



## Research Article

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# A Rhizomatic Analysis of the Korean EMI Experience: A Report on Shifting Attitudes towards English as a Medium of Instruction in South Korea

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## Abstract

*This study investigates the EMI (English as a Medium of Instruction) experience of nursing students in South Korea. From a questionnaire, two-thirds of the participants reported that English should be the primary language of instruction, even when the same number of students preferred L1 as their collaboration medium. In response to the current literature on the Korean EMI experience, this paper adopts an original application of Deleuze and Guattari's ideas in its qualitative analysis of Korean EMI to understand better why students would choose English over their L1. Instead of explaining the contradictions in EMI learning with neoliberal and capitalist critiques, the contribution of this paper is to illustrate the heterogeneity and the transformative shifts in Korean higher education and the specific function that students have in engendering new forms of identities through EMI praxis.*

**Keywords:** Deleuze and Guattari; English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI); rhizome; assemblage; Korean higher education

## 1. Introduction

As institutions worldwide adopt English as the primary mode of instruction, scholars have raised questions about the advantages and disadvantages of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI). What do students gain by taking courses exclusively in English? (Galloway et al., 2017; Galloway & Rose, 2018) How do students cope with the difficulties of studying decontextualized content while needing to improve their English competence? (Dearden, 2016) These questions must be addressed since the growing number of international institutions adopting EMI policies outpaces empirical research about the subject (Galloway & Numajiri, 2019). However, the current EMI discussion underestimates students' belief that English has priority over their L1. As one of the primary stakeholders in higher education, there is a need to examine student participation in EMI systems differently from the standard interpretation. Currently, there is a dominant representation of EMI students codified with negative experiences because of socioeconomic and postcolonial factors (which are valid interpretations in themselves (Garcia & Otheguy, 2019; Chun, 2021; Kim, 2017). However, this view frames Korean EMI as an outcome of neoliberalism and capitalism as if this were a default condition, free from potential shifts and transformations. In response, this paper examines

the attitudes of South Korean (Hereafter, Korean) nursing students toward EMI using a radical theoretical framework. Using a rhizomatic analysis based on Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's work as a qualitative methodology, the Korean EMI experience will be revealed with more open-ended and creative dimensions (Masny, 2015). The rhizomatic analysis will highlight Korean students' contradictory feelings about EMI and pave new paths of understanding beyond the socioeconomic reductions of the current literature.

## 2. Literature Review: The Socioeconomic and Cultural Dimensions of Korean EMI

English as a medium of instruction is a policy of implementing English as the primary mode of education "to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries where the first language of the majority of the population is not English" (Macaro et al., 2018, p. 37). EMI is justified by the belief that English is the universal language among speakers of other languages that facilitates international collaboration (Veitch, 2021). The spread of EMI has revealed a higher percentage of private institutions adopting its practice than public universities (Dearden, 2014). This trend is the case in South Korea. EMI's proliferation in higher education has invited critiques of its practice and implementation (Byun et al., 2010; Byun et al., 2011). The Korean government recognized that national prosperity was heavily reliant on the knowledge produced by its education system, and Korean universities needed to raise their global standing (Byun et al., 2010; Kang, 2018). Policymakers devoted their energies to invigorating their universities with the spirit of globalization, and financial incentives were created for institutions to attract foreign faculty and students. One of the main reasons for recruiting international students is that Korea's domestic population is in decline (Statistics Korea, 2021). Because of a shrinking student population, Byun et al. (2011) write that many Korean universities "are being forced to tap into the international market to recruit students from overseas (p. 471). Under these conditions, the Korean higher education system has become an economic commodity, given its "near-blind emphasis on the economic aspects of internationalization" (Byun et al., 2011, p. 481).

This narrative of government incentivization is inseparable from the negative feedback from Korean teachers and students in expanding EMI implementation. Both groups have expressed dissatisfaction: students have been unhappy with their teacher's pronunciation, and teachers have been frustrated with the student's inability to follow lectures and low English fluency (Kim, 2014). For teachers, the main difficulty is the added workload of preparing English lectures and the frustration of knowing that using L1 would be a more effective way of teaching the material to their students (Kim, 2017). The anxiety experienced by Korean students brings to light EMI's negative impact. Kim's (2017) research on Korea's Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST) revealed how adopting a full EMI curriculum spurred other top Korean science institutions to follow suit. Kim reported a tragic story in 2011 when four KAIST undergraduate students committed suicide. KAIST's EMI policy was blamed for increasing levels of competition and thereby exacerbating student anxiety. The incident made educators and policymakers reconsider their EMI policy since more students and teachers find it more difficult to use English than their mother tongue (Chun et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2016). Korean students long to use their mother tongue in their classroom (Kim, 2017). A study of EMI implementation in three of Korea's top science universities reported how 9 out of 10 students favored L1 instruction over English-only instruction (Kim et al., 2016). According to this narrative, the Korean government's ambition to raise university standards has neglected to realize that multilingual or bilingual strategy is "a natural phenomenon and must be recognized and utilized as a legitimate, effective instructional strategy." (Kim et al., 2016, p. 14). Based on the current literature, EMI's negative impact is justified by Korean universities because of Korea's declining birth rate and the fact that universities must adopt policies that will attract more international students to survive (Byun et al., 2011; Kim, 2017).

