

Application of EMI in International Business Law Course in EFL Setting

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Abstract

International Business Law is a fundamental course for Business English majors. It is suitable for adapting EMI (English as a Medium of Instruction) teaching mode according to its nature, talent training goal and teaching contents. This paper focuses on the implementing EMI in International Business Law course for business English majors of Baoding university and conducts questionnaires and an interview to collect data to summarize and analyze some experience so as to provide some useful references for peer universities.

Keywords

EMI, Business English Major, International Business Law, Questionnaires and Interview

1. Introduction

Nowadays, the unstoppable globalization has infiltrated every corner of the world. Therein, English, as the indispensable communication tool, is intensely studied. As David Graddol puts it, “We are entering a phase of global English”. (Graddol, 2006). Many Educational scholars have put forward various teaching and learning theories on English teaching. Besides the English majors, a steadily increasing number of universities in China have been promoting the instruction of non-English professional courses in English. In an EFL (English as a foreign language) setting, those non-English speaking universities teaching courses using English as the medium of instruction can be named as EMI, which allows for a more widespread adoption of English when teaching content knowledge in nations or jurisdictions where the dominant official language is not English.

Teaching academic subjects through the use of the English language has seen a steady increase in popularity over the last decades (Dearden, 2014) and has become commonplace in universities around the globe. In China, the booming of

EMI started in 2001 when government policies included the number of EMI courses as a performance indicator for the evaluation of universities (Galloway et al., 2017). By 2006, 132 of 135 universities across China were offering EMI courses, as is revealed in a national study (as cited by Hu et al., 2014: p. 22). By 2019, 5.2% of all the courses in universities in China were taught in all-English shown by the *A Report of the Status Quo of Globalization of Universities in China* released in 2020. Amongst these universities, Tsinghua University, the top university in China, has launched over 700 courses instructed in English.

Baoding University is a regional higher education institution which is located in Hebei Province. This university upholds the motto of Pursuit of Integrity, Practice and Knowledge and defines as its mission the training of high-caliber talents with the international vision and social responsibility; thus, it is imperative to integrate the content studies and foreign language training in daily teaching. With more and more faculty members gaining the overseas study background, the university has set up 16 EMI courses till 2022. The course International Business Law is a required course to Business English majors and is normally open to the sophomore. Since most of the second-year university students have solid language capacity basis, it is applicable to conduct EMI on this course. This paper in the following aims to make an analysis of Baoding University's experiences in implementing EMI on the course of International Business Law, such as the conditions required for teachers, the selection of materials, and effect of student learning, etc. so as to provide some useful references for peer universities.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definitions and Some Related Concepts

The concept of EMI is first put forward by Julie Dearden and Ernesto Macaro, professors of the College of Education in Oxford University, and they define it as “the use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English” (Dearden, 2014).

During the development of EMI, there are several concepts and terms which are closely associated, such as English-Medium Education, English-Medium Teaching, English Language as Medium of instruction and so on. All these above-mentioned ones are readily to confuse readers, so professor Macaro identify and clarify EMI in his book *English as a Medium of Instruction-A growing Global Phenomenon* published in 2018 (from page 15-43), and also summarizes differing features of such related concepts as Immersion, CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), CBI (Content Based Instruction)/CBLT (Content Based Language Teaching) and EMI (Macaro, 2018). In order to distinguish the above-mentioned teaching modes of English integrated with content education Gene Thompson and Jim McKinley drew a figure to show the different focus of these teaching modes (Figure 1).

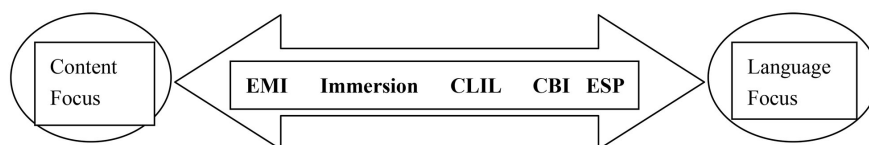


Figure 1. Integration of content and language learning. (Adapted from Thompson & McKinley, 2018).

