

Rating English-Medium Instruction Degree Programs at Japanese Universities

Bernard Susser

Doshisha Women's College (Emeritus)

Reference Data:

Susser, B. (2017). Rating English-medium instruction degree programs at Japanese universities. In P. Clements, A. Krause, & H. Brown (Eds.). *Transformation in language education*. Tokyo: JALT.

Japanese universities' efforts to internationalize include the establishment of English-medium instruction degree programs (EMIDPs). However, questions have been raised about the qualifications of the faculty teaching in these programs and the teaching methods used. This study addresses the first question by comparing the syllabi of EMIDP courses to the instructor's training and research to evaluate the instructor's qualifications to teach each course. The syllabi were also examined to determine how each course was taught. The results show that about 5% of the courses are being taught by instructors teaching out of field, and that most courses use a student-centered pedagogy.

日本の大学の国際化への取り組みには、英語を教授媒介言語とした学位授与プログラム (EMIDP) の確立があります。しかし、これらのプログラムで指導教員の資格と使用されている教授法について疑問が提起されています。この研究では、EMIDP 授業のシラバスと担当教員のトレーニングおよび研究を比較して、各授業を教えるための教員の資格を評価することによって、最初の質問に答えます。また、各授業がどのように教えられているかを調べるためにシラバスが調査されました。結果は、授業の約5%は専門外の担当者で教えられていること、そしてほとんどの授業では学生中心の教授法が使用されていることを示しています。

One aspect of the internationalization of Japanese higher education has been the establishment of undergraduate English-medium instruction degree programs (EMIDPs) at many universities, often with government encouragement and financial support. While graduate programs taught in English have been in existence in Japan for many years, undergraduate programs have not been common until recently. A standard

definition of EMIDPs, also called English-taught programs (ETPs), is “HE [higher education] programs which use English exclusively as the language of instruction in countries where English is not the usual language of instruction in HE” (Bradford, 2015, p. 38). A definition specific to Japan is programs in which Japanese language ability is not a condition either for admission or graduation, in which registration for courses conducted in Japanese is not a requirement, and in which it is possible to obtain a degree by registering only for courses conducted in English (Shimauchi, 2012, p. 7; see also Shimauchi, 2016, pp. 10, 108-112). Such programs contribute to a university's internationalization directly by attracting international students and faculty and indirectly by providing an opportunity for the home students to improve their English language and cross-cultural communication skills. Many Japanese universities have English-medium instruction programs of various kinds and for various purposes (Brown & Lyobe, 2014). This paper deals only with EMIDPs, which are “relatively rare” at Japanese universities (Brown, 2016, p. 419).

Along with the enthusiasm accompanying the establishment of these programs, several problems concerning EMIDPs have been reported in the literature in areas such as language, culture, pedagogy, administration, and institutional issues (Bradford, 2016b; Susser, 2016b, pp. 6-10). Problems directly related to the present research fall mainly in the area of pedagogy. The first problem in this category is that both research on EMIDPs and the goals of the programs themselves sometimes conflate (a) English-medium instruction (EMI) as content-based language instruction for home students with (b) EMI courses in the disciplines that use English as a lingua franca for international (including both native and nonnative speakers of English) and home students studying together (e.g., Toh, 2016, pp. 116-117). This conflation is a serious problem because it subverts a main rationale for EMIDPs, which is to attract international students and provide the linguistic means for their education. As Smit (2010) argued, “English is thus chosen to make tertiary education possible, not to help students improve on their English” (p. 62). Further, EMIDPs that enroll mostly domestic students may have a significant portion of the curriculum devoted to English language teaching (Shimauchi, 2016, p. 149).

Susser: Rating English-Medium Instruction Degree Programs at Japanese Universities

A second problem in the area of pedagogy is that many researchers have cast doubt on the efficacy of EMI programs for learning content because of the “limited English proficiency of instructors and students, lack of discussion in class, and the pressure from using English” (Cho, 2012, p. 141). A third pedagogical problem in EMIDPs is that many content teachers do not see themselves as language teachers and become frustrated when the students seem not to have sufficient English language ability to follow their courses (e.g., Airey, 2012). This situation worsens when students enroll in a course to improve their English skills rather than to learn about the subject matter.