The financial justification has been questioned since EMI has been described as an extension of colonial injustice. One scholar describes this injustice as English, a linguistic capital whereby

competent people have epistemic money over those who do not (Williams & Stelma, 2022). In its current implementation, the narrative suggests that it is likely that English will have epistemic value, given its status as *Lingua Franca*, while Korean will be devalued because of its limited use outside of Korea (Williams & Stella, 2022). Korea's complicated relationship with the English language has its roots in the colonial past and its conflicted relationship with American power and authority (Kim-Rivera, 2011). The current ideology behind English education has made Korean parents interpret that the "inability to speak English was a serious disadvantage in finding a decent job in South Korea and the international job market" (Lee, 2021, p. 227). Parents who felt their English language competency was lacking invested heavily in their children's education. For many Korean families, English is essential to acquiring or maintaining their middle-class status (Lee, 2021, p. 228). This idea is quite prevalent in the EMI literature, which views English as the fundamental expression of socioeconomic competition in South Korea after the IMF Crisis (Piller & Cho, 2013; Byun et al., 2014; Kang, 2018). The critique of EMI praxis often associates English competency with the acquisition of advantages and benefits of the global economy insofar as "proficiency in English has already become a powerful means of social stratification" (Kedzierski, 2016, p. 386). EMI is yet another expression of Eurocentric privilege perpetuating the "coloniality of power" (Garcia, 2019, p. 159).

EMI praxis is rooted in this admixture of ambition and survival, embodied by choices made in governmental policy, ideology, and the cultural identification of English with prestige and privilege. This admixture also reveals how EMI is not entirely harmful or even a negative experience; EMI praxis in South Korea produces new emergent conditions. English is not just a means to make money but an enabling condition for global opportunities and intercultural exchange. For one scholar, English in Korean education should be interpreted within the context of mutual influence and cultural symbiosis (Rudiger, 2020). The English language has had a considerable influence since the speech has enabled Koreans to export their cultural products and achieve their goal of global recognition. From mutual nurturing, English has become a fixed part of the linguistic ecology in Korea (Rudiger, 2020, p. 170). Potentially, this goes both ways; the adoption of English has been the goal of Korean policymakers to export Korean influence worldwide.

### 3. Study Rationale: What is a Rhizomatic Analysis of EMI?

Deleuze and Guattari lay out the methodology adopted for this study, which constitutes a new descriptive language to express how connections and identities emerge. One of the new terms introduced by Deleuze and Guattari is *assemblage*, a gathering of persons, groups, and machines, all of which participate in production and creation. This paper defines EMI as an assemblage comprising students, teachers, and universities. These assemblages manifest metaphysically as having no points but only lines (Masny, 2013, p. 341). The idea is that gatherings and groupings do not have fixed beginnings or ends; they are infinite in that they can be assembled in multiple and uncountable ways. Assemblages manifest as rhizomatic in nature. Deleuze and Guattari describe the rhizome as not having "a beginning nor end but always a middle (*milieu*) from which it grows and overflows" (2013, p. 21). As a concept to be applied in education, Deleuze and Guattari's idea of a rhizome is quite helpful since it "establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 7). Because of their desire to recognize human relations from the standpoint of multiplicity, adopting Deleuze and Guattari's ideas to qualitative research requires the critical assumption that the collected data has a heterogeneous form that cannot be reduced or simplified to a set of factors or categories. The irreducibility of differences for a different type of analysis to map out the processes in Korean EMI. In a provisional sense, a rhizomatic study is a type of cartography by which researchers draw the models of becoming: becoming a student; becoming a teacher; becoming Korean; becoming an EMI instructor. The purpose is to create new means of articulation by confronting the traditional and common forms of understanding and engagement in each phenomenon (Mazzei & McCoy, 2014). A rhizomatic approach includes the risks of producing contradictions, uncertainties, and ambiguities to

