Articles

Learner Resistance to English-medium instruction practices: a qualitative case study

Yi-Ping Huang ✉

❝ Download citation   ⬈ https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2017.1421629   Check for updates

📄 Full Article   🖼 **Figures & data**   📑 **References**   ❝ **Citations**   📊 **Metrics**

🖨 **Reprints & Permissions**   📄 PDF

ABSTRACT

The internationalization of higher education has resulted in the growth of English-medium instruction (EMI) practices and research. The existing EMI research has documented learners' favorable attitudes toward EMI but not necessarily its practices. Learners' dissatisfaction has not been viewed as a form of resistance. Through the notion of learner resistance that underscores agency in defiance, this study examined the occurrences of learner resistance and the reasons for it by investigating Chinese learners' experiences in an undergraduate business English-taught program in Taiwan. Multiple sources of data, including interviews, stories, and class observations, were

findings showed that most Chinese learners resisted an

agogy, and context. Their resistance may be related not simply

In this article ☰

to academic disciplines but more importantly to a Confucian Heritage Culture of learning. Such findings highlight learner agency in resisting actions and call for further investigation into potential learner resistance in EMI practices.

Introduction

In recent decades, globalization and internationalization have accompanied homogenization and marketization of higher education. English is used as a common medium of instruction for in countries where English is not an L1 in order to attract international students and increase student mobility (Jenkins 2014). The expansion of English-medium instruction (EMI) is legitimated in order to increase students' English abilities, promote study abroad, attract international students, acquire knowledge of target cultures, spread national cultures, and increase national competitiveness (Dearden 2015). According to research conducted by the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA), the number of English-taught programs (ETPs) in Europe has increased from 725 in 2001, to 2389 in 2007, and eventually to 8089 in 2014 (Wächter and Maiworm 2014). Publications also indicate such growth in Asia (e.g. Brown 2017; Hu, Li, and Lei 2014; Kim, Kweon, and Kim 2017). This growing number of EMI courses suggests a global interest in EMI.

Not to be left behind, Taiwan has also implemented this EMI phenomenon. The Ministry of Education in Taiwan (2001b) has promulgated an internationalization policy to increase the English abilities and broaden the cross-cultural views of its citizens and in turn to increase individual and national competitiveness. Of the many internationalization mechanisms, providing EMI courses has become the most essential, for they can appeal to both international and local students. At the national level, to ensure its implementation, the number of EMI courses has become a significant benchmark for funding and promoting educational quality (e.g. Ministry of Education 2001a). At the institutional level, many universities have provided incentives to encourage teaching in English. These national and institutional mechanisms have

In this article ≡

of EMI provisions in university settings, such that the growth

en 18% within five years (Chung and Lo 2016).

Empirical studies on EMI have documented learners' common concerns about the quality of EMI mostly due to the lack of English proficiency or pedagogical assistance (instructor) and the dearth of interest, academic English/culture and background knowledge (student)(Hu, Li, and Lei 2014; Huang 2012; Lueg and Lueg 2015; Tatzl 2011). Despite frustrations, the majority of stakeholders still favored EMI (Aguilar and Rodríguez 2012; Kim, Kweon, and Kim 2017; Sert 2008). Their overwhelming positive attitudes may be related to their view of English proficiency and EMI as access to success, employability, and educational opportunities (Airey 2011; Hu, Li, and Lei 2014). Yet, such access does not guarantee equality or justice; university admission requirements of English proficiency may come to dominate the gate-keeper role of English, and high tuition fees for admission in English-taught programs may perpetuate and attenuate potential inequalities for those who have restricted socioeconomic resources (Hu, Li, and Lei 2014).

Although previous EMI research has reported learners' positive attitudes toward EMI but not necessarily its practices, limited studies have explored the cases of learner resistance – learners' defiant or scornful attitudes or actions toward EMI practices; that is, learners' challenges or dissatisfaction while learning via EMI may be viewed as results of acclimatizing to the new way of learning rather than as a form of agency through resistant actions (cf. Canagarajah 1993, 1999; Courpasson and Vallas 2016). The sociocultural and sociopolitical nature of learner resistance makes it pedagogically significant to understand the occurrences and reasons behind opposition to EMI in a specific context. As such, this paper examines the circumstances and reasons for Chinese learners to resist learning via EMI in an undergraduate business ETP in Taiwan. In so doing, it aims to illuminate a case of learner resistance in EMI research. Although learner resistance was not the focus of the original research design, it emerged from the first interviews with learner participants who expressed themselves through their absences, non-responses, and forgetfulness characteristics of resistant behaviors based on prior literature (Escandon 2004; McVeigh 2002).

Learner resistance

≡ ined in a variety of fields (e.g. sociology, politics, and general erspectives (e.g. Bourdieu and Foucault) (Courpasson and

Vallas [2016]). Yet, it has received relatively limited attention in foreign/second language research (Canagarajah [1993], [1999]; Escandon [2004]; Jing [2006]; McVeigh [2002]; Sakui and Cowie [2008]). A thorough review of these works is beyond our scope. We will instead discuss central concepts relevant to this study.