A fourth problem concerns the qualifications of the instructors. There have been reports in the literature that some courses in EMIDPs have been assigned to faculty who are capable of teaching in English but are not formally qualified to teach the discipline of the assigned course (e.g., Bradford, 2016a, p. 437; Brown, 2017, pp. 123-124; see also Susser, 2016b, p. 3 for other citations). This out-of-field teaching can be seen as violating the university’s obligation to its students as well as adversely affecting the quality of education the university offers. The opposite situation, in which a discipline-qualified instructor’s English language ability is weak, is also a frequently cited problem (e.g., Hu & Lei, 2014, p. 560). This is complicated by the fact that “lecturers who are highly proficient in English do not necessarily make good lecturers unless they make frequent use of communication-enhancing pragmatic strategies” (Björkman, 2010, p. 87).

Finally, the fifth problem raised in the literature is pedagogical style and course format. It is a common problem for EMI programs in general that local instructors’ teaching styles do not meet international students’ expectations (e.g., Bradford, 2015, pp. 81-83, 218, 224; Shimauchi, 2016, pp. 186-187; Tsuneyoshi, 2005, pp. 79-81). Specifically, pedagogy based on formal lectures is likely to disappoint students used to more interactive forms of instruction. In addition, research on instructional methods in many different situations tends to favor student-centered learning over lectures (e.g., Macaro, 2015, pp. 6-7). Further, experts have argued that active student participation rather than lectures is especially important in classes made up of students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Leask, 2008, p. 21; Leask & Wallace, 2011, p. 31; Wilkinson, 2013, p. 15).

The present study builds on the results of a pilot study (Susser, 2016a) to focus on the last two of these problems: questions about the qualifications of some EMIDP faculty and issues of instructional style and course format. In contrast to previous studies that have examined in depth a comparatively small number of Japanese EMI programs of various types, including EMIDPs (e.g., Bradford, 2015; Brown, 2014, 2017; Ng, 2017), the present study is inclusive in the sense that a large number of syllabus course descriptions from all EMIDPs that met certain criteria (explained below) were examined with respect

to faculty qualifications and course format. Specifically, the two research questions were (a) whether the instructor was formally qualified to teach a particular course, and (b) whether the course was taught with a student-centered pedagogy. In the discussion section, I explain the significance of the results and note how they must be qualified by the limitations of my research method. The conclusion suggests that this is an important topic on which more research is needed.

Data Collection and Analysis

The first step in the research process was to find the EMIDPs in Japan. Several Internet sites, such as the *Global 30* site (<http://www.uni.international.mext.go.jp/>) and the *Univ. In Japan* online database (<http://univinjapan.com/>), provide lists of EMIDPs (see Susser, 2016b, for a complete list of sites). Using these lists, I compiled a master list of programs and then applied the following criteria to produce the final list:

1. The program was undergraduate, leading to a bachelor’s degree or equivalent.
2. There was a specific statement that students can obtain sufficient credits for graduation by taking only courses offered in English.
3. The program started no later than April 2014; newer programs were excluded because sufficient data for analysis were not available.
4. STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) programs were excluded because I do not have the qualifications to evaluate courses in such programs.

Further, certain types of programs were excluded:

- programs at international universities, where the entire university functions in English or bilingually,
- programs that aim to produce bilingual graduates, and
- programs in which “most” but not all of the program’s courses are offered in English.

This selection process resulted in a list of 45 programs at 17 universities. The data for one program were not available, so the analysis was conducted on 44 programs at 16 universities—most of which are among Japan’s leading institutions (complete list in Susser, 2016b). By comparison, Ota and Horiuchi (2016, p. 95), using different selection criteria, found 39 programs at 20 universities.

The analysis consisted of examining online course syllabi and the instructors’ academic qualifications to determine (a) if the instructor was formally qualified to teach that par-

ticular course, and (b) how it was taught. As Table 1 shows, I examined 896 course syllabi. Most of these were 1st- through 3rd-year content courses in the disciplines; I excluded language and other skills courses, seminars, workshops, internships, and so forth. I then compared the course content with the instructor's academic degrees, other qualifications, and publications by searching the university's faculty database, supplemented by Internet searches as needed. If the instructor's academic training and research topics were not related to the discipline of the course, the instructor was judged to be teaching out of field, defined as "teachers assigned to teach subjects which do not match their training or education" (Ingersoll, 2003, p. 5). (This does not mean that these instructors were not qualified to teach at the university level. In fact, all of them held advanced degrees, mostly doctorates; all but one had published academic work; and all of them were teaching other courses in disciplines that matched their training.)