occupy open-ended and decentered milieus (Parr, 2010, p. 235). Thus, a rhizomatic analysis does not attempt to represent its data in the conventional sense. Instead, rhizomatic research posits an aesthetic encounter of multiple forces and ruptures created by those participating in each assemblage (Amorim & Scott, 2018), enabling a different qualitative research method (Bright, 2020). This study deploys a qualitative methodology composed of writing "that draws attention to language itself, making connections between things that might be overlooked, a collective enunciation of incredulity, expressing these truths of inquiry" (Bright, 2020, p. 24). Such research aims to provide an incomplete representation of data. However, it offers a palpating engagement with the collected experiences of the participants and acknowledges their inherent ambiguities and difficulties as multiplicities (Masny, 2013, p. 346).

A compelling reason to adopt a rhizomatic analysis arises from the need to better delineate the current Korean EMI narrative and challenge EMI's representation in the existing literature. The standard interpretation of the Korean EMI detracts from the processes by which it functions and conceals its participants' emergent experiences. In its current state, the codification of Korean EMI is represented as a totality of negative experiences reducible to a set of socioeconomic factors and cultural categories. This paper attempts to upend this codification by revealing the contradictory elements in student EMI experiences regarding the transitory experiences of young adults adjusting and adapting to higher education. Every assemblage, in its codification over codes, creates the conditions to which the collective body can be upended and transformed (Smith, 2018, p. 236). Oppressive and coercive structures produce excesses that overturn these social structures. To this extent, an essential part of the rhizomatic analysis here is demonstrating how an educational system can be overturned, given that education systems tend to foreclose creative possibilities by favoring coercive ways of being (Carlin, 2015).

For the rest of this paper, EMI will be referred to as an EMI assemblage, a productive collection of individuals and institutions. From the lived experiences of student participants, the EMI assemblage can be better examined in terms of existing interconnections in the linguistic ecology of Korean experiences. What is required is a descriptive analysis of how students negotiate their sense of identity and achievement along EMI instruction. From these experiences, potential ruptures and contradictions indicate the pathways to describe EMI beyond the current socioeconomic narrative that reductively interprets EMI experiences as products of foreign and neoliberal influence. As it stands, scholars and researchers resolve the issue of EMI with a recommendation for more L1 recognition over English competence to ameliorate the contradictory experiences of EMI learning (Garcia & Otheguy, 2019; Williams & Stelma, 2022). However, this recommendation assumes that EMI is an outcome of capitalist forces and neoliberal policies, with students having no control over their experience (Piller & Cho, 2013). This paper attempts to break from this interpretation by answering three research questions with a rhizomatic analysis.

**RQ1:** How do students feel when communicating with their professors in an EMI environment?

**RQ2:** What are the best study practices of EMI students?

**RQ3:** How do students feel about EMI compared to the possibility of L1 instruction?

#### 4. Participant Characteristics

The object of our study is a Korean nursing program. This university program offers English content classes and courses with Korean instructors who code-switch while using English textbooks. Unlike other Korean universities that have adopted a complete EMI program, the nursing program of this university only has 60% of its courses in English; these are the core courses of the nursing program. Electives and liberal arts courses are offered in Korean. The nursing courses provided in Korean have English textbooks translated into class by the professors. As stated in the literature review, many of Korea's prestigious universities have attempted to adopt complete EMI curricula, often to the detriment of student and faculty performances. This university has adopted a more liberal, bilingual educational approach, allowing instructors and students to learn in English and Korean. Comparing

the program with higher-tiered universities in Korea, the Korean nursing program has a semi-full-time EMI curriculum. All 135 students who participated are of Korean descent.

## 5. Methodology

This study adopted two approaches. The first approach includes a survey for students, student commentary, and student interviews. The questionnaire is meant to highlight differences in student attitudes toward EMI. A Likert scale was used to determine the degree of agreement with statements concerning their learning experience. The questionnaire has twelve questions to isolate a possible diversity of opinions about EMI and their preferences for the learning mode. Items 1 to 4 corresponded to RQ1. Responses to these statements were supposed to represent students' feelings toward their EMI instructors. These items helped determine how students feel about classroom experience, communication, and instructor rapport. Items 5 to 8 correspond to RQ2. Responses to these statements represented the degree to which students prefer one learning strategy over the other and the preferred communication medium of these practices. Items 9 to 12 corresponded to RQ3. Responses to these statements represented how students feel about English use compared to possible L1 instruction. The levels of agreement demonstrated how students felt about EMI compared to the alternative of direct L1 instruction. At the end of the questionnaire, students were invited to leave a comment about their learning experience. Student comments were submitted in the original Korean and were transcribed and translated by a professional translator.

