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English as an Instructional Medium in Korean Higher Education: Focusing on the Perspectives of Professors

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The study explores the way professors working in a private university in Korea perceive the recent English-medium instruction (EMI) frenzy in Korean higher education (HE) and the way they respond to its manifestation at their institution. Working within a qualitative research paradigm (Merriam, 2009), I gathered data primarily via one-time semi-structured interviews with ten participants who have offered or are offering EMI at the time of data collection and used a qualitative data analysis method. The findings illustrate that the professors view external factors residing outside individual universities, such as the college rankings and the university evaluation parameters, as the principal drive behind the current EMI boom in Korean tertiary education. Acknowledging the importance of strengthening the international competitive edge of Korean HE in the global era, the professors perceive the EMI policy positively expecting it to be beneficial for both students and institutions. They, however, problematize the blind acceptance of EMI policy and externally forced EMI expansion movement in Korean HE, which they believe will lower the standard of the academic experience of students. Experiencing first-hand the inadequate manifestation of the EMI policy at their university, the professors claim that a systematic long-term implementation plan and context-suitable approaches should be taken at both the national and institutional level for successful future EMI implementation and expansion efforts.

[English-medium instruction/higher education/attitudes of professors]

I. INTRODUCTION

The status of English as a lingua franca has been increasing in diverse cosmopolitan contexts around the contemporary world, even more so in the so-called Expanding

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Circle countries in which English has traditionally been learned for specific purposes but is now being used more as a common language for wider communication (Graddol, 2006; Jenkins, 2007; McKay, 2002). Though it has not gained bilingual status in Korea, English has become ever more influential and has deeply penetrated into the lives of Koreans. The manifestation of its glocal power in the Korean context can easily be traced in the multifaceted social practices of our lives, well expressed in the term '*English fever*,' which encompasses diverse phenomena such as early English education, early study-abroad experiences, the 'lone goose' father phenomenon, private education, college students' habit of strengthening their resumes with high TOEIC scores, to name a few.

Speaking of the roles and uses of English at the tertiary level in Korea, the recent trend of implementing English-medium instruction (EMI) at university campuses has indeed been gaining much attention off and on these campuses. Since its commencement early in the new millennium, the number of university lectures offered in English has rapidly increased (Byun et al., 2011). Leaving behind the question of whether it is a meaningful tool for educating Korean university students or not, many institutions seem to feel a need to follow the nationwide trend. They seem to believe that it is now indispensable to offer EMI given the national and global benefits that it is expected to bring to university campuses, such as active academic and cultural exchanges with other countries, improved reputations of Korean universities, and an increased intake of international students to Korea, which is closely linked to the financial stability of Korean institutions in the current competitive higher education (HE) market around the globe.

Compared to the perceived importance of EMI in tertiary education in Korea, research that focuses on EMI is still in its initial stage, mostly reporting students' reactions to and their experiences with it. Given that instructors and professors are those who in reality experience the policy directly in their daily classroom environments, it is only natural that efforts should be made to better understand their attitudes toward and perceptions of EMI in order to implement and promote EMI successfully in Korea. Against the backdrop of the current fever in Korea toward tertiary education in English, the present study aims to shed some light on the perspectives and responses of Korean professors who currently offer or have offered EMI in college classrooms. The study focuses on understanding the way professors working in a medium-sized private university located outside the Seoul Metropolitan area view the ever-more popular EMI policy in Korean HE and the way it is manifested in their local university setting.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Using English as a medium of instruction in HE has increased greatly since the heralding of the new millennium around the globe. While issues related to EMI have been widely explored in South-Asian and European countries for quite some time (Altbach, 2004; Coleman, 2006; Ferris, 1998; Flowerdew & Miller, 1992, 1996; Kirkgoz, 2009; Klaassen & De Graaff, 2001; Ljosland, 2011; Paseka, 2000; Sert, 2008; Vinke, Snippe, & Jochems, 1998; Zegers, 2008), it has been only recently that attempts have been made to improve our understanding of the current context of Korea in introducing, implementing and promoting EMI policy in tertiary education (Hong, Min, & Ham, 2008; Hwang & Ahn, 2011; Kang & Park, 2005; Kim, 2009; Oh, 2011; Oh & Lee, 2010; H.-S. Park, 2009; Shin, 2009). Discussions on the necessity and feasibility of EMI in Korean academia started early in the new millennium, but it was not until the middle of the first decade of the new millennium that universities in Korea became interested in implementing EMI policy at their universities, hoping to receive the benefits that the Korean government provides, i.e., the financial support and an improved assessment as regards the university evaluation parameter (Byun et al., 2011). Through the proactive initiative of the Korean government to encourage universities to adopt the EMI policy and thereby to take part in the internationalization of Korean HE, many universities in Korea now adopted the EMI policy and offer English-medium classes to both undergraduate and graduate students. While the number of universities offering EMI has rapidly increased, research exploring the way the EMI policy in Korea is perceived by the people involved, i.e., university administrators, professors, and students, has only begun to produce some tangible results.

