

Internationalization of Higher Education and its impact on regional  
identity  
- Focusing on International Programs in English as a Medium of Instruction  
(IP-EMIs) at leading universities in South Korea -

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### Introduction

The purpose of this research is to examine the socio-cultural impact of internationalization of higher education on regional identity with a focus on the role of English as a medium of instruction and communication among international students. The ultimate goal of this paper is to show the impact of internationalization of higher education in South Korea as a case study of IP-EMIs (International Programs in English as a Medium of instruction), which are established in leading universities in Seoul.

IP-EMIs, in which most classes are conducted in the English language, which enable international students to obtain a degree with using only English, have gradually increased in EFL (English as a foreign language) countries such as Japan and South Korea, where higher education was traditionally implemented in the national language, and been established at “nation-state style” leading universities. The introduction of IP-EMIs has been discussed primarily with a political and economical strategic point of view, but socio-cultural perspective of IP-EMIs has not yet been studied or discussed.

Taking a constructivist approach for regional integration, Adler and Barnett argue that peoples’ mobility within the region can facilitate a sense of community, mutual understanding and collective identity. However, we do not know how IP-EMIs work in creating a cognitive community within East Asian region. Some scholars in sociolinguistics, for example, Robert Phillipson,<sup>2</sup> criticize the dominance of English, proposing the expression “Linguistic Imperialism” because, in their view, English has become a medium of western culture or value and there are causal factors and particular interests behind the expansion of English in a neoimperial world<sup>3</sup>. Bourdieu<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Phillipson, “Linguistic Imperialism”, Oxford University Press, 1992

<sup>3</sup> Robert Phillipson, “Linguistic Imperialism Continued”, Orient BlackSwan, 2010, p. 207

discusses language's symbolic power and Gramsci also discusses his critical thought about the hegemony of English. According to Gramsci, 'Hegemony' is used to illustrate that whether or not individuals, institutions or states 'choose' (seemingly freely) to learn, teach or facilitate English, the spread of English is part and parcel of unequal power relations.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, English in IP-EMIs cannot be considered only as a medium of instruction, but we must also critically consider the socio-cultural impact, what English and IP-EMIs bring and what they mean for international students who study in IP-EMIs. In previous study, political and economic aspects of higher education has been widely discussed and studied, but there is a need to place priority on the "social and cultural rationales" and particularly on those rationales that serve to promote cultural identity and cross-cultural understanding.<sup>6</sup>

This research will investigate the socio-cultural impact of IP-EMIs on international students at leading universities in South Korea: Seoul National University, Korea University and Yonsei University. Socio-cultural impact will be investigated in terms of the students' personal experience and motivation for coming to IP-EMIs, their current experience, degree of mutual/regional/global understanding and the raising of regional awareness and identity. The research questions would be: how does IETPs have socio-cultural impact for international students? What are the purposes and motivations for international students to study in IP-EMIs in the non English speaking country? How does English as a medium of instruction work as a vehicle for increasing understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity?

## **Trends, Changes and Challenges**

We have witnessed internationalization and regionalization in higher education in East Asia. According to Knight and de Wit, Internationalization should be promoted with "a perspective, activity or program which introduces or integrates an international/intercultural/global outlook into the major functions of a university or college."<sup>7</sup> Moreover, internationalization of higher education is "the process

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<sup>4</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "Language and Symbolic Power", Polity, 1993

<sup>5</sup> Peter Ives, "Global English, hegemony and Education: Lessons from Gramsci", Peter Mayo, *Gramsci and Educational Thought*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, pp.78-99

<sup>6</sup> Kiyong Byun and Minjung Kim, "Shifting Patterns of the Government's Policies for the Internationalization of Korean Higher Education", *Journal of Studies in International Education*, published online 6 July 2010

<sup>7</sup> Jane Knight and Hans de Wit, "Strategies for internationalization of higher education: Historical and conceptual perspectives", in H. de Wit (ed.), *Strategies for internationalization in higher education*, Amsterdam: European Association for

of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post secondary education.”<sup>8</sup> The introduction of English as a medium of instruction is one of the major trends of internationalization in higher education.

