A Comparative Study on English as a Medium of Instruction in Mongolia, South Korea, and Japan—Analysis of Policies and Practices in Private Universities

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http://hdl.handle.net/11094/76353

https://ir.library.osaka-u.ac.jp/

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Abstract of Thesis

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Title
A Comparative Study on English as a Medium of Instruction in Mongolia, South Korea, and Japan—Analysis of Policies and Practices in Private Universities
(モンゴル、韓国、日本におけるEMI(英語を媒介とする授業)に関しての比較研究 —私立大学での方針と実践の分析)

Abstract of Thesis

This study explored the implementation of policies for English as a medium instruction (EMI) at six private universities in Mongolia, South Korea, and Japan and investigated the challenges they face. In the course of the study, it also identified the driving factors that influenced these universities to adopt EMI programs and the role of program implementers in making key decisions related to EMI. Lack of studies on Mongolia, lack of comparative studies across nations, and lack of research on private universities led the researcher to take this study.

Except for one study on EMI in Mongolia (Gundsambuu, 2019b), the implementation of EMI in higher education in Mongolia is little studied. Thus, this study made a contribution to discovering in-depth the phenomenon in the Mongolian context. Comprehensive research by Macaro et al. (2018) found that a high proportion of the studies were ‘case studies of one institution using mixed methods’ and comparative studies amongst institutions and/or amongst countries were lacking. In South Korea and Japan, empirical studies on EMI in private higher education are few. Through a qualitative comparative case study design, this study examined EMI programs in six private universities in three countries from the perspectives of those involved with the implementation process. Data were generated via 45 interviews with senior and junior administrators, and faculty members.

The results of this study indicate similarities across the six-case study institutions that the rationales for implementing programs taught in English are grounded in 1) a desire to raise their international profile in the field of international higher education with a focus on 2) increasing the number of international students and 3) developing the international competencies of graduates for the global job market. For South Korea and Japan, the decrease in the number of college-age students and the decline in the population were identified as strong factors that affect higher education institutions to implement EMI.

External and sideways factors are seen also as rationales for the decision on the adoption of EMI at the six case-study universities. In particular, the external factor—global university rankings—influences the case-study universities to implement or extend their EMI programs. The study by Deem et al., (2008)
concludes that universities in Europe and Asia have a quest to establish world-class universities through their performance in publication and research output in English. In contrast, the findings of this case study present a different view. The case-study universities wish to approach their ambitious goal to become a top university in the region, or Asia, or in the world in part through the introduction of EMI programs.

This study also identifies a sideways factor that influenced the case-study institutions to adopt EMI—international collaborations in establishing joint and dual degree programs in English. Higher education institutions are nowadays increasingly engaged in international collaborations to achieve the goal of being internationally acknowledged and recognized. To do so, higher education institutions are now rushing in opening joint/dual degree programs with universities abroad and programs for international students (Dewi, 2018). The findings of the study present that the case-study universities have established an international office that manages the EMI programs, exchange programs, and recruitment of international students. The case-study universities unanimously supported the idea that establishing joint/dual degree programs and exchange programs in English with partner universities abroad have had a greater impact on the introduction of programs taught in English.

Another distinct feature of this study is that it investigated whether the initiative to establish the EMI program was a top-down policy or if it was rooted from bottom-up initiatives and the roles of the program implementers. The findings from this study report both top-down and bottom-up initiatives for establishing the programs. This study also finds that program implementers, faculty members, in particular, are not well represented in the decision-making process. Although they are the key implementers of the programs, their voices are not well reflected in the decisions and it may create some potential challenges in the implementation process of the programs and may raise concerns about the quality of the program. Administrative, managerial and institutional challenges were found to be the most challenging obstacles to program implementation at these six case-study universities. In particular, obstacles relating to insufficient funding, lack of capable human resources, and need for recruitment of more international students are prominent. Other types of challenges, such as linguistic and cultural difficulties are considered minor and can be solved easily in a shorter time than the above two types.
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English Medium Instruction (EMI) as a notable trend in the context of the internationalization of higher education (HE) teaching and learning. The trend towards EMI, defined here as ‘the use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English’ (p21), started in Europe with the harmonization process outlined in the Bologna Declaration of 1999, and has since spread throughout the world, but especially in Asia.