Still in an initial stage, empirical studies of EMI in Korean HE have largely focused on the perceptions of and attitudes toward EMI among students, through which researchers aim to offer ways to improve supporting measures for students so that they can have successful EMI learning experiences in college. Studies that investigated students' perceptions of EMI and its effectiveness thus far tend to show mixed results. Some studies demonstrate that students are more satisfied with and have more interest in EMI than Korean lectures (Hwang & Ahn, 2011; H.-S. Park, 2006; Yu & Chung, 2009). Students with high levels of English proficiency in particular tend to prefer EMI, experiencing less difficulty in understanding lectures and using English textbooks. Students' positive evaluations of EMI over Korean lectures are also shown to be related to their expectations to improve their English abilities (Yun, 2009). Oh's study (2011) in fact revealed that students are more satisfied with their English learning than with their content learning in English-medium classes. In contrast to the

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studies mentioned above, other studies showed students' negative reactions to EMI, finding that some students believe it is ineffective in making them comprehend the contents clearly in such classes (H.-S. Park, 2009). Not only do students evaluate EMI as ineffective in terms of comprehension, they also negatively view EMI in assisting them to improve their English skills (Jin & Shin, 2011; Song, 2008). In another study, students did not show a preference for either EMI or Korean lectures (Jeon, 2002).

Considering students' perceptions of EMI in terms of providing opportunities to improve their English proficiency, students seem to believe that EMI does help improve their English ability, specifically their content-related English skills (H. Lee 2006; H.-S. Park, 2006, 2009). Students, however, are not positive about the effectiveness of EMI in assisting them to improve their general English ability (H. Lee, 2006; H.-S. Park, 2006; Song, 2008). Although students are negative about EMI in terms of its ability to develop their general English skills, they believe that EMI does help improve certain areas of English skills, such as reading proficiency (Kang & Park, 2005; H. Park, 2007), vocabulary knowledge (H. Park, 2007), and listening proficiency (H. Park, 2007).

As for the challenges posed by English-medium classes, students report that they experience the most difficulty in understanding lectures and taking part in class activities (Oh, 2011; Yun, 2009). In other words, students experience the greatest difficulty in the areas of speaking and listening in EMI (Kang & Park, 2005; Oh, 2011). Students who perceive their English proficiency as low to intermediate, in addition, seem to believe that their low level of English is the obstacle that most prevents them from having a successful EMI experience (Kang & Park, 2005). Students with low levels of English proficiency are well aware of the importance and the necessity of EMI but think that EMI should cater to their level of English and that using Korean for a certain period of time should be allowed in EMI (B. H. Lee, 2010). Students also add that EMI makes them concentrate more on lectures but state that it is difficult to catch up and follow once they fall behind unless extra support measures are provided, such as providing additional information, offering more examples, and checking students' understanding (H.-S. Park, 2006).

For a successful EMI experience, students expect that 1) extensive and detailed feedback on their assignments and papers should be available (Hong, Min, & Ham, 2008); 2) clearly stated goals and expected learning tasks need to be provided through the class syllabus and on class registration sites (Hong, Min, & Ham, 2008); 3) lecture contents should be carefully designed and well prepared (Yun, 2009); 4) there should be a Korean summary either at the beginning or at the end of each lecture (Kang & Park, 2005); 5) pre-EMI classes that focus on preparing and improving students English skills for taking English-medium classes should be available at the university

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level (Kang & Park, 2005; Oh, 2011; Yun, 2009); and 6) EMI need be designed with students' current levels of English and their ability to understand English lectures in mind (Hong, Min, & Ham, 2008; Yun, 2009).

Compared to research on EMI from the students' perspective in the Korean context, empirical studies focusing on instructors' points of view are rare. Kang and Park's (2004) study of the perceptions of Korean faculty in an engineering department demonstrates that 19 of the professors who participated in the survey show confidence in their use of academic English related to their content areas but still feel stress when offering EMI. The greatest challenges in managing EMI include students' inappropriate listening and speaking ability levels and the fact that they have to use English when delivering lectures and giving explanations. As a support system, the professors hope that the university reduces their teaching load if they offer EMI given that it typically takes twice as much effort and time for them to prepare English-medium classes compared to Korean lectures. They also feel the need for more systematic support for students, such as assistance with their English writing and hiring native speaker teaching assistants to provide feedback on students' use of English in their papers.

In Oh and Lee's (2010) study, the professors believe that in order to offer effective EMI, they have to design their English-medium lessons with the students' current English proficiency in mind and to proceed each week while keeping pace with the students' comprehension of the content. They also consider that the professors have to have a good command of English and that English-medium classes should provide many opportunities for students to use English in class. The professors articulate that systematic support is needed for them to improve their management of English-medium classes. Examples were 1:1 coaching from native speakers, an EMI manual to which they can refer, small-group English workshops and EMI methodology workshops.

In a similar study, Maeng, Han, Kim, and Kim (2011) found that the majority of 60 professors (51%) who participated in the survey study are negative about offering EMI, while only 27% showed a positive reaction. The professors consider their current English ability along with students' insufficient levels of English to be the greatest obstacles in managing EMI. The professors proposed several ideas that individual universities may take into account before implementing the EMI policy. Those include; 1) limiting the number of students in each EMI class; 2) institutionalizing an incentive system for instructors and professors; 3) restricting the EMI policy to certain academic disciplines that EMI is viable; 4) offering the same class both in English and in Korean during the same semester; and 5) spending sufficient time before implementing the policy in order to evaluate the feasibility and the preparedness of professors and students.

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As shown above, only a small number of empirical studies exist that bring to light the issues related to the offering of EMI from instructors' point of view. To ensure the success of the implementation of EMI policy, professors and instructors' beliefs and attitudes toward the policy are extremely important as they are the ones who apply the top-down policy into practice and deal with the potential obstacles and challenges in actual classrooms. Centering on the way the professors understand the current EMI expansion drive in Korean HE and its implications in their local institution, the present study is expected to broaden our understanding of the way EMI is understood among university faculty and will therefore contribute to the current literature in the Korean EMI context.