As for the interviews, the questions directed students to answer how they perceived their teacher's and peers' English communication and competency. These questions determined the English communication level inside and outside the classroom. More importantly, these questions revealed how these students rationalized and explained their EMI experience; second, they showed how these individuals have progressed and developed in an EMI environment. Written consent was obtained to audio record the interviews, and the quotations were written verbatim from the video recordings. Student interviews were conducted exclusively in English, with minimal use of L1 translation. With the survey results, the second approach was analyzing the data using a rhizomatic procedure. The focus was on the irreconcilability of student preferences in terms of how student preferences contradicted each other when comparing L1 to English use. The items with the most significant frequencies were compared to illustrate the contradictory elements in student responses and highlight their ambivalence in the EMI assemblage. There were 34 comments coded and categorized into three distinct experiences. The first category describes how studying in an EMI environment is difficult; the second type of comment states how English would be helpful in the future; the third type demonstrates how students have adapted to the learning environment. These statements were grouped by looking at frequently used words, such as "helpful," "difficult," or the expression "got used to." Student statements were analyzed to understand EMI experiences better and specify the instances of contradictory feelings. Finally, the collected data was compared to the standard interpretation of the Korean EMI experience to identify potential decoding that challenges the stable representation of EMI.

## 6. Results

One hundred thirty-five students participated in the study. Out of 135 students, there were 71 third-year students, 55 first-year students, five fourth-year students, and only four second-year students. Regarding gender, there were 115 female participants and twenty male students. As for how students felt about their EMI experience, 53% reported that their instructors identified if they had issues understanding the material (see Table 1). However, only 36% of students believed they could effectively communicate with their instructors. About 66% of students felt they had teachers' support to understand their course content and develop their language skills. Students feel comfortable communicating with their instructors, and more than 50% feel they receive adequate support. When

students were asked about their learning preferences, 45% thought they learned best in class with their instructors' lectures and explanations, and about 59% preferred to study alone. Regarding the preferred language of collaboration, 64% of respondents reported they chose Korean; only 32% chose English. Although half of the respondents decided to collaborate using L1, 75% believed that English should be the primary language of instruction. When asked if they agreed with the statement, "I do not know why English is the primary language of instruction," 61% disagreed. Only 15% of the respondents agreed. EMI policies seem well-established and transparent for these students, as only 15% reported not knowing why EMI is practiced. Although these students write positively about their English development (63% of students said that their English has improved), only 45% feel comfortable using English outside the classroom.

**Table 1:**

RQ1: How do students feel when communicating with their professors in an EMI environment?					
Survey Items	Strongly Disagree N (%)	Disagree N (%)	Neutral N (%)	Agree N (%)	Strongly Agree N (%)
1. My instructor recognizes when I need help understanding the material.	4 (3%)	10 (7.4%)	49 (36.3%)	52 (38.5%)	20 (14.8%)
2. I am confident in my ability to communicate in English with my instructor	7 (5.2%)	30 (22.2%)	49 (36.3%)	30 (22.2%)	19 (14.1%)
3. I have my teacher's support to develop my English skills and understand the course material.	1 (0.7%)	9 (6.7%)	36 (26.7%)	60 (44.4%)	29 (21.5%)
4. I learn best in class with the teacher's instructions, lectures, and explanations.	3 (2.2%)	9 (6.7%)	35 (25.9%)	60 (44.4%)	28 (20.7)
RQ2: What are the best study practices of EMI students?					
Survey Items	Strongly Disagree N (%)	Disagree N (%)	Neutral N (%)	Agree N (%)	Strongly Agree N (%)
5. I learn the best outside of class by collaborating with others to learn the material.	3 (2.2%)	20 (14.8%)	53 (39.3%)	46 (34.1%)	13 (9.6%)
6. I learn the best outside class by studying the material alone.	2 (1.5%)	12 (8.9%)	42 (31.1%)	59 (43.7%)	20 (14.8%)
7. I can better understand the course material when collaborating with others using only our native language.	1 (0.7%)	10 (7.4%)	38 (28.1%)	65 (48.1)	21 (15.6%)
8. I can better understand the course material when I collaborate with others using only English.	9 (6.7%)	37 (27.4%)	45 (33.3%)	32 (23.7%)	12 (8.9%)
RQ3: How do students feel about EMI compared to the possibility of L1 instruction?					
Survey Items	Strongly Disagree N (%)	Disagree N (%)	Neutral N (%)	Agree N (%)	Strongly Agree N (%)
9. I agree that English should be my class's primary language of instruction.	3 (2.2%)	8 (5.9%)	22 (16.3%)	64 (47.4%)	38 (28.1%)
10. I am trying to understand why English is the primary language in my class.	29 (21.5%)	54 (40%)	32 (23.7%)	10 (7.4%)	10 (7.4%)
11. My English has improved. I can better follow my instructor's instructions and lectures.	1 (0.7%)	8 (5.9%)	43 (31.9%)	57 (42.2%)	26 (19.3%)
12. I enjoy using English outside of class.	8 (5.9%)	27 (20%)	39 (28.9%)	42 (31.1%)	19 (14.1%)