This study set out to investigate policies and practices around EMI in private universities in three countries: Mongolia, South Korea and Japan. As such, it was quite an ambitious project. Having conducted a thorough review of the relevant scientific literature on internationalization and the growth of EMI programs and courses, four gaps in the literature were identified. Firstly, previous research had tended to focus on Europe rather than Asia. Secondly, comparative studies have tended to focus on nation/state funded rather than privately funded higher education institutions (HEIs). Where in-depth studies have been conducted they generally only focus on institutions in one country setting. Finally, few studies have focused on faculty members as key stakeholders in the implementation of EMI programs and course content. Having identified this gap, Sainbayar Gundsambuu designed a research project that aimed to ‘explore factors or motives that drive private institutions to adopt EMI policy and how the EMI policy is implemented in the non-Anglophone countries—Mongolia, South Korea, and Japan’ (p4).

The study addressed three research questions (RQs):
1. What are the key drivers of policy on adoption of EMI in private higher education institutions in Mongolia, South Korea, and Japan?
   - How do the faculty members and administrators perceive the rationales?
2. How do government policies (top-down), faculties and departments (bottom-up) and external agents (external and sideways) influence EMI practices in these institutions?
   - To what extent are the faculty members involved in the decision-making process related to EMI?
3. To what extent are the EMI policies implemented in practice in private institutions?
   - What have been the major challenges in the implementation of EMI?

The study was exploratory and employed a qualitative methodology to address the above RQs. Six private universities were targeted for a multiple, cross-case study analysis. The case
studies at each institution were developed based on data gathered from documentary sources, field observations and interviews with administrators/academic leadership and faculty members. The documentary analysis focused only on English language materials for the cases in Japan and South Korea, but Mongolian and English in the cases in Mongolia. Four weeks were spent in Mongolia and two in Korea on fieldwork. Interviews at the two sites in Japan were conducted less intensively over a six-month period. Interviews in Japan and Korea were conducted in English, while in Mongolia they were conducted in Mongolian and English. In total 45 EMI program implementers were recruited for the study across the six field sites. An impressive amount of data was collected as a result of this process.

Two stages of thematic analysis were conducted on the data: within-case study and cross-case study analysis. A number of models and conceptual tools were used to organize and make sense of the data, including Knight and de Wit’s rationales for internationalization, Tsuneyoshi and Bradford’s typology of implementation challenges and Kaplan and Baldauf’s framing of top-down and bottom-up decision making around implementation, and the idea of sideways/external influencers.

The results of the study reveal that the rationales and implementation challenges in private institutions are largely the same as those reported for national universities in the region. The Japanese case studies reveal very similar motivations and implementation issues as reported in earlier studies. The data from Mongolia clearly adds to the work on EMI in the region and is a novel contribution. The scientific literature on EMI implementation in Korea had been based on rather dated studies, and so again this study offers an update on earlier literature and also focuses on two private rather than public institutions.

It was felt by the examining committee that all three RQs were addressed with clarity and with some depth. The two-level analysis was useful in that we could see how each of the six universities had implemented EMI programs and courses without too much cherry picking of data. The only problem with this approach is that it felt as if there was a great deal of repetition. As Table 16 on page 201 makes clear, the rationales for implementing EMI were similar across all six institutions. In many ways this was not surprising given what the extant literature had already reported and the known drives of both internationalization and EMI implementation. Likewise, the challenges faced by each institution as articulated by the informants were also familiar and very much conformed the results of other studies on EMI implementation whether in Asia or Europe. So, in many ways, the results simply confirmed the applicability of what we already know about EMI implementation in national institutions to private HEIs. Where we gained insights that go beyond the literature to date is the analysis of faculty involvement in the decision-making process. This made clear that faculty with key responsibilities for implementing EMI provision were rarely consulted with and that the process was largely top-down. The problems this creates were clarified.

The main complaint is that thesis is very repetitive and thus hard work to read. At 400 plus pages with appendices, it would benefit greatly from further editing and page cutting. The main editing requirements is the synthesize to a greater degree the data within and across chapters and case studies. Nevertheless, the design, the data and the analysis are solid. The study will be of interest to those working on internationalization of HE issues, particularly those with an interest in the policy and implementation practice of EMI programs and courses. Indeed, Mr. Gundsambuu has already had three articles from this research published in international, peer reviewed journals and a fourth is under review.