III. METHODOLOGY

1. Context and Participants

The study was conducted at a private university in Korea located outside the Seoul Metropolitan area but relatively close enough to commute, which I am going to refer to as Z University. Z University is a medium-sized university, with about 10,000 students and 1,000 teaching and research faculty members during the academic year of 2010. The primary participants of the study are ten professors working in different academic disciplines at Z University who had offered or were offering EMI prior to/during the spring of 2010. The secondary participant is a professor who organized the first EMI workshop for professors at Z University, whom I am going to call as Professor Z.

In recruiting the participants, I first contacted Professor Z. From this communication, I obtained a contact list of instructors and professors who attended the EMI workshop during the fall of 2009, most of whom were planning to offer EMI in the upcoming spring semester. I also received a list of English-medium courses that were to be offered during the spring of 2010 at Z University.

Close to the start of the spring semester of 2010, I sent out emails to the professors who attended the EMI workshop in the fall. I also emailed individual professors in diverse departments who did not attend the autumn workshop but were to offer EMI in the spring, aiming to recruit a variety of participants working in different academic disciplines. Most of the professors who took part in the workshop replied back to my email, some answering positively and others showing negative feedback to participating in the study. None of the professors and instructors whom I had contacted via individual email responded back. Among around the 16 professors who replied to

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my email, ten who showed interest in the study were finally chosen.

Seven of them were from the college of social sciences, and three were from the college of business. About half of them were assistant professors, and half were associate or full professors. All of the participants had experience studying in English-speaking countries (the United States and England) while working toward their doctoral degrees. In the professor information sheet, they all self-evaluated their level of English proficiency as 'advanced,' specifically referring to their use of academic and everyday English. Their EMI teaching experience prior to the spring semester of 2010 ranged from zero to eight years. Two of them had teaching experience in the United States of more than three years. The majority were male, with two females.

Professor Z was a full professor in one of the departments in humanities at Z University. He was known for his efforts to implement and support EMI at the university, having offered numerous English-medium courses in his department and taking a leading role in achieving a national grant designed to support EMI in Korean HE.

2. Data Collection and Analysis

I gathered data mostly through a single semi-structured interview with each of the ten professors during the spring and summer of 2010. Individual interviews were arranged to fit the participants' schedules and were conducted in their offices. Each interview typically lasted for an hour to an hour and a half. Interviews were mostly about sharing their experiences of offering EMI, and their ideas about and responses to the EMI policy and the implementation of Korean HE in general and at Z University in particular. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim.

I also collected data through personal conversations with Professor Z. Although he was not available for the interview, I was able to communicate with him through telephone calls and emails. I used the email contents and the memos I jotted down while communicating on the phone as data. To understand the context in which the ten professors work, I reviewed official documents such as the university website and an official timetable. All data was originally in Korean including Korean interviews with the professors. I translated them into English while preparing this report for publication.

To conduct qualitative data analysis (Merriam, 2009), I first read the entire data set several times in an attempt to develop a comprehensive understanding of it overall. The first rough coding categories and themes evolved through these multiple readings. The initial coding categories were then applied back to the original data to evaluate their usefulness. Through this process, some coding categories were changed while

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others were discarded; still other new categories emerged from the data. Once the coding categories were established, I created a coded chart for individual participants to better understand the issues and concerns of each in addition to a coded chart for the context, i.e., Z University. I then produced a combined chart based on each theme and coding category to understand the professors and the context as a whole. Through this chart, a narrative regarding the professors' attitudes toward the EMI policy in general and its implication at Z University was created.

3. Limitations

The study could have provided a more detailed picture of the way the EMI policy at Z University is experienced among the professors and students if observation data had been available. I attempted to observe at least a few classes taught by each participant, but due to time conflicts, I was only able to observe one EMI class for five participants only, which is why I decided not to include the observation data in this report. As I was not working at the research site but had to visit the place on certain days of the week, observations were not as viable as I had hoped.

IV. FINDINGS

1. Z University and the EMI Policy

Z University is one of the local universities near the Seoul Metropolitan area known for its effort to provide students with strong college education programs. It recently won major government funding for its 'excellence in teaching' project (University website). It also received funding from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology designed to support Korean tertiary institutions to implement and expand EMI (Professor Z). Like other universities in Korea, Z University has worked to survive the national and international HE competition and has been seeking ways to internationalize the university by recruiting more faculty and students from around the world (Professor Z).

English-medium classes at Z University were first offered in 2001 by few professors who were interested in the global trend toward EMI, but the concept did not become popular until very recently (Professor Z). With the recent increase in the number of English-medium classes at Z University, the first EMI workshop was organized in the spring semester of 2009 as one way to support professors systematically. The weekly workshops were designed to assist professors who were offering or planning to offer

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EMI by providing diverse on-line and off-line resources designed to improve the management of classes and to address the issues and challenges that arise in their English-medium classes (Professor Z). It was also expected to provide a place for professors to share their experiences as they would collectively seek ways to offer a more meaningful and satisfying EMI experience for students. The university's proactive adaptation of the EMI policy was also shown in its policy which requires newly appointed faculty members to offer at least one English-medium course per semester and in their system which provides monetary and instructional incentives for professors not required to offer such a course but who do nonetheless (Professor Z).