Drawing on core elements of resistance in previous literature (Hollander and Einwohner [2004]), learner resistance is broadly defined as actions that challenge or scorn the system or practice regardless of intention, recognition, embodiment, or consequence. It is true that research has focused on resistance patterns or behaviors (Escandon [2004]; Steils [2013]). For instance, Escandon ([2004]) sorts resistance into patterns, including absenteeism, absent-mindedness, no/limited responses, indifferent or rude behaviors, and physical arrangement. In Steils's ([2013]) study, she also identifies such opposing behaviors as shunning effort, pleasing instructors, and focusing simply on passing exams. Although these attitudinal and behavioral aspects enable the researcher to define and discover resistant acts, the nature of learner resistance is complex and hence examinations include not only observable behaviors but also underlying reasons (Hollander and Einwohner [2004]).

Learner resistance in itself entails an active and creative nature. As Long ([1994]) expresses, resistance is 'an active construct rather than a passive absence of something' (14). This active dimension of resistance stresses two significant viewpoints. The first aspect underscores the primacy of agency – often defined as 'the capacity to achieve desired and intended outcomes' (Giddens [1984], 14–15) – whether it be collective or individual. The emphasis on individual capacity suggests resistance as an empowering not a constraining force (Courpasson and Vallas [2016]). The agentive dimension of resistance further modifies the structuralist's macro-societal reproduction (Phillipson [1992]). Instead, the exercise of agency constitutes and reproduces structure (Giddens [1984]), and hence agency is highlighted in cultural resistance and appropriation. For example, Canagarajah ([1993], [1999]) discovered that students in Sri Lanka resisted cultural alienation that resulted from using American textbooks, and hence they wrote glosses in the margin and even changed the stories to suit their interests and experiences. His later work ([2013]) on translanguaging practices can also exemplify that learners display agency to appropriate different languages and re-contextualize English.

:ome a way through which one may gain or negotiate one's (Canagarajah 1993, 1999).

In education, many studies have documented learner resistance to educational reforms or instructional changes (Brodie 2010; Hu 2002; Jing 2006; Tsang 1999; Sakui and Cowie 2008; Steils 2013). Such resistance usually is attributed to students' psychological traits (Hiemstra and Brockett 1994). More recently, learner resistance is being interpreted from sociocultural and sociopolitical perspectives, given its context-specific and relational nature (Courpasson and Vallas 2016). The contextual and relational dimensions of learner resistance emphasize that sociocultural and sociopolitical factors must be taken into consideration while interpreting resistant acts (Canagarajah 1993, 1999; Jing 2006; Tsang 1999; Sakui and Cowie 2008). For instance, Hu (2002) explained that Communicative Language Teaching resisted and appropriated by learners and instructors with a Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) may be related to the incompatibility between the West's culture of learning/teaching that emphasizes inquiry, verbal communication, and critical thinking and the East that underscores learning virtues, mental thinking, and harmony. The influence of an examination-oriented culture in Asia on language learning and teaching has also been well documented (Canagarajah 1993, 1999; Jing 2006). Jing (2006), for instance, attributed student resistance to metacognitive teaching in a Chinese university to examination-oriented culture shaped by societal and institutional pressures at the macro level and learning for passing exams at the micro level.

Based on the above tenets, this paper defines learner resistance as an exercise of agency in actions to challenge, oppose, and/or criticize EMI practices. The research focuses on exploring *what* constitutes learner resistance, *why* learners construct their resistance, and *in what ways*.

Methodology

Data used in this article are drawn from a large qualitative case study on local and international students' learning experiences in a university business ETP in Taiwan in the 2013–2014 academic year. A multiple-case study design was adopted insomuch as it enables a holistic understanding of the behaviors and intentions of learners in real-life contexts (Yin 2009) so that insights into the EMI phenomenon can be gained.

In this article

This research was conducted in an undergraduate business ETP in a university in Taiwan. The target university and program were chosen not because students there demonstrated resistance but because they were participants in a specific type of ETP. This program aims to recruit and train students with bilingual and management capabilities to broaden their cross-cultural views and increase their competitiveness. Freshmen admitted to the College of Commerce are eligible to apply for the ETP. These students are selected annually based on their grades in the College Entrance Examination.

These students were eligible to take two types of courses in the program and could get a certificate after they take enough courses: one includes content courses (e.g. Economics and Management) taught by subject-matter faculty, and the other is related to English skills courses (e.g. Oral and Writing Skills) taught by EFL instructors. The former aims to 'train students to express academic content in English,' while the latter attempts to enhance learners' Business English skills. It is stated that the former is open to all the students in the university, including international students, with the ETP students having priority in course selection, while the latter are restricted to only ETP students. The ETP students also have priority in having an international peer in the buddy program, becoming an exchange student, and having a business internship. It is no wonder that the ETP is called 'an honors program' by the college website because of its selectiveness and privileges offered to its students.

Participants

Research participants included four Chinese students who were juniors in their early twenties in the College of Commerce in the target university. They were majoring in International Business or Accounting. They were recruited by an email that specified looking for non-native English-speaking (NNES) juniors in the ETP to understand their learning experiences via EMI. Ethical approval of research was obtained when they agreed to participate in the study. These four students (Amy, Ken, Brad, and Gabriella) were chosen because of their similar academic disciplines (homogeneity). Table 1 shows the personal profiles of these participants.

Table 1. Four participants' profiles.

Data collection

Data were collected between 2013 and 2014 from multiple sources, including semi-structured interviews, learning stories, and class observations. The participants were interviewed five times (Amy, Ken, and Brad) and four times (Gabriella) in Mandarin Chinese – a language in which they felt comfortable expressing themselves. Each interview lasted between 90 and 120 min. The number of interviews differs according to the number of ETP courses participants took and the details they provided. Interview protocols were based on Carspecken's (1996) guidelines; that is, interview questions are grouped under topic domains. Interview questions explored learning experiences in the ETP, interaction with international students, opinions about the design and pedagogy of the ETP, and learners' change in experiences or opinions. All the interviews were transcribed verbatim.

