

Undergraduate English-medium Instruction in Japan: policy and implementation

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In Japan the number of university courses taught in English is increasing, as it is in many other countries around the world. Currently, undergraduates can study academic-content in English in just over 40% of Japan's 779 universities, and can complete an entire degree via English-medium instruction (EMI) in at least 40 universities (MEXT, 2017). The Japanese government views EMI as a key tool for internationalizing its higher education system (Hashimoto, 2017; MEXT, 2009a; Mulvey, 2017), and over the past several years has implemented several policies that have both directly and indirectly contributed to the growth of EMI. This paper overviews policies promoting the expansion of EMI and gives insights into how these policies have affected the patterns of EMI implementation.

Definitions and Data for English-medium Instruction

The growth of EMI has inevitably brought with it some confusion as to the goals and expected learning outcomes of classes taught in English. In its most basic interpretation, EMI refers to the teaching of academic-subject content in English. More comprehensively,

EMI entails the use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English. It may or may not include the implicit aim of increasing students' English language abilities. (Brown and Bradford, 2017, p. 330)

The key element defining EMI is the focus on academic-subject content, rather than a focus on English. In Japan, many English language learners regularly engage with academic content in content-based instruction (CBI) classes, and via content and language integrated learning (CLIL). This has led to some conflation of these three approaches to teaching (for example, see Miles, Cripps and O'Connell [2017a, 2017b] which confuse EMI with CBI and CLIL and the study described by MacGregor [2016] where language teachers viewed CBI and CLIL as synonymous).

The goal of EMI is subject-content knowledge acquisition, not the acquisition of language. The content taught in an EMI course is a full part of the students' degree program curriculum, and assessment is tied directly to subject-content knowledge. English language

learning may occur, but language is not an explicit aim of EMI, nor is it assessed. CLIL and CBI, on the other hand, both explicitly seek to further students' language acquisition. CLIL classes have the dual aim of furthering both content and language acquisition, with the subject content at a sufficiently challenging level to be a legitimate part of the students' curriculum. CBI differs in that its singular aim is language learning. Subject content is merely a vehicle for language practice, and is usually unrelated to the students' academic major. For extended discussions about the definitions of English-medium teaching in higher education, readers may want to refer to Brown and Bradford (2017) and Unterberger and Wilhelmer (2011).

Since 2005, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has collected data to track the number of EMI classes and programs in Japan. MEXT defines EMI courses as "courses conducted entirely in English, excluding those whose primary purpose is language education" (MEXT, 2015). This definition is clear in that classes must be entirely English-medium; however, the phrase "primary aim" allows for some variation in interpretation. Depending on how this phrase is understood by universities (or rather the staff member tasked with filling in the survey), some classes which fall into the CLIL category or even actually earn language credits may be counted in these figures. Despite this, researchers in Japan have a reasonably good idea of the number of institutions with EMI classes, the latest MEXT survey achieved a 99% response rate (MEXT, 2017). MEXT data highlight a rapid increase in the number of universities offering EMI in Japan, particularly since 2010 after government funding began to encourage EMI development (see Table 1).

Table 1 Japanese universities offering undergraduate EMI classes by year

Year	# of schools
2005	176
2006	185
2007	194
2008	190
2009	194
2011	222
2012	241
2013	262
2014	274
2015	305

Note. Data were not collected for 2010 due to the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Source: MEXT, 2017, 2013, 2009b

Policies Promoting English-medium Instruction

Despite recent interest and growth in EMI, it is not a new phenomenon in Japan; EMI has a long, but unstable, history which has had effects on its current implementation. As Mulvey (2017) discusses, EMI used to be a cornerstone of education, but has been beleaguered by practical and nationalistic concerns which have, so far, hindered its sustainability. It has roots in the early Meiji Period (1868–1893), when English was one of the three primary languages (along with German and French) of university instruction. At that time, Japan began to import Western knowledge and ideas to assist in the nation's modernization by inviting foreign faculty, instructors and engineers to Japan and sending Japanese bureaucrats, academics and students to Europe and North America. However, as the government-sponsored students returned to Japan, they replaced the foreign faculty, and by government ordinance, in 1893 Japanese became the medium of instruction (Hall, 1998; Nakayama, 1989). Instead of being considered as a tool for learning, English became an academic subject (Smith and Motomichi, 2003).

