Feature Article

Current Trends in English-medium Instruction at Universities in Japan

Howard Brown

University of Niigata Prefecture

English-medium Instruction (EMI) of academic subjects is expanding rapidly at universities in Japan without a clear nationwide picture of the context. This study paints such a picture with findings from a nationwide survey of 258 universities with undergraduate EMI programs (response rate 46%, n=118). The survey results cover the scope, scale and organization of EMI programs as well as showing which fields are most often taught in English. Results also reveal some challenges to EMI implementation relating to both faculty and students.

日本の大学において、専門課程の英語による教育（EMI）が急速に広がりつつあるが、全国的な現状の輪郭は明確に描かれていない。本研究は、EMIによる学位プログラムを提供する日本の大学258校を対象に実施した全国的調査によって明らかになった現状を報告する(回答率46%,　n=118)。調査結果は、英語による教育が最も多く提供されている分野を示すだけでなく、EMIプログラムの範囲、規模、組織についても取り上げる。また、教員および学生双方のEMI導入に対する課題を明らかにする。

English-medium instruction (EMI) of content classes is a growing trend in Japan. As of 2005, 176 universities reported offering some EMI courses and by 2013, the number had jumped to 262 (MEXT, 2015). This represents a 50% increase in less than a decade, and currently, over one-third of Japanese universities offer EMI (Table 1).

This rapid development has paralleled the "fast-moving worldwide shift from English being taught as a foreign language (EFL) to English being the medium of instruction (EMI) for academic subjects" (Dearden, 2014, p. 2). This shift is reflected in the definition of EMI in Japan, where EMI refers to courses conducted entirely in English, excluding those whose primary aim is language

Table 1
Number of Universities Offering Undergraduate EMI programs

Universities (total)	2005	2009	2013
National (86)	42	47	59
Public (83)	16	24	29
Private (601)	118	123	174
Total (770)	176	194	262

education (MEXT, 2015). The growth of EMI in Japan appears to have been largely uncoordinated, and there has not yet been a clear picture of how and why EMI is developing nationwide. There is no standard image of *normal* in Japanese EMI. This study is an attempt to paint just such a picture, based on a 2014 survey of 258 universities known to offer undergraduate EMI courses.

Methods

To gather information about EMI in Japan, data was collected for this study through a written survey[1] developed based on trends arising in a pilot study of eight Japanese EMI programs (Brown & Iyobe, 2014) and Wächter & Maiworm's (2008) overview of English-taught programs in Europe. This survey sample included 258 universities which self-reported to MEXT that they offered undergraduate EMI courses as of 2011. Of those 258 universities, only 29 were known to offer one or more full-degree English-taught programs (ETPs), in which students can earn all credits necessary for graduation in English. At most universities, a limited number of EMI courses were offered as a part of, or a complement to, a mainly Japanese-medium program.

The survey was sent to the general affairs desk at the universities with a bilingual cover letter asking the staff to forward the request for information to the most appropriate faculty member or administrator. The survey was first sent in the spring of 2014 with a follow-up in the fall of that year for universities which had not responded to the first round. From the full sample of 258 universities, 118 responses were collected for a response rate of 46%. A total of

31% of responses came from national universities, 11% from public universities and 58% from private universities. Considering the overall breakdown of EMI programs in Japan (Table 1), national universities are somewhat overrepresented in the responses, and private universities are somewhat underrepresented. Responses were received from roughly equal numbers of administrators and faculty members.

Results and Discussion

Key findings from the survey results are reported and discussed below. While the results are intended to be descriptive rather than analytical, some interesting differences in approaches to EMI emerged. The size of university student body seemed to influence some, but not all, results. The type of university, publicly or privately funded, also seemed to impact some responses. It should be noted that during data analysis, no significant differences were seen between national and local public universities. In addition, local public universities represented a very limited number of responses. As such, in the discussion below, national and public universities are grouped together as *publicly-funded universities* to contrast them with private universities.