In addition, all the students wrote one story about content-learning experiences in English. English was used because the participants considered this exercise to be an English-practice opportunity. Learners were required to recall influential experiences they had in the ETP. Within this learning context, participants described what was going on, who was involved, and what it meant to them. These stories were used for triangulation and for further exploration in interviews.

For those who took content courses in English in their junior years (i.e. Ken, Brad, and Gabriella), class observations were also conducted to supplement interview and story data, especially those related to pedagogy and intercultural interaction. A three-hour class was observed and audio-taped for each participant. In order not to interrupt the class, passive observation was conducted, and observation notes of teacher instruction, student responses, and student-student/teacher-student interactions were kept based on Carspecken's (1996) guidelines. All the interaction patterns and learner responses were jotted down without sorting them into resistance or non-resistance. Such data were summarized and confirmed by the participants in the interviews where learner interpretations of instructors' pedagogy were also queried. Only observations relevant to the selected themes were transcribed.

rner resistance, despite its emergence as a significant theme
id not become our focus until data analysis; that is, all data

collection methods aimed to understand learners' reactions toward the ETP, reasons underlying their choices and actions, and potential changes across time in general. In so doing, we attempted to ward off researcher bias.

Data analysis

All the data were analyzed recursively through the following three stages: First, based on Carspecken's (1996) reconstructive analysis, the researcher read through the participants' interviews, stories, and observation notes while also reconstructing data, i.e. recovering reasons underlying the verbal accounts, and noting possible subject positions or identity claims. Then, the researcher began to analyze data, starting from interview transcripts to stories and finally observations. In data analysis, codes – labels describing or explaining data excerpts – were assigned and compared within individuals and across individuals. The codes then were classified into categories, from which themes were derived. In the final step, the researcher compared categories with those in previous literature. During this process, specific attention was paid to what learners resist (or not), why they do so, and how they do so. To enhance trustworthiness, triangulation and peer debriefing were adopted.

Results and discussion

The analysis showed that three out of four participants often used negative terms (e.g. embarrassing, disappointing, wasted, nothing special, and not as expected) and paralinguistic features (e.g. sighing, frowning, and apologetic smiles) to indicate their dissatisfaction about taking EMI courses. Gabriella was the only one who decided to get both certificates, while Amy quit taking EMI courses after three semesters, Brad took only EMI courses that he deemed worthwhile, and Ken voiced his decision not to obtain the EMI course certificate in our last interview (his junior year). The further analysis of the occurrences and reasons for resistance will be reported in three parts: curriculum, pedagogy, and context.

Curricular aspects of learner resistance: 'It's easier' and it's not relevant

In this article

≡ e participants' resistance to 'easy' and 'irrelevant' content

ost learners resisted 'non-challenging' content, whether it be

lectures or examination questions. All the participants reported their observations that the Chinese-mediated courses were more cognitively challenging than the EMI ones. Amy sighed while comparing these courses: 'What is taught [via EMI] will be relatively easy and the test is easier' (IN1). All the students attributed the lack of challenging materials to the lack of English proficiency and the presence of international students. First, many participants expressed that the foreign medium of instruction made it difficult for instructors to talk deeply about the topic. As Amy explained, 'He [the instructor] probably does not know how to teach in a deeper way in English' (IN1). The students reasoned that the instructor might lower expectations because of students' restricted English proficiency, except that Brad believed the ETP students' English proficiency is not a problem due to the admission requirement of English proficiency and instructors' use of simplified English. The following excerpts from Amy and Brad contrasted these two points:

Amy:

'Even the instructor teaches well, he may use English blah- [fluently] Even if he keeps talking in English, we probably cannot understand' (IN1).

Brad:

'It's not because of English … . Because their classroom English is … . we can understand' (IN1).

The second reason involves that the presence of international students made exams and content easier than expected. Many students are concerned that the instructors may lower expectations because international students' mathematical abilities were not as good as those of Taiwanese students. As Brad narrated,

> Take [Course Title] as an example … . I don't like to take courses with international students, especially those exchange students because first they don't really want to attend courses and they don't think the instructor will flunk them … . Also, we Asians are really good at mathematics … So … in the first [Course Title] class we took SAT test, and it was not difficult for us. Just a few words we don't understand … .I think it's for talented junior high students
>
> instructor taught is not difficult for us, but rather difficult for …udents. The instructor needs to make a balance. (IN1)

The non-challenging content made Brad skip classes and just review one night before the mid-term exam. Although he got high scores on this subject matter by studying independently, he wished he could have understood not simply the formula the instructor introduced but also the ways to create new formulas.

In addition, relevant learning was interpreted as effective but mostly missing in the ETP. In particular, students resisted lectures without examples to scaffold understanding abstract concepts. As Amy explained, 'Like (in the textbook) a section requires us to reflect on the theory … . Provide examples … . But the instructor skipped it … . But with reading by myself, I can take time to think' (IN2). Compared with listening in class, reading textbooks contextualizes the concepts and allows time to think, all of which led Amy to quit taking EMI courses. However, examples are not limited to those in textbooks but also in life. All the observed courses favored by my participants showed abundant life examples drawn from both instructors and students. Amy further described the content of her favorite course in the junior year as a contrast:

> He [the instructor] did not lecture the textbook … . I cannot simply rely on the textbook because it's not in the textbook … . He elaborates and provides examples … . Like because the textbook includes only foreign examples … ., he would provide examples in Taiwan (IN5).