Regionalization, on the other hand, is characterized especially by the growing regional student and faculty mobility, emphasis on regional research collaboration, university alliance and research networks.<sup>9</sup> The growing number of incoming international students, one of the benchmarks of internationalization of higher education, is becoming major emerging trend in higher education in the East Asian region.

In the process of internationalization, we see a rapid increase in so-called “international programs” at higher education institutions in East Asia. Here “international programs” are those in which classes are conducted in English, and which are designed to enable international students to submit their papers in English and obtain a degree without knowing any domestic (national) languages. In this paper, they will be called IP-EMIs, International Programs in English as a Medium of Instruction, are established to attract international students to their higher education institutes, especially at famous leading universities in this region.

Since “internationalization” has become an important criterion for status building, such as in international university rankings for leading universities, universities in East Asia, especially in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) countries such as South Korea and Japan, have opened up new IP-EMIs to accommodate more international students and bring “internationalization” to their campus. IP-EMIs have actually facilitated students’ regional mobility among East Asian countries. These programs can give an opportunity to those who are not so proficient in the host country’ s language, such as Korean or Japanese, and enable them study in English, which is somewhat of an international language.

In recent years, various kinds of regional collaborative programs have emerged in East Asia and the Pacific, such as UMAP (University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific) and AUN (ASEAN University Network). Currently, discussion is taking place among China, Japan and South Korea about the creation of Campus Asia (Collective Action for Mobility

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International Education Publications, 1995, p. 15

<sup>8</sup> Jane Knight, “Internationalization, remodeled: Definition, approaches, and rationales.”, *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 2004, p. 11

<sup>9</sup> 杉村美紀・黒田一雄（研究代表）（2008）『アジアにおける地域連携教育フレームワークと大学間連携事例の検証』報告書、文部科学省平成20年度国際開発協力サポートセンター・プロジェクト

Program of University Students), in which all courses will be basically delivered in English as a medium of instruction. The creation of an Asian version Erasmus program, reflecting the model of the Erasmus program in the process of regional integration in Europe, is also discussed among researchers as well.

Therefore, examining the impact of IP-EMIs is important not only for each higher education institute, but also for regional cooperation in East Asia.

### **Korean context of Higher Education as a case study**

This research will examine the IP-EMIs in leading universities in Korea as a case study. The reason I chose Korea for this research is that Korea traditionally established its higher education and academic system with its national language (Korean) as the medium of instruction and it is a comparatively monolingual society, but has recently actively been introducing IP-EMIs.<sup>10</sup> According to Kachru's three 'circles' of English,<sup>11</sup> Korea belongs to the expanding circle of the countries. In the Korean context, people use English as a foreign language, so it belongs only to the global use.<sup>12</sup>

The Korean government released "Study Korea Project" in 2004 and introduced a funding program to provide financial support to universities offering IP-EMIs. In response to this policy, universities in Korea began to show great interest and adopted English as a medium of instruction as much and as fast as possible.<sup>13</sup> As statistics in 2006 show, English medium instruction classes offered at Korean universities are 2.2% of all classes, and the government aimed to increase this to 3.1% by 2010.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, the reason to focus on leading universities is because leading universities, namely SKY universities (Seoul National University, Korea University and Yonsei University), are the most active in internationalization. And also for regional educational collaboration and cooperation like Campus Asia, these leading

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<sup>10</sup> Joseph Sung-Yul Park (2009), *The Local Construction of a Global Language Ideologies of English in South Korea*, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin • New York

<sup>11</sup> Kachru, Braj B. 1992. "Teaching World Englishes," in Braj B. Kachru (ed.) *The Other Tongue: English across Cultures*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press

<sup>12</sup> Yasutaka Yano, "World Englishes in 2000 and beyond" , *World Englishes*, Vol 20, No. 2, 2001, pp. 119 - 131