It was not until the 1980s that discussion of EMI resurfaced in Japan. During the period of Japan's rapid economic expansion, the country needed bilingual, culturally literate staff. It also needed to improve its relationships with neighboring countries and the United States, and improve its political presence. So, Japan started a full-scale discussion about how it could internationalize education (Ishikawa, 2011: 207–208; McConnell, 2000; Yonezawa, 2014: 40). Guidelines were set up to allow universities and schools to accept returnees (children with Japanese citizenship who have received the majority of their K-12 education outside of Japan). A government plan to accept 100,000 international students by the end of 2000 was implemented. The Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program, which invited young people from English-speaking countries to Japan to foster international perspectives, promote international exchange and strengthen language education, was established (McConnell, 2000: 1). And, the government began to allow non-Japanese faculty members to gain tenure at national universities. These faculty members (*gaikokujin kyoushi*) were to teach their specialties in English (Mulvey, 2017). However, as both Hall (1998) and Mulvey (2017) discuss, these tenured positions did not materialize as originally intended, and many foreign professors were soon relegated to teaching English language classes on short-term contracts.

One policy implemented during that time was the 100,000 International Students Plan (*Ryugakusei Ukeire Jūman-nin Keikaku*) of 1983. This plan, with a goal of accepting 100,000 international students by the year 2000, is one of two government policies focused on increasing the number of international students to Japanese higher education institutions which are often credited with driving Japan's current wave of EMI.⁽¹⁾ The 100,000 International Students Plan was supported by the expansion of Overseas Development Assistance

(ODA) which gave scholarships to international students, and it was accompanied by an easing of regulations to allow international students to work part-time in Japan. Consequently, many international students arrived from Japan's regional neighbors. The 100,000 International Students Plan had initially not included provision for the development of EMI, in fact it specifically stated that Japanese language courses and Japanese language teacher training should be strengthened in order to receive international students. However, interim government evaluation of the policy's progress and recommendations from the 1993 United States-Japan Conference on Cultural and Educational Interchange (CULCON) prompted a focus on developing EMI programs for short-term visiting students from Europe and the United States (Kamibeppu, 2012; Ota, 2003). The Ministry of Education's Advisory Committee on the Promotion of Short-Term Student Exchange Programs thus advocated "shifting the concept of study abroad from *studying Japan and Japanese* to *studying your academic field in Japan* [emphasis added]" (Ota, 2003: 40). Consequently, the number of EMI programs at major national universities began to increase.

As the 100,000 international student target was met in 2003 (MEXT, 2004), Japan entered into a phase of higher education internationalization that Ninomiya, Knight and Watanabe (2009) describe as one where the *quality*, in addition to the *quantity* of international students became a focal point. Whereas Ministry of Justice changes to student visas in the 1980s and again in the early 2000s enabled the 100,000-international student target to be reached, they also raised concerns over increases in overstays, illegal labor, and the quality of students admitted to Japan (Breaden, 2013; Kamibeppu, 2012). Therefore, under the guidance of a report prepared by the Central Council for Education in 2003, a review of the criteria and methods for selecting students for Japanese government scholarship programs and entrance into universities was undertaken (MEXT, 2004; Ninomiya et al., 2009). This focus on quality marks a shift in MEXT's rationale for its international student policy - moving from international understanding and foreign aid to a more strategic emphasis on recruiting high-quality international students who could contribute to the research agendas and overall competitiveness of Japanese universities and the Japanese economy (Ishikawa, 2011; Kamibeppu, 2012; Ninomiya et al., 2009). New government initiatives were not specifically aimed at expanding EMI at this time, however several EMI activities have been supported by programs such as the 21st Century Center of Excellence (COE) Program (2003), Distinctive University Education Support (Good Practice [GP]) Programs (2003) and Global COE Program (2007) which enhance the research functions and quality of education in universities.