Brad explained why he chose Chinese-mediated courses instead: 'I like new ideas … .The Chinese-taught [Course Title] course, the instructor gave us examples … . He told us how companies worked' (IN1). All of these gave learners reasons to attend classes and concentrate on lectures because they could no longer rely simply on the textbook. Relevance as such has a positive effect on student learning.

When relevancy was not demonstrated, students' passions about learning were reduced merely to surviving in examinations – a resisting behavior shown in Steils's (2013) study – which was found in Ken's case. As Ken explained,

> [Course Title] has multiple choice questions … . So if you can do exercises, it'll be okay. And [Course Title], you need to do every exercise. The test questions are similar (to those in the textbook) … . Just memorize the test questions, and input, output. I forgot after the exam (IN3).

lenging and non-relevant content discouraged Ken, who continued to invest in EMI courses. In his December 2013

narrative, Ken wrote,

> Seriously, for the content of the course, I have no idea how it influences me … . I feel like I am still a test-taking machine, studying those theories. I can barely see how it makes my life better; it's kind of no use to my daily life (S2).

The Chinese learners' desire for challenging and relevant content even in courses taught via a foreign language may be related to the CHC of learning. First, the above examples suggest that the Chinese learners desired to deepen their knowledge horizons (Hu 2002). They hoped to do so not simply by reading textbooks but more importantly by knowing how to apply textbook knowledge to reality. Ken's defiance of being reduced to a test-taking robot implies that learner resistance may occur when relevancy is not developed for knowledge use. Such findings can also reflect the Chinese learners' view of teachers as virtuosos who need to be skillful performers and to meet students' needs based on their knowledge of subject matter and students (Paine 1990). In this respect, even with a diversified student population and a foreign medium of instruction, it is the instructors' responsibility to provide challenging cognitive and relevant life examples.

Pedagogical aspects of learner resistance: 'It's just one-way transmission'

Learner resistance concerns not only *what* to teach but more importantly *how* to teach it. The following contrasts were observed in the lexical use while learners described the two styles: positive terms (e.g. 'useful,' 'active,' and 'interaction') for dialogical instruction versus negative ones (e.g. 'traditional,' 'dull,' and 'one-way delivery') for monologic instruction. The monologic style of instruction for knowledge transmission was often the scapegoat. This study showed that typical resistant behaviors in monologic courses were spacing out, using smartphones, chatting, and absences. As Amy explained, 'Sometimes while you are thinking, the instructor continues to teach and with a large class size you cannot … it's just one-way transmission. So when spacing out, I feel unmotivated to listen' (IN2). Likewise, Brad justified,

> I decided not to take [Course Title] in English because he did not teach well for … he just kept reading ppt … . That's not what I want. I'd rather find a

ould interact with students and ask students questions in
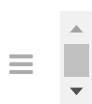
Ken further described the boring routine of taking such monologic courses:

> It's just like senior high school, listening during the class, one-way delivering, and back to home study, finally aiming to score high on the test. I cannot figure out what's the difference between college and senior high school. This kind of feeling continues in [Course Title], [Course Title]. (K-S2)

The above quotations suggest that students resist being reduced to passive receivers in the knowledge transmission model of teaching which may have been practiced in their prior education. Instead, they needed, and desired, to be guided by using questions. Ken joyfully described how his favorite instructor guided students to think in English:

> Some teachers ... do not give us time to think. Many teachers just directly [tell us the answer] ... . But this instructor [in the course we observed] starts with simple questions so before these questions ... . Then after you answer the question, he'll summarize it and give you some feedback ... . A deeper analysis of your answer. I think other teachers seldom do so. (IN3)

The above excerpt suggests that although instruction is teacher-dominated, the Chinese learners envisioned their teachers as experts to carefully select and analyze knowledge and help them connect and deepen knowledge (see Hu 2002). In so doing, they aimed for a higher level of competence (critical thinking or problem solving rather than memorization) as explained by Kevin in the following example:

> For example, he [the instructor] said, 'In the supermarket, the research showed that men buy beer and diapers every Friday night,' and he asked us, 'Why do they buy beer and diapers- two unrelated products?' And he explained that Friday night men felt tired and want to go home, see movies, drink beer, but it's been one week so they would think about buying diapers for children ... . Then he continued to ask us, 'If this is the case, then how should we arrange beer and diapers in a way to increase the store's revenue?' I responded, 'We can put them together so that they can save time. It's like economies of agglomeration. Putting all things together, it's easier for customers to buy.' ... . He allowed me to think ... . So I can have the opportunity to try to say what I think ... . This training of logical thinking is
> ng able to summarize and express your thoughts is important

In this article

The above excerpts show that even in lectures, these instructors would guide students to think through issues in theory by using open-ended questions, allowing thinking and discussion time, and synthesizing different perspectives and even providing expert opinions. Such descriptions of pedagogy can be explained by the primacy of mental activeness emphasized in the CHC of learning (Hu 2002; Paine 1990). Although Ken would answer his instructor's questions, this is not common for local students from our class observations or interviews and hence it is difficult to conclude that verbal engagement advocated in the Western culture of learning was preferred by the Chinese learners.