As the similar teaching mode of EMI, CLIL, i.e. the integration of professional courses and language study, has been existing in the elementary and middle schools for long time, and the difference between EMI and CLIL lies in that EMI puts more focus on content teaching while English only serves as the medium, subordinate to the professional facts. In contrast, there are two equally-important focuses in CLIL, and the content and language training are attached equal importance. However, both EMI and CLIL are the mode of teaching courses in English, where English is foreign or second language. Nevertheless, CBI, ESP (English for Specific Purpose) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) pay more attention to the cultivation of language competence, while the professional contents and facts are the channel to achieve the acquisition of language. In Asia, especially in Japan and China, language researchers and teachers tend to view Non-language skill courses, such as English and American Literature, Culture and Society of English-speaking Countries, as EMI courses, for these courses function to impart professional facts and contents instead of languages skills.

2.2. The Rise of EMI Courses and Associated Challenges

University students are expected to benefit from EMI programs in terms of content learning as well as additional opportunities to learn English in their discipline.

EMI courses are considered to increase the chances for local students in international academia and business and increasing the level of English within the home country. Another argument is the prestige of the English language, resulting in access to better employment for individuals and in access to prosperity and modernity on a larger scale (Dearden, 2014).

In light of the fruitfulness of EMI, an increasing number of universities worldwide are now offering EMI programs at postgraduate and, to a lesser extent, undergraduate levels. For example, in 2016, in Austria alone, the number of programs offered were 119 EMI master's, 44 EMI PhD and 3 EMI undergraduate programs (Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, 2018). Maiworm and Wächter (2014), who investigated the spread of EMI programs throughout Europe, found that the number of programs increased from 725 in 2001 to 8089 in 2014. They observed highest absolute numbers in the Netherlands, Germany, and Sweden, but also a strong increase in Central Eastern Europe.

Researches of EMI in China also prosper in recent years. Many scholars have put constructive suggestions on the building of EMI courses in Chinese universi-

ties. EMI courses in universities were formally promoted by [China Ministry of Education \(2001\)](#) in the Official Document (2001) No. 4 concerning the Education Guidelines of Enhancing College Undergraduate Teaching Work, actively promoting Chinese higher education institutions to realize the three-year target of the teaching of 5% - 10% courses in English or other foreign languages, with the purpose of cultivating talents of international competitiveness in face of challenges of higher education modernization and economic globalization as well as technological revolution.

In 2005, Zhu Wenzhong, professor of Gongdong University of Foreign Studies, makes an empirical analysis of teaching courses in English for the students of Business English majors, finding that the concept and mode of teaching business courses in English should be well informed to or discussed with the learners of Business English, the selection of foreign English teaching materials or textbooks should be taught with some Chinese local practices and cases, and the development of multi-skilled teachers should be strengthened, etc. ([Zhu, 2005](#)). At the same, there are many other researchers who have made related studies and drawn some findings. For example, Cai Yun makes a research on the design and implementation of EMI by taking the program of International Business Management as an example, and argues that this education mode should be fit for the students' English language proficiency, the teachers of this program should process both English proficiency and a business disciplinary qualification, and the teaching practices should emphasize on the combination of theories with business practices, etc. ([Cai, 2005](#)). In 2014, Li Ying published the monography named *Transdisciplinary Study on EMI in Universities of China*, conducting comprehensive research on EMI courses, including the status quo of Chinese EMI, the building of EMI courses, the criteria of EMI effect evaluation and so on ([Li, 2014](#)).

As for the quick spread of EMI in China, the reasons are manifold. Most importantly, they are rooted in a perceived need for globalization, which includes strengthening an institution's international prestige. EMI courses are also considered to increase the chances for local students in international academia and business and increasing the level of English within the home country. In addition, another argument is the pivotal role of English language in globalization, resulting in access to better employment for individuals and in access to prosperity and modernity on a larger scale. For example, most academic research is published in English (about 94 per cent of research in international, high-impact publications is in English). Therefore, if students want to stay current with their field, it makes sense for them to learn in English, given that the content is mostly in English. In many technical fields, much of the content and vocabulary is also in English, as are students' dissertations and research.

However, there are challenges with EMI. They mainly arise from the potentially inadequate level of English proficiency of teachers as well as students. According to a survey by [Lam and Maiworm \(2014\)](#), EMI program directors state that the main problem for teaching in EMI courses is the students' heterogeneity

in terms of English language proficiency. Lam and Maiworm further note that although EMI instructors generally have a good command of English, this does not necessarily mean they can handle and adapt to the wide range of language levels in their classroom. In the meanwhile, the scanty of level-appropriate teaching materials in English across different subjects poses another challenge (Coleman, 2006) and consequently, British or US American textbooks, with their respective cultural settings, are often used. In China, Lai Guofang (2022) makes an analysis of the mode of EMI, and argues that English immersion education is becoming popular in the whole country, but not many people show doubts about its problems, shortcomings or disadvantages such as insufficient evaluation system, teaching staff, students and teaching materials, etc. He suggests that measures should be taken to handle these problems to face the challenge of this education mode. In spite of these critical voices, EMI courses have been steadily on the rise over the past decades and this will likely continue over the coming years.

