

English-Medium Instruction Policies in South Korean Higher Education

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With the rise of globalization and the spread of English, English-medium instruction (EMI) has become a common practice among higher education institutions around the world. In the past two decades, many South Korean universities have also established and implemented institution-wide EMI policies. Using Ricento and Hornberger's (1996) metaphor of the language planning and policy (LPP) onion as a heuristic, this paper looks at the different LPP layers involved in shaping these institutional EMI policies and describes how the global EMI phenomenon has been taken up in the South Korean national and institutional contexts. Furthermore, this paper elucidates the motivations, beliefs, and attitudes of different LPP actors and how they may overlap or conflict with one another across and within layers. Investigating the multilayered nature of EMI policies reveals how the unilateral and mandatory nature of initial planning, which failed to take into account the varying positions of stakeholders, led to many of the problems associated with EMI.

In 2006, the newly appointed president of the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology, one of South Korea's most prestigious universities, announced plans for a series of institutional reforms which received extensive media coverage and sparked heated debates. Among these reforms was the 100% English-medium instruction (EMI) policy, which mandated all undergraduate courses to be taught in English. Although this policy had been controversial from the start, the backlash against it grew especially harsh following a chain of suicides by four students and one professor at the university in 2011 (Heo, 2011). While media reports on the causes of the suicides were mainly based on speculation, many pointed to the highly competitive and stressful university culture intensified by the new institutional reforms (e.g., Choi, 2011; Lee, 2011). Concerning the EMI policy specifically, opinions were mixed over whether it was a direct contributing factor (Kim, 2011). However, few disagreed that it had created another burden for students and faculty whose primary language was not English. Thus, the tragedies ultimately brought EMI to the forefront of the discussion, pressing the administration to reexamine its rationale and reflect on the effects of the policy.

Although the case above illustrates one of the more extreme approaches, EMI is a commonly observed practice and growing trend in higher education worldwide (see Doiz, Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2013). South Korea is no exception, with the introduction and rapid proliferation of EMI among its universities starting in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Due to the widespread popularity of EMI among many South Korean universities, it has even been described as a sort of "policy fashion" (Byun et al., 2011, p. 432). However, the complexities of implementing EMI in a context such as South Korea, where English is not a language used in everyday

communication, were seldom considered in universities' initial policy formation and planning stages. Many were preoccupied with the quantitative expansion of EMI rather than the quality of learning. As a result, EMI policies often took different directions than originally envisioned by university administrations and officials, as problems due to rushed and inadequate preparation frequently became apparent in practice. In light of this situation, this paper has two aims: (a) to describe the process by which EMI has come to be accepted in the South Korean national and institutional contexts and examine the factors which have led to its varying realizations by different institutions, and (b) to understand the complex relationships among different language policy actors as well as language planning goals which contribute to the ongoing debates that exist around EMI policies in South Korea. By deconstructing the EMI policies to reveal their multilayered nature, the overarching goal of this paper is to better understand the issue and discuss future directions for EMI in South Korean higher education.

Conceptual Framework

Over decades of research, scholars have come to understand language planning and policy (LPP) to encompass not only official, top-down policies, but also practices employed at the local, classroom, and individual levels (Menken & García, 2010). In positioning LPP as "a multilayered construct," Ricento and Hornberger (1996) propose the metaphor of an LPP onion which highlights how "essential LPP components—agents, levels, and processes of LPP—permeate and interact with each other in multiple and complex ways as they enact various types, approaches, and goals of LPP" (p. 419). Policies are neither formed by a single actor in isolation nor carried out in an exclusively top-down manner. Rather, each layer contributes to the shaping of the policy and is affected by other layers of the onion. Furthermore, actors in the inner layers are not merely recipients of top-down policies, but have agency in interpreting and implementing them. In turn, their actions can influence policy formation in the outer layers. Such a broad conceptualization of LPP urges researchers to account for the complexity of LPP processes by not only uncovering how top-down policies build structures to influence individual behaviors, but also by understanding how individuals may exercise agency in implementation (Johnson, 2013). The multiplicity of layers (and agents within those layers) ultimately makes a language policy "as dynamic as the many individuals involved in its creation and implementation" (Menken & García, 2010, p. 1). Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of a language planning activity requires an investigation of all the layers involved (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007). With this in mind, this paper identifies and investigates the interaction among the following layers of society to detail the case of EMI in South Korean higher education: the global layer comprising global influences and processes driving universities to adopt EMI, the national layer including the South Korean government, the institutional layer of universities themselves, and individual agents such as faculty members and students.

In addition, this paper seeks to understand the differing language planning goals that these LPP actors and entities may have. In his framework, Cooper (1989) presented three types of language planning that each underscore a different aspect of language being planned: corpus planning and status planning, which were

