

Negotiating bilingual language support in English-medium instruction: A classroom-based study in Japan

Research Overview

This study explores how students experienced bilingual language support in a team-taught English-medium instruction course at a Japanese university. Drawing on questionnaire and open-ended response data, it shows that support enhanced motivation, mediated ongoing linguistic difficulty, and functioned both as immediate comprehension aid and as developmental scaffolding for learner independence.

Abstract

This study examines how bilingual language support was negotiated and experienced in a team-taught English-medium instruction (EMI) course at a private university in Japan. While EMI has expanded rapidly in Japanese higher education under internationalization policies, many students continue to face difficulties in processing content through English, particularly in settings where linguistic support is uneven or insufficiently integrated into content teaching. In response to this pedagogical challenge, the present study investigates whether embedded bilingual support within an EMI course can shape students' motivation, self-efficacy, perceived difficulty, and perceptions of their own developing independence.

The study was conducted in an introductory EMI religious studies course jointly taught by a content instructor and a language supporter. The language supporter provided structured support from Week 3 onward for approximately 15 minutes at the start of each class. This support included bilingual vocabulary review, simplified explanations, occasional Japanese translation of key terms, paraphrasing of difficult content, and assistance through handouts and annotated PowerPoint slides. The study adopted a mixed-methods design involving 16 undergraduate students. Quantitative data were collected through bilingual pre- and post-course questionnaires administered in Weeks 3 and 15. The questionnaires examined three core dimensions of EMI readiness: motivation, self-efficacy, and perceived linguistic difficulty. The post-course questionnaire included 10 additional items designed to capture students' evaluations of specific support practices, together with two open-ended questions eliciting

comments on the most helpful forms of support and on changes in reliance over time. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and paired-samples *t*-tests, and qualitative responses were examined interpretively in order to contextualize the numerical trends.

The findings revealed a differentiated pattern across the three readiness dimensions. Students' motivation to learn through English increased over the semester, reaching the conventional threshold for statistical significance. This suggests that sustained exposure to EMI accompanied by visible pedagogical support can strengthen learners' willingness to engage with academic content in English, even when the demands of EMI remain high. In contrast, gains in self-efficacy were more modest and did not reach statistical significance. Similarly, perceived difficulty remained relatively stable across the semester. These results indicate that although bilingual support may not substantially reduce the inherent cognitive and linguistic demands of EMI within a single semester, it can still play an important role in sustaining affective engagement and helping students persist under challenging conditions.

Students' evaluations of the support practices were highly positive overall. Particularly strong ratings were observed for bilingual paraphrasing and summary on PowerPoint slides, the content instructor's in-class Japanese translation of key vocabulary, and weekly review activities that revisited content-related words and useful English expressions. These responses suggest that students especially valued support that reduced lexical processing burden and facilitated comprehension of disciplinary content. At the same time, qualitative responses revealed an important distinction between immediate perceived effectiveness and experiential centrality. Although in-the-moment Japanese mediation received the highest ratings in the questionnaire, students' open-ended comments more often highlighted routinized practices such as weekly vocabulary review and printed PowerPoint handouts for note-taking. These regular, predictable forms of support appeared to become more central in students' retrospective understanding of what helped them learn.

The qualitative findings also showed that the development of learner independence was uneven and non-linear. Only a small number of students reported becoming less dependent on language support over time, and those who did attributed this change primarily to their own increased preparation, such as previewing slides or studying vocabulary before class. Most students, however, felt that continued support remained necessary because each lesson introduced new concepts and unfamiliar terminology. Rather than disappearing, support appeared to shift in

function. For some learners, it became a background resource that could be accessed selectively; for others, it remained an essential means of coping with ongoing linguistic and disciplinary demands. These findings suggest that fading in EMI should not be understood as the simple withdrawal of support but as a qualitative change in how support is used and appropriated by learners. Overall, the findings indicate that bilingual language support in EMI is best understood as a negotiated and developmental resource that helps students sustain engagement and develop more strategic participation in English-medium academic learning.

Keywords

English-medium instruction (EMI); bilingual language support; instructional scaffolding; student perceptions; Japanese higher education