

Student assessment of English as a medium of instruction:  
A preliminary study conducted on the exhibition and  
meeting planning and practice undergraduate elective  
course

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ISSN: 2243-7703  
Online ISSN: 2243-7711

OPEN ACCESS

Received: 10 March 2023

Revised: 13 July 2023

Accepted: 28 July 2023

Available Online: 28 July 2023

DOI: 10.5861/ijrse.2023.23

### **Abstract**

The course syllabus and teaching materials used in the exhibition and meeting planning and practice elective course offered to third year undergraduate students in a university in northern Taiwan was redesigned to not only introduce fundamentals of the MICE industry and business-related fields as an application of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI), but also to allow students to investigate and give English presentations about actual exhibitions held in Taiwan as well as write exhibition proposals. This prompted interest on how students evaluate the course concerning the improvement of their English skills, as most of them had limited knowledge and learning experience on the aforementioned topics. Employing qualitative methodology to collect and analyze data, findings show that students regard the course as quite challenging yet useful. While most students had difficulty remembering terminologies and definitions, learning the fundamentals of related topics as well as written exercises, discussions, oral presentations, and proposals provided a means for students to effectively practice their English skills. Improvement of students' English skills may be further achieved by improving the course through supplementary teaching visual materials and students to be given more exposure to actual exhibition and meeting events. However, these courses should not be too theory-focused, but rather be pragmatic so as to be tailored towards future career choices and goals.

**Keywords:** syllabus design, MICE industry, EMI, trade exhibition, Taiwan, English teaching and learning

## **Student assessment of English as a medium of instruction: A preliminary study conducted on the exhibition and meeting planning and practice undergraduate elective course**

### **1. Introduction**

The growth of English as a medium of instruction (hereinafter EMI) in tertiary education has been a hot topic in recent years (Lagasabaster, 2022; Macaro et al., 2018; Fenton-Smith et al., 2017; Vu and Burns, 2014; Hu and Lei, 2014) due to many universities' desire to "internationalize" (Dearden & Macaro, 2016). Therefore, there had been an increasing necessity not only for students to study English, but also for teachers to teach using English (Litovchenko & Shmeleva, 2020). Numerous studies on EMI discussing challenges, strategies and policies have also been conducted on non-English-speaking countries (Rose et al, 2020; Rose & McKinley, 2018; Kim, 2017; Mahboob, 2017; Dimova et al., 2015; Costa & Coleman, 2013). With subject content learning (for teachers) and English language proficiency (for students) as two main issues commonly addressed, EMI continues to face challenges as to how as a program can it achieve what it intends to accomplish. Such issue further extends to more and more countries where English is not a native language, and their educational institutions hope their students and eventually their citizens to become globally prepared and equipped in terms of being competent in the universal language. One way of being able to attain such aspiration is teaching as many courses in different departments and colleges in English.

Courses taught at the department of applied foreign languages in a university in northern Taiwan include subjects that are catered for students who may opt to gain future work in industries on trend such as meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions (hereinafter MICE). Among these courses is the exhibition planning and practice course that is offered as an elective for third year undergraduate students. The course syllabus and teaching materials for the said course had been taught for several years and was redesigned to not only introduce fundamentals of the MICE industry and business-related fields such as management and marketing in English, but also to allow students to investigate, gather information, and give English presentations or reports on actual exhibitions held in Taiwan.

Given that English is a foreign language in Taiwan, schools and recent research have looked at EMI and its effectiveness in increasing student proficiency. This prompted interest on how students evaluate the exhibition planning and practice course concerning the practice and improvement of their English, as most of them had limited knowledge and learning experience on the aforementioned topic and other subjects related to it. Therefore, the research questions are as follows:

- What are students' perceptions about the effectiveness of a particular course taught in English towards the practice and potential improvement of their English skills?
- How can these perceptions be used to improve the course syllabus design for future students?

### **2. Literature review**

In order to better understand the importance and extent of research on EMI, this section is organized by starting with previous studies on EMI and similar programs and the student involvement on their assessment, followed by a geographical focus on East Asia particularly Taiwan where English is not a native language, and the finally the MICE industry as an example of a specific domain and subject taught as an undergraduate course in Taiwan universities in which English is used to teach specific content to students to help them improve their proficiency and prepare for future careers in the MICE industry.

