

# **Students' attitudes toward EMI: Using Chung Hua University as an example**

Wen-Shuenn Wu

Lecturer, Department of Foreign Languages and Literature,  
Chung Hua University

## **Abstract**

It has been a trend that more and more content teachers in universities of Taiwan are using or are going to use English as a medium of instruction (EMI) for courses that are not related to language learning. The telephone interviews we have conducted indicated that most universities in Taiwan offered professors nominal financial incentives to make up extra time they will spend, but did not draw up clear guidelines for EMI. Considering students' English proficiency, the EMI language policy is particularly limited to graduate courses. However, some universities also applied it to undergraduate courses. A questionnaire survey was conducted at Chung Hua University to investigate students' attitudes towards EMI. The results showed that most students, even those who confessed that they did not have a good command of English, thought that EMI was a helpful language policy. The findings also suggested that most students were aware that learning English by using it in the classroom was one of the most effective ways to improve their English. The paper also discusses the feasibility of EMI in an EFL environment in Taiwan and compares the EMI language policy with that in some other ESL/EFL areas such as Hong Kong and Malaysia. Finally, the paper concludes with how English teachers in universities of Taiwan should face a possible full-scale EMI language policy in the future and what kinds of roles we can play once EMI is fully implemented.

**Key words:** English as medium of instruction (EMI), medium of instruction (MOI), English teaching

## INTRODUCTION

It appears to be a general consensus that English has been a global language, a language that is widely used in higher education, business, technology, science, and the Internet (Crystal, 1997; Nunan, 2003). Since TESOL professionals should play an important role in English language policy, we need a “clearer understanding of educational policy implications of global English” (Nunan, 2003, p.590). In response to the widespread use of English, non-English-speaking governments around the world have taken various measures to upgrade the English proficiency of their citizens such as introducing English as a compulsory subject at younger ages, encouraging teacher education of language practitioners, and implementing EMI in schools. Of course, the emergence of English as the world’s most important lingua franca has also exerted a major influence on Taiwan’s English language education in public schools as well as competitive private language schools. On the one hand, age of initial English instruction in public elementary schools was lowered to Grade 1 in 2002 (in which learners are 7 years of age). Classes are taught 1-2 hours per week during the two 20-week semesters in each school year. On the other hand, more and more private kindergartens touted as using English as the only medium of instruction (MOI) have been sprouting up, especially in urban areas. However, here in Taiwan not too much research in the impact of English as a global language on language policy, especially EMI in higher education, has been conducted.

In Taiwan, EMI (English as medium of instruction) is a new language trend in tertiary institutions. Most professors in universities used to employ either Mandarin or Mandarin-English mixed code in their instruction. Then, in the beginning of 2000s some elite national universities offered MBA (Masters of Business Administration), EMBA (Executive Masters of Business Administration), or IMBA (International Masters of Business Administration) programs, stressing that English would be used as the only medium of instruction to improve students’ English proficiency and attract international students. Students are expected to learn not ‘about’ English (as a subject) but ‘through’ English (as a medium). According to a special feature of local United Daily Newspaper on EMI published

on March 29th and 30th, 2006, more and more universities in Taiwan have employed EMI in their content subjects. For example, National Taiwan University (NTU), a highly prestigious academic institution in Taiwan, offered 420 EMI courses during 2005-2006 academic year, 26% of which were offered by College of Liberal Arts and 13% of which by College of Bio-Resources and Agriculture. The regulations of NTU stipulate that departments have to offer EMI courses if there is any international students in the class. Similarly, National Cheng Kung University (NCKU) also provided 205 EMI courses during 2005-2006 academic year, most of which were graduate courses. Another typical example of private tertiary institution is Yuan Ze University. One quarter of its courses (about 30 credits) used English as medium of instruction as early as in 2002-2003 academic year. While using English as medium of instruction in higher education in Taiwan seems to be a promising plan, whether this EMI policy, all of which were autonomously initiated by universities but not forced by Ministry of Education, is effective is in doubt, whether this EMI policy can last long is not clear, and whether this EMI policy has been strictly implemented should be further examined.