first identified by Kloss (1969), and acquisition planning, which was Cooper's addition. Corpus planning concerns the *form* of a language, status planning the distribution of *functions* among languages, and acquisition planning the number of *users* of a language (Cooper, 1989). LPP often involves the planning of one or more of these aspects. This is also the case for South Korean universities' EMI policies, which contain elements of both status and acquisition planning: The policies set the function of English as an instruction medium while also pushing to increase the number of English users by requiring students to develop the expected level of proficiency for or through their courses. However, while identifying language planning types can help us understand the potential scope of a language policy, they alone do not fully explain the motivations behind LPP decisions or the directions that they can take (Hornberger, 1994). We also need to understand "the motivation for setting particular status, corpus, and acquisition goals and for choosing particular means and the reasons that the means do or do not effect the goals within a given social context" (Cooper, 1989, p. 182). Hornberger's (1994) integrative framework, shown in Table 1, provides a starting point for reflecting on the various language planning goals associated with a policy. As the framework demonstrates, various goals exist under each dimension. In fact, language planning is more likely to be effective "if goals are pursued along several dimensions at once" (Hornberger, 2006, p. 32). For instance, a university which sets an interlingual communication goal for their EMI policy will not be able to effectively achieve this if participants do not know the language. Thus, the policy may be carried out with the simultaneous goal of second/foreign language acquisition. This also demonstrates that despite their separate categorizations, different aspects of language planning, such as status and acquisition planning, are closely related and often occur together (García & Menken, 2010).

On the other hand, the coexistence of multiple goals can also be a potential source of conflict (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997). If varying goals are pursued or given preference by different actors, tensions can exist and pull a language policy in multiple directions. This is well articulated by Haarmann (1990): "Most

Table 1
Integrative Framework of Language Planning Goals

Types	Approaches	
	Policy planning (on form)	Cultivation planning (on function)
Status planning (about uses of language)	Standardization	Revival
	Officialization	Maintenance
	Nationalization	Interlingual communication
	Proscription	Spread
Acquisition planning (about users of language)	Group	Reacquisition
	Education/School	Maintenance
	Literature	Foreign language/Second language
	Religion	Shift
	Mass media Work	
Corpus planning (about language)	Standardization	Modernization
	Graphization	Renovation

Source: Adapted from Hornberger (1994)

inconsistencies in practical language planning result from conflicts of interest. It is a well-known fact that the objectives of language planning are often incompatible” (p. 123). The EMI case demonstrates that policies will be carried out most effectively not only when multiple goals are involved, but also when actors are in agreement about the priority of these goals—a point which will be elaborated on throughout the paper. Discussion of top-down policies and perspectives will draw mainly from analyses of government documents and universities’ mid- and long-term development plans. This will be complemented by a discussion of individual actors’ viewpoints based on media reports, campus newspaper articles, and survey results from previous studies which provide a glimpse into the beliefs and attitudes held by the actors regarding policies formed in the outer layers.

Globalization and the Internationalization of Higher Education

Globalization, or “the shift toward globalized economic, political, and social relations” (Currie, 1998, p. 2), has had a far-reaching impact across society. Advances in transportation and communications technologies have resulted in an increasingly compressed world, transforming the ways in which institutions operate (Mitchell & Nielsen, 2012). While globalization may create new opportunities and open up access, it has also perpetuated and widened existing inequalities (Altbach, 2004; Blommaert, 2010). For instance, in the higher education sector, globalization has facilitated exchange among scholars and institutions from diverse contexts while at the same time allowing the dissemination and reinforcement of models and practices set by the more powerful institutions (Altbach, 2004). In order to adapt to the changing global environment, many governments and academic institutions engage in processes of internationalization,¹ coming up with various policies and practices “to cope with globalization and to reap its benefits” (Altbach & Knight, 2007, p. 291). Several scholars have described internationalization as an active response to globalization (see, e.g., Altbach, 2004; Knight, 1999). That is, although globalization may be inevitable, internationalization affords governments and institutions “a significant degree of autonomy and initiative” to “choose the ways in which they deal with the new environment” (Altbach, 2004, p. 6). However, Mitchell and Nielsen (2012) also contend that internationalization itself may be a leading factor furthering the process of globalization, and thus that it should not be viewed merely as a response.

EMI is viewed as one such internationalization strategy that has been taken up in a variety of contexts. Governments and universities may promote English as a medium of instruction in order to adapt to the reality that many prominent institutions are located in English-speaking countries, many renowned academic journals are published in English, and English is the most widely spoken second and foreign language in the world. This strategy, though, may also reinforce the influence of English in higher education. Coleman (2006) labels this process “the Microsoft effect” in that “once a medium obtains a dominant market share, it becomes less and less practical to opt for another medium, and the dominance is

¹ Although the terms *internationalization* and *globalization* have sometimes been used interchangeably, scholars draw a distinction between the two (Altbach, 2004; Altbach & Knight, 2007; Park, 2011; Teichler, 2004). Internationalization “tends to address an increase of border-crossing activities amidst a more or less persistence of national systems of higher education” while globalization “tends to assume that borders and national systems as such get blurred or even might disappear” (Teichler, 2004, p. 7).

thus enhanced" (p. 4). As such, the advancement of English in higher education can be seen not only as a result, but also another cause of English's global spread and its high economic and social value unequalled by any other language.

The readiness with which institutions accept the global spread of English is also closely tied to the spread of neoliberalism and the marketization of higher education. As an emphasis on free trade and greater mobility pushes higher education into a global market, academic institutions are increasingly becoming more like businesses, where "the student has become the customer" and "universities are no longer institutions but brands" (Coleman, 2006, p. 3). Particularly, it has been observed that "higher education institutions are developing a consumerist mentality which transforms education into a product exchangeable in an open market" (Mitchell & Nielsen, 2012, p. 7). What is more, universities are not just competing within their own national contexts, as they are now placed on the same terrain as other universities around the world. This has driven many of them to adopt EMI as a way to market themselves and appear more appealing to an international audience. EMI may be used "to attract international students unwilling to learn the local language and to improve the English-language skills of domestic students and thus enable them to work in an international arena" (Altbach, 2004, p. 10).

