

## Chapter 2

# English as a Medium of Instruction in East and Southeast Asian Universities

Andy Kirkpatrick

**Abstract** In this chapter I shall consider the increasing shift to the use of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in East and Southeast Asia, with the focus on the university sector. I shall also discuss possible implications of the trend towards EMI in Asian universities for the Australian university sector. The chapter begins with a brief discussion of the recently published Australian Government White Paper, *Australia in the Asian Century* and this is followed by summary of recent developments concerning the use of EMI in selected European universities. The main part of the paper reviews and discusses the adoption of EMI among selected universities in Asia. Some tentative predictions regarding the use of English and Asian languages in higher education in Australasia conclude the chapter.

**Keywords** English as a medium of instruction • Higher education • Multilingual education • Asia literacy • English as a lingua franca

### 2.1 Introduction

In October 2012, the Australian Government released a White Paper entitled *Australia in the Asian Century* (Australia in the Asian Century Taskforce 2012). This is illuminating as it indicates how the Australian Government is trying to position Australia as part of the Asia–Pacific region and the ideas which it believes need to be adopted in order to ensure Australia benefits from what is termed the ‘Asian Century’. It calls on all Australians to play their part in ‘becoming a more Asia-literate and Asia-capable nation’ (p. iii). The Executive Summary of the White Paper recognises that ‘Asia is an important source of new ideas, arts and culture, technologies and leading-edge science’ (p. 8), yet this is the only mention of Asia as a source of knowledge in the document. It vows to support Australian researchers

---

A. Kirkpatrick (✉)  
Griffith University, 170 Kessels Road, Nathan, Queensland 411, Australia  
e-mail: a.kirkpatrick@griffith.edu.au

in their bid to strengthen their partnerships with researchers in the region and promises that, ‘Every Australian student will have significant exposure to studies of Asia across the curriculum...’ At the same time, ‘All schools will engage with at least one school in Asia to support the teaching of a priority Asian language’, (i.e. Mandarin, Hindi, Japanese and Indonesian) (p. 15).

While these are fine sentiments, Australian universities’ recent record for the teaching of Asian languages is poor, with many languages restricted to a small number of universities and few students undertaking in-depth language studies (Dunne and Pavlyshyn 2012). The White Paper is short on details as to how these promises might be delivered. In the China Daily’s *Asian Weekly*, Wilson (2012) summarises critics’ responses to the White Paper as being replete with fine aspirations but short on details on how to realise them. He quotes Kanishka Jayasuriya, Director of the Indo-Pacific Governance Research Centre at Adelaide University, as saying that, despite the apparent recognition of Asia being an important source of new ideas, in fact the White Paper appears to ‘neglect the growing shift of knowledge to Asia, the growth of research universities in the region—in China, South Korea and India—and the need to build strategic alliances and collaborations with these research institutions’.

I start with this reference to the White Paper as a way of illustrating how Australia is beginning to see how important Asia now is, but, at the same time, still not quite able to free itself from the notion that, in terms of higher education, Asia is a primarily a provider of international fee-paying students rather than a source of knowledge. I shall argue, however, that the trend towards English medium education in universities in the region actually provides an opportunity for Australian students to undertake at least a part of their degree programs in Asia. The irony is that the increased use of English as a medium of instruction has the potential of further advantaging speakers of English and disadvantaging speakers of other languages. It also reduces the role that Asian languages are playing in higher education and research.

## 2.2 EMI in European Universities

In Europe, the increasing adoption of EMI at universities has been well-documented (Maiworm and Wachter 2002; Wachter and Maiworm 2008). This has been attributed to the Bologna Process, which has encouraged universities across Europe to standardise their degree offerings so as to allow students the opportunity to undertake part of their degrees in different universities. Not surprisingly, this has led to English being adopted as a common medium of instruction, as this makes it easier for both students and staff to move between universities in different countries. This is the paradox of internationalisation, whereby the increased diversity of courses offered in English and the local languages may lead to students coming into contact with fewer languages (Haberland 2011, p. 43).