In the late 2000s, policy focus concerning EMI shifted from small-scale exchange programs to the introduction of full-length degree programs taught in English (English-taught programs, ETPs). It was felt that more classes taught in English and more international students would improve the quality of education and enhance the nation's global competitiveness and in 2008, the 300,000 International Students Plan (*Ryūgakusei Sanjūman-nin*

Keikaku) was launched. The government aims to have 300,000 international students studying in Japan by 2020. When the plan was announced, there were 123,829 international students in Japan, by May 2016, this number had risen to 239,287. A central plank of this plan is the Project for Establishing University Network for Internationalization (Global 30) funding project (commonly known as the G30 Project), which between 2009 and 2014 supported 13 Japanese universities in implementing both graduate and undergraduate degree programs taught in English.

In 2009, the G30 universities together committed themselves to launching at least 33 new undergraduate and 124 new graduate ETPs by 2014 (MEXT, 2009a). This goal was surpassed. As shown in Table 2, in the academic year 2013/2014, the final year of the G30 funding cycle, the G30 universities offered 33 new undergraduate and 153 new graduate ETPs as reported by MEXT. Yet, many of the new ETPs were small. Only Kyoto, Meiji, Waseda, Doshisha, and Ritsumeikan universities reported student intakes greater than 20 in any one of their new undergraduate ETPs in the final year of the project, and many universities reported intakes of only “few”, “limited” or “a select number” of undergraduate students (MEXT, 2012) (see Table 3; see also Ota and Horiuchi [2017] for discussion of admission quotas). Still, the G30 Project and the competitive nature of the Japanese higher education market have catalyzed universities across Japan which have not received G30 funding to also expand their EMI courses and ETPs (Kuwamura, 2009; Yaguchi & Seaton, 2014).

Table 2 *Number of ETPs in the 13 G30 Universities in 2009 and 2013*

University		Number of ETPs in 2009			Number of ETPs in 2013		
		bachelor's	master's	doctoral	bachelor's	master's	doctoral
National	Kyoto	0	1	2	1	13	11
	Kyushu	0	5	5	5	31	27
	Nagoya	0	4	4	5	9	8
	Osaka	0	3	3	2	5	5
	Tohoku	0	3	4	3	10	9
	Tokyo	0	8	10	2	19	16
	Tsukuba	0	10	1	3	17	6
Private	Doshisha	0	1	0	1	5	4
	Keio	0	5	3	1	6	4
	Meiji	0	0	1	1	3	1
	Ritsumeikan	0	4	2	2	6	6
	Sophia	1	2	1	3	3	2
	Waseda	1	7	6	6 a	15	7
	Total number of ETPs	2	53	42	35	142	106

^aMEXT counts six undergraduate ETPs at Waseda University. However, three of these programs are actually sub-programs with shared courses in one faculty.
sources: MEXT, 2012; Kyoto University, 2010

Table 3 *G30 University New ETP Total Student Intake 2013*

University		Student intake 2013		
		bachelor's	master's	doctoral
National	Kyoto	30	approx. 60	approx. 30
	Kyushu	few	approx. 40	approx. 30
	Nagoya	limited	limited	limited
	Osaka	limited	approx. 10	approx. 12
	Tohoku	30	88	75
	Tokyo	select number	149	10
	Tsukuba	few	approx. 60	29
Private	Doshisha	50	45	28
	Keio	15	25	15
	Meiji	20	approx. 35	5
	Ritsumeikan	80	few	few
	Sophia	30	15	10
	Waseda	100	55	3
Student total		approx. 370	approx. 600	approx. 260

Note. This table shows the total student intake for all ETPs established under the G30 Project
source: MEXT, 2012

As the G30 ETPs were under development, the Japanese government, with its 2010 New Growth Strategy, shifted its focus away from inbound international students and started to place more emphasis on fostering the international skills of Japanese students, nurturing what they call “Global Human Resources” (global *jinzai*). Newer initiatives and funding have concentrated on encouraging students to study abroad: for example, the Go Global Japan Project (2012) focuses on developing programs to send Japanese students to study abroad, the Tobitate! (Leap for Tomorrow) Study Abroad Initiative (2013) provides scholarships and other aid with the help of private-sector contributions, and in recent years, there have been increases in government loans for study abroad. To support these initiatives, there has been a growth in classes taught in English to help prepare students for overseas study as well as for more generally developing their international skills.