Scope and Scale of EMI Programs

Results indicate that EMI programs in Japan tend to be small and peripheral. Only 6% of respondents reported that all or most students at their university take

Table 2
Approximate Size of EMI Programs

Students in EMI courses	Percentage of responses
All	3%
Most	3%
About 50%	2%
About 25%	12%
About 10%	21%
5% or fewer	47%

EMI classes. However, at nearly two thirds of universities, EMI classes serve 10% or less of the student body (Table 2).

This small program size is consistent with earlier studies (Brown & Iyobe, 2014) which showed that many programs served as few as 2%-3% of students. This is also consistent with Nakatsugawa's (2014) finding that the government is not encouraging widespread EMI but rather is aiming to serve approximately 10% of the nationwide university cohort.

It seems that large universities (more than 10,000 students) and medium-sized universities (2,500 to 10,000 students) have relatively small EMI programs more often than small universities (fewer than 2,500 students) do (Table 3). In fact, 57% of large universities and 61% of medium-sized universities reported that EMI serves fewer than 5% of students, while only 35% of small universities reported this program size. In general, there seems to be more variety in program size among smaller universities. These differences are considered significant based on a chi square test result showing $p = 0.0304$.

In addition to being small, EMI programs tend not to be integrated into the students' mainstream program. While some universities offer coordinated programs, either within a given department or serving the needs of several departments, nearly half of responding universities reported that EMI was ad hoc (Table 4).

Table 3
Comparison of EMI Program Sizes Based on Size of University

	Percentage of responses		
Students in EMI courses	Small	Medium	Large
Less than 5%	35%	61%	57%
Approximately 10%	20%	20%	32%
Approximately 25%	20%	18%	0%
Approximately 50%	10%	0%	0%
Most	5%	0%	0%
All	10%	0%	6%

Table 4
EMI Program Structure

Program Type	Description	Responses
Ad hoc	A few classes across the curriculum. Not a significant part of the curriculum.	44%
Semi-structured	Positioned within a given department. Several classes related to students' major taught in English. May have some structure but not formally recognized as a program.	28%
Integrated	Positioned within a given department as a formalized program. May have entry benchmarks and completion requirements. May have a certificate of completion / diploma.	15%
+α	Serving students from several departments. EMI credits offered in addition to major. Possibly parallel to program for incoming exchange students. May have a formal program name and a certificate of completion / diploma.	12%

Chapple (2014) notes this ad hoc delivery saying that EMI is being implemented without concern for the quality of the classes or integrity of the curriculum. In addition, Takagi (2015) found that EMI courses in Japan are often based on what the existing faculty of a given university can teach in English, rather than on how such courses fit together to form a coherent curriculum.

Despite the current tendency for small program size and ad hoc delivery, there is a trend towards larger, more organized programs (Table 5). A quarter of universities have recently increased EMI courses, and 16% have formalized previously ad hoc programs. More than 75% of responding universities are currently expanding or planning to expand EMI offerings (Table 6).

Table 5
Overview of Recent Changes in EMI Programs

Recent Changes	Responses
Increase number of classes	24%
Change to more formalized program	16%
Increase student numbers	8%

Table 6
Expansion Plans among Established EMI Programs

Planned Changes	Responses
No expansion plans	23%
Currently expanding	42%
Expansion in the near future	36%

It is interesting to note that this expansion is largely seen in publicly funded universities. Comparisons using a chi square test shows a significant difference (p = 0.00428) between university types. Nearly all (96%) publicly-funded universities are currently expanding or planning to expand EMI programs, while more than one third of private universities have no expansion plans. It seems that while more private universities are now adopting EMI for the first time (Table 1), more publicly-funded universities are expanding previously implemented programs.

The Student Body and Faculty of EMI Programs

Rationales for EMI are tied to domestic students. Looking at the mean scores given for possible rationales on a five-point Likert scale (Table 7), we see that EMI appears to be linked directly to domestic students' language proficiency and post-graduation workplace needs.