Phillipson puts it more strongly. What emerges unambiguously ‘is that in the Bologna process, internationalization means English-medium higher education’ (2009, p. 37). This, in turn, leads to adopting English ways of thinking. ‘How can one go along with the use of English without exposing oneself to the risk of being anglicized in one’s mental structures, without being brainwashed by the linguistic routines?’ (Phillipson 2006, pp. 68–69). Similar views have been expressed in Australia. ‘Internationalization has become little more than an entrenchment of the English language as an instrument of power and of an English-speaking worldview as the only legitimated perspective through which the world can be viewed and interpreted’ (Trevaskes et al. 2003, p. 5).

In a nuanced recent study of the history of the increased use of EMI at a Dutch university, Wilkinson shows that, when the Dutch initially applied the Bologna approach in 2002, the reasons for the development of EMI courses were to encourage ‘student mobility and diploma portability’ (2013, p. 7). He also points out that there were comparatively few EMI courses at that time. He argues, however, that in more recent years there has been a large increase in EMI courses and that the reasons have shifted from educational to financial, evidenced in part by the university’s attempt to attract students from outside Europe as they are required to pay international student fees. In describing a specific course in European studies in which ‘there is no explicit demand on the students to seek source material in a language other than English’ (p. 14), Wilkinson also cites concern about domain loss—that English is becoming the language of scholarship at the expense of other European languages. He makes the telling point, however, that while domain loss may be a national concern, it is seldom a concern for an individual university, which is usually happy to let students rely on English (2013, p. 12). I shall argue later that there is little concern for domain loss in Asian universities which have adopted EMI courses.

In their study of attitudes towards EMI courses and the use of English across the campus at the University of the Basque Country, the authors show that there are mixed views across all sectors of the university (Doiz et al. 2013). On the one hand, people acknowledge that EMI has broadened their minds, made them aware of other peoples, and increased their mobility. On the other, some feared the imposition of ‘one-way thinking’ and of English as the hegemonic language of communication. Many participants also acknowledged their own limitations in English and noted how this made life difficult for them. Importantly, the majority of the few *international* students who were surveyed reported that they wanted to learn the language of the host country and be taught in the local language—made more complex here, as both Basque and Spanish were involved. The authors concluded that English is valued by all three bodies (local students, faculty and administration personnel), although all also bemoan their own limitations in English (2012, p. 13).

In moving from universities outside Anglophone nations to those that are Anglophone, we see related and similar concerns being expressed about how English is dominant at the expense of other languages. This includes the lack of respect for multilingual ability among international students. For example ‘Universities in the Anglophone centre appear to have taken a largely myopic stance’, have ‘a fixation on English and a monoglot ideology’, where ‘the linguistic repertoires of bi- and

multilingual students (are) problematized rather than being treated as multilingual capital' (Preece 2011, p. 122). Potential contributions that international students can make are 'overlooked in the web of anxiety about standards and resources' (Trevaskes et al. 2003, p. 5).

The irony of this is that the nations that are the focus of this chapter, that is, China, South Korea and Japan, along with the ten countries that comprise the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), namely Burma, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, have all promoted the use of English as a language of education in primary and secondary education and many have introduced EMI courses at tertiary level (Kirkpatrick 2011). Recent developments in the use of EMI in selected universities across East and Southeast Asia are the topic of the following section.

## 2.3 EMI in Asian Universities

At the 2012 Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit, it was agreed that ways of facilitating staff and student mobility across the region would be examined. This Bologna-like plan will inevitably give further impetus to the establishment of EMI courses. As it is, of the thirteen countries listed above, only Indonesia has not made English a compulsory subject at primary school. In many countries, English is introduced in the third year of primary school (China, for example). In some, it is used as a medium of education in primary school, as well as being taught as a subject (in Brunei and the Philippines, for example) and in Singapore it is the medium of instruction in primary school.