All the above-mentioned researches and findings, although not directly related to the current case study, have paved a foundation for conducting the case analysis of Baoding University's experiences in implementing EMI in teaching International Business Law course.

3. Research Questions

In order to promote the construction of EMI courses in colleges and universities in China, based on the application of EMI to International Business Law course of Baoding University as a case, this paper will adopt such methods as questionnaire and interview to explore the following three issues:

- 1) What is the attitude of teachers and students to applying EMI to International Business Law course? How satisfied?
- 2) What are teachers and students' concerns and challenges for this EMI course?
- 3) In terms of teaching effectiveness, is there any difference between Chinese International Business Law course and the EMI course?

4. Methodology

The author uses questionnaires over students and interviewing lecturers to collect data.

4.1. Student Questionnaire Design and Result Analysis

The student questionnaire consists of three parts: the first part is the basic information of the students, and the purpose is to understand the basic situation, especially the English proficiency level of the students. The second part is concentrated on the students' attitude, satisfaction and concerns about the EMI International Business Law course, in terms of the all-English textbook and slides; the teaching method of this EMI course; the effect of this EMI course and the

way of assessment of this EMI course, etc. The third part is an open issue, exploring students' expectations for the EMI course as well as the teacher, and suggestions for other students.

These questionnaires were delivered to the subjects online via the website <https://www.wjx.cn/>. 68 copies of questionnaires were sent and 55 valid copies were collected

4.1.1. Basic Information of the Survey Subjects

Among the respondents, the number of female students is 49, accounting for 89% and 6 male students, representing 11%. 50 students are juniors, while 5 students are sophomores. As for the English proficiency level, 35 students (63.64%) have passed CET-4 (roughly equivalent to IELTS 5.5 - 6), and 20 students (36.46%) have passed CET-6 (roughly equivalent to IELTS 6 - 6.5).

4.1.2. Students' Attitude towards the International Business Law EMI Course

58.18% of the respondents give positive attitude towards EMI course, while 32.7% of the students choose neutral standing about this course and in contrast only 9.12% of the respondents show definitely objection to the EMI course. It suggests that most of the students willingly accept the EMI course, indicating that a majority of students realize the importance of EMI and believe that EMI can be rewarding for their language competence.

4.1.3. Students' Satisfaction towards International Business Law EMI Course

Overall, students' satisfaction is of medium level or higher. 31 students (56.3%) are very satisfied with this course, while 19 students choose "average" and only two students are dissatisfied with the EMI course. The reason for their dissatisfaction come from that they reckon think that it is useless to learn this International Business Law course in English.

4.1.4. Students' Concern towards International Business Law EMI Course

As for the personal evaluation of their performance and study effect, 59.38% of the respondents think they can follow the progression of the EMI course, while 25% of the students express their concern and anxiety when taking part in the course. Their concern mainly originates from the professional contents instead of the language barrier. Since the students are Business English majors, and they have not learned underlying basics for the discipline of law, they have difficulty in understanding some core concepts of law in mother language. The teaching mode of EMI aggravates such grievance. For example, when asked about the difference between common law system and Romano-Germanic law system, the students who grow up in the civil law system in China cannot understand this knowledge point, for it is beyond their perception.

Another concern and challenge come from the assessment of this EMI course. Under the current education system in China, students are most concerned about mark in examination, for it is closely related to further education and em-

ployment.

Therefore, students have complicated emotions for EMI teaching, because such teaching mode means more difficult tests and students intends to learn more while test little. In the survey, 37% of students suggest “English test papers, open paper tests Test”, 20% of students recommend “segmented assessment, accumulated grades”, and 8% students suggest that the assessment should be based on practical training (such as mock trial court), class performance combined with final test papers. In terms of curriculum assessment, the author believes that innovative thinking should be employed, and the part with strong practicality should be tested in virtual or real settings, such as the mock trial court or taking part in the real operation of disputes settlement in the business enterprises in person.