EMI now has a dual role in Japan, serving both international and domestic students. Government policy has promoted this through its initiatives to support EMI initially for international students, and then for domestic students. Policies have cumulated in the most recent large government funding scheme, the Top Global University Project, which essentially draws together past project goals. In 2014, 37 universities were selected to receive support for comprehensive internationalization and university reform, to include increasing

the numbers of joint degree programs, collaboration with overseas institutions, and students who have earned credits at foreign universities; improving the ratios of foreign faculty and international students; reforming management systems to promote transparency; and expanding EMI (MEXT, n.d., 2014). Significantly, under this project universities are expected to implement activities that play to their strengths and they are encouraged to further develop their current international endeavors. This mandate is promising for the future sustainability of EMI, as it is unlikely that previously established EMI programs will lose their momentum. In addition, the activities it promotes are likely to encourage increasingly more English use in Japanese universities (Rose and McKinley, 2018).

English-medium Instruction in Practice

There is a lot of variation in the ways that different higher education institutions are implementing EMI in undergraduate education, not least because of the dual role that EMI has in Japan. In her research, Shimauchi (2016, 2017) categorized ETPs based on their curriculum structure and the types of students enrolled. Shimauchi's three models are: 1) the *Dejima* model, where students, primarily international and Japanese returnee, study isolated from mainstream campus life—perhaps even on a separate campus; 2) the *Crossroad* model, which accommodates both domestic and international students studying together; and 3) the *Global Citizen* model, which, for the most part, aims to use EMI to cultivate international awareness and skills among Japanese students who have graduated from domestic high schools. These categories can be applied to EMI more generally, not only to ETPs.

The *Dejima* model is so named because of the isolation the implied by the term *Dejima*, the island in Nagasaki harbor that for 200 hundred years was the only place in Japan open to foreign trade. These EMI programs are likely focused towards students who have completed high school outside of Japan. They are often well structured, with a sequence of courses that build specific knowledge. However, it may be difficult for students to take classes from other areas of the university outside of this structure. The second type of EMI program is the Crossroad model. In this model, international and domestic students earn the same degree, but there may be different requirements regarding the number of credits to be taken in English depending on if the students entered the program via an international (e.g., via TOEFL/IELTS scores and interview) or domestic (e.g., via Japanese domestic entrance exam) entry route. It is likely that students will study some of their classes with short-term exchange students in this type of program, in fact, some of the classes may have been specifically designed for short-term students (with limited numbers of classes taught in English, some universities cross-list courses in multiple programs). The classroom could consist of students from diverse cultural and academic backgrounds with a variety of motives for enrolling in EMI.⁽²⁾ The third model, the Global Citizen model, is the most common EMI program type in Japan, partly because it lends itself more readily to an EMI, rather than

just ETP, model. In Global Citizen model programs, students study a limited number of EMI classes as part of, or as a supplement to, their mainstream Japanese-medium program. Some programs may be structured as a sequence of classes, others may consist of ad hoc elective classes with or without a target number of EMI credits to be earned. Foreign students present in the classroom will most likely be those enrolled in the standard Japanese-medium four-year degree program, however short-term exchange students may also be present.⁽³⁾

As EMI is developing, the boundaries between these three models are becoming increasingly blurred. For example, programs once classed as *Dejima* are opening to students from across campus. In some cases, this is at the request of international student enrollees would like greater contact with domestic Japanese students, in other cases, it occurs as universities want to provide more internationalized learning experiences to their domestic students (Bradford, 2015). In other instances, some newer Global Citizen programs are becoming more *Dejima*-like in their structure, with domestic students enrolled in programs designed to enhance their global competitiveness in departments or faculties established specifically for these programs. Shimauchi (2016, 2017) found Crossroad programs to be rare. Given that international student numbers remain relatively low in Japan (approx. 6% of the full-time student population is international (JASSO, 2017; MEXT, 2016), it is unlikely that the number of Crossroad programs that serve “a balance of domestic and international students” (Shimauchi, 2017: 182) will rise substantially in the near future. EMI programs are likely to retain a primary focus towards either international or domestic students. That said, as EMI is becoming more established and widespread, programs are, in the spirit of comprehensive internationalization and the Top Global University Project, tending to find ways to accommodate both international and domestic students.