### Student Comments Regarding Ambivalence towards EMI

1. It is not easy to study English, but after I finish learning it, it is an opportunity to learn much more than just Korean.
2. Difficult but helpful.
3. It is a little complicated, but it is okay.
4. If you do not use complex vocabulary, it will help me better understand.
5. English sounds more comfortable, and Korean words are awkward.
6. Some concepts come quickly from learning in English, but English is sometimes difficult to understand.
7. English is difficult, but I know that English is essential, so I am studying to my best.
8. Although it is difficult to study English, it was good that my listening skills in English improved.
9. Difficult but helpful class.
10. It was tough to come from a state where I could not speak English well, but my English proficiency was better than before. However, it is uncomfortable that I still need to speak more English to learn nursing in English.
11. Learning the terms in English is beneficial, but it takes work to understand the class content fully.
12. It is not easy now, but I am looking at it positively because it will help in the future.
13. It is painful but necessary.
14. Currently, there is no clear point of growth, but if you continue, you will see a change in your English skills.

Thirty-four comments were received, and 14 critical statements expressed conflicting feelings. Examining each word according to stable coding, in terms of positive or negative disposition, 21 students said studying in English was difficult. 11 students reported how learning in English will be helpful in the future. Fourteen statements on adapting to an EMI environment. More than two-thirds of the statements were mixed, with positive comments often including adverse reports about EMI. For example, one student states that her learning process is "painful but necessary." Another student wrote that studying is "difficult, but it is okay." One student believed that "learning the terms in English is beneficial, but it is difficult to understand the content of the class fully."

Most students describe their EMI experience as challenging. One student wrote, "I think it is not easy," and another stated that "the lectures are hard to understand." Another student commented, "it is tough, and it is tough to understand and very time-consuming to study alone." These statements reveal how students have endured the struggles. The following is another student who offered a full explanation of their learning situation:

*Since the textbooks and the class content are all English, students who do not speak English must study alone after class, which takes a lot of time. Moreover, even if I understand the contents of the course in Korean, the test scores need to be clearly understood because the test questions are in English.*

The EMI assemblage has the irreconcilability of requiring the deployment of two languages. The students use L1 to the scaffold, even when English remains the language of instruction and assessments. The double difficulty for lower-level students is that it takes more time to understand and retain the material. However, as one student explained: "It is difficult to study in English, but after I finish learning it, I think it is an opportunity to learn much more than just learning in Korean." More than a few student statements demonstrate their belief in English as the medium of internationalization and opportunity; a few messages reinforce the idea that continued improvement to one's English competence will be helpful to one's future. These beliefs were stated despite many students preferring L1 use over English. Perhaps one of the key insights was provided by one student who explained how EMI might not be so advantageous after all:

*During clinical practice, I also heard the names of diseases and medical terms in English. It was beneficial to study nursing in English. However, I am currently looking for the national exam, and since the national exam is in Korean, I have the inconvenience of studying Korean and English twice.*

The immediate payoff for this student needs to be clarified. Upon graduation, the language of certification is Korean. In this light, English might be associated with dreams of global opportunities from an institutional and ideological level, but L<sub>1</sub> remains the medium of practical necessity. The questionnaire results show that EMI is a mixed experience; despite these mixed comments, the overwhelming majority still support EMI. What is concealed and overlooked by the standard interpretation of the Korean EMI experience is how English can be an alternative mode of expression for young Korean people. When asked how she feels about her current learning environment, a student states that she feels relieved to communicate in English.

*When talking to Korean professors, the cultural aspect is Korean, and we must speak politely. When we talk to professors in English, I feel more comfortable sharing what I think, which is why I feel good.*

Speaking in English opens new ways of communicating for this student. The Korean language reinforces the formal relationship between students and teachers and does not allow for the apparent casualness of English conversation. Although some students feel burdened, conversing in a new language frees this student from strict Korean expectations. Unsurprisingly, this student prefers to study her course content in English. She also states that "English is not a special ability anymore. It is just a common language. You should know how to speak, or you should know how to do this in English." For the first student, learning English is part of the norm. English competence is a fundamental expectation, yet its acquisition and competence allow for novel experiences.