Fifty-eight instructors and professors participated in the EMI drive at Z University, offering 67 English-medium courses in the spring semester of 2010 (University document). Class sizes ranged from as few as three students to as many as sixty-four (University document). Information on the extent to which English was used or the way the EMI policy was actually realized in each classroom was not available. The professors who participated in the present study, however, expressed their difficulties in implementing an 'English-only' policy in their classrooms due to students' "low" levels of English proficiency (Professor D; Professor J). According to one professor, students who gain admission to Z University typically receive a grade level of "3.5 or 4.5" in their high school academic reports (Professor I).

2. The Background of the Current Drive to Expand English-Medium Instruction

The professors at Z University think that "the college rankings" (Professor B) and "the governmental support" (Professor G) are the decisive factors behind the current fervor for EMI at universities in Korea. Knowing that "EMI is one of the key factors affecting the internationalization parameter in the college rankings" (Professor I), the professors believe that universities in Korea cannot help but offer EMI courses to survive and to "increase their competitive edge both nationally and internationally" (Professor F). The professors' beliefs in the externally-oriented nature of the current EMI boom are well-presented in the following comment:

> The fever of EMI, if I tell you the downright truth, results from the fact that universities want to receive a favorable evaluation on the University Evaluation Index in terms of globalization. I think there is this inevitable, rather passive reason behind it. (Professor A)

They also share a similar view on the necessity of EMI situating the discussion within

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Z University:

> The university's drive for EMI is largely due to the college rankings – the internationalization parameter in the college rankings, to be more specific. It is why the university administration requests that we offer English-medium classes. The overall milieu is that our university cannot help but participate in the current move of internationalizing universities. To secure our university's competitiveness, we feel that we should not appear to fall behind the overall trend of Korean higher education. (Professor C)

Given the current Korean context in which "globalizing universities are highly emphasized" (Professor J), professors believe that Z university has "to achieve a high score on the university evaluation parameter" (Professor B) and accordingly "raise the national reputation" (Professor I) by offering EMI.

Acknowledging the importance of globalizing university campuses, others view EMI as an essential element in the effort to "attracting foreign students" (Professor J) and in "arranging exchange programs with universities in foreign counties" (Professor H). In order "for the university to be competitive in the global market, i.e., to make it a global campus" (Professor B), professors think it necessary for Z university to become a campus that is more international- student-friendly:

> The EMI implementation in our university largely comes from our hope to gain an international reputation. … It is for potential customers from foreign countries. If we do not have an English-using environment, international students will not come. That is why we try to keep expanding the portion of EMI classes. (Professor I)

More international students on university campuses are perceived to be directly related to the overall positive reputation of Korea:

> Having more international students in universities will work to Korea's advantage in terms of building global networks or heightening our national brand. The overall rankings and images of Korean universities will also be elevated. Hence, there are many advantages of implementing EMI courses in universities, though these are not educational benefits per se. (Professor G)

Additionally, making the university campuses English-friendly and therefore globalized is regarded as beneficial for domestic students as well because it is

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perceived to provide them with "an experience similar to that of studying abroad" (Professor B).

Looking at the issue from a larger sociocultural perspective, a few professors think that EMI has become popular because universities want to "provide more opportunities for students to be exposed to English in everyday contexts" (Professor G). The cross-societal fever of English in Korea is yet considered the main cause behind the EMI boom:

> Speaking from a more general perspective, it is part of the English fever widespread in Korean society. Koreans feel that we still need more English education after all those primary and secondary school years of studying English. There is a general consensus that our mandatory English education is not enough. I think the recognition that Koreans lack communicative competence, which now is perceived to be the most important English skill, has led the EMI phenomenon at the tertiary level. (Professor A)

The professors at Z University attribute forces external to universities, i.e., the college rankings and the university evaluation parameter, which is closely related to the funding from the Ministry of Education, to the popularity and speedy implementation of EMI in Korean universities in general and at Z University in particular. They also view EMI as one of the tools for globalizing university campuses in Korea as it gives campuses an English-friendly environment, which is expected to attract more international students. The professors further consider EMI to be one manifestation of the well-known English fever deeply rooted in Korean society.

3. A Natural Course in the Globalized World: Positive Attitudes toward EMI

Centering on the campus globalization and EMI efforts within Z University, a few professors shared the opinions about the positive aspects of EMI implementation at their university. They considered EMI in a favorable light because they believe it works to promote students' awareness of the importance of English:

> I think it is a good idea to offer EMI courses if we want to globalize our university. To be more specific, we can implant in the mind of the students the idea that living with English in the contemporary world is now indispensable. Seeing the course titles in English on the registration site itself, I think, motivates our students. (Professor F)

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More exposure to English on campus is also considered advantageous to students' futures because it is expected to prepare them for the global job market:

> If we use more English on campus and therefore make English more accessible in students' college life, it will benefit our students. It will be beneficial for their future when they try to get a job and enter the workforce because Korea is now very much globalized and is looking for global talent. (Professor C)

Others view EMI favorably because it better accommodates the influx of international students, which they believe positively assists campus globalization:

> There are more international students entering our school, not only in undergrad programs but also in graduate programs. … Thus, EMI classes are necessary. Yes, they have become necessary in our university. Not every student has to take them, but for those who need them, EMI courses are necessary. (Professor J)

As long as the EMI implementation at Z University is practiced reasonably, i.e., "not requiring [the professors] to offer too many EMI courses" (Professor H) and "not demanding all faculty members to offer EMI without considering their expertise and disciplines" (Professor B), the professors seem to believe that "recommending EMI classes fits into the general trend of internalizing colleges in Korea" (Professor B).

