

Comparative Enactment of EMI Policy Across Disciplines in Taiwanese Higher Education

Abstract

Research Overview

This study explores the comparative enactment of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) policy across the College of Education and the College of Engineering at University Alpha in Taiwan. Using policy enactment theory, the research examines how disciplinary contexts shape faculty interpretations, practices, and challenges in EMI implementation under Taiwan's higher education internationalization policies.

Purpose

In recent years, English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) has become a central strategy in the internationalization of higher education in Taiwan, particularly under the influence of the "Bilingual Policy" and the Ministry of Education's Program on Bilingual Education for Students in College (BEST). Universities have increasingly expanded EMI courses in order to enhance global competitiveness, attract international students, and align with international ranking systems. However, existing EMI research often treats universities as institutionally homogeneous spaces, paying insufficient attention to how disciplinary cultures, professional norms, and local institutional contexts shape the enactment of EMI policies differently across academic disciplines within the same university.

This study therefore aims to comparatively investigate how EMI policy is interpreted and enacted within two contrasting disciplinary contexts—the College of Education and the College of Engineering at University Alpha (pseudonym), a Taiwanese public university located in central southern Taiwan. The study seeks to explore how faculty members and administrators understand the purposes of EMI, negotiate pedagogical and linguistic challenges, and respond to institutional and national policy expectations. In particular, the study examines how disciplinary epistemologies, teaching traditions, faculty identities, and material conditions contribute to different patterns of EMI enactment. By focusing on intra-institutional comparison, this study moves beyond broad institutional analysis and highlights the

contextual and discipline-dependent nature of EMI implementation.

The study is guided by policy enactment theory, which conceptualizes policy not as a fixed directive to be implemented uniformly, but as a process of interpretation, negotiation, and enactment shaped by situated, professional, material, and external contexts. This framework enables the study to examine how similar institutional policies can produce different enactment practices across disciplinary settings.

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative comparative case study approach through an intra-institutional comparison between the College of Education and the College of Engineering at University Alpha. Using a “most similar systems” comparative logic, the study examines how disciplinary cultures shape EMI enactment differently despite shared institutional and national policy contexts. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 17 participants, including six from the College of Education and eleven from the College of Engineering, as well as institutional documents related to EMI policy and internationalization. The analysis was guided by Ball et al.’s (2012) policy enactment framework, focusing on situated, professional, material, and external contexts to compare faculty perceptions, pedagogical practices, institutional support, and policy pressures across the two colleges.

Results / Discussion

Preliminary findings suggest that EMI enactment differs significantly across the two colleges due to contrasting disciplinary epistemologies and pedagogical expectations. Faculty members in the College of Engineering generally approach EMI from a more instrumental and pragmatic perspective, viewing English as a necessary medium for accessing global scientific knowledge, conducting research, and preparing students for international labor markets. The use of English-language textbooks and technical terminology is often perceived as aligned with disciplinary norms, resulting in relatively greater acceptance of EMI practices.

In contrast, faculty members in the College of Education express stronger pedagogical and linguistic tensions regarding EMI implementation. Participants frequently emphasize that educational theories, critical discussions, and culturally nuanced concepts become difficult to communicate fully in English, particularly when

students possess limited English proficiency. As a result, hybrid teaching approaches combining English and Mandarin frequently emerge as pragmatic responses to classroom realities. Faculty members also express concerns that excessive emphasis on English may reduce student participation, critical engagement, and learning depth.

The findings further reveal that EMI enactment is shaped not only by language proficiency, but also by broader professional and institutional contexts. In the professional context, faculty identities and beliefs about teaching significantly influence how EMI is interpreted and practiced. In the material context, challenges such as increased workload, insufficient EMI pedagogical training, limited teaching resources, and large class sizes create implementation difficulties across both colleges, though these challenges manifest differently depending on disciplinary teaching styles. In the external context, national internationalization policies and institutional performance indicators exert pressure on colleges to expand EMI offerings, occasionally resulting in tensions between policy expectations and classroom realities.

Overall, this study argues that EMI policy enactment is deeply contextual and discipline-dependent rather than institutionally uniform. By foregrounding intra-institutional and cross-disciplinary variation, the research contributes to EMI and higher education internationalization scholarship by demonstrating the importance of disciplinary cultures in shaping policy enactment processes. The study also provides implications for developing more context-sensitive and discipline-responsive EMI policies and support systems within Taiwanese higher education.