### **EMI POLICY IN HONG KONG AND MALAYSIA**

Compared to other countries in Asia, especially those decolonized countries like Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, or India, EMI policy in Taiwan's higher education is in its infancy. The important language policy changes in former colonial countries are now examined to see whether they can provide us new insights into the implementation of EMI in Taiwan.

#### ***Hong Kong***

Hong Kong was a British colony from 1842 until the handover to China in 1997, with English as the official language alongside Cantonese and, increasingly, Putonghua. There were some common misconceptions about language policy in Hong Kong. First of all, not all government officials and English teachers of native speakers promoted EMI education and deterred Chinese (or more specifically Cantonese) as a medium of instruction (CMI) education. For example, in 1860s, Frederick Stewart, the first Inspector of Government

Schools who was brought out by the Hong Kong Government from Britain to teach English and to supervise all government schools strongly advocated that equal emphasis should be paid to Chinese and English in the curriculum, that English should not be learnt at the expense of Chinese, that learning content subjects through a foreign language would adversely affect the quality of learning, and that no attempt should be made to ‘denationalize’ the young people of Hong Kong (Bickley, G., 1990; Tsui, 1996; Tsui, Shum, Wong, Tse, & Ki, 1999). However, his caution and recommendation were not heeded by the government. Later, in the *Report on Education in Hong Kong* given by another education inspector Burney (1935) (as cited in Tsui, et al., 1999), he also recommended that “educational policy in the Colony should be gradually reorientated so as eventually to secure for the pupils, first, a command of their own language sufficient for all needs of thought and expression, and secondly, a command of English limited to the satisfaction of vocational needs” (p.200). Then, in 1970s two important events which had a profound influence on language policy occurred. First, in 1972, China’s joining the United Nations had a strong impact on Hong Kong people. The Chinese as an Official Language Movement also took place in the early seventies, and in 1974, under public pressure, Chinese was established as an official language. Second, at the same year, Hong Kong government’s position toward language education changed. Although the Report of the Board of Education (referred to as the Education Green Paper) in 1973 recommended that Chinese become the usual language of instruction in the lower forms of secondary schools and that English should be studied as the second language, the subsequent White Paper on Education Policy published in 1974 still as usual did not adopt this professional recommendation by putting forward parental concern and Hong Kong’s economic development as justifications, but at least they left the choice of medium of instruction to schools (Tsui et al.).

The second myth is that the substantial increase of English-medium secondary schools in Hong Kong resulted from the ‘colonialist conspiracy’. In the early 1950s, more than half of the territory’s secondary students were attending Chinese-medium schools, but by the mid 1990s, over 90% of students were attending English-medium secondary schools.

In fact, this phenomenon was “largely driven by parents, who perceived that access to future education in Hong Kong and overseas, and careers in government, business and the professions depended on high levels of proficiency in English” (Evans, 1999, p.23).

The third fallacy is that most people in Hong Kong speak English fluently and naturally in their daily life like people in other ESL (English as a second language) countries. However, many studies found that it is not true. Hong Kong's English-medium tertiary institutions complained that after seven years of mixed-mode instruction, secondary-school graduates “were increasingly unable to satisfy the high linguistic demands of the local and international academic communities” (Evans, 1999, p.25). In another study conducted by Li, Leung, and Kember (2001) indicated that English cannot be claimed to be a second language, for it has limited usage. English only serves as a tool for study and is definitely not a language used for communication in daily life. It is more like a foreign language (p. 298).

The return of Hong Kong to China's sovereignty no doubt had a lasting impact on Hong Kong's language policy. From two Education Commission Reports before 1997 and the *Medium of Instruction Guidance for Secondary School* (the Guidance) issued in September 1997, the shift of Hong Kong government's position on language policy can be clearly identified. In the *Education Commission Report No. 4*, an official document issued in November 1990, it states:

*The language in education policy is based on the view, backed up by research (summarised in Annex 6A), that the majority of students will learn more effectively through the mother tongue than through English. The Working Group noted that the problem has been, however, that many schools have tended to choose their medium of instruction on the basis of parental wishes rather than on educational grounds. Parental wishes have favoured English since English is perceived to be the gateway to a brighter future for their children....The Working Group recommended that school should be encouraged to adopt clear-cut policies of language use and the incidence of mixed-code should be minimised (p. 95-96).*