Also, while full-degree ETPs tend to attract international students, non-degree EMI programs mainly serve domestic students (Table 8). EMI students are predominately domestic at nearly half of responding universities and entirely domestic at a further 12%. In this sense, although Japan's relatively few ETPs attract and serve international students, the more common non-degree EMI programs seem to be part of Japan's internationalization at-home efforts.

Among universities reporting all or predominately international students in EMI programs, approximately 60% report mainly full-time international students in EMI, while 40% report mainly short-term, visiting students. Those short-term students are studying in Japan for as little as one semester and may be attending only EMI courses while on campus. The full-time students, in contrast,

Table 7
Possible Rationales for Implementing EMI (Five-point Likert Scale Results)

Rationale	Mean	Mode
Attract foreign students	3.1	5
Attract domestic students	3.4	4
Prepare domestic students for the demands of international markets	4.4	5
Improve the profile of the university	3.2	3
Improve the English language skills of domestic students	4.4	5
Respond to the government push for internationalization of education	3.2	3
Maintain competitiveness with rival universities	2.9	3
Improve the position of the university on ranking lists	2.6	3
Offer content which is better taught in English	3.4	3

Note. Responses on a Likert scale where 1= not an important factor, 5= a very important factor.

Table 8
Breakdown of Students in EMI

	Responses	
Students	Full-degree ETPs	Non-degree EMI
All international	45%	9%
Predominately international	22%	9%
A balance of international and domestic	12%	16%
Predominately domestic	22%	54%
All domestic	0%	12%

are generally enrolled in a mainstream Japanese-medium program and take EMI courses as a part of their degree, similar to domestic students.

The faculty members in EMI programs are also predominately domestic. In

Table 9
Breakdown of Faculty Teaching in EMI

Faculty	Responses	
	Full-degree ETPs	Non-degree EMI
All international, native speakers of English	0%	1%
All international from a variety of language backgrounds	0%	0%
Primarily international, native speakers of English	12%	29%
Primarily international from a variety of language backgrounds	0%	5%
Balance of international and Japanese	22%	24%
Primarily Japanese	45%	37%
All Japanese	22%	2%

ETPs two thirds of responding universities have predominately or all Japanese faculty (Table 9). For non-degree EMI programs, the figures are more balanced, but Japanese faculty appear to be in the majority.

These results reflect two ways in which EMI has developed in Japan. Earlier findings (Brown & Iyobe, 2014) show that some EMI programs in Japan are positioned within language-learning departments. Content-based language classes develop over time and shift their focus away from language learning to become content classes taught by language-teaching faculty, mainly international (Sekiya, 2005; Carty & Susser, 2015). Other programs, (Honma, 2003; Aloiau, 2008), are developed and taught by content specialists, largely Japanese. At some universities, both kinds of programs are developing in parallel in different departments.

Two interesting findings emerged from a comparison of universities' faculty breakdown. First, small universities appear more likely to have a balance of Japanese and international faculty in EMI. In fact, 64% of small universities reported a balanced EMI faculty, compared with only 18% of medium-sized and 12% of large universities (chi square test result, $p = 0.0178$). Also, private universities seem to have more international faculty in EMI; 43% of private

universities reported predominantly international EMI faculty, compared to only 19% of publicly funded universities (chi square test result, $p = 0.0174$).

There are concerns about EMI faculty in the literature. Chapple (2014) argues that there is little acknowledgement of the special demands of EMI. Classes are taught by those willing to do it, rather than those who have the necessary expertise and sensitivity. Ishikawa (2009) is concerned with the long term buy-in from faculty. Amid falling budgets and increasing workloads, EMI represents an unrealistic burden. And Yonezawa, Akiba, and Hirouchi (2009) report concerns that faculty understanding of EMI and internationalization is far behind the ambitious goals set by the government.

In addition, it seems that few Japanese faculty members have sufficient language skills for success in EMI (IHEP, 2009). Fewer than 3% of positions are held by foreign faculty, many of whom are language teachers, and only approximately 10% of Japanese faculty members have international graduate-level credentials (Ishikawa, 2009). There are, however, signs of change. The government has called on universities to double the number of international faculty positions, and the current Top Global University funding scheme includes targets for hiring international faculty.