Clearly, the global spread of EMI cannot be explained solely as a pursuit of English for its own sake. Cooper's (1989) argument that language planning is rarely carried out with purely linguistic goals in mind, and that it is instead often a means to meet nonlinguistic ends, also applies to EMI policies, which have been driven largely by nonlinguistic motivations such as a perceived need for internationalization in the face of globalization. Although this has been identified as a key rationale for the adoption of EMI in a wide range of contexts, at the same time the processes by which EMI takes root in different local contexts are unique. Qiang (2003) notes that "national identity and culture are key to internationalization of higher education," as "a country's unique history, indigenous culture(s), resources, priorities, etc. shape its response to and relationships with other countries" (p. 249). Thus, in the following section, I will describe the place of English in South Korea and examine how the South Korean government has encouraged the internationalization of universities, of which EMI is often a part.

Governmental Internationalization Projects and English in South Korea

Similar to what can be observed in many other parts of the world, South Korean society places great social value on English. The late 1980s in South Korea marks a time when awareness of globalization grew, as the country opened itself up to the world particularly with the hosting of the 1986 Asian Games and the 1988 Olympic Games (Park 2009; Shim & Park, 2008). As Shim and Park (2008) note, "such international events (and others that followed) were clinched by the Korean government as important symbolic resources for the construction of a highly specific connection between globalization, modernization, and English" (p. 144). This attachment to English was further strengthened when Korea went through a financial crisis in 1997, and English came to be viewed as necessary for survival in the competitive international markets (Shin, 2007). According to Kim and Nam (2007), the financial crisis in particular "uncovered the limitations of a

material-oriented manufacturing economy, and the Korean government proposed a shift to a knowledge-based economy as one of its major policy goals" (p. 123). In this context, the government pursued several projects as part of its plans to internationalize universities, as the competitiveness of the nation was seen as directly linked to the competitiveness of its universities (Park, 2011). As will be discussed in more detail below, references to English were sometimes subtle, but the assumption of English's importance was nevertheless embedded within the projects. Thus, although there has not been a single unifying government policy requiring universities to adopt EMI, these projects either directly or indirectly encouraged universities to do so. For instance, "in hopes of further encouraging higher education institutions to offer EMI, the Korean government linked its evaluations for various incentive projects... to the proportion of EMI among all courses offered by a university" (Byun et al., 2011, p. 435). In what follows, notable government internationalization projects will be examined in terms of their overall goals and their stance on EMI.

Brain Korea 21

One of the first major projects to promote the internationalization of universities was the Brain Korea 21 (BK 21) program, which was launched in 1999. The project emerged "in response to concern over the relatively low standing of the nation's universities and researchers" and sought to "nurture globally competitive research universities and graduate programs" and "breed high-quality manpower in Korea" (Seong, Popper, Goldman, Evans, & Grammich, 2008, p. 1). Two phases have been completed so far—Phase 1, which was carried out from 1999 to 2005, and Phase 2, which was carried out from 2006 to 2012.² Because it was designed as a way to enhance South Korean universities' overall standing in the global community, the focus of BK 21 was more on internationalization strategies in general rather than on EMI in particular. As Shin (2009) describes,

To accomplish its goals, the BK 21 program required participating universities to reform their systems (e.g., admissions, academic standards, faculty evaluations etc.) according to global standards. Further, to monitor institutional reforms and research performance, formative evaluations were conducted annually. Subsequently, some universities were excluded from the program because of poor performance at the mid-term evaluations. (p. 671)

Although EMI may not have been a priority in BK 21, there were aspects of the project that nudged universities to provide EMI courses. For instance, the evaluation criteria for science and technology programs in BK 21 Phase 1 included shares of foreign language-medium instruction lectures, albeit just 1% (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development [MEHRD] & Korea Research Foundation, 2007, p. 626).³ Furthermore, in the selection criteria

² A third phase, BK 21+, started in 2013 and is scheduled to be completed in 2020.

³ The evaluation standards and selection criteria differed for science and technology programs, humanities and social sciences programs, regional (non-Seoul) programs, and specialized programs. Interestingly, foreign language-medium instruction was only explicitly included as a criterion for science and technology programs.

for applied science research groups in BK 21 Phase 2, globalization of graduate education, including “shares of lectures in English only,” “percentage of foreign faculty,” and “percentage of foreign students,” was weighted 5% (Seong et al., 2008, p. 217). Although this percentage is small, it demonstrates that EMI was “a prerequisite for universities wishing to receive government support” (Byun et al., 2011, p. 435).