<sup>13</sup> Kiyong Byun, Huijung Chu, Minjung Kim, Innwoo Park, Suhong Kim and Juyoung Jung (2010), "English-medium teaching in Korean higher education: policy debates and reality" , Springer Science + Business Media B.V., published online 30 November 2010

<sup>14</sup> Kiyong Byun and Minjung Kim, "Shifting Patterns of the Government's Policies for the Internationalization of Korean Higher Education" , *Journal of Studies in International Education*, published online 6 July 2010

universities are more feasible and realistic actors than other institutions in terms of management and quality assurance.

## **Research Questions and Methodology**

First of all, this research tries to find out the purposes and motivations for international students to study in IP-EMIs in South Korea. It will also examine their current experience in IP-EMIs, focusing on the role of the English language: how does English as a medium of instruction work as a vehicle for increasing understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity? Isn't it an agent of westernization? Don't international students just use IP-EMIs in East Asia as a "stopover station" of brain train to the English speaking countries?

This research takes qualitative research method. It reveals details of the socio-cultural impact of IP-EMIs by semi-structured interviews with international students from the East Asian region who studying abroad at IP-EMIs such as the Graduate School of International Studies (SNU, KU and YU), The Division of International Studies (KU) and Underwood International College (YU).

The author implemented semi-structured interviews with both closed- and open-ended questions. English, Japanese and Korean were used in the interviews. The length of interview varied from 30 minutes to 75 minutes each depending on informants. The author contacted the informant with a snowball method and interviewed 23 international students from East Asia (ASEAN members, Japan, China and India); 8 Japanese, 7 Chinese, 3 Thai and 1 each from Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines and India. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded.

## **Findings**

### **1. Negative and Positive Motivations**

For the first research question: What are the purposes and motivations for international students to study in IP-EMIs in Korea? This study found both negative and positive motivations. Some students wanted to pursue their education in English native speaking countries such as the US, but they couldn't go there, because of economic and academic reasons. So sometimes Korea was not the first priority, it might be said that IP-EMIs in Korea are still in the periphery of the US academic system. – *“There was no enough time for me to study TOEFL or GRE, so that's why I came here.”* (Z, SNU GSIS)

- *“I could not go to America so I came to South Korea. Compared to going to US, Japan and Korea are feasible choice.”* (K, SNU GSIS)

As positive motivations, some students mentioned that the emerging importance of Korea or Asia. Some actually mentioned that they shared the same value and culture, or they had similarities, so that's the reason they came to Korea and decided to study and stay here.

- *“Korea-Philippines relations are getting stronger...I saw the opportunity regarding this one. Why not US...I think it's overrated. Everyone wants to go there, and I don't want to be the one, I always want to be a different”.* (E, KU GSIS)
- *“I think it's more important to go to quality university ...the best university in that country rather than just the language (English) or America”.* (M, SNU GSIS)
- *“Because here is Asia, one of the Asia...It's quite near to me”.* (E, KU GSIS)

Many students also talked about the advantages to learning two languages, English and Korean. The international students who are coming to IP-EMIs have sufficient levels of academic English proficiency, so they think that the Korean language can be an additional asset they can get during their study in IP-EMIs.

- *“At language level, of course it's advantage. I got to speak 2 languages at the same time, compared with the universities in USA”.* (W, UIC YU)
- *“English is the basic, but if you can have Korean skill, that's will be big plus for you”.* (A, GSIS SNU)

## 2. IP-EMIs Create the New Arena?

The interview revealed that IP-EMIs in Korea can provide an arena where everyone can communicate on an equal basis. Some students are critical about that people in this world too much admire the native speaker. One student said that there is a wall between native speakers and non-native speakers. And since now his/her classmates are in Korea, the student proposed that they are all in the same position as international students and students feel they can talk equally.