## 2.1 *English as a Medium of Instruction*

Previous research has looked into the aims and outcomes of EMI and related programs in different global regions (Walkinshaw et al., 2017; Corrales, et al., 2016, Pérez-Cañado, 2012) and stakeholders in specific fields such as policy makers, educators, academics, and practitioners (Walkinshaw et al., 2017). Other closely related terms were used in education in particular regions such as content-based instruction (CBI) (Heo, 2006; Davies, 2003; Crandall & Kaufman, 2002) and content and language integrated learning (CLIL) (Bruton, 2011; Lagasabaster & Sierra, 2010; Coyle, et al. 2010; Coyle, 2007), wherein the overall main objective of such programs looks at how English as a global language can be utilized for various benefits including bilingual education (Corrales, et al., 2016) and overall economic competitiveness.

Although EMI may still need to have a clearer aim, as it has no language learning objective (Galloway, 2020), and educators have faced challenges including teacher workload and preparation time (Byun et al., 2011; Sercu, 2004), lack of classroom interaction (Airey & Linder, 2006), student understanding (Kirkgöz, 2009), correcting language errors (Aguilar, 2015), varying levels of student English proficiency (Galloway, et al., 2020), and lack of explicit language goals in EMI course descriptions (Costa & Coleman, 2013; cited in Corrales, et al., 2016), it is apparent that the progress and success of EMI as a program as well as those benefiting from it may need time. Given that further research is also required as to why EMI should be continuously implemented to come up with ideal delivery practices and for teaching, learning and teacher professional development (Dearden, 2014), there is therefore a need to look into current issues.

## 2.2 *EMI programs and student involvement*

As expectations of student outcomes may be unrealistic due to content teaching not necessarily equating to language proficiency development, (Walkinshaw et al., 2017; Hamid et al. 2013; Wilkinson, 2013), students' opinion, beliefs attitudes toward EMI and other related programs should be taken into consideration and not be left unaddressed, as students themselves should benefit from such programs (Soruç and Griffiths, 2018). Previous studies looked into student perceptions, attitudes and satisfaction towards courses and subjects where English is used for instruction (Lin et al., 2021; Huang, 2020; Chu et al., 2018; Yeh, 2014; Chang, 2010; Lagasabaster & Sierra, 2009, Wu, 2006), finding them as helpful, beneficial, and effective for English learning, and giving overall satisfaction. Student views should therefore not be neglected.

## 2.3 *EMI in East Asia*

The Asia-Pacific is a region where EMI in higher education was given importance in helping improve tertiary students' English competence (Rose et al., 2020; Rose & McKinley, 2018; Fenton-Smith et al., 2017), as they become part of the future workforce that will use English as an instrument for effective communication in different sectors such as economy, trade and commerce, and education (Walkinshaw et al., 2017). Particularly in East Asia where EMI has grown in the recent years (Kirkpatrick, 2014) as it is closely related to government goals of improving the English proficiency of its citizens (Galloway, 2020), recent studies have shown that faculty and students perceived EMI as having national, institutional and personal benefits (Hu & Lei, 2014) and improves English proficiency, intercultural understanding and enhanced career opportunities (Galloway, et al., 2017).

***EMI in Taiwan*** - In recent years, Taiwan has followed the trend of establishing EMI university curricula in order to attract international talents and upgrade the world rankings of its universities, and for internationalization of higher education around the globe and increased communication among nations spearheaded by globalization of world economies (Tsui, 2017). The need for EMI curriculum at the tertiary level continued to rise, consequently making EMI courses in universities and colleges a national policy in Taiwan (Chou, 2016). This also in turn involved teaching ESP courses (Huang 2020) that are focused on teaching and

learning English in specific subjects such as subject courses (Chang, 2010), international finance and business management (Li & Wu, 2017), international business (Chu et al., 2018), accounting and civil engineering (Hsu, 2021), globalization and higher education (Lin et al., 2021), and foundation psychology course (Hua, 2019), and MICE (Yang & Wang, 2016).