In another *Education Commission Report* (No. 6), the one issued in March 1996, the importance of mother-tongue teaching was again emphasized:

*While the concept of mother-tongue teaching was generally supported by teachers and educationalists, many members of the public were still under the mistaken impression that mother-tongue teaching would lead to a corresponding decline in the standard of English. The Commission considers that the Final Report should reaffirm the policy of mother-tongue education and that a public education programme regarding the rationale of mother-tongue teaching should be strengthened (p. 4).*

Finally, after the handover, the Hong Kong government issued the *Medium of Instruction Guidance for Secondary Schools* (the Guidance) to schools in September 1997 for implementation as from September 1998. According to the Guidance, schools should adopt Chinese as the MOI for all academic subjects, starting with their Secondary 1 intake of the 1998/99 school year and progressing each year to a higher level of secondary education. Schools may teach in English if they could demonstrate that they fully satisfy the prescribed requirements in terms of student ability, teacher capability and support strategies and programmes. Out of a total of 421 government and government-subsidized secondary schools, 124 applied to use EMI. Only 114 were approved, including 14 who appealed the initial rejection, leaving more than 300 schools using CMI (Hopkins, 2006; Tse, Shum, Ki, & Wong, 2001). Language policy can be seen to be closely related to the social, political and economic agenda of post-colonial governments (Tse et al.); but the political agenda definitely played the most crucial role to the shift of language policy of Hong Kong government after the handover.

### ***Malaysia***

Prior to independence in 1957, primary schools in Malaysia were available in four mediums: English, Malay, Mandarin, and Tamil. The elite schools attended mostly by ethnic

Chinese used English as the medium of instruction. The majority of the Malays were excluded from EMI schools because many EMI schools, located in urban areas, were Christian mission schools of which the Malays were suspicious (Ridge, 2004; Tan, 2005). Later, ten years after Malaysia independence, Malay was declared the sole national language to unite the nation and its people. The ethnic riot in Kuala Lumpur in May 1969 induced the then Minister of Education, Dato Haji Abdul Rahman Ya'akub, to declare in July that beginning from January 1970, EMI schools would be phased out in Malaysia and by 1985 all former EMI schools would become Malay-medium schools (Tan, 2005).

However, the 1990s witnessed a comeback of English as medium of instruction mainly because of concerns about the general decline in English standards, high unemployment rate of the ethnic Malays who have poor command of English, and the continued segregation of the races (Tan, 2005). Hence on May 11, 2002, the then Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad announced that English would be used a medium of instruction for science and mathematics not only at tertiary levels but also during the first year of primary schooling (Gill, 2005).

EMI policy for science and mathematics can be viewed as one of the pathways leading to the success of Vision 2020, a blueprint delivered by then Prime Minister Dr Mahathir in February 1991 to the Malaysian Business Council. Vision 2020 outlined his thoughts on the future course of the nation and how it should go about to attaining the objective of developing Malaysia into an industrialized country (Gill, 2005; Ridge, 2004). It is from 2003 that a Malay-English bilingual education policy is fully implemented. The sudden shift to EMI is similar to the drastic change of post-independence language policy almost 40 years ago when Malay was declared the sole national language and medium of instruction. Whether the decisions made about EMI will finally succeed or not is not certain but is worthy of attention. After all, the language policy formulated from people of power and authority rather than from users' linguistic awareness about the importance of a certain language is not easy to carry out. However, as Tan (2005) stated, if this momentous bilingual education is successfully implemented, "the policy will have a major impact because it

envisages a new generation of Malaysians who will be bilingual in at least Malay and English” (p.49).

### **ATTITUDES TOWARDS EMI IN HONG KONG**

Many studies were conducted, before and after 1997, to investigate how students of primary schools in Hong Kong feel about using EMI. Some major findings in 1980s included that students would have liked their teachers to use more Chinese in the class and more clarifications in Chinese to be included in their textbooks and study materials (Tam, 1980), and that most students agreed that English should not be a medium of instruction in the secondary schools in Hong Kong (Pierson, Fu & Lee, 1980). Interestingly, the attitudes towards EMI in 1990s seemed to be more positive even when the handover of Hong Kong to China was approaching. Using the same survey instrument as employed in an earlier study (Pierson et al., 1980), Pennington and Yue (1994) found that most students in secondary schools agreed that English should be a medium of instruction in Hong Kong (p. 13), probably because English language had continuously increased its presence and importance.