It is noted that interaction in itself does not result in non-resistance. The purpose of learning should also be taken into consideration; that is, reducing learning to simply gaining good grades was held in contempt by the participants. It is one of the reasons that although the TAs were helpful, the participants would not consider simply attending the TA sessions. Some TAs were even described as 'cram school teachers who summarize the important points and teach us how to solve mathematics problems' (K-IN3). These TA sessions are designed for repetition of doing exercises. As Amy explained,

> If I just went to TA sessions, such learning is not meaningful because it's for getting good grades … . It's because … he would use efficient ways to say this is used in this way and give practical examples or funny ones- the examples easier for you to memorize (IN2).

As such, the medium of instruction does not matter as long as the instructors can teach in a way to guide and inspire students.

It is also noted that Gabriella displayed the least resistant attitudes because she perceived no differences of teaching styles in Taiwan and in the U.S. After comparing learning experiences in Psychology in summer school in Berkeley and EMI courses in Taiwan, Gabriella explained,

> I think the instructors [in EMI courses] teach well-and probably it's so-called the Western way of teaching. But I think it's unlikely that in every class we can happily discuss together-that kind of Western way of teaching. After all, the

> owledge- you still need to listen to teachers. So I don't think
> tyles in the two countries] differ much, I believe. (IN2)

Gabriella's belief that 'listening to the instructors' is fundamental to acquiring professional knowledge is often associated with the monologic or dull way of teaching in the Chinese context, as opposed to the 'happy discussion' in 'the Western way of teaching.' This association does not denote the passiveness in the learners, but instead, it suggests the significant learning virtues valued in in the CHC of learning – that is, enduring potential hardship (*keku*) and respect for teachers (*zunshi*) to acquire knowledge (Hu 2002; Li 2012; Paine 1990). For the Chinese learners, as Li (2012) explained, 'one needs to develop the virtue of *keku*, where the learner acknowledges difficulties as an inherent part of learning and must find ways to overcome these hardships' (50), and 'one needs to put one's ego aside in order to make a sincere commitment to learning' (51). As such, the value placed on persistence in learning and trust in instructors in the Chinese educational system may enable Chinese learners like Gabriella to look at the teaching style from a Chinese perspective and so have the least resistant attitudes.

Contextual aspects of learner resistance: 'It's not an honors program'

Like the ETP that requires good English proficiency and high tuition fees for admissions in Hu, Li, and Lei (2014), the ETP in this study is an honors program that recruits outstanding students based on their excellence in English and provides them with additional English skills courses and outstanding instructors. All the students envisioned learning with excellent peers and exceptional instructors, 'as if it was an honor, have a sense of superiority' (B-IN1), 'in the talent class' (K-IN1), 'in another social class where excellent people are,' 'learning with excellent folks' (G-IN1), and 'being taught in a western way' (A-IN1). However, this ETP does not have acclaims as depicted in Hu, Li, and Lei (2014) because it fails to generate symbolic capital as the official discourse guarantees. As Brad explained, 'I was tricked to get in the program' (IN5) and 'If it's an honors program, … of course I'll take courses. Why not?' (IN1). The gap between rhetoric and reality disappointed most students who blame it for not being designed as an honors program because of their concerns over instructor qualifications, large class sizes, and no like-minded peers. Such concerns resulted in many learners' unwillingness to gain a certificate to prove their abilities or achievements after taking the EMI courses.

...xpected to be taught by 'outstanding' instructors when ...iled to perceive it as so. At the beginning, teacher excellence

was often related to English proficiency. As Ken embarrassingly expressed, 'I expected courses to be taught by foreigners' (IN1). Although none questioned instructors as experts, some participants mocked their instructors' accents and simplistic vocabulary. As Ken wondered, 'I think it's ETP, and it's College of Commerce [in this top university]. Why can't you choose instructors who have standard pronunciation to teach in English?' (IN3). These quotations suggest that the merits of this program should have been international instructors with fluent and standard English; that is, race and accent in native-speaker-ism (Norton 1997) may have the purview, especially in many Chinese learners' first impressions of the ETP. It is cautioned that as the study was proceeding, the learners made more critical comments on instructors' lack of pedagogical performance than their race or accent, as indicated in the above sections.

Second and most importantly, the data analysis shows learners' dissatisfactions about the large class sizes of the EMI courses with limited peer interaction, contrasted with their delight in peer learning in the small English skills courses. All the students expressed that they could talk deeper and better with peers in the English skills courses than those in the EMI courses. Unlike active learning and the feeling of camaraderie depicted in the English skills courses, the EMI courses were replete with passive resistance in the learners. Brad confirmed that an honors program required small class size with much student-teacher and peer interaction. Yet, the EMI courses were described as large classes and with limited peer interaction, rendering it difficult for participants to have common interests, let alone the feeling of camaraderie. Peers play a significant role in these Chinese learners' learning presumably because of their CHC of learning. The Chinese analogy of *shuǐ zhǎng chuán gāo,* i.e. a ship rises with the tide, may well capture the image that one can benefit from the improvement of the social environment, and hence greatness in peers reflects and emulates that of one's self.

In particular, the Chinese learners' joy of peer interaction was derived from their peers who are 'like-minded friends who pursue the same life goals. They are supporters of each other' (Li 2012, 200). These participants envisioned their peers with 'hao-xue-xin' – 'the heart and mind for wanting to learning' (Li 2009, 48) – whether they be local or international peers. This notion entails such learning virtues of diligence, hardship, and concentration. It is no wonder that the exchange students' skipping courses, poor performance, and absent-mindedness were described as irresponsible. In contrast, their

d not skip class, worked hard, and expressed critical thinking
being 'nerds' (K-S2) and with 'global mobility' (B-IN5). Local

students' phone distractions and spacing out may also discourage the participants to take the EMI courses. Amy described her powerlessness in large classes as she reflected on why she decided to 'experiment' with skipping class yet she still ended up with good grades:

> Though those who earn the first place in the department will attend classes, showing their passion, but in general … I see classmates are using smartphones. I don't want to be like that [skip classes], but I feel it boring and cannot listen to anything (IN3).