#### 2.4 *The MICE Industry*

The MICE industry had been experiencing rapid development since the later part of the 20th century (Dwyer & Mistilis, 1999; Dwyer & Forsyth, 1997) and it is considered to be key areas of growth for tourism industries around the globe (Buathong and Lai, 2017), making it one of the most lucrative fields in the tourism sector worldwide (Daniela et al., 2011). The MICE industry's future is also linked to global trends in business tourism (Ladkin, 2006). Due to its popularity, rapid growth development and global attention on the MICE industry has created increased demand for talent within this field (Hsieh, 2013). With the potential and continuous increase in demand for jobs in the MICE sector, the education sector has initiated programs in university to prepare students for future careers. These programs are intended not only to teach students the fundamentals of MICE and other related topics, but also to develop employability skills due to the inherent need for multi-skilled, qualified and well-trained employees for the MICE sector (Liu et al., 2022).

#### 2.5 *MICE education*

Although the MICE industry offers a promising future, the lack of knowledge about the MICE industry career path hinders students who aspire to work in this sector (Ladkin & Weber, 2010). One of the reasons for such unwillingness to work in the MICE industry is the lack of knowledge in various positions that are available. Therefore, it is important to increase course work in the MICE segment of the hospitality industry (Fenich & Hashimoto, 2010), which may involve introductory MICE courses (Batra, 2016), practical learning (Pan & Jamnia, 2014), and experiential learning (Sangpikul, 2020). For example, in order to better understand how the industry works, a course including "introduction and analysis of MICE industry" is essential, and talents can subsequently be educated to plan or organize an exhibition, meeting, or event (Hsieh, 2013). Pan and Jamnia (2014) looked at the advantages of courses on students' learning by taking MICE as a practical course, which are the hands-on activities by which students learn how to deal with the tasks in the real workplace.

Because of the business nature of MICE, Fenich and Hashimoto (2010) even found that most programs require studies in generic business subjects such as management, marketing, accounting and finance, as well as human resources. In order to obtain an insight towards planning, managing, and communication skills to handle the events in MICE, Pan and Jamnia (2014) designed a syllabus for a practical course entitled 'destination bidding and planning', which included the 'content and elements of MICE events, international and national MICE, marketing for conference and exhibition, organizing conference and exhibition, planning conference and exhibition, planning and evaluation of the venue, finance planning, catering and accommodation, social program MICE travel and human resource planning' (Pan & Jamnia, 2014, p. 36).

Courses that are aimed to equip students with the knowledge and skills to use English in the areas of the MICE industry, designing an ESP course for MICE should also begin with exploring the needs of the stakeholders in a particular work context in order to determine the specific language needs students need to learn (Varaporn, 2022).

As for instructional techniques, Phelan et al. (2009) highlighted the common teaching methods in MICE education which include lectures, problem-based learning (PBL), case studies, experiential exercises, or inviting guest speakers.

***MICE education in Taiwan*** - As one of the six key emerging industries in Taiwan, programs such as Taiwan MICE Advancement Program and Project Vanguard for Excellence in Tourism were established to make Taiwan an attractive international MICE and tourism environment (Pan & Jamnia, 2014). Responding to the urgent need

of qualified MICE professionals to be well equipped with both competent language skills and sufficient field knowledge, MICE learning materials such as textbooks were designed to achieve the above purposes (Yang & Wang, 2016). Such materials used for undergraduate MICE-related courses in Taiwan for instance are claimed by students to have ‘improved their linguistic skills, provided sufficient content knowledge about MICE, and increased their motivation to learn both the language and content’ (Yang & Wang, 2016, p. 13).

Given that EMI and other related programs are growing, the present research thus hoped to extend aims and objectives of these previous studies to MICE teaching and learning in Taiwan, particularly on specialized courses such as the exhibition planning and practice course.

### 3. Methodology

**Method and data collection tool** - Using qualitative method to collect data, a 12-item English only survey-questionnaire was designed by the researcher using Google Forms and sent to third-year students online via the Teams platform at the end of the 18-week semester. The questionnaire comprised of questions that mostly asked students what they thought about course delivery in English, the content, tasks, and previous learning and visiting experience. All students’ responses were written in English.

**Participants** – Research participants were third year undergraduate Taiwanese students aged 20 to 22 who took the course for the first time. A total of 58 students joined the course.