In addition, some empirical studies on MOI and authentic language use at tertiary level were also made. Much research was related to the decline in English language standards and the decreasing use of English in Hong Kong tertiary educational institutions. For example, investigating the issues related to usage of English and Cantonese at City University of Hong Kong, Pennington and Balla (1996) conducted a survey to 789 full-time students in non-degree courses and found that the language of written communication (i.e. textbooks, handouts, and examinations) was predominantly English. However, the use of oral communication was code-mixing of English and Cantonese: lectures tended to be mainly in English (but a quarter of the subjects also claimed that Cantonese was the usual MOI), whereas discussions in tutorials and laboratory sessions were mainly in Cantonese. Likewise, Evans (1999) investigated the use of English and Cantonese in the degree course in Building Services Engineering (BSE) at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. He found out, out of the questionnaire survey given to 175 full-time and part-time students in BSE, similar results



to the use of English and Cantonese in written and spoken mode.

## THE STUDY

### Purpose

EMI has suddenly become popular among higher institutions in Taiwan recently. However, little research has done on students' viewpoint toward EMI. Therefore, the main purpose of the present study is to investigate students' attitudes towards EMI just implemented to partial graduate courses at Chung Hua University (CHU), a typical private university that was newly-established in the beginning of 1990s.

### Subjects and Procedures

A survey was administered to 28 graduate students studying in the spring semester of 2006 at CHU. The disciplines of participants and the EMI courses they took were shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

Disciplines of participants and EMI courses

Disciplines	EMI Courses	Participants ( $N=28$ )
Applied Mathematics	Advanced Engineering Mathematics	7
Applied Mathematics	Theory of Vibration	4
Mechanical Engineering	Communications and Navigation Introduction	9
Technology Management	Advanced Production and Operations Management	8

In April 2005, CHU established EMI guidelines for potential professors who would like to use English as medium of instruction in the classroom. Apart from English teachers in the Department of Foreign Languages who are supposed to use EMI, any other professors who would like to implement EMI can submit their English syllabus and proposal for approval. Those professors whose EMI application is accepted can obtain 50% extra credit hour (e.g. 3-hour pay for 2 credit hours) as financial incentives.

Considering students' English proficiency at CHU, professors teaching undergraduate courses did not submit the EMI application in the spring semester of 2005-2006 academic year. In order to make sure that students could fully understand the questions of the survey, a Chinese version of the survey was created and distributed in the end of May 2006 when the semester almost ended.

## **Results and Analysis**

### **1. Participants' background and general attitude about EMI**

Participants' English competence is closely related to their viewpoint on EMI; however, it's not easy to find out the real English proficiency of these subjects. Being graduate students at CHU means that, under normal circumstance, they were not required to take any English courses when they were seniors either at CHU or some other tertiary institutions. To the question: *What do you think your current level of English is?* Most subjects thought that their English proficiency was not good. Most subjects reported that their reading (57%), listening (54%), speaking (46%), and writing (43%) skills were fair; some of them even admitted that their reading (25%), listening (32%), speaking (39%), and writing (46%) skills were poor. Asked what should be the MOI for Chung Hua University courses in general, most subjects chose *Chinese supplemented with English* (71%) followed by *English supplemented with Chinese* (18%); only 2 students thought that English and one student thought that Chinese should be MOI for CHU students.

However, even if most subjects confessed that they did not have a good command of English, all of them agreed that EMI is a good language policy for graduate students of Chung Hua University. When they were further asked whether CHU should offer more EMI courses, a majority (93%) of the participants suggested that more EMI courses should be provided in the future. Furthermore, eight (29%) and four (14%) participants suggested respectively that 30% and 50% of courses offered should be taught with EMI.