Given the overall milieu of contemporary Korea as she globalizes, professors see EMI at Z University positively, considering it to be a critical element in instilling the importance of English in students, a key for their future employment and potential. The professors also think highly of EMI being the catalyst of internationalizing Z University by inviting more international students to the university's campus. If reasonably practiced, i.e., by not putting too much pressure on the instructors, the professors believe that the implementation of EMI at Z University is a natural course in the era of globalization.

4. More Harm than Good: Negative Attitudes toward EMI

1) Lack of a Critical Assessment of the Necessity for and Appropriateness of EMI in Korean Tertiary Education

While the professors at Z University are well aware of the positive sides of offering

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English-medium classes, many also share their negative opinions of EMI or the way EMI is currently implemented in Korean universities including Z University. Understanding a university as "a place in which students pursue knowledge and learn to become independent thinkers," the professors lament the current "situation in which college classrooms are becoming centers of English education" (Professor E). The professors also evaluate negatively the current EMI craze, viewing it as one illustration of Korean mentality that tends to pursue and adopt what is happening outside Korea blindly without critical consciousness:

> The fever of EMI, I think, is linked to the overall societal trend in Korea. It reflects our mindset that we have to jump on the global bandwagon, that whatever we call ours will only work within Korea but not globally, and that ours is obsolete. All of these types of thinking are somehow connected to the EMI frenzy. … I am not a patriot or even a nationalist, but I think we tend to believe that good things reside outside of Korea and therefore we have to follow those international trends. Korea is excessively focused on benchmarking, and I think English education or the EMI policy is nothing but an extreme manifestation of that. (Professor E)

Focusing the discussion on the context of Z University, the professors raise questions about the absence of a collective critical inspection of the necessity of EMI at Z University:

> We now live in an era where EMI is perceived as such an important index, a critical innovation, or a significant means of improving the level and reputation of universities. However, when I consider whether this is what we really want, my answer is that it is NOT. The issue here is our identity. I think our university has a unique identity that differentiates ours from other schools: the identity of a teaching university and a local university, and an identity that has an important traditionality. Moreover, I wonder whether this identity is in harmony with the relentless external pressure of expanding and increasing EMI on our campus. I also wonder whether this actually reaches to the members of our university. I think we are involuntarily justifying our decisions of offering EMI classes on the basis that it is a national trend and thus we have to follow it. We believe that we have no choice but to accept the trend. … I think we are becoming numb and nonchalant. (Professor E)

This uncritical pursuit of the national trend without contemplating the feasibility of

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EMI at Z University is perceived to be detrimental for all who participate:

> I think we are experiencing a transition now. ... Once this transition passes, we then may be able to expect some positive evaluation of the current fever of EMI. But for now it is just chaotic. I think we are in utter confusion. Looking at it from the viewpoint of whether we are gaining or losing through this experience, I can definitely say that we are NOT gaining much. I mean, EMI is not being beneficial for professors or students. (Professor A)

The current haphazard enforcement of EMI policy at Z University is also negatively perceived given that it is not implemented in a way that respects the "students' right of choice" (Professor A) in selecting and taking university courses:

> My students have no choice but to take mandatory courses in English if those courses are offered as EMI. They do not have any freedom of choice. I feel like EMI can work to violate human rights, I mean, the rights of our students. If students do not want to take English-medium classes, they should not have to. … We should implement the EMI policy judiciously in a way that appreciates the students' right of choice. Not every student can and should be a good English user. (Professor E)

The professors at Z University are critical of the unqualified implementation of the EMI policy in Korean tertiary education without a careful appraisal of its practicality and the readiness of the participants. They believe that the wholesale acceptance of the EMI policy places college education in Korea in danger of ignoring the students' freedom when selecting and taking courses, thereby limiting their academic experience.

2) The External Pressure and Its Consequences on College Education

While the professors show negative attitudes as regards the overall uncritical and blind acceptance of EMI policy at the university level, they also raise objections to the way it is implemented, i.e., the fact that EMI is not initiated by an individual university but is driven by external factors such as the college rankings and university evaluation parameter:

> In a sense, our university is reluctantly offering EMI courses. I mean, I do not think that our decision to offer EMI courses started with carefully considering and reflecting upon what it is that our students need but instead

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> started from our anxiety to tackle the issue of the nationwide evaluation of universities. Yes, we are offering English-medium classes mainly due to the societal pressure from outside of our university. (Professor A)

The externally forced implementation of EMI at Z University is in fact strongly objected to because it is perceived to violate the administrative and academic autonomy of an individual university:

> Well, I think we offer EMI classes to provide students with a variety of opportunities. But more importantly, we just want to meet the requirements of the Ministry of Education. Personally, I think this is not an issue in which the Ministry of Education should intervene. This is something that our university has to tackle by itself. If English education is such an important matter for our students, then it should be the university who finds the best way to educate our students. It is not something in which people outside of our university can have a say. The questions about how many international faculty members we have or how many EMI classes we offer, all these are nonsense to me. We know our students best and therefore we have to come up with a curriculum that best meets our students' needs. (Professor D)

The "structural problem" where "an individual university" has no option "but to follow the overall trend" (Professor D) to meet the globalization requirement is regarded as "a serious problem" given that it leaves universities vulnerable, i.e., making universities unable to attend to what is "meaningful" to students (Professor F). The professors indeed express some concern about the current situation of Z University, in which the top-down enforcement of EMI policy is making the university ineffective in catering to students' issues and concerns:

> This leads to a problem of us not putting sufficient time and energy into what we can provide our students with through EMI classes. For the successful implementation and management of EMI, we have to set a clear goal and create a context-appropriate methodology for our students. For now, our priority is on whether we offer EMI classes or not. Therefore, we do not have a clear direction of where we are going from now or how we can help our students through EMI at all, which is the biggest problem at the moment. (Professor A)

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3) Disadvantageous for Students' University Experience

The professors, in addition, perceive the current EMI drive at Z University negatively because they believe it does more harm than good for their students. They seem to believe that "combining English education with college content course learning" will easily end up being a situation involving the "chasing [of] two lofty aims at once, only resulting in losing both" (Professor G). The professors seem to believe that "if the current situation continues, students will find themselves caught in situations where they have not improved their English proficiency or gained any knowledge in their content area" (Professor A).

They are also skeptical about the situation in which English proficiency is heavily emphasized when students' basic academic writing skills in Korean are still at the elementary level:

> Our students' Korean writing skill levels are actually low. … They do not know how to write a coherent academic paper in Korean. … Therefore I often wonder whether it will be helpful to work on improving students' English skills when their Korean is not good enough. How beneficial will EMI be in their life? When their academic Korean is not solid enough, can their English be improved? (Professor J)

Experiencing the potentially debilitative effect of EMI on ensuring that students have a firm grasp of their content area, the professors resist the idea of making EMI an across-the-curriculum project, arguing for the need to restrict EMI to "general education courses or elective ones" and to make sure that "the core courses in each department" should be offered "in the [students'] mother tongue, Korean" (Professor E):

> I will never offer my major courses in English. … It is because my students cannot understand the key concepts in our field if they are presented in English. Those concepts are not easy to understand. Plus, I want to make my major courses a place where my students can discuss and share their ideas freely without any undue pressure. Knowing my students' overall level of English proficiency, using English as a medium of instruction is something I cannot do. … In my class, I want my students to learn the basic concepts and to be able to analyze them further. My students are not ready to do these tasks in English. English is an obstacle rather than a support. (Professor E)

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Experiencing the negative ramifications of EMI in terms of comprehensive content knowledge development, the professors call for a judicious application of the EMI policy at Z University, restricting it to elective courses.

4) Unilateral and Rigid Application of EMI Policy

Not only the blind acceptance of the EMI trend but also the way the policy is applied to the university is negatively evaluated. The professors problematize the fact that the "EMI policy is uniformly implemented" across all departments without a careful consideration of issues such as whether EMI will work in certain disciplines or not and whether the students are ready to take EMI classes or not (Professor D).

They also object to the idea of making EMI a requirement for new faculty members. Calling it "totalitarianism," they "hope that it should not be institutionalized" (Professor I). Enforcing the EMI requirement for new faculty without clear plans and directions at Z University is called into question:

> A new faculty member just joined in our department this semester, and s/he has to offer at least one English-medium class per semester. There is no specific guideline of until when and how long other than a vague policy that new faculty members have to offer one per semester. … I think this is a bit illogical. Actually, it is very illogical. It is a ruthless policy that is not based on careful deliberation. (Professor H)

Others draw attention to the irrationality of obliging faculty members who completed their study in Korea or in a non-English speaking country to offer EMI:

> Luckily, I am not in a situation in which I have to be sensitive about the requirement, but I am sure it is a great pressure for new faculty members. Those who did their degrees in Korea or in other non-English speaking countries such as France or Germany are pretty discontented. They raise questions about the present trend in which EMI classes have become a yardstick that determines scholars' academic rankings. It is something we have to give careful thought to. (Professor J)

Thus, the inflexible approach and application of the EMI policy at Z University is not welcomed.

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5) The Internationalization Rationale

While some professors criticize the externally driven enforcement of EMI policy and its negative ramifications on students' academic experiences in Korean universities in general and at Z University in particular, others challenge the 'internationalization' rationale behind EMI implementation arguing that "internationalization cannot be equated to 'Englishization'" (Professor E):

> Internationalization does not mean interacting and working exclusively with English-speaking countries. There are Asian countries and other countries too. However, the university requires us to offer only EMI classes in the name of internationalization. I hope that we make cultural and linguistic exchanges with countries other than English-speaking ones too. (Professor H)

They challenge the one-sided definition of internationalization now widely used in Korea, providing a different way of globalizing Korean universities including Z University, i.e., producing more world-renowned scholars and researchers so that people outside of Korea visit and study in Korea using Korean:

> When faculty members in certain departments in our university are known for their excellent research work, then people from other countries will want to come and participate in those research projects, which will naturally lead to exchange programs with other countries. That is what I think internationalization of a university is. (Professor D)

> For example, if faculty members in our Korean department have a world-wide reputation, students from other countries will come and listen to their lectures in Korean. This will be another form of internationalization. Internationalization cannot be restricted to doing things in English only. (Professor D)

Deploring the current situation in which universities are now becoming a major center for reproducing the English obsession widespread in Korean society, the professors at Z University take a negative view of the national trend of expanding EMI in Korean HE. They also object to the current EMI fascination, believing that it is nothing more than a manifestation of the cultural toadyism pervasive in Korea. Observing from the perspective of Z University, the professors challenge the haphazard acceptance of the EMI trend, which came without a vigilant consideration

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of the practicality and necessity for it at Z University. They are critical of the lack of careful questioning of the benefits that EMI would bring to the lives of students and professors at Z University.