**Data collection period and response rate** - One week was given for students to send their responses back. 42 (72%) answered the survey-questionnaire, with a gender distribution of 38% males (n = 16) and 62% females (n = 26).

**Data analysis** – Minor grammatical and spelling errors were initially corrected by the researcher in order to ensure quick and smooth analysis. The textual data was then analysed through the three-step coding process using the NVIVO software: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Analysis was completed a week later.

### 4. Findings and discussions

This section provides details and discussions on students’ perceptions towards the exhibition planning and practice course and its role in potentially improving their English skills. Given that EMI is considered not to have a clear language learning objective (Galloway, 2020), students’ point of view may shed light on how the program applied to a specific subject can help researchers and practitioners change their perspective towards EMI and devising its goals.

#### 4.1 Numerical data

Table 1 shows the participants’ responses concerning previous knowledge of specific subjects including MICE and other subjects that have relevance to MICE. Students claimed to have learned all subjects in the past, assumingly in senior high school and in university where elective subjects were taught in undergraduate lower level but were taught in Chinese. Students’ decision to select the exhibition planning and practice course was likely to have been influenced by their previous knowledge, particularly in business, management, marketing and trade exhibition/shows. Choosing such course have them the opportunity to apply their skills and knowledge learned from the aforementioned subjects.

**Table 1***Students' answers on previous knowledge on specific subjects (n = 42)*

	Yes	No	I don't know
MICE industry	20	12	10
Marketing	27	10	5
Management	28	7	6
Business	30	6	6
Trade exhibitions/shows	27	9	6
Project management	26	9	7
Strategic planning	19	14	8

Table 2 shows participants' experience and interest in trade exhibitions or similar events. Most students answered to have experience attending exhibitions in the past, both in high school and first years in university, and expressed interest and intention to attend such events in the future. Half of the participants also expressed their interest in obtaining work in trade shows or similar events.

**Table 2***Students' answers on trade exhibitions or similar events (n = 42)*

	Yes	No	I don't know
Attended in the past	29	9	4
Would like to attend in the future	30	7	5
Interested	31	5	6
Would like to have a job in or related to trade exhibitions	21	13	8

As for the course taught in English (see Table 3), results indicate that most students' answers may be in accordance with their level of English proficiency. Although proficiency level may not have been proven except for the results of self-rated proficiency assessment shown on Table 5 given that students were not asked of their scores nor have taken any English proficiency exam, students' answers show their ability to understand and remember the course topics and content.

**Table 3***Students' answers on the course being taught in English (n = 42)*

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I can understand MICE industry, management, and marketing English terms	5	1	19	14	3
I can remember MICE industry, management, and marketing English terms	5	1	24	10	2
I can remember the weekly topics	3	4	19	12	4
I can understand the teacher's explanations about the weekly topics	4	0	16	17	5
I can understand the teacher's content in the material (PPT)	3	1	15	17	6
The teacher can explain the topics well in English	4	0	12	18	8
I can understand the teacher's questions	3	2	15	16	6
I can answer the teacher's questions	5	1	19	14	2

Most students gave a neutral or positive assessment of the course content and tasks given to them to accomplish (see Table 4). Having understood the course objectives and content, students may have found tasks including exercises and presentations to be appropriate and adequate. Such exercises involved choosing and planning a type of exhibition, listing duties and responsibilities of manpower, booth design, budgeting, and questionnaire design. On the other hand, students were tasked to form groups and visit actual trade shows or exhibitions in Taiwan and present their report for the midterm presentation. For the final presentation, they were required to propose their own trade show or exhibition as a consolidation of learned topics and accomplished exercises during the semester. It is also understood that students being able to accomplish tasks well and

recognize the aim of the course may have been affected by having accomplished them by working as a group. Groups were required to equally and fairly divide responsibilities for every task, thereby giving them the freedom to designate responsibilities and exhibit teamwork in order to fulfill the requirements.