Discouragingly for those involved in EMI implementation, memory of past policy incarnations and failure has been haunting rhetoric about the current rise in EMI and higher education internationalization. Researchers refer to the use of EMI for obtaining knowledge during the Meiji period and the “boundary-strengthening” (Goodman, 2007: 72) push for internationalization (*kokusaika*) in the 1980s as efforts towards reinforcing Japanese nationalism and perceptions of Japanese uniqueness, and faculty members recall the political debates surrounding tenure and relegation to contract English-teaching positions of *gaikoku-jin kyoushi* in the 1980s.⁽⁴⁾ As Rappelye and Vickers (2015) eloquently state when discussing the possibility of Japanese universities becoming truly global, “previous experience leads many to suppose that this time, too, the tide of ‘internationalisation’ will once again ebb away, leaving the academic environment fundamentally unchanged.” Rappelye and Vickers (2015) believe that the likely outcome of the Top Global University Project is a “*Dejima* Option” wherein foreign faculty will teach in EMI programs which remain distinct from the Japanese core of the university.

This echoes previous commentary about programs established with G30 funding which criticized them for catering solely to international students, and creating groups of

English-speaking international and Japanese returnee students isolated from their peers on campus (see e.g., Burgess, Gibson, Klaphake and Selzer, 2010; Hansen, 2016). While this may have been a valid observation for some programs (the G30 mandate was, after all, to attract international students), research conducted within G30 ETPs found that those implementing the programs were committed to increasing the competitiveness of Japanese higher education for the benefit of domestic students and to helping them succeed in EMI (Bradford, 2015). Moreover, criticisms over the *Dejima-ization* of G30 programs appear to overlook the fact that the majority of Japan's international students hail from its regional neighbors (see JASSO, 2017). These students are not necessarily better equipped to study via EMI than Japanese students, and so assumptions that EMI classes will be out of reach for Japanese students, both linguistically and academically, are not universally sound.

There is reason to believe that EMI will integrate international and domestic students and is now here for the long term. Since the introduction of the G30 Project, the policy climate surrounding EMI has become more inclusive of domestic students, a step that is welcome to those working with Japanese students within EMI programs. The effects of this can be seen in the growing number of EMI programs which provide support to domestic students. Universities are now less likely to rush to establish a new EMI program without giving thought to the language and academic skills support needed for student success, leading to sustainable programs.⁶⁾ Although only a relatively small number of Japanese universities are direct recipients of the internationalization funding initiated by government policy, the high-profile nature of the projects impacts the whole higher education system and propels similar program implementation at other universities. Furthermore, as Mulvey (2017) details, MEXT currently has more control over university accreditation, curriculum reform and hiring decisions at all universities than it did in the 1980s, enabling the government's vision of an internationally competitive higher education system to take a firmer hold than in the past. Finally, EMI is no longer about learning from the West, nor is it about providing aid to overseas students or showcasing Japan to the world. Japan needs to educate students to be competitive in a global world.

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Notes

- (1) The other is the 300,000 International Students Plan (*Ryūgakusei Sanjūman-nin Keikaku*) of 2008.
- (2) See Bradford (2015) for more discussion of the Dejima and Crossroad types of programs.
- (3) See Brown and Iyobe (2014) for further discussion on variation within Global Citizen program design.
- (4) See Goodman (2007) for discussion of the multivocality of the term internationalization (*kokusiaka*), and Hall (1998) and Mulvey (2017) for more detail about *gaikokujin kyōuin* faculty positions and the failure of EMI.
- (5) See program descriptions in Bradford and Brown [2017: 225-262] for detail about the types of support provided.