The fact that EMI policy is not voluntarily implemented by an individual university but rather implicitly forced is strongly challenged. While some raise question to identifying internationalization with 'Englishization,' others draw attention to the fact that students will not gain much from the current EMI frenzy. Still others problematize the institutionalizing movement of mandatory EMI requirement for new faculty members.

5. A Way Forward: What is Needed?

Understanding the inevitability of having to go with the national and international trend of globalizing universities on the one hand and being aware of the negative manifestation of the current EMI enforcement on the other, the professors speak with one voice that the issue of EMI should be approached "gradually" (Professor A; Professor C). Knowing that "its hasty implementation will only result in transitional confusion and unnecessary damage for both professors and students" (Professor A), they argue for the need to set the nationwide long-term goals for EMI and a gradual implementation of them:

> I think we need a long-term plan at the national level. We should not be anxious about obtaining immediate and visible results. We have to establish long-term goals of what we want to achieve in 10 and 20 years and work to attain those long-term goals incrementally. (Professor A)

The professors also point to the need for a context-embedded implementation of EMI given that universities in Korea differ in terms of the level of their students' English proficiency, in the number of professors who can offer EMI, and in different departments' levels of readiness to offer classes in English:

> In certain universities where most of the students have high level of English proficiency, it may be easier to offer classes in English. For certain disciplines such as natural sciences and engineering, the way they use English may be different from the way people in the humanities use English in class. … Therefore, I think EMI should be implemented differently depending on different academic disciplines and different schools. (Professor C)

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For the successful implementation of EMI at Z University in particular, a more flexible conceptualization of EMI is perceived to be indispensable. In other words, a rigid interpretation of EMI, i.e., the unrealistic expectation that students will learn in EMI classes as much as they do in Korean ones, is considered to be abandoned:

> If we plan to continue to offer English-medium classes, we can design them in such a way that students are introduced to foundational and basic concepts in their academic disciplines, rather than advanced and complex ones, in EMI classes. Offering EMI classes that are not too difficult and not incomprehensible to students could be an alternative. (Professor C)

Similarly, the professors call for the need to reexamine the meaning of internationalization through EMI as appropriate for the context of Z University. Pointing the fact that the majority of the students at Z University are not ready to manage English-medium college life, the professors argue that the new EMI curriculum should be one that benefits the majority of students:

> Realistically speaking, our university cannot be an international university that can use English as a medium of instruction campus-wide at present. … If we implement the EMI policy too rigidly, i.e., making English as a communication tool at the university level, only a small number of students will survive. The EMI curriculum, in this case, will serve only those few students who can communicate and study in English. This is a very ineffective education for our university. However badly we want the internationalization of our university, the general curriculum has to be one that the majority of our students can handle. (Professor H)

A new understanding of internationalization is held to be necessary at this particular university, i.e., internationalization to an extent such that students can communicate and exchange their thoughts with others using English:

> As long as students can communicate with people from other countries, that, I think, is enough to meet the definition of internationalization at our university. Reading English articles and books is for only a minority of students. For the majority, as long as they can understand what the interlocutor says and can communicate in English, it is sufficient. I might be wrong, but I think that is what we need for now. (Professor H)

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For a successful EMI experience among students at Z University, the professors further believe that language support should precede the active implementation of EMI:

> I think there are ways that we can implement EMI at our university better. … What we need most is a more accurate assessment of our students' English ability. Once we have a concrete and realistic picture of our students' levels of English proficiency, we will be able to offer EMI classes that reflect our students' current English competency. I think that is the most important agenda now. (Professor G)

The professors perceive systematic and thorough language training to be mandatory:

> In order for the EMI experience to be successful, students' fundamental English skills have to be improved, be they writing, listening, or conversation skills. I think there are students' demands for that too. We need to provide more intense and through training of English for our students. (Professor C)

Finally, acknowledging the "impracticality" of "expanding English-medium courses such that the majority of core courses are offered in English" (Professor H), the professors also argue for the need to protect students' autonomous right to decide whether to take classes in English or in Korean:

> I hope students can have a say in this matter. Students should be able to choose which language they want to use in their classes. I hope other faculty members agree with me on this issue. I hope the university office leaves us alone in this matter. For core classes that professors regard as their pride, I hope they are given a choice of whether to offer them in Korean or in English. (Professor E)

The professors at Z University believe in the necessity of systematic and far-sighted plans and programs at the national level so that universities can successfully implement the EMI policy. The maintaining of different EMI policies at different universities is regarded as indispensable considering each university's unique context, i.e., the readiness of the students and professors for EMI as well as the financial, educational, and professional sources available to support EMI. Solid English education is thought to be a prerequisite. The professors also believe that students should be given the right to choose whether to take their classes in English or in Korean.

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V. DISCUSSION

The present study explores the way the professors working at a private university in a medium-sized city in Korea understand the current frenzy of EMI implementation in Korean tertiary education and its manifestation in their local university. The study demonstrates that the professors consider forces outside individual universities, mainly the college rankings and the university evaluation parameter, as the major cause for the nationwide obsession with EMI. The professors also view the current phenomenon of using English as an instructional medium as a natural response of Korean HE to the era of globalization. Looking into the unique Korean sociohistorical context in particular, the professors perceive the popularity of EMI as one manifestation of the 'English fever' which has deeply penetrated Korean society.