**Table 4**

*Students' answers on course content and tasks (n = 42)*

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
The learning objectives are clear	4	0	20	14	4
The course content was organized and well-planned	3	2	18	14	5
The course workload (exercises and presentations) are appropriate	3	1	17	18	3
I can accomplish the weekly exercises well	4	2	14	20	2
I can accomplish the midterm and final presentations well	4	1	19	15	3

After having self-rated their English skills (see Table 5), most students assess their skills to be average or above average, which may be correlated with their ability to understand and remember the content, topics, and terms taught in class. As the course was completely taught in English, students may have felt challenged especially concerning their listening and speaking skills. Lack of experience presenting in English may have also hindered students' give a higher than average assessment of their ability to accomplish presentations well, as seen on Table 4.

**Table 5**

*Students' self-rating of English skills (n = 42)*

	Very bad	Bad	Neutral	Good	Very good
Speaking	1	3	24	13	1
Reading	1	6	20	11	4
Writing	2	12	19	8	1
Listening	2	4	22	12	2
Presenting in English	2	6	25	7	2

Given the course was in an 18-week semester, most students answered being attentive, interested, and able to attend weekly classes. Most students have shown interest to learn in the course despite their self-assessment of their English ability to be moderate, which may suggest that their level of interest, attentiveness and attendance in class may be influenced by their English skill level. Being late or hesitant to attend classes may be a personal choice, as habit can be a factor in students' attitude and motivation to attend classes and learn. Although the course was held every Thursday morning from 10:10 am to 12:00 noon, several students have opted to attend classes late, or do not come to class every week.

**Table 6**

*Attendance and attentiveness in class (n = 42)*

	Yes	No
I attend class every week	30	12
I come to class early, on time, or almost on time	32	10
I sometimes come to class late	24	18
I am hesitant to attend class	14	28
I pay attention in class	31	11
The course and topics are interesting to me	26	16

#### 4.2 Analysis of responses to open-ended questions

**Problems or issues encountered** - As students were asked to write any problems or issues they encountered during the course, most students answered 'English-related problems' such as 'reading and speaking in English', and 'understanding professional or technical words'. With EMI's goal to help students learn English through

pure English instruction and content, it is understood that students experienced difficulties learning and remembering terms not used in daily life. With the exhibition planning and practice course also serving as an ESP course, terms and phrases used in business, management and especially marketing were taught to students, as they are common in the MICE industry. Given that Taiwanese teachers can translate from English to Chinese and use translanguaging to teach and explain topics in other courses for English practice and improvement or those with English content, the exhibition planning and practice course was taught by a foreign teacher, giving the course a challenging one for the students.

***Understanding the principles of exhibition*** - With most students having prior learning on MICE and other related subjects (refer to Table 1), it is clear that they indicate presentation skills and how to hold an exhibition from organizing and planning, and completing are key aspects in understanding the fundamentals of accomplishing exhibitions. With most students also answering that they *'need to gain more knowledge on advertising and branding'*, learn about *'budgeting and allocating'*, and networking such as *'talking to potential customers'*, it is understood that the exhibition planning and practice course became an opportunity for students to acknowledge specific topics where they may improve their learning and skills that are required for making exhibitions well-planned and successful.

***Useful or valuable aspects*** - Students regard the *'fundamentals of MICE industry'*, *'learning more by attending an exhibition'*, *'planning'*, *'meeting'*, and *'improving English skills'* as useful and valuable factors from the course. With the course designed to allow students to learn as much as possible during the 18-week semester, the teacher hoped to optimize the course for students' learning, which was evident in the students' responses. Although the course was being taught only in one semester, the students' English skill level may not be proven to have improved; however, students were able to practice their skills particularly speaking and writing for their exercises and presentations.

***Suggestions on how to improve the course*** - Regarding suggestions on improving the course, many students answered *'more supplementary teaching materials such as videos, advertisements'*, and *'participate in more or various types of exhibitions'*. This indicates that students show interest on the course given that additional visual materials are utilized for students to practice their English skills such as watching and listening to advertisements, and to gain ideas from these materials for exhibition themes or selecting the type of trade shows. Visual materials are deemed effective teaching and learning tools.

***Suggestions on the course taught completely in English*** - As for suggestions on the course being completely taught in English, most students answered *'they can practice and improve English skills'*, *'communication'*, *'provide Chinese translations'*, and *'slower teaching pace'*, the course can be improved by adding tasks to help students practice their communication skills such as discussions with the teacher and classmates and interviewing key people in the MICE industry, while retaining exercises and presentations for students to practice and improve their English skills. However, given that the course aims to immerse students in an English-only course, Chinese translations may not be provided by the teacher, as it might discourage students to learn and remember English words and terms that are essential to the course. The teacher can adapt to the students' conditions by decreasing speed in teaching so students can follow easily.

