

Improving Teaching in English-Medium Instruction Classes at Japanese Universities through Needs-Based Professional Development Workshops

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Abstract : In order to attract more international students to study for undergraduate degrees in Japan, many universities have been developing English-Medium Instruction degree programs. This means that many faculty members must now teach their courses in English, which raises a number of concerns. A common misconception of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) is that teaching in English is simply a matter of translating materials. Since much of the teaching in Japan still relies on a more traditional, teacher-centered, approach, continuing with this style in an EMI environment that targets international students can cause a clash between what is happening and what students expect in the classroom, not to mention what the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) has shown is effective teaching. A variety of considerations need to be taken into account in EMI classrooms such as varying English abilities of the students, modifying input material, and assuring comprehension through interactional checks. This paper analyzes the effectiveness of the English-Medium Instruction (EMI) undergraduate degree programs in engineering, agriculture, and science at a large research university in Japan by presenting the results from student surveys regarding the areas where perceived improvements need to be made. The students were the most dissatisfied with communication with their teachers in English, communication with Japanese students in English, adherence to only English being used in the classes, and the quality of the education they received. In addition, the results of a needs analysis survey of Japanese teachers having to teach in English showed that they believed they were most in need of English vocabulary and expressions to use in the classroom and teaching methods for teaching in English. The result from the student survey and the faculty survey show similar concerns between the two groups. By helping the teachers to understand student-centered teaching and the benefits for learning that it provides, teachers may begin to incorporate more student-centered approaches that in turn help to alleviate the dissatisfaction students are currently experiencing. Through analyzing the current environment in Japanese higher education against established best practices in teaching and EMI, three areas that need to be addressed in professional development workshops were identified. These were “culture” as it relates to the English language, “classroom management techniques” and ways to incorporate them into classes, and “language” issues. Materials used to help faculty better understand best practices as they relate to these specific areas will be provided to help practitioners begin the process of helping EMI faculty build awareness of better teaching practices. Finally, the results from faculty development workshops participants’ surveys will show the impact that these workshops can have. Almost all of the participants indicated that they learned something new and would like to incorporate the ideas from the workshop into their teaching. In addition, the vast majority of the participants felt the workshop provided them with new information, and they would like more workshops like these.

Keywords : English-medium instruction, materials development, professional development, teaching effectiveness

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