Even in Indonesia—the only country yet to make English a compulsory primary school subject—there is high demand for English from parents and this is a cause for concern for some scholars. '...with the emerging and mushrooming demand for English, schools then drop the local language in order to give more time to English teaching. As a result, in the long run, children and the younger generation can no longer speak the local language. This is culturally and linguistically pitiful' (Hadasantosa 2010, p. 31). Indeed the Indonesian Ministry of Education recently responded to these concerns by announcing that English, along with science, would no longer be taught in primary schools. According to a *Straits Times* report, which was then re-reported in the *Jakarta Globe* of 25 October, the Deputy Minister of Education, Musliar Kasim, is quoted as saying, 'It is too early to teach such hard subjects to the pupils', and that 'Elementary schools won't have English lessons because [pupils] haven't even learnt to understand the Indonesian language yet' (Osman 2012).

The announcement met with protests from those who argued that the removal of English would further delay Indonesia's move to participate in modernisation and globalisation. They were apparently effective as the *Jakarta Globe* of 14 November announced that the Deputy Minister had backtracked, assuring Indonesians that English would continue to be taught as an elective subject in elementary school (English will be taught 2012).

The debate over the role of English has been mirrored in other Asian countries. For example, in 2011, Malaysia abandoned its policy of teaching maths and science in primary school using English as a medium of instruction and has reverted to teaching these subjects through the national language, Bahasa Melayu. This decision was taken as exam results showed that children from poorer and rural backgrounds were failing to cope with learning science and maths through English. Even more radically, the Philippines, after several decades of a bilingual education policy in primary school that saw maths and science subjects taught in English and other subjects in the national language, Filipino, is now implementing a mother-tongue policy which allows the use of twelve other Filipino languages as languages of education for the early years of primary education (Agcaoili et al. 2013).

While this shows that some school systems in the region are now promoting local languages as languages of education, in the great majority of contexts, there has been an increase in the teaching of English. Those who can afford it will send their children to kindergartens where English is taught. They will also send their children to private English medium schools in favour of local government schools. 'To actually forsake the public school system that teaches in your own language for the private one that teaches in English is an increasingly common phenomenon' (Wang Gungwu 2007, p. xiv).

Hong Kong provides an informative example of how the medium of instruction (MoI) at the university level influences the choice of MoI at the primary and secondary levels. English and Chinese enjoy equal status in Hong Kong as co-official languages, although Chinese only achieved this status in 1974. Despite several reports into language education policy over several decades advocating the use of the mother tongue as a MoI—and in the case of Hong Kong's students this remains overwhelmingly Cantonese—the colonial government responded to protests from schools and parents and 'backed down from pressing ahead with Chinese-medium instruction' (Bolton 2012, p. 231). In contrast, it allowed a *laissez-faire* approach, which meant that almost all secondary schools adopted EMI. An obvious reason for this was that the universities taught all subjects, other than Chinese itself and Chinese-related subjects, in English. The exception has been the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), which was founded in 1963, specifically to offer a Chinese medium university education. In 2004, however, the appointment of a new Vice-Chancellor who wanted to improve CUHK's international position and outlook, mandated an increase in the number of EMI courses. This caused an outcry among some students and alumni, with one student taking the university to court on the grounds that the university's charter obliged it to have Chinese as its primary MoI. After some years, the Court of Final Appeal ruled in the university's favour, saying it had the power to choose its own MoI. But as Li (2013) points out in his study of the CUHK case, it was noteworthy that few people outside CUHK took much interest in the case and that the push to retain Chinese as the primary MoI at CUHK met with little support from outside the university itself or from the other of Hong Kong's universities. It was a very local issue, not a societal one (2013, p. 77). It would appear that, generally speaking, people in Hong Kong are happy with English being the medium of instruction at tertiary level.

This is also true at secondary level. The postcolonial government had reversed the laissez-faire policy and insisted that Cantonese be the medium of instruction for all primary schools. It also mandated Cantonese as the MoI, except for those schools which met certain special criteria and would be allowed to continue to teach in English on that basis. This policy, while applauded by academics, was bitterly opposed by parents and after a decade of controversy and minor policy shifts, the government finally caved in to parental pressure and released a revision of the language policy termed *Fine-tuning the Medium of Instruction for Secondary Schools* (Hong Kong Education Bureau 2007, 2009). A report into the consequences of the fine tuning showed that there was an increase of over 30% in the classes taught in English, with a corresponding percentage decline in those taught in Chinese (Kan et al. 2011). Other consequences included teachers now having to teach the same subjects in either Chinese or English, depending on whether the particular class has or has not met the criteria for EMI.