From the interviews, it becomes clear that a high level of English competence is only sometimes possible. When one student describes her need for more confidence in speaking in English, she points out that many students in her program have lived abroad. She says, "I think they are cool. Moreover, I think they are so free to speak English by speaking without fear." She explained what motivates her to study nursing in English: "Our goal is to become a global nurse, and most medical terms are in English, so it is beneficial during my hospital practice." When discussing her answer to question three, the same student tells us that she would like to have more courses in Korean instead of English: "I am good at speaking Korean rather than English. I am more comfortable and understand more quickly, and I can concentrate more on the course." From this student's comments, it becomes unclear to what extent English competence is appropriate to this student's nursing training. The third student discusses the possibility of learning in Korean and says that learning from the professor is still optimal. However, the EMI lectures could be easier to understand. The third student elaborates on how she and her friends rely on L<sub>1</sub> collaboration to understand the lectures better and adapt to their learning environment:

*After class, studying is the best because my friends can teach me what they understand and what I do not understand. We can talk for some time, and she can appreciate another way; if I know other ways, we can talk and fix it. So, studying with my friends is best for me.*

Even if the third student favors L<sub>1</sub> collaboration, she still supports the partial EMI system. She explains that the textbooks are all in English and that "mixing Korean and English is harder because we have to study in Korean and English" when specific medical terms do not have exact Korean translations. This belief does not stop the third student from confessing the cause of low student morale. When asked about how other students are faring in the program, the third student confides that "many students are having a hard time because of English, so many of them quit studying. I feel the same." For a few students, the compelling reasons to continue studying in an EMI system conceal the prevalent use of one's mother tongue.



## 7. Representational Qualitative Analysis

**RQ1:** How do students feel when communicating with their professors in an EMI environment?

**RQ2:** What are the best study practices of EMI students?

**RQ3:** How do students feel about EMI compared to using their L1?

From the results, students have a positive rapport with their EMI professors. When asked about their learning experience with their professors, most participants admitted to having a positive experience overall. Most students reported that they preferred their instructor's lectures. However, when it came to communicating with their EMI professors, only a slim majority felt comfortable speaking in English. The answer to RQ1, from the preliminary results of the student questionnaire, is that students have a positive relationship with their professors and believe they are in a supportive learning environment, despite some language barriers.

However, when asked about their study practices, the students favored using L1. For most students, L1 is the preferred medium of study collaboration. However, the students responded positively to EMI lectures; more than 60% chose to study alone or with others. Only 33% of participants believed that English collaboration was the best learning strategy. A traditional interpretation of these results for RQ2 is that students prefer L1 as their learning medium, especially when collaborating with other students. Most students had a positive attitude towards collaboration as a learning strategy.

EMI students rely on their L1 to understand their EMI material, but they still prioritize English over L1. Most students still prefer English instruction over L1 instruction. Even though the students have no interest in English outside of the classroom, it is clear why they must learn their nursing content in English. Based on the results regarding RQ3, the students believe in the value of English instruction over their mother tongue, despite the prevalent use of L1. This contradiction between students using L1 and adhering to EMI becomes apparent in the clamor of student dissatisfaction with EMI. Most students report from the questionnaire comments and interviews that studying English is painful but necessary, which appears to be consistent with the standard interpretation of Korean EMI. The student's adherence to EMI reaffirms the common belief that English competence is vital to the form of cultural capital (Lee, 2021; Williams & Stelma, 2022) that is required so that one can be a participant in the global economy (Rudiger, 2020; Kedzierski, 2016). This belief is rooted in Korea's educational policies, despite their unpopularity, for the sake of international competition (Byun et al., 2011; Kang, 2018). These results confirm that only by adopting EMI can Korean universities survive the economic instabilities inherent in Korean demographic trends.

### 7.1 *A Rhizomatic Discussion: Why EMI is about L1 and not English*

The participants' comments and statements reveal ruptures inherent in the EMI process, which upend the standard interpretation of EMI in South Korea. Speaking English in Korean society can manifest as a radical experience of transformative shifts in cultural identification, a type of deterritorialization. Learning English in South Korea operates within the disciplinary formation of schooling. However, the assemblage of power in EMI also contains lines of flights from the constraints of sociolinguistic norms of L1. For a minority of English-competent students, EMI is not a burden since English speech is an opportunity to become something other than just a Korean speaker. Using English also liberates these speakers from the normative constraints of Korean culture, and they find pleasure when they find themselves in a different community of speakers. English competence is a potential clearing for new sociolinguistic spaces. Instead of seeing her English ability conforming to English cultural praxis, this student utilizes English speech to decode Korean culture; she finds pleasure in adopting a different linguistic identity. However, this same student does not see her English ability as unique. Ideologically, English competence is a given for the interviewed student, and she resists associating any attachment to her power. For several students, English competence is not an advantage but a component of the Korean social assemblage,

especially concerning education.