Study Korea Project

While BK 21 included EMI as one of its selection and evaluation criteria, this criterion did not hold a very significant value. Another government internationalization project where EMI played a more prominent role was the Study Korea Project. As stated by Byun et al. (2011), it was only then “that universities began to show a greater interest in EMI,” and EMI began “to assume a prominent role in Korean universities’ internationalization policies” (p. 435). Introduced in 2004, the goal of the project was to bring international students to study in Korean universities with the ultimate goal of reaching 50,000 students by 2010 (MEHRD, 2005); when this goal was achieved earlier than expected in 2007, it was later modified to 100,000 students by 2012 (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MEST], 2008a). Among the six detailed promotion plans established in 2005, the fourth, improving foreign students’ learning and living environment, set the goal of increasing foreign students’ preference to study abroad in Korea by minimizing linguistic difficulties (MEHRD, 2005, p. 24). One of the primary methods through which the government sought to do this was the provision of foreign language-medium courses.⁴ As an incentive for universities to establish such courses, the government planned to (a) provide financial support for 48 schools until 2010 on the condition that they find matching contributions that go beyond the amount awarded by the government and (b) to include a criterion for proportion of foreign language-medium instruction when evaluating universities for various projects (MEHRD, 2005, p. 25). *Foreign language-medium*, however, was replaced by *English-medium* in later documents (e.g., MEHRD, 2007). Although an overwhelming majority of international students coming to study in Korea were from non-English-speaking countries, such as other Asian countries (Lee, Roh, Shin, & Park, 2009), English’s status as a lingua franca and the assumption of its familiarity with all students is unquestioned.

World Class University

From 2008 to 2012, the South Korean government carried out the World Class University (WCU) project. Its purpose was (a) to advance research and nurture future academic generations in key areas for national development and (b) to secure overseas scholars with high research capacity in order to innovate universities’ education and research climate and to cultivate world class research-oriented universities (MEST, 2008b, p. 3). The latter goal was built on the assumption that world class faculty would lead to a world class department and eventually a world class university (MEST, 2008b, p. 3). While there was no explicit mention of EMI in the selection criteria (MEST, 2008b), one of the expectations of inviting

⁴ Additionally, the government also proposed to alleviate international students’ linguistic difficulties by providing support for universities to establish Korean language training programs.

overseas scholars to Korean universities was that they would be offering courses in English. Later, EMI was included in the evaluation criteria for determining whether a university selected for the project was meeting its goals (National Research Foundation of Korea, 2011). Moreover, the 2009 evaluation report of the WCU project includes a statement which implies that EMI was seen as a positive addition to the universities:

Lectures given in English by overseas scholars have brought about the vitalization of English education.

- Out of all the academic courses (302 total) offered in WCU graduate departments and majors (26), 80% (241) are offered in English, and the proportion of EMI courses offered by domestic professors has also reached 58% (=83/144).⁵ (MEST, 2010, pp. 3–4, my translation)

Even though there is no specification that overseas scholars must be recruited from English-speaking countries, the document reveals an assumption that their lectures will be offered in English. Therefore, similar to what was seen in the Study Korea Project, English is viewed as the default medium of international academic communication. Furthermore, highlighting the expansion of EMI courses as one of the effects of the project indicates the importance that the government places on furthering English education.

Summary

The trajectory through which English entered and spread through South Korea demonstrates that “participation on the global stage was imagined as necessarily mediated by the global language of English, which no doubt served as a crucial ideology for shaping the meaning of the English language in Korean society” (Shim & Park, 2008, p. 144). A review of the South Korean government’s successive internationalization projects reveals a recurring discourse emphasizing the need to elevate the nation’s standing in the global community. Specifically, EMI was seen as a means to increase the international prestige of universities, increase domestic students’ English proficiency in preparation for entering the global market, and attract more international students to the country. However, it is also true that, perhaps with the exception of the Study Korea Project, EMI has been promoted as a peripheral rather than main strategy for the overarching goal of internationalization. This point is elaborated by Park (2011), who stated that compared to other internationalization strategies, such as the recruitment of foreign scholars and students to Korean universities, EMI itself has not been the central focus or goal of the Korean government (p. 78). Therefore, the government’s projects alone do not fully explain the surge of EMI in South Korean universities. Park (2011) observes that EMI has advanced mainly through the institutional policies set by universities themselves. In lieu of this view, it is important to consider how universities, acting both under government influences and independently, formulate such policies.

⁵ “영어로 진행되는 해외학자의 강의는 대학 영어교육을 활성화 하는 계기가 되고 있다.

- WCU대학원 학과·전공(26개)에 개설된 교과목(총 302개)의 80%(241개)가 영어로 진행되었으며, 국내 교수의 영어강의 비율도 58%(=83/144개)에 달하였다.”

Institutional EMI Policies

While universities may be placed on the same global and national stage, the needs, goals, and available resources for each institution vary, which inevitably leads them to respond to external influences in different ways. In this section, I will discuss how four South Korean universities have each taken a somewhat different approach to EMI due to a number of factors. The four universities are: Seoul National University (SNU), Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST), Korea University (KU), and Yeungnam University (YU). After discussing the selection criteria, I will describe the relevant institutional EMI policies for each university. The discussion will mainly draw on the mid- and long-term development plans that each university devised in the 2000s, a time period in which EMI proliferated.

Selection Criteria

The four universities have been selected based on a number of criteria that highlight similarities as well as differences in EMI policies. KAIST, the university referred to in the opening of this paper, was included as a special case because of its particularly high profile. The other three were selected based on the following criteria. The first and perhaps most important criterion was the percentage of major EMI courses offered over the years. Universities where the percentage and the rate of increase were relatively small as well as those where they were relatively great were selected to allow for comparisons. This criterion may represent the importance that universities place on EMI or, alternatively, the barriers preventing universities from drastically increasing it. The percentages are presented in Table 2. The second criterion was the university rankings as published by *JoongAng Ilbo*, which is the oldest and most widely accepted measure for national university rankings within South Korea. Since universities compete to receive top rankings, they are often used as a rationale when formulating university policies. Two universities which were ranked at the top (SNU and KU) as well as one that was ranked relatively lower (YU) were included. Finally, universities were selected based on location (Seoul vs. non-Seoul), as Korean higher education institutions are highly stratified based on region. The most prestigious universities are clustered in Seoul while universities located elsewhere are continuously perceived to be in a crisis (Kim, 2013). As a result, two universities located in Seoul (SNU and KU) and one university in a city other than Seoul (YU) were selected.