As indicated above, a key motivation for the Hong Kong universities' insistence on EMI is their desire to rise in the international ranking scales. At the same time, the Hong Kong Government is keen to make Hong Kong an education hub. International education is one of the government's 'six pillar industries' (Li 2013, p. 67). There is little doubt, therefore, that Hong Kong will continue to promote EMI in its universities, often at the expense of Chinese as a language of education, with local research and publications in Chinese not being viewed as internationally important (Mok 2007, p. 446).

Hong Kong is not the only place in the region which is setting itself up as an international education hub. Singapore—which Hong Kong views as its major competitor—has offered only EMI education for several decades. Malaysia and the Philippines are also vigorously expanding their EMI offerings. Malaysia has more than one hundred partnerships with universities from Anglophone countries and a number of private universities (Gill 2004). Some of these are associated with major Malaysian companies or industries. Petronas University (2012) established by the National Oil Company, is an example: the medium of instruction is English and the website offers international students 'an English speaking environment'.

A second example is the Tunku Abdul Rahman University (UTAR), named after the first Prime Minister of independent Malaysia. UTAR was established in 2002 and has rapidly expanded so that it now has nine faculties spread across four campuses. The primary medium of instruction is English.

There are now more than 40 private universities in Malaysia. It is worth noting that this exceeds the total number of universities in Australia, even though state universities are not included in this list. They all offer English-medium courses. That all these universities are seeking to attract international students is indisputable. As the Malaysia University Portal webpage (2012) dedicated to the private universities states, 'International students should not have any problems studying in Malaysia as English is the primary medium of instruction for all courses and study programs conducted at the private higher educational institutions. For those less proficient in the language, there are numerous schools and institutions offering basic English courses'.

The Philippines has more than double this number of private universities, with some ninety listed on the relevant web page of the Entrance University website (2012). These are all EMI universities. Perhaps the most prestigious university in the Philippines is a state university, The University of the Philippines at Dilman. Some years ago, in an attempt to promote the national language, Filipino, as a language of education and research, the university experimented with offering courses through Filipino and encouraging staff to publish in Filipino. The unpopularity of the policy from both staff and students led the university to abandon the Filipino policy, however, and revert to English medium.

Japan is also embracing international education, although internationalisation in the Japanese context tends to mean that it wants the world to better understand what it means to be Japanese. Japan remains ‘a highly ethnocentric and gendered society’ (Howe 2009, p. 386). Yet the then President of Tokyo University, which is the nation’s top-ranked university, has argued that Japanese universities must internationalise for the sake of diversity (Howe 2009).

The Japanese Government recently introduced the Global 30 Project (2012b), which is designed to attract international students to Japan to study in one of 30 universities. The website announces that ‘With the introduction of the “Global 30” Project, the best universities in Japan are now offering degree programs in English. By doing this, these universities have broken down the language barrier which was one of the obstacles preventing international students from studying in Japan. A range of courses in a number of fields are offered in English at the universities under the “Global 30” Project.

The accompanying booklet, *Study in English at Japanese Universities* (Global 30 Project 2012a), lists the 30 universities involved and gives brief details of each. The following excerpts from the Tokyo University and Osaka University entries give a flavour of the booklet. They read:

The University of Tokyo (Todai) is a comprehensive research University that engages in education and research at the cutting-edge of knowledge across the full range of human endeavour. We provide over 35 degree programs in English in the following 10 graduate schools; Economics; Arts and Sciences; Science; Engineering; Agricultural and Life Sciences; Medicine; Frontier Sciences; Information Science and Technology; Interdisciplinary Information Studies; and Public Policy. In October 2012, 2 new English programs will be launched at the undergraduate level; International Program on Japan in East Asia; International Program on Environmental Sciences. (p. 8)

Osaka University is recognized as one of the leading research universities in the world and at the forefront of technological innovation in Japan. We offer degree programs conducted in English.

Undergraduate level: Chemistry-Biology Combined Major Program and Human Sciences All-English Undergraduate Degree Program.