The answer to the first research question, if the instructor was formally qualified to teach a particular course, is shown in Table 1. Of the 853 courses whose instructor's qualifications I was able to check, 39 or 4.35% were being taught by instructors teaching out of field. For example, instructors with advanced degrees and publications in teaching English to speakers of other languages were teaching courses in unrelated fields such as business administration.

Table 1. Evaluation of Syllabi (N = 896) and Instructors (N = 572) of Courses in EMIDPs

Item	Number	Percent
Courses taught by a qualified instructor	814	90.85
Courses taught by an out-of-field instructor	39	4.35
Courses for which instructor's qualifications could not be checked	43	4.80
Courses with student-centered pedagogy	630	70.31
Lecture-style courses	231	25.78
Courses whose pedagogy could not be determined	35	3.91

Note. EMIDP = English-medium instruction degree programs.

Another aspect of instructors' qualifications in EMIDPs is English language ability. Of the 572 instructors teaching the courses studied in this research, I was able to check the

backgrounds of only 429 (75%). Most of these, including the native speakers of English, had undergraduate degrees, graduate degrees, or both from universities in English-speaking countries and had authored academic papers in English. However, "the ability to read widely and write at length in a second language does not necessarily transfer to effectively explaining key concepts to students in such a way as to make the lectures comprehensible" (Barnard, 2014, p. 13). Students in many EMI contexts have complained that even though their local professors had studied overseas in Anglophone countries, their classes consisted of "PowerPoint English," in which the instructors simply read off their presentation slides (Kim, 2016, p. 128). In the end, there was no way for me to evaluate the construct of English language ability with any accuracy.

The second research question looked at whether the course was taught with a student-centered pedagogy. Student-centered learning includes three elements: students have a degree of choice in their education, students learn actively rather than passively, and there is a "shift in the **power relationship** between the student and the teacher" (O'Neill & McMahon, 2005, p. 29). The implication is that discussion and other forms of active learning are preferable to lectures. Table 1 shows that, of the 861 courses whose instructional style and course format could be determined from the course syllabus, 25.78% were being taught as lectures. This result, however, is based on very rough data. To determine how these courses were taught, I looked for specific statements in the course syllabus about the pedagogy. I also checked the weekly schedule to see if any time was allotted for discussion, presentations, and so forth. Another useful indicator was the statement about grading: In some cases, a specific percentage of the final grade was allotted to discussion or presentations. Unfortunately, there were problems. Many universities apply a standard format label to each course, such as *lecture* or *seminar*. However, these categories often were of little help in determining how the class actually was taught. Another problem was templates. Many universities have their instructors write their online course descriptions using a template, which sometimes seemed to disguise how the course was taught in practice. Finally, there were outright contradictions: There might be a specific statement in the course description that discussion was emphasized but the grade was based entirely on tests or term papers.

Discussion

The first research question was whether the instructor was formally qualified to teach a particular course. The answer is that slightly under 5% of the courses whose instructors' qualifications I was able to check were being taught by instructors who were not formally qualified to teach the subject of the course. Whether this is a large or insignificant

Susser: Rating English-Medium Instruction Degree Programs at Japanese Universities

percentage may depend on one's opinion, but there are three points to keep in mind. First, of course, are the limitations to my research method. The data I used were often indirect and sometimes incomplete. Further, there were no additional raters to confirm or dispute my evaluations, so the judgment of whether an instructor was qualified to teach a given course was strictly my own. Second, I could not check the instructors' qualifications for 43 courses, a number greater than the 39 courses I determined were being taught by out-of-field instructors. The very fact that searches of such sites as *CiNii*, *Google Scholar*, and *Research Map* yielded no information about those instructors suggests that there are some unqualified people in this group.

The third point is that there was considerable variation among the 16 universities studied in the number of classes taught by instructors teaching out of field. Five universities had no courses taught by instructors not qualified to teach the course's subject matter. On the other hand, four other universities had 10% or more courses taught by instructors teaching out of field; two of these had more than 13% of courses taught in this way (see Appendix). This suggests that in some cases there may be problems on the administrative side of the EMIDPs, an issue that appears frequently in the literature (e.g., Breaden, 2013; Toh, 2016). For example, administrators (and faculty in administrative positions) may prioritize a presumed ability to teach in English over formal discipline qualifications in assigning instructors to classes.