Description of Universities and Their EMI Policies

Seoul National University. SNU is a public research university which recently privatized in 2011. It is widely considered to be the most prestigious university in South Korea, and was ranked first by *JoongAng Ilbo* in 2016. Interestingly, compared to other top universities in South Korea (such as KAIST and KU, to be discussed below), the overall proportion of EMI and the rate at which it increased was relatively low. However, it is uncertain whether this represents a hesitancy towards EMI on the part of the administration, as there are some indicators suggesting that it would have liked to go beyond its current state. For instance, an examination of SNU's 2007–2025 long-term development plan reveals that goals were set to increase the proportion of EMI or foreign language-medium instruction

Table 2

Percentage of Major Courses Offered in EMI (Ranking of Institution for EMI Dimension^a in Parentheses)

2016 Ranking	University	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
1	Seoul National University	5.38 (15)	2.47 (28)	11.64 (18)	11.97 (18)	11.97 (22)	11.02 (25)	10.04 (33)	10.08 (32)	9.68 (35)
n/a ^b	Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology	21.43 (2)	35.18 (1)	50.83 (1)	67.94 (1)	> 50 ^c (1)	> 50 ^c (1)	> 30 ^c (1)	> 25 ^c (1)	> 20 ^c (1)
5	Korea University	26.22 (1)	22.19 (3)	24.83 (3)	27.57 (4)	30.86 (7)	35.72 (8)	> 30 ^c (1)	> 25 ^c (1)	> 20 ^c (1)
26	Yeungnam University	1.36 (40+)	1.72 (35)	1.94 (35)	4.86 (25)	5.35 (38)	7.34 (36)	10.48 (30)	9.83 (33)	12.73 (32)

Note. Data compiled from JoongAng Ilbo (n.d.).

^aFor the EMI dimension, each institution received a score on the report based on the percentage of major courses offered in EMI, calculated using the following equation: (number of major courses offered in EMI/total number of major courses)*100. ^bJoongAng Ilbo rankings became unavailable for KAIST in 2015, as specialization universities were excluded from the overall rankings starting that year. The last year that KAIST was included in the overall rankings was 2014, when it was ranked 2nd. ^cStarting in 2010, a cap was set so that all institutions exceeding a certain percentage would receive a full score on the EMI dimension. In this case, the actual percentage was not reported for that institution.

courses to 15% in 2010, 30% in 2015, and 50% in 2025. The discrepancy between these goals and the reality could be explained by SNU's long-standing status as a public university. According to Kim and Nam (2007), private universities tend to "enjoy more autonomy and organizational flexibility in their restructuring process than do public institutions" which may "allow reform policies to become more efficient" (p. 134). As SNU had been a public institution receiving funds from the government, it has experienced difficulties in remaining autonomous and effectively forming and maintaining consistent institutional policies (Kim & Nam, 2007). Because of its status as a public university, effectively pushing any policy would have required a bureaucratic process. These structures persisted even when SNU privatized in 2011, which perhaps explains why the EMI rate did not increase even after then. One article in *Premium Chosun* pointed out that unlike KAIST, which established an efficient decision-making process after privatization, SNU remains bureaucratic, with the role of the government simply transferring to a central party within the university (Won & Lee, 2014). Therefore, it is possible to interpret SNU's small EMI proportion and increase rate as a consequence of its limited power to aggressively pursue an EMI policy (or any university policy in general) rather than a lack of will.

Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology. KAIST is a public research university specializing in science and technology, located in Daejeon. It has consistently been ranked at the top by *JoongAng Ilbo* in past years, including in 2014 when it was placed second.⁶ It started incorporating EMI in 2003 (Lee & Hong, 2015). As mentioned in the introduction, KAIST began offering all courses in English in 2007 for the entering class of that year and by 2010, its entire undergraduate curriculum was being offered in English.

Although KAIST and SNU were both prestigious public universities, the trajectories they took in terms of EMI were very different. One reason seems to be that KAIST went through a more effective process of privatization, and EMI at KAIST was driven primarily through the vision of single authority figures. The first foreign president of KAIST was Robert B. Laughlin, who served from 2004 to 2006. An account by Kim and Nam (2007) describes that “[Laughlin] expressed his intention of lowering the school’s dependency on the government and increasing international competitiveness” (p. 134). Although his ideas were unpopular, leading him to step down in 2006, Laughlin’s successor, Nam-pyo Suh, took on his ideas and proceeded with the radical university reforms mentioned in the introduction, including the 100% EMI policy. A look at KAIST’s 5-Year Development Plan (2007–2011) reveals the goals it envisioned for EMI at the time. The plan emphasizes the building of a bilingual campus and strengthening the university’s global competitiveness. More precisely, EMI is expected to provide the optimal education environment for foreign students as well as strengthen the global competitiveness of outstanding domestic students (Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology [KAIST], 2007). Thus, KAIST was explicit in its pursuit of two language planning goals: interlingual communication and foreign language acquisition. However, another more implicit goal of language shift seems to have been in place as well. The 100% EMI policy implied that no academic content would be taught in Korean and students’ domain-specific knowledge would be acquired in English. Therefore, students who had up until high school completed their academic studies in Korean were now expected to shift to English.