Fields Taught in EMI Programs

Table 10 shows the breakdown of fields offered by responding universities' EMI programs. In non-degree programs, classes in the humanities are the most common, followed by social sciences and natural sciences. In fact, 70% of responding universities offered EMI classes in the humanities. However, in ETPs, technical fields were most common, followed by natural sciences.

An interesting point is that the fields offered in private and publicly funded universities seem to differ. At private universities more than 75% of EMI programs are offered in the humanities and social sciences. These two fields dominate at publicly funded universities as well, but there is much more variety in the fields available (Table 11). This difference is considered significant based on a chi square test result, $p = 0.00572$.

Table 10
Breakdown of Fields Taught in EMI

Fields	Responses	
	Full-degree ETPs	Non-degree EMI
Technical / professional fields	100%	16%
Education	22%	20%
Humanities	44%	70%
Social Sciences	33%	46%
Natural Sciences	55%	30%
Medicine, dentistry, nursing, etc.	0%	11%

Table 11
Breakdown of Fields in EMI (Publicly-Funded vs. Private Universities)

Fields	Responses	
	Publicly-funded	**Private**
Technical / professional	10%	7%
Education	14%	5%
Humanities	25%	50%
Social Sciences	21%	28%
Natural Sciences	21%	8%
Medicine, dentistry, nursing, etc.	9%	2%

Issues with the Implementation of EMI Programs

Survey findings indicate a mismatch between universities' reported priorities and their actual implementation of EMI in two key areas: faculty and students.

Faculty. When asked about factors for successful implementation of EMI, respondents focused on the role of faculty. Faculty's qualifications, their support for and understanding of EMI, communication among them, and faculty

development efforts for them were all rated highly on a five-point Likert scale (Table 12).

In addition, lack of understanding of and interest in EMI were significant challenges at one fifth of universities (Table 13). However, these were predominantly publicly funded. This issue was reported by 28% of publicly funded universities but only 4% of private universities.

Despite the key role faculty members play in successful EMI, nearly two thirds of universities did not report faculty development (FD) efforts for their EMI programs (Table 14). This is somewhat more pronounced at private universities, where 67% offer no FD for EMI faculty, compared to 46% of publicly funded universities (chi square test result, $p = 0.00161$).

This mismatch is perhaps not surprising given the position of faculty development in general in Japan. FD has been mandatory since 2007; however,

Table 12
Factors for Success in EMI Programs (Five-point Likert Scale Results)

Factor	Mean	Mode
Qualified faculty members	4.7	5
Support from university administrators	3.9	4
Support of leading faculty members	4.2	5
Faculty-wide understanding of EMI	4.3	5
Effective Faculty Development efforts	4.2	5
Strict entry requirements for students	3.1	3
Demand from students	3.7	4
Effective language support for students	4.1	4
Effective marketing	3.1	3
Strong communication between participating faculty members	4.0	4
Clearly structured program	4.0	4

Note. Responses on a Likert scale where 1= not an important factor, 5= a very important factor.

Table 13
Issues Facing EMI Programs

Issue	Responses
Insufficient language ability of international students	10%
Insufficient language ability of domestic students	51%
Active opposition from faculty members	9%
Lack of understanding from faculty members	21%
Active opposition from administrators	5%
Lack of understanding from administrators	9%
Insufficient language ability of faculty	13%
Lack of interest in teaching EMI among faculty	18%
Difficulties with teaching ability of faculty	10%
High dropout rate in EMI classes	2%

Table 14
Faculty Development for EMI Programs

Type of Faculty Development	Responses
No FD for EMI faculty	58%
Workshops and seminars by outside experts	16%
In-house workshops and seminars	14%
Faculty attend outside workshops and seminars	9%
FD previously provided but no longer	3%

Fink (2013) argues that this is not yet a meaningful effort. At many universities FD is perfunctory, and the faculty engagement level is low.