### **2. English use in the EMI class**

As expected, the overwhelming majority of written materials given by professors (i.e. textbooks, handouts, and examinations) were predominantly English, which was similar to

the results of EMI research conducted in Hong Kong (Evans, 1999; Pennington & Balla, 1996). Nevertheless, it appeared that the use of English on student's side was not so strict. For example, asked whether they had to answer the examination papers in English, 19 (68%) subjects reported that it was optional for them to answer the examination in English and 21 (75%) subjects had used Chinese to take the examination because they thought that their English was not good enough. Since participants came from different disciplines, their examination types could vary from multiple-choice questions to short answer questions. It was surprising to find out that graduate students of Technology Management still had multiple-choice questions in their examination because graduate students of Liberal Arts usually had to write a term paper instead of taking an examination with multiple-choice questions. Many students were not sure how to respond to the question of written language use in an examination because they sometimes only had to use alphabets (e.g. multiple-choice questions), numbers, formulas or calculation to answer their examination papers instead of turning in a written report.

In terms of note-taking, the considerable variability in the use of English can be found in different subject areas. For instance, as many as 8 (73%) students of Applied Mathematics reported that they use 90% English or only English to take note, but 6 (75%) participants of Technology Management and 5 (56%) participants of Mechanical Engineering admitted that fewer than 60% of English was used in their note taking.

As far as oral communication is concerned, 20 (71%) subjects reported that their professors did not require them to speak English or ask and answer questions in English; only the teacher in Technology Management required his students to speak English in the EMI course. While speaking English was not compulsory to the rest 20 students, 12 (60%) of them chose to use Chinese to ask and answer questions because they thought their English is not good enough and 3 (30%) of them hardly talked in the class no matter what language they could use.

### ***3. Advantages of EMI***

Whereas the real use of English in the EMI class was not encouraging, an

overwhelming majority of the participants agreed that EMI had the following advantages: helping to improve my standard of English (96%), giving more exposure to global view and international culture (75%), providing opportunities for expressing myself in English (86%), helping me better understand English textbooks (93%), helping to understand reference materials in English (93%).

#### **4. Disadvantages of EMI**

At the same time, they also agreed that EMI had the following major disadvantages: making it difficult to understand the course content (82%), stopping students from expressing themselves smoothly in class (86%), discouraging discussion and interaction between professors and students (54%).

## **DISCUSSION**

The results of this pilot study showed some contradictory findings between students' attitudes toward EMI and real classroom practices. For example, whereas most participants admitted that their English proficiency was either fair or poor, all of them were in favor of EMI language policy and recommended that more EMI courses should be offered, which presumably indicated that they believed that EMI language policy could either help them improve their English competence or give them more opportunities to use English in a natural environment. However, the present study reflected the contradiction that most of them did not grab the chance to use written and oral English.

It has intrinsic limitation to the investigation of EMI language policy in the higher education of Taiwan. Classroom observation may be one of the best ways to unearth the pedagogical reality of the classroom. However, content teachers may be reluctant to let an English language practitioner observe his or her class especially when he or she has to use English as medium of instruction. In addition, it is not easy for language teachers to understand what content teachers teach in the class even if we are allowed to observe the EMI class. Therefore, it is difficult to find out whether the content teachers have clear pronunciation, fluent lectures, and correct usage, and whether the content teachers stick to

English as medium of instruction all the way from the beginning to the end of the class; most of the information related to language use in the classroom can not collect from the survey alone. One of the survey questions is to ask how much students understood their professor's EMI lectures. The results varied from 90%-100% (11%) to lower than 59% (7%) while most students (86%) understood about 70%-90% of the EMI lectures. It is hard to find out why the EMI lectures could not be effectively delivered: participants' listening comprehension ability? professors' peculiar accent? complicated content?

Finally, since only 28 graduate students of a private university were sampled in this survey, the results could not truthfully reflect university students' attitudes toward EMI. A more comprehensive and nationally representative sample is needed to find out students' attitudes toward EMI and their capability to cope with EMI.

