

An Analysis of International Students' Perceptions of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in Korean Higher Education Institutions

(Research Overview)

This study analyzes international students' perceptions of English Medium Instruction (EMI) at Korean higher education institutions. The research method is a survey. Participants will be approximately 300 international students at C University. Survey items assess EMI satisfaction levels, difficulties, and suggestions for improvement, focusing on differences based on self-assessed English proficiency.

(Purpose)

English Medium Instruction (EMI) defined as the use of English to teach academic courses in non-English-speaking contexts, has rapidly expanded in Korean higher education since the early 2000s. EMI was driven by government's internationalization policies such as the Study Korea Project. The number of international students reached a record high of 253,434 in 2025. However, the majority came from non-English-speaking countries including China, Vietnam, Uzbekistan, and Mongolia. EMI courses have become a primary mode of academic engagement for these students.

Despite this growth, the reality of EMI remains complex. Instructors and students are often both non-native English speakers, many courses remain lecture-based and instructor-centered, and students' varying levels of English proficiency can significantly affect their learning experiences.

However, prior research has focused largely on domestic Korean students or Chinese international students, with most studies targeting graduate students and describing EMI experiences without analyzing factors affecting satisfaction or proficiency-based differences. As a result, the EMI experiences of students from diverse nationalities and degree levels remain poorly understood.

The purpose of this study is to analyze international students' perceptions of EMI courses taught by Korean instructors (professors) and to identify practical strategies for improving EMI quality in Korean higher education institutions.

(Method)

The research method is quantitative method. Specifically, this study employs a survey. Participants are international students enrolled at C University, a large regional flagship national university in South Korea with approximately 1,200 international students across undergraduate and graduate programs, during the first semester of 2026. Recruitment will be conducted through group SNS chatroom where international students participate in cooperation with the Office of International Affairs at C University.

The University survey instrument was developed based on prior EMI research and covers background information (gender, major, degree level, EMI course experience, and English proficiency), satisfaction with EMI courses, difficulties experienced, and suggestions for improvement. English proficiency is measured through self-assessment on a 5-point scale. All other items use a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree), and one open-ended question is included to allow for free responses. The survey is administered via Google Forms and data will be collected throughout May 2026.

Data will be analyzed using SPSS. Frequency analysis, descriptive statistics, and independent samples t-tests will be used to examine demographic characteristics, overall trends, and proficiency-based differences. The open-ended response will be thematically categorized to supplement the quantitative findings.

(Results/Discussion)

As this study is currently in progress, data collection has not yet been completed. This study can make three contributions. Theoretically, it extends prior EMI research by incorporating students from a wider range of nationalities beyond Chinese graduate students, broadening the empirical base of the field. Practically, the findings are expected to offer actionable guidance for instructors designing and managing EMI courses at Korean universities. In terms of policy, the results are anticipated to inform the development of institutional EMI support systems that more adequately reflect the diverse needs and perspectives of international students.