The second research question was whether the course was taught with a student-centered pedagogy. The answer is that 25.78% of the classes are being taught primarily as lectures. This compares favorably to the United States, where 50.6% of the faculty rely heavily on lectures (Eagan et al., 2014, p. 6), and it is likely that the percentage is higher in other parts of the world. On the other hand, even 25.78% lecture-style classes may be too many, considering that the research cited above showed that student-centered instructional methods are best for the special conditions of the multicultural and multilingual EMIDP classroom. In any case, the analysis of the pedagogy was subject to the same limitations that affected the answer to the first research question.

Conclusion

This research suggests that despite some claims in the literature, there is no epidemic of teaching out of field in Japan's EMIDPs, although it seems to be more common at some universities than others. Likewise, lecture-style pedagogy is apparently not as common as the stereotypes of Japanese academic practice imply, although my analysis, based on statements in course syllabi rather than class visitations, cannot be definitive. Given the results presented above, the most that can be said is that EMIDPs at Japanese universi-

ties are operating reasonably successfully on the two parameters studied here. However, there are many other factors contributing to educational quality that need to be researched, such as the English language ability of both instructors and students. Further, more reliable research results might be obtained by combining the text analysis method used here with school visitations and in-depth interviews of stakeholders. In addition, the scope of the research should be expanded to include the STEM and other EMIDPs excluded here, and possibly other types of EMI programs.

Bio Data

Bernard Susser is professor emeritus of Doshisha Women's College and has published research on second-language writing instruction, CALL, content-based language instruction, and English-medium instruction. <bernsusser@gmail.com>

References

- Airey, J. (2012). "I don't teach language": The linguistic attitudes of physics lecturers in Sweden. *AILA Review*, 25, 64-79. <https://doi.org/10.1075/aila.25.05air>
- Barnard, R. (2014). English medium instruction in Asian universities: Some concerns and a suggested approach to dual-medium instruction. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 4(1), 10-22. <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v4i1.597>
- Björkman, B. (2010). So you think you can ELF: English as a lingua franca as the medium of instruction. *Hermes*, 45, 77-96.
- Bradford, A. (2015). *Internationalization policy at the genba: Exploring the implementation of social science English-taught undergraduate degree programs in three Japanese universities* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). The George Washington University, Washington DC. Retrieved from PQDT Open. <http://pqdtopen.proquest.com/doc/1668131342.html?FMT=AI>
- Bradford, A. (2016a). Teaching content through the medium of English: Faculty perspectives. In P. Clements, A. Krause, & H. Brown (Eds.), *Focus on the learner* (pp. 433-438). Tokyo: JALT.
- Bradford, A. (2016b). Toward a typology of implementation challenges facing English-medium instruction in higher education: Evidence from Japan. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 20(4), 339-356. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315316647165>
- Breaden, J. (2013). *The organisational dynamics of university reform in Japan: International inside out*. Oxon, England: Routledge.
- Brown, H. (2014). Contextual factors driving the growth of undergraduate English-medium instruction programs at universities in Japan. *The Asian Journal of Applied Linguistics* 1(1), 50-63.

Susser: Rating English-Medium Instruction Degree Programs at Japanese Universities