***Overall assessment*** - Students gave their overall assessment of the course, with 20 out of 42 respondents (48%) giving a neutral or positive assessment (*'very good'*, *'great'*, *'good'*, *'nice'*, *'not bad'*, *'so-so'*, *'it's okay'*), 4 students (9%) giving other responses (*'not sure'*, *'I don't know'*, *'no idea'*), and 18 giving no response (43%). Overall assessment may have been influenced not only by factors previously discussed, which included prior knowledge, interest in exhibitions, course content, and tasks to help them practice their English skills, but especially by how students may have seen the course as beneficial for their future goals and plans. The assessment of the course may have been influenced by its usefulness for students, given that most students may opt to work in trade exhibitions or similar events in the future (refer to Table 2).



## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1 Contributions of the study

While EMI is currently under critical observation and examination by researchers and practitioners, the present research has thrown light on how one specific subject can change the way students think about its usefulness and effectiveness in helping them be exposed in English and how the course can be tailored or modified in the future by teachers in order to better suit students' proficiency while learning new topics and helping students practice their English. Although the exhibition planning and practice course is an example of a specialized course under MICE industry studies, which may not at all be offered in the curricula of other tertiary institutions or respective departments, other EMI courses concentrated on various specific topics can be beneficial for students so long as they learn new content in English, help them practice by using the target language, and the course can help for their future career goals. Although students may have difficulty remembering terminologies and definitions, learning the fundamentals of related topics as well as activities such as written exercises and oral presentations provide a means for students to effectively practice their English skills. With EMI's means to allow students to learn, practice and improve their English proficiency by being immersed in English-only courses, the exhibition planning and practice course and other similar courses can continuously be provided by teachers for undergraduate students. Although these courses may not be required, students can select and benefit from them through English practice and additional rich-in-English-content knowledge.

### 5.2 Pedagogical implications

Allowing students to practice their English skills may be achieved through supplementary elective courses such as the exhibition planning and practice course. However, these courses need not be too theory-focused so as not to discourage students with technical terms, but rather be practical so as to be tailored towards future career choices and goals, as the motivation factor may play a crucial role on students' decision to select elective courses. To encourage students to further practice their English and learn from the course, teachers may also include reading exercises by reading information such as news about the MICE industry in Taiwan such as statistical data on its contribution to local economy, demand for jobs, and other current events. Teachers may also come up with ways to expose and involve students to participate in actual exhibitions through internships.

As for students' proficiency, given that students' prior knowledge and their language qualifications considerably differ (Unterberger, 2014), there may be a need to position EMI courses at the proper level and time where students are already equipped with adequate English level in order to perform better. As shown in Figure 1, courses in other categories such as English for specific purposes or ESP can be provided for students in lower levels to initially teach vocabulary and other topics related to the course.

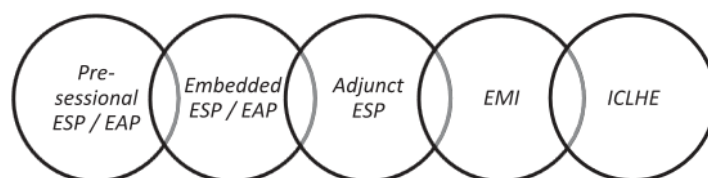


Figure 1. English-medium paradigm (Schmidt-Unterberger, 2018).

### 5.3 Limitations and suggestions for future research

Given that the course syllabus was redesigned, a comparison between old and revised syllabuses may have been done to see any differences between students' responses. However, students who took the course that

utilized the old version of the syllabus have already graduated. As a preliminary study, future research including analysis and comparison of data from successive courses may need to be conducted. The questionnaire items were all in English, which may have hindered students to answer. A correlation among factors may be conducted, such as students' English skill level and their ability to understand the course being taught entirely in English. Quantitative approach may be done in future studies to measure students' attitude, motivation, and satisfaction on English-only taught courses.

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