Indeed, the Chinese learners resisted learning in a large class without like-minded peers.

Given the above concerns, none of the participants recognized the power and status conferred by the university in the certificate of the EMI courses. Instead, all the participants believed the primacy of one's capability to be more important than the certificates. Even Gabriella who maintained her commitment to earning the certificates explained, 'I don't care … . Certificate is simply a proof' (IN4). What they emphasize is 'knowledge in use' (Li 2009, 54). For these learners, acquiring academic knowledge and being able to put it into practice was the most essential, and so whether or not, and to what extent, they could learn from the course matters more than insistence in taking courses for a certificate. As Amy expressed, 'I don't think we should seek the title. What's the use of it? If I take these courses and learn nothing practical and I have this title. I am a- an idiot?' (IN1). Amy's irritation by using 'idiot' challenges the illogical discourse hidden behind gaining an EMI certificate without learning anything. When asked about the effect of the certificate, all the students took time to think and even asked the interviewer if she knew of any influence. When the interviewer mentioned the ease to get jobs, 'Yeah, but' was a common pattern the participants used to reject such a claim. Two participants reported, 'Yeah, the teaching assistant in the office said this certificate is useful. But is that true?' Presumably because they are still novices in the field, they cannot recognize the possible influence of the certificate conferred by the institution. To these participants, the immediate feeling of improvement is most important, but also missing. To justify her point, Amy even used other friends' and professors' opinions: 'If you want to learn much, then don't take EMI courses.' Clearly, conflicting values exist in taking EMI

ᵗs exercise their agency to take the courses that they think ᵗᵃn to work for institutionalized certificates.

Conclusion

In this study, we analyzed the Chinese learners' resistance to the EMI practices in terms of curriculum, pedagogy, and environment for sociocultural reasons. Three important implications are discussed below.

First, this study highlights that learners may exercise agency to challenge dominant discourses or practices in an ETP. Although the learners did not resist EMI specifically, they fought against non-challenging and non-relevant curriculum design, non-interactive pedagogy, and a non-honors program. Although their concerns about an environment not conducive to learning have been reported in prior studies (Hu, Li, and Lei 2014; Huang 2012; Sert 2008; Tatzl 2011), many Chinese learners in this study may display resistant attitudes and behaviors, such as skipping classes, showing absent-mindedness, selecting Chinese-mediated content courses, and even giving up getting the EMI certificate; that is, the learners did not blindly take EMI courses without evaluating their own learning purposes and effectiveness. Such acts reflect that learners exert agency to create a better learning environment, suggesting the active nature of resistance (Courpasson and Vallas 2016) and highlighting learner choices to meet students' needs or interests (Canagarajah 1993, 1999).

Second, this study confirms that the reasons behind resistant actions are sociocultural (Canagarajah 1993, 1999; Jing 2006; Sakui and Cowie 2008; Tsang 1999). The sociocultural factors in this study involve the academic disciplines and the CHC of learning. First, academic disciplines may influence decision making in the learner. Like Evans (2015), business students' decisions tended to be determined by feelings or short-term outcomes in immediate contexts. In this study, many learners skipped classes within a few weeks and gave up obtaining the EMI certificate mostly within one year. Second, although a social network has been found as more important capital than knowledge acquisition in business school (Vaara and Faÿ 2011), this is not necessarily the case in this study presumably because of the influence of the CHC of learning. In particular, the instructors are expected to become not only subject-matter experts but more importantly virtuosos who can relate abstract concepts to students based on their

e peers, international or local, are envisioned as diligent,
and learning to use (not necessarily learning by use) and

mental involvement (rather than verbal engagement) in learning are emphasized. Gabriella's favor for EMI courses in Taiwan due to no perceived differences between teaching in Taiwan and the U.S. also becomes evidence to account for the prevalence of the CHC of learning. As such, providing a conducive learning environment becomes the responsibility of the instructor.

Third, the opposing and scornful actions also imply a gap between official discourse and student discourse. First, the honors program was only in rhetoric, discouraging most ETP participants, and hence future curriculum designers should consider program management by evaluating their underlying values. For instance, if selectiveness for elites is endorsed, it should be implemented by selecting qualified students and instructors, providing small classes, and holding high expectations of students. Second, the presence of international students may not necessarily be appreciated presumably because too few students were recruited and peer interaction was too limited. As such, the additive curriculum design of international students without peer integration is of limited use. More international students should be recruited and opportunities for peer interaction should be given early in the program. Most significantly of all, the heavy demands on EMI instructors' roles as virtuosos warn against the taken-for-granted assumption of the well-preparedness of instructors and emphasize the role of content teachers in professional development. Given that the role of virtuosos necessitates teachers' holistic understanding of subject matter, pedagogy, students, and contexts, as well as their expression ability in English, pedagogical suggestions are needed from not only language experts but also experienced content instructors who can help visualize pedagogical skills by providing discipline-specific teaching demonstrations and discussions, as recommend by Tsui (2017).