There are, however, some early indications that FD specifically for EMI is developing. The British Council now offers two training programs for EMI faculty in Japan, one designed to support non-native faculty in their language

proficiency and the other aiming to improve teaching skills. However, these programs are not yet widely implemented. Other isolated FD initiatives are also taking place; however, it appears they are, for now, limited to universities that are, in a sense, already doing EMI well.

Students. In addition to the needs of the faculty, there is also a mismatch between universities' reported priorities and actual implementation connected to the students in EMI. Results indicate a widespread concern about the language proficiency of domestic students. Language support for students was identified as a key to success (Table 11), and low language proficiency among domestic students was a concern at more than half of universities (Table 12). This is consistent with Tsuneyoshi (2005) and Ishikura (2015) who both report issues with domestic students, especially those in non-degree EMI programs, keeping up with classes. Given that domestic students are the bulk of participants in EMI programs, this would seem to be a priority. However, in many programs, little is being done to address this situation.

As Table 15 shows, external language proficiency tests (TOEFL, IELTS, etc.) are part of entry requirements for many ETPs in Japan. However, language-proficiency benchmarks are much less common in non-degree programs. The lack of entry benchmarks may indicate that students' language proficiency is meant to be supported during the EMI program. However, as seen in Table 16, there is little or no coordination between EMI and language-teaching faculty in nearly half of responding universities, implying that such support is not part of the program.

In addition, targeted English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classes are seen at only 8% of responding universities. More than 40% of EMI programs rely on general English classes not associated with the program, and nearly half have no required language training at all (Table 17).

Taken together, these faculty and student issues with implementation seem to confirm Chapple's (2014) worry that EMI is being implemented superficially in Japan. This echoes Le Ha's (2013) argument that the government sees EMI rather simplistically, assuming that implementing EMI will automatically internationalize the campus, attract international students, and give domestic

Table 15
Language Proficiency Benchmarks for Entrance to EMI Programs

	Responses	
Benchmark	Full-degree ETPs	Non-degree EMI
None in place	25%	67%
Based on an external test	70%	22%
Based on an in-house test	3%	11%
Required pre-session / preparation courses	3%	0%

Table 16
Communication between EMI and Language-teaching Faculty

Type of communication between EMI faculty and language teachers	Responses
Little or none	49%
Occasional communication	3%
Regular, informal communication	16%
Regular, coordinated communication	9%
Some (or all) of the EMI faculty are language teachers	24%

Table 17
Language Training for Students in EMI Programs

Available Language Training	Responses
Nothing special	49%
General English classes	43%
English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classes	8%

students an international experience. The fact that the program is in English is the point; the actual quality of the program itself or the expertise, preparedness, and experience of the faculty are not considered. Hamid, Nguyen, and Baldauf

(2013) explain that many governments see EMI as "a relatively simple and cheap solution to both the problems of internationalization and upgraded local language proficiency" (p. 10).

Conclusion

This study began with the need to paint a picture of *normal* EMI in Japan. While it is important to remember that EMI is implemented in a variety of models, it can now be said that a typical undergraduate EMI program is a peripheral, ad hoc program in the humanities or social sciences taught by Japanese faculty who are not specifically trained as EMI teachers, for a limited number of domestic students who may lack the necessary language proficiency and language support to take full advantage of the program.

This is not a very positive description of EMI. However, it is also possible to say that EMI in Japan is developing towards larger, more structured programs. New programs are being implemented, including full-degree ETPs, appealing to both domestic and international students. In addition, existing programs are expanding and becoming a more central part of the curriculum. There is good reason to be optimistic about future developments in EMI in Japan.

However, there are still some weaknesses in EMI programs which need to be addressed. In particular, more attention needs to be paid to the students' language proficiency. Clear benchmarks and proficiency testing upon entry are not widely seen. Programs also lack coordination between EMI and the students' language classes. In addition, there is a need for more effective ways to recruit, evaluate, incentivize and train faculty members involved in EMI.

Acknowledgements

This work was partially supported by JSPS Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research (C), Project Number 25370638.

