

EMI classroom assessment practices: A survey of Taiwanese tertiary teachers

Wu, Jessica; Li, Naihsin

The Language Training & Testing Center, Taiwan

Abstract

While assessment is part of teaching, it is often problematic in EMI (English-Medium Instruction) for those who teach non-native speakers of English via the medium of English (Dearden, 2014). Aiming to help EMI teachers to meet their assessment needs, the EMI Classroom Assessment Practices (ECAP) questionnaire was developed and administered to 40 EMI instructors teaching at the tertiary level in Taiwan.

The questionnaire surveyed university teachers regarding their assessment practices in EMI, and their self-perceived skills in these practices. It also investigated the effect of instruction medium on the assessment practices among the teachers who had conducted a similar course using Chinese as the medium of instruction. The responses were analyzed to identify teachers' needs for training and support in EMI classroom assessment and to explore the role of students' L1 (Chinese) and L2 (English) in the EMI assessment. Furthermore, the relationships between questionnaire responses and teacher-/course-related variables were examined.

Results showed that the teachers have, in general, practiced various assessment methods to evaluate student progress. However, the practices were mediated by some teacher-/course-related variables, such as discipline, experience of staying in an English-speaking country, and course size. Instruction medium also showed an effect. In particular, the following learning-oriented assessment practices were less often performed in EMI classrooms: making appropriate alignments between assessment and instruction goals; communicating assessment results to students and providing feedback; and, assessing students' higher-level cognitive abilities.

A high correlation was found between the assessment techniques that were less practiced and those that the teachers felt less skilled in, signaling the possibility that the assessment practices in the EMI classroom were dominated by the teachers' familiarity with certain kinds of assessment techniques, rather than by instructional objectives. In addition, it was found that teachers perceived a critical gap in their skills in designing test items that assess high-level cognitive abilities, despite the fact that they frequently do so.

In terms of students' L1 and the role of English in the EMI classroom, almost all EMI teachers were aware of students' difficulties with English and used simple

English when presenting the assessment task. However, it was not common for them to take into consideration and make accommodations for students' language difficulties when considering task performance; neither did they find it necessary to provide corrective feedback on language errors. Nevertheless, teachers who incorporated language improvement as one focus of assessment more often practiced these strategies.

The findings of the investigation have implications not only for advancing our understanding of teachers' assessment needs in the Taiwanese EMI context but also for developing and implementing useful training programs in support of EMI teachers' professional development with regard to assessment. Last but not least, the contextual features of EMI assessment identified through the study may serve as a point of departure for the definition of good assessment practices for EMI.