Although this study heightens the primacy of learner resistance in EMI research, the small-scale of this qualitative case study does not aim to gloss over learner resistance, generalize such findings, or evaluate the effectiveness of an ETP. Rather, an exploratory study as such attempts to illuminate a case of learner resistance in EMI research and so provide directions for future investigation. For instance, future studies can examine not only local students' viewpoints but also international students', since Chen's (2014) research on international students' learning experiences in Taiwan shows potential dissatisfaction about the CHC of learning. Future examination can also benefit from

esearch on why and how learners resist EMI practices from
v, given that all the learners stabilized their choices for

learning in their junior years. Research in these directions will enhance the quality of EMI practices.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

References

1. Aguilar, M., and R. Rodríguez. 2012. "Lecturer and Student Perceptions on CLIL at a Spanish University." *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 15: 183–197. doi:10.1080/13670050.2011.615906. [Taylor & Francis Online], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

2. Airey, J. 2011. "Talking About Teaching in English: Swedish University Lecturers" Experiences of Changing Teaching Language." *Ibérica* 22: 35–54. doi:10.1080/1358684X.2011.543506. [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

3. Brodie, K. 2010. "Learner Resistance to Teacher Change." In *Teaching Mathematical Reasoning in Secondary School Classrooms*, edited by K. Brodie, 183–197. New York: Springer. [Crossref], [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

4. Brown, H. 2017. "Investigating the Implementation and Development of Undergraduate English-Medium Instruction Programs in Japan: Facilitating and Hindering Factors." *Asian EFL Journal* 19 (1): 99–135. doi:10.24093/awej/vol8no1.26. [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

5. Canagarajah, A. S. 1993. "Critical Ethnography of a Sri Lankan Classroom: Ambiguities in Opposition to Reproduction Through ESOL." *TESOL Quarterly* 27 (4): 601–626. doi:10.2307/3587398. [Crossref], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching. Oxford,
ress. [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

7. Canagarajah, A. S. 2013. *Literacy as Translingual Practice: Between Communities and Classrooms*. New York: Routledge. [Crossref], [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

8. Carspecken, P. F. 1996. *Critical Ethnography in Educational Research: A Theoretical and Practical Guide*. New York: Routledge. [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

9. Chen, R. T.-H. 2014. "East-Asian Teaching Practices Through the Eyes of Western Learners." *Teaching in Higher Education* 19 (1): 26–37. doi:10.1080/13562517.2013.827652. [Taylor & Francis Online], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

10. Chung, C. L., and M. L. Lo. 2016. "Prospect and Case Study of English-Medium Instruction of Transportation Courses in Taiwanese Universities." *English Teaching & Learning* 40 (3): 87–121. doi:10.6330/ETL.2016.40.3.04. [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

11. Courpasson, D., and S. Vallas. 2016. "Resistance Studies: A Critical Introduction." In *The SAGE Handbook of Resistance*, edited by D. Courpasson, and S. Vallas, 1–28. Los Angeles: SAGE. [Crossref], [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

12. Dearden, J. 2015. *English as a Medium of Instruction – A Growing Global Phenomenon*. British Council. https://www.britishcouncil.org/education/ihe/knowledge-centre/english-language-higher-education/report-english-medium-instruction. [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

13. Escandon, A. 2004. "Education/Learning Resistance in the Foreign Language Classroom: A Case Study." *AIS St Helens Centre for Research in International Education, Research Paper Series, Working Paper No. 5*. [online]. http://www.crie.org.nz/research_paper/Arturo_WP5.pdf. [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

14. Evans, R. A. 2015. "The Culture of Business Education and its Place in the Modern University." *The Canadian Journal of Higher Education* 45 (4): 229–243. doi:10.1177/095042229100500305. [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

onstitution of Society: Outline of Theory of Structuration. of California Press. [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

In this article ≡

16. Hiemstra, R., and R. G. Brockett. 1994. *Overcoming Resistance to Self-Direction in Adult Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass. [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

17. Hollander, J. A., and R. L. Einwohner. 2004. "Conceptualizing Resistance." *Sociological Forum* 19 (4): 533–554. doi:10.1007/s11206-004-0694-5. [Crossref], [Web of Science ®] , [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

18. Hu, G. 2002. "Potential Cultural Resistance to Pedagogical Imports: The Case of Communicative Language Teaching in China." *Language, Culture and Curriculum* 15 (2): 93–105. doi:10.1080/07908310208666636. [Taylor & Francis Online], [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

19. Hu, G., L. Li, and J. Lei. 2014. "English-medium Instruction at a Chinese University: Rhetoric and Reality." *Language Policy* 13 (1): 21–40. doi:10.1007/s10993-013-9298-3. [Crossref], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

20. Huang, Y. P. 2012. "Design and Implementation of English-Medium Courses in Higher Education in Taiwan: A Qualitative Case Study." *English Teaching and Learning* 36 (1): 1–51. doi:10.6330/ETL.2012.36.1.0. [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

21. Jenkins, J. 2014. *English as a Lingua Franca in the International University: The Politics of Academic English Language Policy*. Oxon: Routledge. [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

22. Jing, H. 2006. "Learner Resistance in Metacognition Training? An Exploration of Mismatches between Learner and Teacher Agendas." *Language Teaching Research* 10 (1): 95–117. doi:10.1177/136216880601000107. [Crossref], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

23. Kim, E. G., S. O. Kweon, and J. Kim. 2017. "Korean Engineering Students" Perceptions of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) and L1 Use in EMI Classes." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 22 (2): 1–14. doi:10.1080/01434632.2016.1177061. [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