Korea University. KU is a private research university located in Seoul. Although it was placed fifth in the *JoongAng Ilbo* national rankings in 2016, it is considered one of the top three universities in South Korea, along with SNU and Yonsei University. It was also one of the first universities to offer EMI, doing so in 1999 (Song, 2008). In 2003, KU launched the Global KU Project (2003–2010), signaling plans to magnify its emphasis on internationalization. An interview with the university president at the time provides insight into EMI’s place within this long-term plan:

In order to increase the competitiveness of the university, we must provide a consumer-centered education. Every year we open a seminar with corporate human resources directors, and the most sought-after qualities in students are enthusiasm, teamwork, creativity, and international communication skills. Among these, international communication skills are most important. The Global KU project seeks to satisfy this demand. Therefore, we increased EMI and in order to

⁶ *JoongAng Ilbo* rankings became unavailable for KAIST in 2015, as specialization universities were excluded from the overall rankings starting that year.

heighten awareness of other cultures we send 1000 students, which is 20% of the student body, to schools in other countries.⁷ (“Eoyundae chongjang inteobyu,” 2006, my translation)

The president’s statement reveals a belief that the university’s prestige is closely tied to students’ performance in the job market, and that EMI will serve as a tool to prepare students for an international market. As KU is a private university, the president and university administration hold considerable sway in deciding the policies of the university, and therefore the president’s views serve as an important indicator of the directions envisioned for the EMI policy.

Yeungnam University. YU is in many ways different from the three universities discussed so far. It is located in the Gyeongnam province in the southern part of South Korea. It placed 25th in the *JoongAng Ilbo* rankings in 2016, which is noticeably lower than the other three universities. Nevertheless, it is prestigious within its region. In fact, it was the only university from the Gyeongnam province to have placed in the top 30. A look at the proportion of major EMI courses shows a small initial value and a low increase rate, similar to SNU. However, the reasons for the smaller values seem to differ for SNU and YU. As part of the YU Global Initiative which the university launched in 2009, YU set the goal of increasing its proportion of major EMI courses from 4% in 2009 to 10% in 2012. These goals are much more modest compared to the other three universities. In terms of their goals for internationalization, SNU, KAIST, and KU seem more occupied with global standing. Their places as top national institutions remain undisputed and unquestioned, and thus they are able to attend to more internationally-oriented goals. YU’s development plans over the years, on the other hand, make frequent mention of a crisis resulting from the polarization of universities and the need to compete with universities in Seoul for survival (Yeungnam University, 2009, 2013). Such different circumstances put pressure on YU to focus more on cultivating its status within the nation. Thus, its modest values and goals for EMI may imply a relative lack of resources, a greater concern for national rather than global standing, or both.

Summary

The four universities’ EMI policies show differences in terms of conceptual and practical goals, which in turn reflect the diverse characteristics of each institution. SNU, KAIST, and KU, all of which have already established their prestige within the nation, perhaps had more freedom to pursue their global standing. YU, on the other hand, faced the task of competing with prestigious schools in the metropolitan Seoul area and thus had to consider their national standing in addition to their global standing. Furthermore, public/private status as well as the location of the university seemed to be factors affecting the degree to which universities could pursue EMI, as private universities are able to put institutional policies into motion more quickly and universities located in the

⁷ “대학의 경쟁력을 높이기 위해서는 수요자 중심교육을 해야 한다. 매년 기업체 인사책임자와 세미나를 하는데, 학생들에게 가장 요구되는 자질로 열성·팀워크·창의성·국제적인 커뮤니케이션능력을 꼽는다. 그중에서 국제적인 커뮤니케이션 능력이 제일 중요하다. 글로벌 KU 프로젝트를 통해 그러한 요구를 충족시키고자 했다. 그래서, 영어강의를 확대했고 다른 문화에 대한 이해를 높이기 위해 1년에 1000명, 학생의 20%를 해외 학교에 보냈다.”

Seoul area tend to have more resources. Nevertheless, the four universities all showed a general pull towards EMI, and their policies were in line with the overall social climate linking English with success. Thus, the findings lend support to Ricento and Hornberger's (1996) argument that institutions "play important roles as policymakers, arbiters, watchdogs, opinion leaders, gatekeepers, and most usually reproducers of the existing social reality" and that "attitudes toward languages and their speakers are deeply embedded in institutional structures and practices" (p. 416).

Individual Agents

In this section, I turn my attention to individuals in the innermost layer of the LPP onion, that is, the faculty and students who are impacted by EMI policies. It should be noted that these individual agents are not merely passive recipients of the policies. As Ricento and Hornberger (1996) claim, "educational and social change and institutional transformation... often begin with the grass roots" (p. 417), and inner actors often serve as key players in shaping policy. Here I will focus on three groups—domestic faculty, domestic students, and international students—with the understanding that each group is not homogenous, but composed of individuals with varying attitudes, opinions, and experiences regarding the policies. Furthermore, I do not assume that these are the only ways to represent the different stakeholders affected by EMI policies. I draw mainly from published studies, media reports, and campus newspaper articles to depict the experiences of these three groups. In the interest of convenience, I draw from individuals from multiple institutions where data is available.

