
University Grants Council of Hong Kong (Hong Kong Institute of
Education EPL-TEIF-01/02/03)

**Enactment of medium of instruction
policy: Enhancement of student learning
in courses with English as a medium of
instruction**

Briefing Paper No.2

**Enhancement of Student Learning
with English as the Medium of
Instruction: Survey Results**

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December 2014

Enhancement of Student Learning with English as the Medium of Instruction: Survey Results

This research project aims to identify the difficulties and needs in teaching and learning of EFL students and staff during the transition from a tertiary institution where the medium of instruction (MoI) is the mother tongue of the dominant student population to one that adopts English, a foreign language for the majority of the student body, as the primary language of lesson delivery. Through surveys and interviews conducted at a tertiary institution in Hong Kong, the study intends to investigate the perceptions of two groups of stakeholders of the MoI policy and provide critical insights in helping instructors and learners cope with the change. As an increasing number of tertiary educational institutes worldwide are considering the possibility of mandating English as the MoI in view of the perceived strategic value of the language for global competitiveness, this study will render implications for post-secondary institutions which aim to switch their MoI to English or are undergoing a similar change in a wider context.

This series of Briefing Papers presents information about different aspects of the project.

Enhancement of Student Learning with English as the Medium of Instruction Project Briefing Papers Series Editor: Dr. CHOI Tae-Hee (Hong Kong Institute of Education)

Please cite as:

Yuen, W. K. G., Choi, T.-H. & Cheung, K. L. (2014). *Enhancement of Student Learning with English as the Medium of Instruction: Survey Results*. Briefing Paper, Enactment of medium of instruction policy: Enhancement of student learning in courses with English as a medium of instruction Project. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Education.

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This report summarizes findings from a survey concerning existing and future language policies at the focal institute. The survey, conducted in December 2013, invited voluntary participation from Bachelor of Education students enrolled in different departments at the institute. It aimed to identify successful pedagogical strategies that had enhanced teaching and learning in CLIL lessons as well as participants' experience coping with EMI lessons.

Main Themes in the Survey

The survey consisted of lexically and syntactically similar but role-specific question sets for the student version and the staff version; the former focused on learning and the latter focalized both learning and teaching. Both questionnaire sets contained six questions concerning respectively the effect of EMI on learning, useful strategies, difficulties, support, language proficiency, and views on the focal institute's plan to mandate English as the MoI for all courses starting from 2016/17.

The Effect of EMI on Students' Learning

The use of English as the medium of instruction was deemed detrimental to students' learning. In average 46% of student participants and 56% of staff participants perceived EMI negatively in the six areas of expression of ideas in class, understanding of content, higher order thinking, class participation, student-teacher relationship and completion of assessments, while one fourth of students and teachers chose "no effect" and only 23.8% of students and 17.9% of teachers perceived EMI positively. The aspect on which both groups of participants presented most negative views was understanding of content, with 53.9% students and 76.9% staff members. The aspects followed were those that relied on a satisfactory level of understanding, namely, expression of ideas in class, higher order thinking, and class participation, with in average 46.7% and 64.1% of students and teachers respectively. The least concerning area for both groups was teacher-student relationship, which was commented on negatively by 39.7% of the students and 23.1% of the teachers.

It is observed that the effect of EMI on students also posed obstacles to teachers as more than 80% of staff participants identified their difficulties in teaching with student-centered aspects. Half of them noted that students' English proficiency prevented them from actively participating in class; one added that he or she had to adjust the pace for those students who needed more time to understand course content in English. In terms of assessment, two teachers commented on this aspect negatively, expressing rather serious concern that "some [English major] students do struggle with expression and sentence structure" and "students were unable to express their ideas fully or interpret/explain/translate other people's ideas accurately."

Useful Learning Experiences/Teaching Strategies

While about one tenth of student participants claimed that being immersed in an English environment in class was already beneficial to their language development, certain class components were also mentioned, including particularly presentations (11.2%), group discussion (9.7%), written assessment (5.8%), lexical input sessions (5.8%) and videos as teaching aids (3.4%). Teachers' comments, probably due to the small sample size of only

13, show little intra-group consistency with a variety of strategies including videos as teaching aids, case studies, more accessible teacher talk, games, presentations, and interactive teaching. Group discussions/work was an exception, considered to be effective by more than half of the staff respondents. Generally the results hint at a serious mismatch of class activity preferences between the students and teachers with, again, group discussion being the exception. More alarmingly there existed another wide discrepancy between effective class activities in students' experiences and the support they needed, revealing the fact that even the most useful learning episodes students had participated in could not address their needs.

Supports Needed for Students and Teachers

Corresponding to the obstacles encountered by students, nearly 60% of student respondents expressed that they needed support regarding understanding of content. Within this group of respondents, 62% of them needed bilingual written materials and class instruction. About one fourth said they needed more explanation of theories, especially those related to local or science-related topics and in tutorials, would be conducive to their understanding of course content. One tenth of them said they needed more readings or class materials. Besides the students who focused on understanding of theories, about one fourth of student participants also attributed their difficulties to English proficiency and claimed that more supports on English language enhancement would be helpful to their learning through EMI.

Helps for teachers, although of a wide variety, generally required institutional supports. One third of them suggested collaboration between staff members; two of them expressed that discussion and sharing among staff members would be conducive. One suggested inviting an expert in CLIL from the English department of the focal institute to give language-learning sessions to students whose first language is not English. Other recommendations were providing translated summaries of Chinese readings for teachers who cannot read Chinese, more multi-media resources in English, approval for bilingual teaching, more preparation time, more supports to enhance students' English proficiency and setting up an English-language entrance requirement for EMI courses.

Students' and Teachers' Perceptions of the Plan to Mandate English as the MoI in 2016/17

Revealed in the attitude scale, both students' and teachers' opinions on the 2016/17 policy leaned slightly towards opposition, with about 45% students and 30% teachers disagreed and agreed with the policy respectively. It is also observed that the English level of students and the perception of the mandate were positively correlated. An ANOVA test with correlation analysis shows that the higher students self-rated their English proficiency the more positively they viewed the plan, adumbrating that current EMI teaching might have failed to profit students with lower English level. In terms of written feedback, comments from both groups, with a comparable number of effective responses to those of the attitude scales, show a greater adversity to the language mandate. Nearly 60% of student participants commented negatively. More than one third of them claimed that some courses might in all probability be more effective if Chinese was the MoI because of their nature or complexity in content, and 18% of them expressed

that English as the MoI hindered their learning. About one fourth of student participants' comments viewed the policy positively, claiming that EMI could enhance their English proficiency and learning as well as competitiveness and job prospect. With a similar percentage to that of students', over 60% of teachers commented on the policy negatively, expressing their worry that language enhancement might be weighed over (effective) learning, and CLIL-corresponding measures were insufficient.

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