- *“Even though some people speak like native speaker, I would say, so what? It doesn't mean that that person is smart. Because we are not native speaker of English, we can express our thought more understandable”.* (H, KU GSIS)

- *“There is the wall between native speakers and non native speakers, so if I am in USA, I think I can only communicate with Asian people. Since we are in Korea, we are all in the same position as international students and I feel we can talk equally”*. (T, KU)

### 3. The Role of English for the International Students in IP-EMIs

English has been described as the de-facto established dominant (common) language. Some students said English is the basis for one to survive in international life and some students refer to English as an international language, global language or universal language. One of the interesting discourses from students is that English is like a make-up and Korean is like an accessory. It means English is something you must do, like a make-up, but you wear an accessory (=Korean) when you want to look more gorgeous. The Korean language seems definitely a plus factor for students who study in IP-EMIs in Korea.

- *“English is the basic, basic for you to survive in international life, but if you can have Korean skill, that will be plus for you”*. (A, SNU GSIS)
- *“English is like make-up and Korean is like accessory. Make-up is something you must do, but you wear accessory to make you look more gorgeous”*. (S, YU UIC)
- *“Is it too elegant if say it’ s universal language, but it’ s language for everyone, right?”* (E, KU GSIS)

### 4. The Power of the “People” ?

National factors such as interests in the Korean culture, Korean language, business and society have also been studied in previous research, but the influence of Korean friends is considerably strong. International students who are currently enrolled in IP-EMIs in Korea met Korean friends at home university, which is also a leading university. These universities are also internationalized and have many international students. On the other hand, some students met Korean friends in previous experience in studying abroad in high school or undergraduate school, especially in English speaking countries such as the US, Australia, New Zealand and Canada.

### 5. Model of Student Mobility

Many students interviewed have extensive international experience including studying abroad. One group of students has study abroad or working experience in western countries (English speaking countries) and decided to come to Korea after

those experiences.

- *New Zealand (high school) → Australia (Undergraduate) → Korea*
- *Australia (as an exchange student) → China (language learning) → Korea*
- *Canada (as an exchange student) → Iceland (working) → Korea*

Surprisingly, some students have study abroad experience in another northeast Asian countries like Japan or China and came to Korea afterwards. There were also three students who applied to IP-EMIs both in Japan and Korea, and eventually came to Korea.

- Studying abroad in China → Korea
- Studying abroad in China → Korea
- Studying abroad in Japan → Korea
- Applied to Japan and Korea → Korea (3 students)

#### 6. IP-EMIs Open the Door?

The most cases, even though they are interested in Korea, their language proficiency is inadequate to be enrolled in academic programs in Korean. So English enables International students to study in Korea and experience the new culture.

- *“I get to love Korea starting from English program (IETPs) ... If you are stopped with linguistic barrier, you will lose a lot of opportunities. English program bridge the foreigners to learn the language”. (E, KU GSIS)*
- *“Besides, I can learn Korean through language learning, if I speak in Korean, Korean people don't consider me as foreigner. This taught me a lot of things about Korean culture and society”. (S, UIC)*

### **Conclusion**

This paper at this moment can provide four tentative conclusions. First, some students who have high English proficiency still think that English speaking countries are the desirable destinations for studying abroad, but these interviews reveal that there is an emerging recognition of the importance of Korea and East Asia as a region. Second, the influence of people the students met in the other countries and regions is quite strong. It might enhance the regional identity or the awareness as Asian citizens. Third, to be able to learn the Korean language considered an advantage even though they are studying in English speaking university communities. English is considered as a de-facto international language, the basic skill and most accessible



language for most of the students, but Korean is meaningful for their cultural interests and capacity building. And finally, IP-EMIs work as a core of student mobility in East Asia and offer a window on a new culture. IP-EMIs, in fact, already enable international students to move around the world and the East Asian region. They do not work just work such as a “stopover station” of brain train to English speaking countries, rather they create a place to connect people to communicate in the same language and build a network among international students with various backgrounds.

We can never emphasize too much the importance of education in an international context, IP-EMIs (International Programs in English as a medium of instruction) included.