Domestic Faculty

Ricento and Hornberger (1996) "place the classroom practitioner at the heart of language policy" (p. 417). While there are larger sociopolitical, macro-level forces which teachers have little control over and which they oftentimes may accept and follow as they are expected to, there have been studies (e.g., Johnson, 2009; Menken, 2008) demonstrating that "teachers can transform classrooms, thereby promoting institutional change that can lead to political and, ultimately, broader social change" (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996, p. 418). Instead of viewing practitioner behaviors as either unwittingly reproducing or constantly resisting existing social beliefs, I will try to understand how faculty members involved in EMI implementation negotiate between policy and reality.

In a study by Cho (2012), a survey among faculty at a select university revealed that 90.2% of "faculty respondents considered English proficiency of professors" either "important" or "very important" in "leading to successful and effective classes taught in English" (p. 149). However, Cho (2012) also found that "nearly half of the respondents answered that they were dissatisfied (43.9%) or highly dissatisfied (2.5%) with classes given in English," one of the reasons given being "that delivering course content effectively was difficult due to the [*sic*] their inadequate English proficiency" (p. 148). These survey results demonstrate a frequently mentioned problem of EMI: English is not the mother tongue of most faculty members. This may directly affect faculty's teaching practices. For example,

some studies have noted that faculty do not always use only English in so-called English only lectures. In one study involving data from multiple universities across the nation, Lee and Hong (2015) found instructors were more likely to mix Korean and English during EMI courses than exclusively use English. Byun et al. (2011), focusing specifically on one university (KU), found similar results. However, should such teaching practices be viewed only as the result of faculty's own language abilities?

In addition to their own English proficiency, faculty respondents in Cho's (2012) study indicated that their dissatisfaction with EMI courses stemmed from the fact that "discussions between students and teachers and among students were repressed due to the students' inadequate English proficiency" and because "students asked fewer questions" (p. 148). Similarly, some of the KU professors interviewed in Byun et al. (2011) "did not necessarily support the EMI policy, which they thought deprived instructors of the advantages of using a shared mother tongue, where pedagogically appropriate, with their students" (p. 443). To delve deeper into this issue, we may also look at the views of professors from KAIST, where the EMI policy came under national scrutiny. Their opinions gathered from media interviews revealed a generally critical stance towards the radical university policy. One pointed out that personal relationships between professors and students cannot be built if professors give lectures as if they were reading from scripts; another stated that if KAIST truly wanted to become a top ten world university, students should learn the natural sciences in their mother tongue because language mediates thinking, and it is students' educational right to learn in their mother tongue (Shin, 2011). One professor went so far as to declare that he would conduct all his classes in Korean in order to reclaim the personal relationship between professor and student (Yoon, 2011). However, this same professor stated that it was not his intent to say that EMI should be eliminated completely, as it is nearly impossible these days to conduct world class research without developing one's English language skills. Rather, he emphasized the problematic nature of the university EMI policy where implementational realities were ignored.

Gathering from these sources, faculty's concerns regarding EMI seemed to not just include but also go beyond their own struggles with English; they reflected the critical ways in which faculty considered students' needs and the shortcomings of institutional policies. Faculty's altered teaching practices therefore could be viewed as a way to cope with, adapt to, or sometimes even resist a unidirectional university policy.

Students

As discussed in earlier sections of this paper, EMI policies often involve both a language acquisition goal and an interlingual communication goal. The former has mainly targeted domestic students to prepare them for the competitive job market while the latter has mainly targeted international students to alleviate the linguistic barriers they may experience. In the discussion to follow, it will be demonstrated that these two different goals intended for two different groups have sometimes proven to be at odds with each other, leading to the question of whether setting a common policy for such a complex set of needs is sufficient.

In terms of the language acquisition goal of EMI for domestic students, previous studies show competing viewpoints within institutions and even within individuals. To give one example, Byun et al. (2011) found that students in their study generally “believed EMI leads to improved English proficiency” but also “felt that EMI was hindering their acquisition of knowledge to some extent” (p. 438). These students elaborated on a number of challenges for EMI, including the inequalities it may bring, the extra effort necessary to master the content material, and the lack of quality compared to courses taught in Korean. The students in Cho’s (2012) study problematized EMI in similar ways, pointing to the “lack of class participation such as few questions and unheated discussions,” “a low level of concentration,” the “lack of interaction and discussion between students and professors,” and “the disadvantage experienced by students with limited English proficiency” (pp. 156–157). Thus, students seemed to share faculty’s previously mentioned concerns, and they did not automatically perceive and accept university policy as the norm. Their experiences also reveal how the reality of EMI falls short of the imagined goal.

In terms of the goal of interlingual communication for international students, both the Korean government and individual institutions have used EMI as a strategy to draw more international students to Korean universities. Many Korean universities do not set strict Korean language requirements for these international students, because, as one professor in Palmer and Cho’s (2011) study questioned: “How many students will come to Korea if they have to pass a Korean language examination?” (p. 129). Table 3 presents the results from a survey administered to international students enrolled in South Korean universities, conducted by

Table 3

Survey Results of Foreign Students Enrolled in Degree Programs

Korean Language Ability at Time of Entry to Korea	
Category	n (%)
1. Fluent	108 (13.6%)
2. Could Partially Understand Lectures	139 (17.5%)
3. Daily Communication Possible	220 (27.7%)
4. Could Not Use Korean At All	327 (41.2%)
Total	794 (100%)
Time Spent Studying Korean for College Entrance	
Category	n (%)
1. Did Not Study Korean	100 (29.8%)
2. 6 Months	66 (19.6%)
3. 6 Months to 1 Year	44 (13.1%)
4. 1 Year to 1 Year 6 Months	47 (14%)
5. 1 Year 6 Months to 2 Years	22 (6.5%)
6. Other	57 (17%)
Total	336 (100%)