Notes

1. Copies of the full survey are available from the author upon request.

References

Aloiau, E. (2008). The design of the international program English curriculum: Faculty of Economics, Soka University. *Soka Keizaironshu* [Soka Journal of Economics], *37*(1), 107-127.

Brown, H., & Iyobe, B. (2014). The growth of English-medium instruction in Japan. In N. Sonda & A. Krause (Eds.), *JALT2013 Conference*. Tokyo, Japan: JALT.

Carty, P., and Susser, B. (2015). Global education and classroom teaching: From CBI to EMI. In P. Clements, A. Krause, and H. Brown (Eds.), *JALT2014 Conference Proceedings*. Tokyo, Japan: JALT.

Chapple, J. (2014). Finally feasible or fresh façade? Analyzing the internationalization plans of Japanese universities. *International Journal of Research Studies in Education*, *3*(4), 1-14. doi: 10.5861/ijrse.2014.794

Dearden, J. (2014). *English as a medium of instruction: A growing global phenomenon*. London, England: The British Council.

Fink, L. D. (2013). The current status of faculty development internationally. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, *7*(2), 1-9.

Hamid, M. O., Nguyen, H. T. M., & Baldauf, R. B. (2013). Medium of instruction in Asia: Context, processes and outcomes. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, *14*(1), 1-15. doi: 10.1080/14664208.2013.792130

Honma, M. (2003). *Keizaigakubu intanashonaru puroguram ni tsuite* [Regarding the economic department international program] In I. Takahashi (Ed.), *Keizaigaku wa omoshiroi* [Economics is interesting], (pp. 135-150). Tokyo, Japan: Soka University Keizai Gakkai.

IHEP. (2009). *Impact of college rankings on institutional decision making: Four country case studies*. Washington, DC: Institute for Higher Education Policy.

Ishikawa, M. (2009). University rankings, global models, and emerging hegemony: Critical analysis from Japan. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *13*(2), 159-173. doi: 10.1177/1028315308330853

Ishikura, Y. (2015). Realizing internationalization at home through English-medium courses at a Japanese university: Strategies to maximize student

learning. *Higher Learning Research Communications*, *5*(1), 11-28.

Le Ha, P. (2013). Issues surrounding English, the internationalisation of higher education and national cultural identity in Asia: A focus on Japan. *Critical Studies in Education*, *54*(2), 160-175.

MEXT. (2015). *Heisei 25 nendo no daigaku ni okeru kyouiku naiyoutou no kaikaku joukyou ni tsuite* [About the state of affairs regarding university reforms to education in 2013]. Retrieved from http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/koutou/daigaku/04052801/1361916.htm

Nakatsugawa, M. (2014, August). *The recent shift toward "Gurobaru" on language policy in Japan: A critical analysis of the recent language policy developments*. Paper presented at the The JACET 53rd (2014) International Convention, Hiroshima, Japan.

Sekiya, Y. (2005). Content-based English teaching in an EFL setting: A case of a Japanese university. In S. S. R. Jourdenais (Ed.), *Content, tasks and projects in the language classroom: 2004 conference proceedings* (pp. 23-34). Monterey, CA: Monterey Institute of International Studies.

Takagi, H. (2015). The internationalization of curricula: The complexity and diversity of meaning in and beyond Japanese universities. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, *52*(4), 349-359.

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. doi: 10.1177/1475240905050291

Wächter, B., & Maiworm, F. (2008). *English-taught programmes in European higher education: The picture in 2007*. Bonn, Germany: Lemmens.

Yonezawa, A., Akiba, H., & Hirouchi, D. (2009). Japanese university leaders' perceptions of internationalization: The role of government in review and support. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *13*(2), 125-142. doi: 10.1177/1028315308330847

Author bio

Howard Brown *is an associate professor with the University of Niigata Prefecture. He coordinates the Academic-Communicative English Program and sits on the steering committee for English-medium Studies. His current research interests relate to the effective implementation of English-medium instruction programs in higher education. brown@unii.ac.jp*

Received: December 4, 2015
Accepted: April 14, 2016