- Brown, H. (2016). English-medium instruction in Japan: Discussing implications for language teaching. In P. Clements, A. Krause, & H. Brown (Eds.), *Focus on the learner* (pp. 419-425). Tokyo: JALT.
- Brown, H. (2017). Investigating the implementation and development of undergraduate English-medium instruction programs in Japan: Facilitating and hindering factors. *Asian EFL Journal Quarterly*, 19, 99-135.
- Brown, H., & Iyobe, B. (2014). The growth of English medium instruction in Japan. In N. Sonda & A. Krause (Eds.), *JALT2013 Conference Proceedings* (pp. 9-19). Tokyo: JALT.
- 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, 135-163.
- Eagan, K., Stolzenberg, E. B., Lozano, J. B., Aragon, M. C., Suchard, M. R., & Hurtado, S. (2014). *Undergraduate teaching faculty: The 2013–2014 HERI Faculty Survey*. Retrieved from <http://www.heri.ucla.edu/monographs/HERI-FAC2014-monograph-expanded.pdf>
- Hu, G., & Lei, J. (2014). English-medium instruction in Chinese higher education: A case study. *Higher Education*, 67, 551-567. <https://doi.org.10.1007/s10734-013-9661-5>
- Ingersoll, R. M. (2003). *Out-of-field teaching and the limits of teacher policy* (Document No. R-03-5). Retrieved from <http://www.education.uw.edu/ctp/sites/default/files/ctpmail/PDFs/LimitsPolicy-RI-09-2003.pdf>
- Kim, S. K. (2016). English is for dummies: Linguistic contradictions at an international college in South Korea. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 46, 116-135. <https://doi.org.10.1080/03057925.2014.922409>
- Leask, B. (2008). Internationalisation, globalisation and curriculum innovation. In M. Hellstén & A. Reid (Eds.), *Researching international pedagogies: Sustainable practice for teaching and learning in higher education* (pp. 9-26). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.
- Leask, B., & Wallace, J. (2011). *Good practice report: Learning and teaching across cultures*. Retrieved from http://www.olt.gov.au/system/files/resources/GPR_Learning_and_Teaching_Across_Cultures_Leask_2011.pdf
- Macaro, E. (2015). English medium instruction: Time to start asking some difficult questions. *Modern English Teacher*, 24(2), 4-7.
- Ng, P. C. L. (2017). English-medium instruction in Japanese universities: Policy implementation and constraints. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 18, 57-67. <https://doi.org.10.1080/14664208.2016.1204053>
- O'Neill, G., & McMahon, T. (2005). Student-centred learning: What does it mean for students and lecturers? In: G. O'Neill, S. Moore, & B. McMullin (Eds.), *Emerging issues in the practice of university learning and teaching* (pp. 27-36). Dublin, Ireland: AISHE.
- Ota, H., & Horiuchi, K. (2016). Measuring the accessibility of study in Japan utilizing international admissions procedures of English-taught degree programs. *Higher Education Forum*, 13, 91-107.
- Shimauchi, S. (2012). Nihon ni okeru koutou kyouiku no kokusaika to "Eigo puroguramu" ni kansuru kenkyuu [Research on internationalization of higher education and EMIDP (English Medium Instruction Degree Programs) in Japan]. *Kokusai Kyouiku*, 18, 1-17.
- Shimauchi, S. (2016). *Higashi Ajia ni okeru ryuugakusei idou no paradaimu tenkan: Daigaku kokusaika to "Eigo puroguramu" no Nikkan hikaku* [Paradigm shift on international student mobility in East Asia: Comparative analysis on internationalization of higher education and English-medium degree programs in Japan and South Korea]. Tokyo: Toshindo.
- Smit, U. (2010). Conceptualising English as a lingua franca (ELF) as a tertiary classroom language. *Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics*, 39, 59-74. <https://doi.org.10.5774/39-0-4>
- Susser, B. (2016a). How international are Japanese universities? In P. Clements, A. Krause, & H. Brown (Eds.), *Focus on the learner* (pp. 7-13). Tokyo: JALT.
- Susser, B. (2016b, November). *Rating English-medium instruction degree programs* [handout]. Paper presented at JALT2016, Nagoya, Japan. <https://doi.org.10.13140/RG.2.2.27686.93762>
- Toh, G. (2016). *English as medium of instruction in Japanese higher education: Presumption, mirage or bluff?* London, England: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tsuneyoshi, R. (2005). Internationalization strategies in Japan: The dilemmas and possibilities of study abroad programs using English. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 4, 65-86. <https://doi.org.10.1177/1475240905050291>
- Wilkinson, R. (2013). English-medium instruction at a Dutch university: Challenges and pitfalls. In A. Doiz, D. Lasagabaster, & J. M. Sierra (Eds.), *English-medium instruction at universities: Global challenges* (pp. 3-24). Bristol, England: Multilingual Matters.

Appendix

Breakdown of Courses Taught by Out-of-Field Instructors

University	Courses examined	Instructors of those courses	Courses taught by out-of-field instructors	Percent taught by out-of-field instructors
1	47	25	2	4.26
2	27	21	0	0.00
3	16	14	2	13.33
4	79	47	10	12.99
5	25	17	3	13.64
6	76	54	3	4.05
7	115	50	0	0.00
8	22	13	2	10.53
9	18	11	1	6.25
10	41	27	0	0.00
11	69	38	5	7.81
12	50	25	0	0.00
13	61	42	1	2.00
14	193	138	8	4.30
15	23	21	2	9.52
16	34	29	0	0.00
Totals	896	572	39	4.35 (average)