4.1.5. Students' Expectation to International Business Law EMI Course

The open question is set to explore students' expectations for the International Business Law EMI course, teachers and future students. This study finds out that students generally expressed their hope that more EMI courses can be set up to better improve their English competence. Among them, some point out the necessity of teaching in small class, hoping that the number of people in the class will be controlled within 15 - 20 people to ensure the teaching effect. In terms of textbooks, students hope that the lecturers should pick up English textbooks, which can be matched with their language level. In addition, for the expectations of EMI teachers, students expressed their hope that teachers can strengthen their English, especially spoken expression. At the same time, in terms of class language use, a few respondents hope that teachers can pay attention to spoken language, and the words used should be as easily-understandable as possible. In the meanwhile, the teacher also should pay attention to the rhythm, and be able to explain knowledge points and organize classroom activities with simple vocabulary and sentence patterns. In addition, the expectations of EMI students also include the accurate grasp of students' English level before the class, and accordingly, the class is taught.

4.2. Interview with Teachers

Since the number of teachers who have ever taught or are teaching the International Business Law course is rather small, the author employs qualitative study to delve into the effect of EMI teaching of International Business Law course. The question list of the interview includes three parts. The first part is about the basic information about the lecturer, including the teacher's educational experience and English proficiency as well as overseas study experience. The second part is set to explore their attitude, concern and challenges to teach International Business Law in English. The third part inquires their expectation to the students and required aid and assistance from school authority.

There are 4 participants in this Interview. Dealing with research questions of this research, then data are collected and analyzed. The following findings are

drawn. Among the four teachers, 3 of them have the background of overseas study, as well as over 10 years of teaching experience. Professor Huang Ying, teaches International Business Law in both Chinese and English, but all the interviewee concur on that EMI course is of great importance for students to cultivate their language competence as well as acquire professional knowledge. As for the concern of the teacher, they mostly focus on the degree of students' understanding and acceptance, and whether the common assessment is scientific for EMI course.

In the open-question section, the lecturers concentrate on the problem that preparing the International Business Law course is categorically time-and-energy-consuming. Furthermore, although they are confident in their language skills, they are still limited to the free English output in the class, especially when it comes to forensic terms, that is to say, they need to further enhancement. Teachers are eager to participate in EMI teachers' retraining, and even teachers who have participated in the training have stated that they need to have advanced training courses. It can be seen that carrying out the necessary EMI teacher training is the most fundamental support and help that colleges and universities can provide teachers, thereby helping teachers to break through the language, especially the language ability in specific subject domain which they are delving in.

5. Discussion

In recent years, EMI courses have steadily increased in academia across all subject areas due to globalization. In the appraisal or probe into the practice of this teaching mode via the practical application of EMI to the International Business Law course in Baoding university, this study has found out some issues that are worthy of further investigation.

The first question this paper aimed to answer was to what extent the teachers and students are satisfied with the International Business Law EMI course. It is revealed that both teachers and students are content with the EMI course.

However, there are worries or doubts in learners or even teachers about the real effect or teaching quality. These doubts include: for example, teaching the International Business Law in all-English way may undermine the understanding of specialized law terms or conception. It is argued that some law terms or jargons and theories themselves are profound and obscure to understand even in Chinese as a mother language, so it will be extremely tough to explain them clearly in English as a second language.

Second, for applying EMI mode to the International Business Law course, the qualification of teachers is the key. However, the scanty of competent teachers who are equally adapt in both English and law exerts negative effect on the teaching effect. In some universities which launch EMI courses, the required teachers are not competent or not ready for teaching law courses in English, but their school authority may follow the "fashion" of teaching in a hurry, or seek

for the so-called approach of “education innovation” painstakingly, so they begin to teach the courses. The questionnaire survey in Baoding University indicates that the students’ satisfaction level for the EMI course is not high. The students’ complaints originate from the mismatch between their language ability and professional course’s high requirement, the inappropriate textbook, the lectures’ spoken English and so on.

Third, the English proficiency of some students is not suitable for taking the EMI course. Sometimes, even the teachers are excellent and eligible for the EMI course, the contradiction between teachers’ teaching and learners’ learning still exists. Some students just feel difficult in reading the texts, understanding the lectures or writing the exam papers and homework in English. Therefore, it is suggested to carry out a placement test for the students before the EMI course opened, then decide who are fit for signing up for the EMI course.