Graduate level: Special Integrated Science Course and International Physics Course sponsored by Graduate School of Science.

Osaka University welcomes international students of all nationalities with aspiration and commitment to excel. (p. 10)

The aim of the Global 30 project is to attract 300,000 international students; to date, however, results have been disappointing, with less than 22,000 international students enrolled in 2011.



In South Korea, some form of English-fever seems to have taken hold. For example, in what is known as the ‘wild geese’ phenomenon, Korean mothers take their children to study in English-speaking countries, leaving the fathers behind to earn the money to fund their children’s overseas education. In 2007, there were nearly 7000 Korean children in New Zealand schools (Takeshita 2010, p. 274). There is also increasing pressure for Korean universities to adopt English medium instruction. In 2007, the prestigious Korean Advanced Institute of Science and Technology adopted the policy of enforcing EMI across the entire curriculum, a policy being adopted by an increasing number of Korean universities (Kim *in press*). However, as Kim also reports, the policy has received criticism (Kang 2012), not least because it places great linguistic demands on both staff and students. Demands for the return to the use of Korean as an MoI are being heard.

Chinese universities are also increasing the number of EMI courses which they offer. As long ago as 2001, the then Premier Zhu Rongji, said that he hoped all classes (at his alma mater, Tsinghua University’s School of Economics and Management) would be taught in English, as China needed to be able to exchange ideas with the rest of the world (Gill 2004).

In addition to the several ‘foreign’ universities setting up in China, offering their programmes through English, of which Nottingham University in Ningpo is a good example, many local universities are seeking to increase their international student numbers by increasing their EMI programmes. While the most prestigious universities may have the staff—and be able to recruit international staff—to be able to deliver programmes through English, there remain concerns. For example, even at Beijing University, while many are proud of the introduction of bilingual and EMI courses, some lament the reduction of Chinese-medium courses. One sociology professor felt that students do not have enough knowledge of the subject in Chinese and that teaching in English would only undermine their grasp of the subject (Hayhoe et al. 2011b, p. 123).

The prestigious East China Normal University in Shanghai is also increasing its EMI programmes. The university’s goal is to attract 5000 international students to live on campus and for 10% of courses to be ‘taught bilingually’ (Hayhoe et al. 2011a, p. 204), although it is not clear what ‘taught bilingually’ means in practice. The longer term goal is to develop 100 courses taught in English.

Geographical position and prestige can hamper drives toward internationalisation. For example, Southwest University in Chongqing, Siquan, has plans to increase its number of international students from 393 in 2007–1500, but ‘a prohibitive factor is the lack of qualified teachers who are able to teach courses in English’ (Li et al. 2011, p. 234).

China’s University and College Admission Systems (CUCAS) (2012) lists EMI courses offered by Chinese universities. There is particular interest in Bachelor Degrees in Medicine and Surgery (MBBS). The website advises:

Studying for an MBBS (Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery) in China has become increasingly popular for international students. Medical schools in China are recognized by the Medical Council of China and many of them are recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO) in the Directory of World Medical Schools. The number of



English-medium MBBS programs in China is increasing. In general, English taught MBBS programs last six years. After completing basic education, there is typically a year-long internship for practice. The duration of the internship differs according to requirements of each university. Respective universities may have certain additional criteria for applicants to meet, such as a high score in the subjects of biology, chemistry and mathematics. Additionally, although the medium of instruction is English, international students will still need to study Chinese language in order to communicate with patients in the clinics. Many medical schools require foreign students to pass the HSK test (Chinese language proficiency) before graduation.

It is worth noting that the MBBS, although delivered in English, requires students to learn Chinese so that they communicate with their patients. Few universities in Asia, however, appear to require international students to learn the local language. In this it is possible that they underestimate the wants and needs of the students. It is surprising, for example, that universities in China and Hong Kong do not require long-term international students to learn Chinese, as this could be a great attraction for such students, given the importance of Chinese in today's world, as evidenced by the increasing number of international students who are in China undertaking specialised Chinese language courses.