In this article ≡

Self-Perfect: Chinese Beliefs About Learning." In *Revisiting the ging Contexts, Changing Education,* edited by C. K. K. Chan,

and N. Rao, 35–69. Hong Kong: Springer/Comparative Education Research Centre. [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

25. Li, J. 2012. *Cultural Foundations of Learning: East and West*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [Crossref], [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

26. Long, H. B. 1994. "Resources Related to Overcoming Resistance to Self-Direction in Learning." In *Overcoming Resistance to Self-Direction in Adult Learning*, edited by R. Hiemstra, and R. G. Brockett, 13–21. San Francisco: Jossey Bass. [Crossref], [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

27. Lueg, K., and R. Lueg. 2015. "Why do Students Choose English as a Medium of Instruction? A Bourdieusian Perspective on the Study Strategies of Non-Native English Speakers." *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 14 (1): 5–30. doi:10.5465/amle.2013.0009. [Crossref], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

28. McVeigh, B. 2002. *Japanese Higher Education as Myth*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe. [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

29. Ministry of Education, ed. 2001a. *The Aim for the Top University Project*. http://140.113.40.88/edutop/index_3.php. [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

30. Ministry of Education, ed. 2001b. *White Paper on Higher Education*. Taipei: NIOERAR. [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

31. Norton, B. 1997. "Language, Identity, and the Ownership of English." *TESOL Quarterly* 31 (3): 409. doi:10.2307/3587831. [Crossref], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

32. Paine, L. W. 1990. "The Teacher as Virtuoso: A Chinese Model for Teaching." *Teachers College Record* 92 (1): 49–81. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9620.2006.00689.x. [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

uistic Imperialism. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
CCU

In this article

34. Sakui, K., and N. Cowie. 2008. "'To Speak English is Tedious': Student Resistance in Japanese University Classrooms." In *Narratives of Learning and Teaching EFL*, edited by P. Kalaja, V. Menezes, and A. M. F. Barcelos, 98–112. New York: Palgrave MacMillan. [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

35. Sert, N. 2008. "The Language of Instruction Dilemma in the Turkish Context." *System* 36: 156–171. doi:10.1016/j.system.2007.11.006. [Crossref], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

36. Steils, N. 2013. "Exploring Learner Identity in Virtual Worlds in Higher Education: Narratives of Pursuit, Embodiment, and Resistance." *Unpublished doctoral dissertation*, Coventry University. [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

37. Tatzl, D. 2011. "English-medium Masters" Programmes at an Australian University of Applied Sciences: Attitudes, Experiences and Challenges." *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 10: 252–270. doi:10.1016/j.jeap.2011.08.003. [Crossref], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

38. Tsang, E. S. C. 1999. "Resistance to Self-Access Learning." In *Experiments and Evaluation in Self-Access Language Learning*, edited by B. Morrison, 25–42. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Association for Self-Access Learning and Development. [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

39. Tsui, C. 2017. "EMI Teacher Development Programs in Taiwan." In *English as a Medium of Instruction in Higher Education: Implementations and Classroom Practices in Taiwan*, edited by W. Tsou, and S.-M. Kao, 165–182. Singapore: Springer. [Crossref], [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

40. Vaara, E., and E. Faÿ. 2011. "How can a Bourdieusian Perspective Aid Analysis of MBA Education?" *Academy of Management Learning and Education* 10: 27–39. doi:10.5465/AMLE.2011.59513271. [Crossref], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

vorm, eds. 2014. *English-taught Programmes in European tate of Play in 2014*. Bonn: Lemmens. http://www.aca-

secretariat.be/fileadmin/aca_docs/images/members/ACA-2015_English_Taught.pdf.
[Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

42. Yin, R. K. 2009. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE. [Google Scholar] Find it@NCCU

Additional information

Funding

Related articles

Exploring the potential for language supportive learning in English medium instruction: a Rwandan case study
Lizzi O. Milligan et al., Comparative Education, 2016

Teaching Chinese, Japanese, and Korean Heritage Language Students : Curriculum Needs, Materials, and Assessment
Kimi Kondo-Brown et al., Taylor & Francis Group, 2017

Student presentations as a means of teaching and learning English for Specific Purposes: an action research study
Bin Ai et al., Teaching in Higher Education, 2018

On the Discursive Construction of 'The Chinese Learner'
Rose Clark et al., Language, Culture and Curriculum, 2008

The risks of following the informal and hidden curriculums
Marika Davies et al., The BMJ, 2017

Arts Observation Curriculum May Be Beneficial for Medical Students
PracticeUpdate, 2015

Integrating Life Science Content & Instructional Methods in Elementary Teacher Education
Cory Forbes et al., The American Biology Teacher, 2015

Expanding Oral-Systemic Curricula in Healthcare Education
Eric T. Stoopler et al., Medscape

In this article

People also read

Article

Implementing English-medium instruction (EMI) in China: teachers' practices and perceptions, and students' learning motivation and needs >

Li Jiang et al.

International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism
Volume 22, 2019 - Issue 2

Published online: 16 Sep 2016

Article

Students' perceptions of English-medium instruction in a Hong Kong university >

Anna Po-yung Tsui et al.

Asian Englishes
Volume 19, 2017 - Issue 1

Published online: 13 Oct 2016

Article

English-medium instruction policies in China: internationalisation of higher education >

Zhiguo Zhang

Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development
Volume 39, 2018 - Issue 6

Published online: 20 Nov 2017

In this article

In this article

In this article ☰