However, multiple student comments simultaneously reveal that English in the greater sociolinguistic Korean ecology is not necessarily advantageous. What is purported by the dominant view, in terms of internationalization and global opportunities, conceals the relative disadvantages of EMI. Although the students who participated in this study believe that English will be helpful (eleven responses explicitly stated this belief), this helpfulness is not immediately apparent. Many students noted that their L1 understanding of their nursing material is indispensable insofar as their certification exam is in Korean. It remains a fact that they must learn English to conform to an EMI environment and retranslate the material to their native Korean. Hence it needs to be clarified how English is a form of epistemic capital. EMI is just an additive difficulty to the certification process for these nursing students. Students are aware of the double burden of their EMI education, but they are compelled to believe that their EMI education is helpful. There is the temptation to reduce this EMI adherence to an ideological principle that this scholar expresses:

The discourse contending that English competence is a collaborative index of the middle class has been leveraged as a new ideology in South Korea so that English ability has become an entity representing the middle class (Lee, 2021, p. 230). This view ultimately suggests that the Korean EMI assemblage is an ideological byproduct of neoliberalism and linguistic imperialism propagated by the type of English education in Korea. Korea's desire for English education expresses the need to reach a higher social class. The issue with this interpretation is that it effaces the ambivalence experienced by students as if the desire for English competence is just a consequence of both capitalism and bourgeois values. Such an interpretation renders their social interaction reducible to the capitalistic competition: "English-speaking competence itself becomes capital to exclude and include others in their field. The field plays a role in the segmentation between them and us." (Lee, 2021, p. 231) However, this study's participants did not behave this way; they did not act as if they were in some class struggle. To adapt to the challenges of an EMI learning environment, the nursing students in this study regularly collaborated. This study's regularity of L1 use shows how the EMI assemblage requires collaborative alliances that resist the binary operation of "us" versus "them." Students described the necessity of cooperation to overcome the challenges inherent in the EMI assemblage, such as the double difficulty of deploying two languages to become nurses. These nursing students must cooperate, the rationale of which is best expressed by a student who wrote: "It is tough to understand, and it is very time-consuming to study alone." Thus, the strategic adversary is not the socioeconomic rival with a monopoly on epistemic capital. It is the EMI assemblage with its coercive procedures of individuation and the educational process of becoming a Korean nurse who speaks English. In an EMI assemblage, the problem is not competing with other students but adapting to the rigorous demands of a two-language education system. What is experienced is not just group conflict but the anxiety of potentially resisting the EMI process by which these students must abide.

The importance of collaboration in the Korean EMI assemblage upends the view that English is a valuable epistemic capital. Collaboration is the strategic action to fend off feelings of alienation and improve one's understanding of the material. There is empirical evidence to demonstrate the significance of L1 collaboration. Only a small number of students found English as their preferred collaboration medium (32.6%), while most participants admitted to L1 as their preferred medium (63%). Even if there are opportunities made possible by English acquisition, the real value is in the judicious use of L1 in the collaborative phase of EMI learning. With recourse to L1, knowledge is possible for most of the participants in this study. The rhizomatic analysis of this study has provided a tentative narrative on how EMI could be approached as a heterogeneity replete with emergent conditions and potential creative acts in the face of coercive mechanisms. The results show empirical evidence showing how some participants choose to cooperate instead of merely seeing each other as academic competitors.

A few students resisted the rigid conformity of fulfilling expectations of being an EMI student. The same students demonstrated the true pedagogical lesson of collaborating, as if to say, "Do with me," or "Speak English with me," rather than speak like me. These statements are significant for these

individuals to renounce their privilege to share a new experience as a moment of forgoing competition in favor of generosity (Alcala, 2022). EMI collaboration is a potential rupture from the arborescent model from which EMI is founded. EMI competence gives way to performances and conversations between equals, allowing these students to escape from the individuating forms of EMI praxis and competency hierarchies defended by traditional education.