It is also noteworthy that the tertiary section appears able to ignore the National Language Law, Article 10 of which unequivocally states that 'schools and other educational institutions must use Putonghua and standardised Chinese characters as the basic spoken and written language in education and teaching' (Kirkpatrick and Xu 2001).

Indeed, it would appear that, with few exceptions, most Asian universities have accepted that if they want to raise their international profile they need to provide EMI courses. They have done this, but without developing carefully considered language education policies. Yet, with the increase of internationalisation and the consequential increase in the number of EMI courses, universities need to establish language education policies. Different contexts provide different circumstances and different problems. In Europe, for example, the Finnish Minister of Education explained that 'we were realistic enough to see that foreign students who came to Finland to study for a term or two couldn't be expected to do that study in Finnish or Swedish. So the Ministry started to promote English-language education' (Doiz et al. 2013, p. 214). At the same time, the five Nordic countries have language education policies that insist Nordic languages are used along with English. Preisler (2009, p. 26) has argued for a form of 'complementary languages'. This would involve the use of English and the relevant language (Danish in Preisler's context) in some form of complementary distribution. How the languages would complement each other would depend on the nature of the individual programme, i.e. 'the national or international scope of their academic content and orientation of the students' (2009, p. 26).

Generally speaking, in the Asian contexts reviewed here, only few universities have established and implemented their own language education policies. We reviewed the developments at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, which showed how the original charter of the university to provide Chinese medium education has been compromised by the university's decision to embrace internationalisation

and increase EMI programmes. It is important to note that the Hong Kong Government's aim is to create a citizenry which is trilingual in Cantonese, Putonghua and English and biliterate in Chinese and English. This laudable policy is undermined by six of the eight government-funded institutions being EMI institutions. Only the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd) has a specific language policy whose aim is to produce graduates who are functionally trilingual. This includes setting language exit requirements in each of the three languages that students agree to work towards. The exit requirements vary depending on the L1 of the students and the courses they are undertaking (See Xu (forthcoming) for a full account).

The HKIEd policy also recognises how important it is for language policy to match actual language use. For example, although many universities advertise their courses as EMI, actual practice shows that the students and teachers commonly use the languages available to them in their teaching and learning (Barnard and McLellan in press). A Hong Kong study showed that, in fact, 'English is a medium of instruction for just over half the lectures' (Li et al. 2001, pp. 297–298). Instructively, the HKIEd policy makes a crucial distinction between official medium of instruction and classroom language use.

The MOI, to be adhered to strictly in all undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, bears on the following: (a) the course outline, including synopsis, aims and objectives, main assigned readings, teaching and learning activities, and the course's intended learning outcomes; (b) formative assessment in writing, including major assignments and quizzes; and (c) summative assessment such as the final exam. Accordingly, all assessed activities of an EMI course should be in English, while those of a CMI course should be in Chinese 'classroom language' (CL) refers to the language of interaction between teacher and students and among students in the classroom (lectures, tutorials, labs and so on). While the CL of an EMI courses is English by default, a CMI course may be conducted in Cantonese or Putonghua, subject to the teacher's reference after consulting all relevant factors, such as the students' language backgrounds and abilities. Subject to moment-by-moment classroom learning and teaching needs, the teacher of a CMI or EMI course may find it necessary to switch to some other language(s). It should be noted that classroom code-switching, which is typically justified by students' enhanced learning outcomes, do not constitute a breach of the Institute's new LLT policy. (Xu forthcoming)

Xu proposes that higher education institutions in multilingual societies should implement language policies that mirror the multilingual reality of the settings.

## 2.4 Conclusion and Predictions

I have provided merely the briefest summaries of the development of EMI programmes in universities in selected Asian countries. It is clear, however, that the main goal is to attract international students. The motivations for this are various and include the desire to rise up the various international ranking tables. The financial perspective is also crucial. The financial motivation involves a national dimension in that it is not simply the fees the international students bring, but the fees that local students bring who otherwise might have spent this money overseas as international students in Anglophone countries. Increasing higher education opportuni-

Dynamic Ecologies

A Relational Perspective on Languages Education in  
the Asia-Pacific Region

Murray, N.; Scarino, A. (Eds.)

2014, XI, 233 p. 14 illus., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-94-007-7971-6