Fourth, the teaching concept and teaching skill of some teachers needs to be improved to reach the expected teaching effect for the EMI course. For example, it is conducive for EMI teachers to innovate traditional ways of assessment. Besides, teaching EMI International Business Law course poses great challenges to the teachers. To begin with, since the international business law gets involved with the Anglo-American legal system, it is imperative to offer teachers opportunities to experience the legal environment in person. During the class, the instructor is expected to compare the difference of similar terms in common law system and Chinese law system (basically belonging to the Romano-Germanic legal system). Furthermore, EMI International Business Law course teachers are required to first understand what case teaching and legal logic reasoning, and can apply case teaching proficiently.

Based on the characteristics of EMI, the examination should balance the test points between professional contents and language skills. Besides, some teachers are not managing the lectures of the courses in a proper speed or rhythm, and they have not offered sufficient support or instruction for the students who are in difficult study.

In order to upgrade the teaching capacity for teachers of EMI International Business Law course, the university should provide sufficient support for them, financially and academically. For example, sending teachers abroad to study is of prime necessity. Additionally, retraining EMI teachers is also an effective way to improve their teaching capacity. The survey finds that the most competent teacher is the one who holds a bachelor degree of English and a master or doctoral degree of law. Therefore, the university should fund teachers who are willing to further study law positively.

6. Limitations of This Study

Even though this study has furthered our understanding of EMI course in law contexts, the generalizability of the findings is subject to a number of limitations.

First, the scope of this study is limited by a relatively small sample size, espe-

cially with regards to the teacher sample. Due to the fact that in Baoding University, even in other universities in Hebei Province in China, the number of EMI course is relatively small, and teachers who teach the International Business Law course are far fewer. Therefore, in this study there are only four samples for teacher group, thus resulting in the fact that the findings and data are not highly representational. Besides, although the student sample as a whole was relatively large ($N = 55$), the individual sub-groups were smaller, particularly the samples from lower grades. In the survey, there are only 5 respondents (9%) are the second-year students, which is apparently too small for a scientific research.

A further limitation lies in the subjective nature of the design of questionnaire. Actually, the author is aware of the fact that one of the teachers who are the subject of this study is so charming and welcoming, irrespective of his teaching ability, that almost all the students admire him even to the blindness extent. Hence, the respondents may give their judgment based on the teacher's personal appealing instead of the EMI course, thus making the data collected misleading.

7. Conclusion

In this study, via the mix-design of questionnaire survey of 55 students of Business English Majors and an interview of 4 teachers at Baoding university, it explored the attitude, satisfaction, concerns and expectations of teachers and students for the International Business Law EMI course.

The interview results show that both the EMI class teachers and students held a positive attitude towards the EMI course and recognized its importance and value. However, the low satisfaction of the course is mainly concentrated in the difficulty of using English and the pressure of teaching. In terms of In terms of EMI concerns of EMI teachers, it is mainly focused on the lack of training. As for the expectations of the EMI course, teachers hope that students' English level and spoken ability can be strengthened, and they can be more actively participating in the discussion in the classroom.

Compared with EMI teachers, the students surveyed are also positive for the EMI courses. They believe that the studying the International Business Law in English is more rewarding than the Chinese class. In terms of concerns of the EMI course, the problem of the students is mainly concentrated in the mismatch between their language ability and the difficulty of the professional contents. The above findings show that students can rationally conclude the benefits of EMI course for improving their professional knowledge and foreign language skills. Although they admit that the pressure of the EMI course is relatively high, they still insist on that the EMI course is very important in today's era, and has high enthusiasm and interest in this, and is willing to overcome difficulties to study. In the answer to open questions, students point out that the current EMI course needs to be further optimized in terms of teaching materials and assessment methods, so that students can better adapt to EMI teaching. According to this,

the author believes that EMI teaching teachers can arrange some professional reading materials and provide some professional vocabulary to students before the class to help students preview the content in advance.

Nevertheless, due to our research design and participant sampling, some weakness still exists in this study, for example, the scope of EMI application in this study is only restrained to the International Business Law course. Future studies are suggested to investigate the application of EMI to a wider scope of subject contents.

Overall, it is imperative and rewarding to carry out EMI teaching mode in the course of International Business Laws. During implementing EMI teaching in this course, full consideration should be given to students' language capacity, thereby rationally setting up the teaching objectives as well as optimizing the course assessment, thus achieving premium teaching effect.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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