Given what has been discussed concerning what students do in an EMI classroom, it should not be surprising that the object of value, vis-à-vis English competence, appears overestimated and overvalued. In the Korean EMI scholarship, English has been portrayed as the coercive medium that aggravates and frustrates Korean students. This interpretation is part of a greater narrative that states how EMI praxis embodies neoliberal and capitalist ideologies, reinforcing the homogenized language identities (Garcia & Otheguy, 2019) and overestimating social pressure over individual choice (Piller & Cho, 2013). However, this representation conceals how English has been adopted and incorporated into a given educational assemblage. To be precise, the issues and contradictions of Korean EMI are not solely the consequences of globalization, linguistic imperialism, or capitalism. These have emerged in admixture with the assemblages found in the Korean sociolinguistic ecology: in the acts of creating and producing Korean identities, in the desired forms of individuation negotiated by members of the Korean socius. Scholars investigating Korean EMI literature have missed something significant when examining the transformative shifts in Korean higher education. The sociopolitical conflict inherent in EMI implementation is a matter of the L1 used by students and not necessarily the perceived need for English competency.

## 8. Conclusion

In *Deleuze's Philosophy of Difference* (2020), Bright reflects on the nature of English instruction as an industry and as an assemblage while he observed the pedagogical encounters in an international school in Vietnam:

*Aren't we telling them that English is needed to keep up, that it is the international language? The business language? The commercial language? The common language? The internet language? The language of study and education? The way out of poverty? The way to knowledge? Their only hope? Because it seems that the message is everywhere: built into the school and writ large in the city. (p. 75)*

Bright's meditation enumerates the different but interconnected reasons why English instruction has been established as the medium of instruction in non-English speaking countries. These reasons pervade academic policies and aspirations vis-à-vis the school, the city, and the larger socio-political context. English instruction in Vietnam, Korea, and other non-English countries is practiced for heterogeneous reasons. There is a temptation to homogenize these reasons with a Marxist narrative or a neoliberal critique even when multiple conditions converge in English education. The reality is that a learning system is both stable and unstable, in its dynamic process of exchanges and encounters, with multiple variables that affect its production (Masny, 2013). This dynamic heterogeneity applies not only to education but to language as well. When interpreting EMI within the context of Marxist and neoliberal critiques, language is seen as a given feature subject to capitalist and neoliberal forces. However, language is a heterogeneous process of expression and physical communication with continuous variation (Bell, 2018). The Marxist critique of the Korean EMI experience does not consider how the EMI experiences contain disruptive potentialities. Human interactions have striated structures that contain intensive forces resistant to the categories of order and measure (Somers-Hall, 2018).

Against the current literature, this paper offers a qualitative reading which reveals how the EMI assemblage has both stable and unstable powers, the conflicts of which offer its participants novel ways of organizing their experiences contrary to the norms that govern them. However, the findings and analyses of this study reveal how most participants still prefer EMI over L1 instruction. Despite

some students disliking English, a crystallized view remains that English competency increases one's prospects of respectability and success. English acquisition promises the type of prestige that is not available if students were to limit themselves to their L1. Although the rhizomatic analysis has revealed new modes of identity that break away from traditional Korean epistemic regimes, there is still a need to transform student attitudes and perceptions. The fundamental problem of EMI praxis is ethical; students must be led toward a more open view of globalization that is not solely dependent on English competency. Policymakers and educators should cultivate an educational culture recognizing multilingualism as legitimate (Veitch, 2021, p. 9). One of the growing trends in EMI research is the call for multilingual and translanguaging approaches to broaden the scope of English language identity in higher education (Macaro et al., 2018; Dearden, 2018; Rose, 2019; Veitch, 2021). For many students in EMI classrooms, "multilingualism is their norm, and thus it is abnormal to be restricted to English only" (Jenkins, 2018, p. 13). Policymakers should also follow Galloway's work on Global Englishes, which provide a framework for multiple embodiments of the English language (Galloway & Rose, 2018). However, the issue with this ethical imperative is that the heterogeneity purported by these scholars evades a critical question. How do we open the English linguistic landscape without reintroducing hierarchies that privilege English over other languages?

The transformation required to propagate non-coercive forms of identities and new forms of becoming within the EMI assemblage must occur locally in non-English speaking communities. For these individual experiences to change, a sustained dialogue highlighting the heterogeneous factors affecting their experiences must continue, opening the academic landscape beyond the demands of English competence, and revealing the performative aspects of language that students produce. Even if this study only partially accounts for the EMI experiences of Korean nursing students, the data collected testifies to a greater need. The current literature could benefit from producing more rhizomatic investigations to serve as lines of flights, as potential lines of escape away from the striations of EMI education and the greater Korean society.

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