in Korea today.

Without changing the measurement systems of the government and university rankings, it is difficult to achieve desired goals of communication skills for students. Further, without examining all of the interconnected systems and subsystems surrounding the education system, continuous attribution of factors contributing to poor student learning by assigning blame to individual students and professors, and criticizing individual institutions is a meaningless and ineffective endeavor for improving the quality of EMI courses of HEIs in Korea.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the study provide for suggestions to help tertiary education systems attain and meet the Korean government’s aim for verbal English language proficiency amongst its citizens.

Central to this idea, the Korean governments “degree of internationalization” measure across its universities should consider the quality, rather than the quantity of EMI courses offered. The establishment of adequate quality control processes of the implementation and continuation of EMI courses at tertiary level should also be integrated into government policies to include cultural diversity and internationalization. The development and implementation of workshops for both students and teachers undertaking EMI courses would support the aim to increase verbal participation in class and thus overall EMI
learning outcomes. For EMI teachers, the provision of professional workshops to enhance EMI teaching strategies would be beneficial as effective English language ability does not necessarily correlate or translate to effective EMI teaching. For students, provision of prerequisite courses, including “English for Academic Purposes” should be made mandatory for potential and current EMI students. For Korean tertiary institutions, the careful selection of courses appropriate for EMI courses must be considered. The eminence of certain subjects may require deep understandings of Korean language, philosophy, thoughts and ideology, and teaching quality may be compromised if taught in the English language. Otherwise, EMI may severely restrict the rigorous exploration of academia and compromise the integrity of subject content learning.

9. LIMITATIONS AND CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

This study is limited by its small scale and limited sample data, as it considers only the Faculty of Social Science at A University. Despite the small scale, this study provides a deep understanding of the complicated and interacting factors which contribute to verbal participation in EMI courses at HEIs in Korea. Further studies should be conducted on multiple HEIs, multiple disciplines, and larger samples of students and professors who are learning and teaching in EMI courses across HEIs in Korea. In addition, the sample should include international students who are studying in EMI courses in HEIs to identify their experiences in a Korean university. Further research should examine the empirical costs and benefits of the implementation of English as a MOI at HEIs, with the main goal being to explore how much language competency is being acquired by students through EMI courses as well as how much subject content learning is being achieved.

REFERENCES


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**APPENDIX**

**Survey Questionnaire**

Dear students,

We would like to find out your experiences of English medium instruction classes in order to improve our teaching in future. Please answer each question without reservation, as your honest feedback will significantly help to improve EMI teaching for future students of EMI courses. Thank you, from professors of EMI courses.

1.1. In your EMI classes, please indicate your feelings of the necessity of the aspects of the class listed in the left hand column below. Chose only one from the right and write it in each category.
Why Students Don’t Participate in English Medium Instruction Classes...

1) Professor’s lecture ( )
2) Small group discussions ( )
3) Regular check ups for comprehension ( )
4) Report writing ( )
5) Presentations ( )
6) Literature review ( )
7) Exam ( )
8) Others (_______) ( )

1.2. From the above list, select the two most important aspects of EMI courses.
   a. ( ) b. ( )

2.1. Compared to classes conducted in Korean, how deeply was the subject content of your EMI class covered?
   a. Below 50%  b. 51-60%  c. 61-70%  d. 71-80%  e. 81-90%  f. 91-100%

3.1. On average, how many hours per week (to the nearest hour) do you spend studying for your EMI course? (i.e. preparation, reading, discussions outside of class time)
   a. 1hr or less  b. 2-3 hrs  c. 4-5hrs  d. 6-7 hrs  e. 8-9hrs  f. 10hrs or more

3.2. On average, how many hours per week (to the nearest hour) do you spend studying for your other courses (i.e. preparation, reading, discussions outside of class time)
   a. 1hr or less  b. 2-3 hrs  c. 4-5hrs  d. 6-7 hrs  e. 8-9hrs  f. 10hrs or more

4.1. How much of the subject content of EMI classes do you understand?
   a. less than 50%  b. 51-60%  c. 61-70%  d. 71-80%  e. 81% or more

5.1. To what degree have you acquired the skills listed in the left hand column below as a consequence of attending your EMI course? Make only one selection from the right hand column for each skill.
   1) Listening skills ( )
   2) Comprehension ( )
   3) Writing skills ( )
   4) Knowledge in majoring subject ( )
   5) Gained confidence in study ( )
   6) Increased general knowledge ( )
   7) Other benefit (_______) ( )
6.1. Have you ever taken any English exams such as TOEFL or TOEIC?
   a. Yes (  )   b. No (  )   c. Mock test (  )

6.2. If you answered “yes” in above question, what was your score? (  )

6.3. To improve your English, what kind of learning activities are you involved in?
   Please tick the appropriate activities below and state the numbers of months for which you have been involved.
   - Group study (   months)
   - Overseas study (   months)
   - Attending commercial English classes (   months)

7.1. This is your (  ) EMI course(s) taken.
   a. First    b. Second    c. Third    d. Fourth or more

8.1. Please indicate your feelings about this class. For each statement select only one answer form the right hand column.
   1) I felt uneasy around classmates whose English was good (  )
      a. not at all   b. a little
   2) The professors supported me when I spoke in class (  )
      c. somewhat   d. much
   3) How likely are you to recommend this class to others? (  )
      e. very much

9.1. This class a (  ) unit of study.
   a. Major elective   b. Major core   c. General elective

10.1. The reason for attending this class (select two, with (1) being the most influencing reason and (2) being a secondary factor).
   a. To improve English language competency (  )
   b. To improve daily English skills (  )
   c. Compulsory for the major (  )
   d. Recommended by others (  )
   e. Good teaching methods (  )
   f. Interest in the subject (  )
   g. Others (___________) (  )
11.1. To what extent have you achieved your above purposes?
   a. Not at all   b. A little   c. Somewhat   d. Much   e. Very much

12.1. Are planning to enroll in any EMI course in coming semester (if you are graduating this semester, take this as a hypothetical question)
   a. No   b. One subject   c. Two subjects   d. Three or more subjects

12.2. If you answered “No,” what is the main reason for this?

13.1. What was your grade last semester?
   a. Below 3.0   b. 3.1-3.3   c. 3.4-3.6   d. 3.7-3.9   e. 4.0-4.2   f. 4.3-4.5

14.1. Would you recommend this EMI course to others?
   a. No   b. Not likely   c. Most likely   d. Absolutely

If you don’t intend to recommend, what is the reason?

15.1. What suggestions/recommendations do you have to improve the quality of this class?

Applicable levels: All

Gyungsook Jane Lee
Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies
Chonnam National University
77 Yongbong-dong, Buk-gu
Gwangju 500-757, Korea
Phone: 062-530-5066
Fax: 062-530-1049
Email: janelee@jnu.ac.kr

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