## CONCLUSION

When more and more universities in Taiwan are implementing EMI to some of their curriculum planning. There are a lot of related issues should be seriously considered. Li, Leung and Kember (2001) asked many EMI relevant questions for us to consider:

*If English is to be the medium of instruction, then what this means should be made clear. Are tutorials and other classes conducted in English? Are consultations and conversations between tutors and students in English? Is code switching permissible? Will academics use English when talking amongst themselves? Are assignments and presentations to be in English? Will attention be paid to language when marking assignments? (p.306)*

Without the colonial background like some other Asian countries or areas such as Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, or India, it is not easy for Taiwan to have a full-scale EMI language policy in higher institutions. Furthermore, standards of English and students' ability to cope with EMI vary between institutions and between programs within institutions. Since

educational research has suggested that mother tongue is the best medium of instruction, is it necessary and possible to have a full-scale EMI language policy in Taiwan's tertiary institutions? How about the MOI in high schools and elementary schools? How do we know that students are linguistically and academically prepared for the shift to EMI in the freshman year? Likewise, how can we make sure those teachers who use EMI have a good command of English? Should tertiary institutions also offer English training courses for those teachers who are not confident in giving lectures in English? A Malay-English bilingual education policy has been fully implemented in Malaysia from 2003, almost 40 years after Malaysian government declared that all the EMI schools should become Malay-medium schools. One of the reasons for Malaysian government to reverse their language policy was that students' English proficiency had deteriorated rapidly. Their newly introduced EMI policy is a golden opportunity for us to observe the details and result of their EMI language policy.

If EMI merely applies to some undergraduate or graduate courses, should we give students an English placement test to decide whether they are qualified to take EMI courses? As Tse et al. (2001) suggested students benefited from EMI only if their English proficiency reached a threshold level; otherwise their academic achievements suffered badly. Will the partial EMI policy create a new social caste labeled with better English proficiency or lower English competence?

Because a full-scale EMI policy is unlikely to implement in the near future, it is more practical for English teachers to follow up whether EMI policy implemented in universities of Taiwan is pedagogically effective. In terms of language use and language policy, it is quite common that there is a gap between "ministerial rhetoric and classroom reality" (Nuana, 2003, p.609) or between "espoused theory and theory in use" (Li, Leung, & Kember, 2001). EMI language policy in tertiary institutions involves English language education and another discipline. In the setting of Taiwan's higher education, EMI policy can hardly implement in a framework of interdisciplinary cooperation (e.g. one content teacher and one language instructor teaching at the same time in one course). However, as TESOL professionals, more comprehensive and long-term research on EMI policy should be conducted to find out

whether English is the best medium of instruction in a non-language class and what learning impact it makes on students of higher education.

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「全英語 學校趕時髦 學生行不行」(2006年3月30日), 聯合報

# 學生對於以「英語授課」的態度：以中華大學為例

吳文舜

中華大學外國語文學系講師

## 摘要

近年來，非英語學習相關課程以「英語授課」(English as a medium of instruction, EMI)似乎成爲臺灣高等教育的熱門潮流之一。經由民國 94 年 11 月間電話詢問國內大約 20 所公、私立大專院校，發覺大部份學校有給以「英語授課」的教授些許鐘點費的優惠，但是對於學校以「英語授課」的政策、實施的範圍、學生的接受度和適應能力、以「英語授課」老師的語言流利度和正確性、相關的配套措施等都尙未有明確的規定。考量到學生的英語能力，中華大學的「英語授課」主要針對研究所的課程爲主，由任課教授主動提供英文課程大綱申請英語授課。本文作者針對中華大學研究所四科以「英語授課」的上課學生共 28 位進行問卷調查，結果發現雖然大多數同學承認自己的英文程度並不好，但是普遍認爲「英語授課」是一項很好的政策，也希望以後學校能多開設以「英語授課」的課程。本文先就臺灣目前中、小學到大學的英語教學和「英語授課」現況做簡單的介紹。之後，再就香港和馬來西亞之前和目前的「英語授課」情況做說明，希望能藉由亞洲其他國家實施「英語授課」的經驗，給臺灣目前許多大專院校實施「英語授課」的學校一些參考和借鏡。接著就中華大學研究所學生對「英語授課」的心得和觀感，做仔細的分析。雖然中華大學研究所學生的意見並不能代表全臺灣大專學生對「英語授課」的看法。不過，或許可以反應出學生對英語學習積極認同的態度和課堂實際消極使用的矛盾衝突。最後，作者針對如果以後臺灣高等教育也大規模的實施「英語授課」，提出許多讓我們必須謹慎思考、嚴肅面對的議題。

**關鍵詞：**英語授課、教學媒介、英語學習