Based on their own experience of offering English-medium classes at Z University, the professors acknowledge the positive aspects of EMI in that it enlightens students as to the importance of English in the contemporary globalized world and in how it can assist them as they prepare to enter the global job market. The implementation of EMI is perceived as beneficial not only for students but also for Z University itself because an English-medium campus will serve to attract international students and faculty from around the world, promoting the faster internationalization of Z University.

Despite these perceived benefits, the professors at Z University cast a negative light on the EMI boom in general and on its application at Z University in particular. They find it unfortunate that Korean HE is becoming the leading center for English education. They also problematize the wholesale and uncritical acceptance of the EMI policy in Korean tertiary education, as it came without a careful evaluation of the readiness of institutions and participants and without the formulating of concrete plans for its successful implementation. The way the EMI policy is introduced to individual universities, i.e., universities offering EMI to influence the globalization index on the university evaluation is heavily criticized.

Looking into the context of Z University, the professors believe that the current EMI enforcement puts Z University in danger of ignoring the students' right to choose freely and to take their preferred courses as it forces them into English-medium classes. They also think that Z University can easily fall into the trap of mistaking means for ends, i.e. placing too much emphasis on whether the university offers enough English-medium classes to meet the globalization index. In doing so, they feel the university can lose sight of what students really need and how the university can help them to have a successful EMI experience. The rigid application of the EMI policy at Z University is also negatively evaluated. The professors disapprove not only of

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imposing mandatory EMI courses for new faculty members, but of enforcing the EMI policy unilaterally across all disciplines without considering the backgrounds and expertise of the faculty members. Problematizing the internationalization rationale behind the EMI expansion, the professors also point to the irrationality of identifying internationalization with 'Englishization,' asserting for the need to broaden the definition of internationalization so that it includes a more diverse range of cultures and languages.

Experiencing the negative manifestation of the implementation of EMI at Z University, the professors argue the need for a long-term plan and flexible application of the policy at the national and institutional level. Given the diverse academic, administrative, and socioeconomic circumstances under which individual universities operate, they emphasize the need to contextualize the EMI policy so that it serves students and professors in different institutions properly. Not only a flexible approach to EMI implementation depending on the different contexts but also a loose definition of internationalization is called for. Supports for students who take English-medium courses, i.e., helping them improve their English proficiency, is viewed as another prerequisite for the successful management of EMI.

The present study is in line with previous studies in that the professors view EMI as an essential component of internationalizing Korean HE in the contemporary globalized world (Oh & Lee, 2010) and that they consider more proactive support measures at the institutional level to be a prerequisite for a successful implementation of EMI (Oh & Lee, 2010; Maeng et al., 2011). Professors and instructors in previous studies often show positive attitudes toward the overall milieu of internationalizing Korean contemporary HE through different devices, one of which is introducing and expanding English-medium classes (Oh & Lee, 2010). The present study, however, presents more complex attitudes of the professors in thinking of internationalizing Korean HE through EMI. Although the professors in this study acknowledge the importance of offering EMI and understand its positive aspects, a closer examination of their interviews demonstrates that they have concerns over the current haphazard application and externally pressured enforcement of the policy, which they believe makes Z University unable truly to attend to and accommodate the needs and desires of the members of the university and therefore incapable of providing needed academic, educational, and professional support and experience through EMI.

Different from large-scale survey studies previously conducted on instructors and professors in Korea, which aimed to present their general opinions on EMI implementation, the present study is unique in that it presents the perspectives of a particular group of professors working in a local private university, providing a more detailed and concrete perspective on what the situated enforcement of the EMI policy

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meant for the participants and how they responded to the manifestation of the policy at their institution. By adding a new story to the larger picture of EMI, this study is expected to broaden our overall understanding of the way instructors and professors in Korea view the current EMI drive and the way they envision the future of Korean tertiary education through the promotion of EMI as it is contextually appropriate to all of its stakeholders.

VI. CONCLUSION

Korean higher education stands at a crossroads. Situated in an era of ruthless global competition in the HE market on the one hand and facing the domestic problem of a shrinking population of potential customers on the other, Korean HE institutions are in a tough situation that requires them to initiate vigorous reforms in order to survive. At this difficult time, EMI implementation can surely be a wise solution with the potential to overcome the crisis given that it will draw more international faculty and students from around the world, which will in turn work to raise the international reputation of Korean tertiary institutions while solving the problem of recruiting students. The current unconditional policy adaptation and top-down enforcement style, however, are definitely not the way to move forward. As the professors in this study note, for the successful implementation of EMI policy not only a long-term and systematic plan should be devised but a more flexible and open approach has to be taken at the national level. An ecologically sensitive policy established by policymakers and administrators will allow individual institutions to enact freer and more creative strategies that better suit their own contexts.

At the institutional level, individual universities should strive to come up with context-embedded policies based on a concrete analysis and proper understanding of the educational and financial readiness of each institution and its participants. A policy based on a preliminary needs-analysis of an institution will serve to produce a context-appropriate EMI curriculum and methodology that will work best for the very context for which they are devised. As presented in the study, the professors at Z University assert the need to redefine internationalization for the university such that the EMI policy and the process of campus internationalization will be in sync with the students' current levels of English proficiency and their levels of readiness. Other universities should create their own EMI policies which best fit their circumstances so that the EMI endeavor does not end up as a meaningless form of benchmarking, instead serving as a proactive strategy for an ever-changing and increasingly more globalized world.

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Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Levels: Tertiary

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