Source: Adapted from Lee et al. (2009)

Lee et al. (2009). It shows that nearly 70% of the survey respondents were not able to understand Korean lectures at the time they entered South Korea (p. 129). Furthermore, 29.8% of students did not study Korean when preparing to enter a South Korean university, which the researchers explain is partly because respondents enrolled in undergraduate and graduate degree programs take courses in English (p. 129). The researchers also noted that in a free response item asking for suggestions to Korean universities, many respondents requested an expansion of EMI courses (p. 135).

Several articles published in the *KAIST Times*, KAIST's campus newspaper, reveal concerns created by inadequate language policies. Yoon (2014) questions KAIST's current situation where international students are attracted to the university because it is advertised as a bilingual campus, but are confounded once they arrive on campus and find the reality different from their expectations. For instance, a syllabus may officially state that a course is offered in English, but in fact it may be taught in Korean. Some professors have turned away international students from official EMI courses, asking them to look for another course since the lecture will be conducted in Korean (Yoon, 2014). One KAIST international student reported that he took a course in which he was the only international student, and though the syllabus stated that the lecture would be in English, it was actually conducted in Korean (Yoon, 2014).

However, another article in the *KAIST Times* offered a different perspective. Choi (2014) states that there is insufficient Korean language education for international students. He blames the university's policy for not requiring a certain level of Korean language skills for international students. His arguments indicate that the language barrier between domestic and international students should not be alleviated by the use of English by domestic students, but by the learning of Korean by international students. This is also reflected in the comments of some of the Korean students and faculty in Palmer and Cho's (2011) study: "When I studied in the United States, I had to speak English. All my courses were in English. I wrote my thesis/dissertation in English" (p 130). There is a belief that international students in Korea should do the same.

Summary

An examination of the inner layer revealed a complex relationship among different groups of actors and also a varying set of attitudes and beliefs within each group. Several implications can be drawn: First of all, faculty are not passive implementers of university policies. They not only actively voice their opinions and challenge university policies, they may also alter their classroom practices based on what they believe is best for their students. Thus, they have agency and act as ground level policy makers. Second, EMI policies involved multiple language planning goals and each goal had a different group as its main target; different individuals placed different levels of importance on each goal. Some faculty and students discussed the impact of EMI mainly in terms of its effect on course quality and language learning. Others were more concerned with its role of facilitating interlingual communication and including international students. Still others acknowledged the interlingual communication goal, but problematized the fact that it caters to the needs of one group while

disadvantaging another. Thus, EMI policies are complicated by a difference in perceptions about which goal is primary. Rather than considering how the policy may affect separate target populations differently, EMI policy formation often enforced uniform requirements for all groups, leading to a policy perceived as inadequate by the impacted parties. The inner layer is where the sources of tension become most apparent.

Conclusion

Although policy creation and policy implementation have traditionally been dichotomized (Johnson, 2009), LPP processes rarely fall into such neatly structured categories. García and Menken (2010) depict local actors as *stirrers of the onion* to highlight how they bring various interpretations and appropriations of policies to disrupt linear understandings of language policy as being either top-down or bottom-up. The case of EMI policies in South Korean higher education demonstrates how LPP agents and entities from multiple levels of society collectively contribute to the shaping of policies. While the South Korean government and universities have attempted to use EMI as a way to adapt to a globalized society wherein English continues to expand its dominance as a lingua franca, the reality of EMI policies became most visible at the implementational level. The mandatory, top-down manner in which institutions have enforced EMI has in particular been identified as problematic (Byun et al., 2011). A look into actual classroom practices revealed that individuals exercised their agency to reinterpret these policies which they deemed unsuitable for their situations. Several recent events also indicate that the actions of inner layer agents can prompt negotiation among other layers and lead to changes. For instance, in its most recent development plan, KAIST (2013) stated that it would increase mother tongue instruction in order to prevent a decline in thinking and imagination resulting from a language barrier and reject the excessive focus on English (p. 24). Although KAIST continues to emphasize the importance of an EMI policy, as of 2012 it has started phasing out EMI for humanities and social science electives. Furthermore, it plans to conduct a survey among students and faculty before establishing directions for a new EMI policy. Thus, it seems that the voices of students and faculty are beginning to be reflected in the university's policies.

The issue of EMI is also further complicated by the diversifying Korean classroom, which has historically been assumed to be homogenous. How do we balance the needs of various stakeholders in a language policy? This is not an easy question to answer, but the trial-and-error of actors discussed in this paper may offer some directions. After experiencing much turmoil, KAIST (2013) has also started to highlight the notion of choice, stating in the development plan that it will maintain the principles of a global campus while providing a choice for faculty and students regarding EMI (p. 41). This focus on choice is a promising first step, as it would support the right to receive instruction in the mother tongue while also continuing to provide EMI courses for those who wish for or need it. As Ricento and Hornberger (1996) state, "the principle of linguistic self-determinism—the right to choose (within limits) what languages one will use and be educated in—is not only viable but desirable for LPP decision making because it both promotes social equity and fosters diversity" (p. 401).

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