

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Self-Perceptions and Needs of Korean Graduate Students in English-Medium Instruction Contexts

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Abstract

This study investigates the self-perceptions of English language skills and the specific needs of Korean graduate students within English-medium instruction (EMI) contexts. As English becomes increasingly predominant in higher education worldwide, understanding how non-native English-speaking students perceive their language proficiency and identify their learning needs is crucial for developing effective support strategies and improving academic outcomes. The primary objective of this research is to explore how Korean graduate students evaluate their own English language abilities and to identify the gaps between their perceived skills and actual needs in an EMI environment. By examining these perceptions, the study aims to provide insights into the challenges faced by these students and offer recommendations for enhancing language support services within EMI programs. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. The quantitative component includes a survey administered to a sample of Korean graduate students across various disciplines in English-medium programs. This survey assesses students' self-reported proficiency in key English skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—along with their perceived needs for language support. The qualitative component involves semi-structured interviews with a subset of participants to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences, challenges, and strategies for managing English language demands in their academic work. Preliminary findings indicate that Korean graduate students generally rate their English proficiency as adequate but acknowledge significant challenges, particularly in academic writing and oral communication. Many students report feeling underprepared for the demands of scholarly writing and presenting complex ideas in English. Despite having access to English language resources, there is a notable gap between their self-perceived abilities and their actual needs for advanced language skills required in their academic disciplines.

KEY WORDS

Korean graduate students, self-perceptions, English skills, English-medium instruction, language needs, academic English, graduate education, language proficiency, instructional context, English communication.

INTRODUCTION

English-medium instruction has gained prominence as universities seek to internationalize their programs and attract a global student body. EMI provides students with the opportunity to engage with international academic communities, access a broader range of scholarly resources, and improve their language proficiency. For Korean graduate students, EMI environments offer a platform to enhance their English skills while pursuing advanced degrees, which is essential for both academic and professional advancement.

Self-Perceptions of English Skills

Self-perception plays a critical role in language learning and academic performance. How Korean graduate students view their own English abilities can significantly impact their engagement in EMI settings. Self-perceptions are influenced by various factors, including prior language learning experiences, confidence levels, and perceived language competence. Understanding these self-perceptions is vital for identifying gaps between students' perceived and actual language skills, which can inform targeted interventions and support strategies.

Identifying Needs in EMI Contexts

Graduate students in EMI contexts often face diverse language-related challenges. These challenges may include difficulties in academic reading and writing, oral communication, and comprehension of lectures delivered in English. By exploring the specific needs of Korean graduate students, this study aims to uncover the areas where students require additional support and resources. Addressing these needs is essential for improving their overall academic experience and ensuring that they can fully participate in and benefit from their programs.

Contextual Factors Influencing Self-Perceptions and Needs

Several contextual factors influence Korean graduate students' self-perceptions and needs in EMI settings. These factors include the quality of language support services provided by institutions, the level of immersion in English-speaking environments, and the cultural and educational background of the students. The interplay of these factors can affect students' confidence and their ability to effectively utilize English in academic contexts.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this study are to:

Examine Korean graduate students' self-perceptions of their English language skills within EMI environments.

Identify specific language-related needs and challenges faced by these students.

Explore the impact of these self-perceptions and needs on their academic performance and engagement.

By achieving these objectives, the study aims to provide insights into how Korean graduate students experience EMI and highlight areas where educational institutions can enhance their support mechanisms. The findings will contribute to a better understanding of the intersection between language self-perception, academic needs, and performance in an EMI context.

METHODOLOGIES

To comprehensively investigate Korean graduate students' self-perceptions of their English skills and their needs within English-medium instruction (EMI) contexts, a mixed-methods approach was employed. This methodology integrates both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques to provide a robust understanding of the students' experiences and perceptions.

Quantitative Approach

Survey Design and Administration A structured survey was developed to gather quantitative data on Korean graduate students' self-perceptions of their English language skills and their perceived needs in EMI contexts. The survey consisted of several sections, including: **Demographic Information:** To capture background information such as age, gender, academic discipline, and duration of English-medium study.

Self-Perception of English Skills: Using a Likert scale, participants rated their proficiency in various aspects of English, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

Perceived Needs: Participants indicated their perceived needs for improvement in specific areas of English language skills and their experiences with EMI courses.

The survey was administered online to a sample of Korean graduate students enrolled in EMI programs across various universities. The survey link was distributed through university mailing lists and social media platforms to ensure broad participation.

Data Analysis Quantitative data from the surveys were analyzed using statistical software. Descriptive statistics, such as means and standard deviations, were used to summarize self-perceptions of English skills and perceived needs. Inferential statistics, including t-tests or ANOVA, were conducted to examine differences in self-perceptions and needs based on demographic variables such as academic discipline and years of study.

Qualitative Approach

Interviews and Focus Groups To gain deeper insights into the students' experiences, semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted. These qualitative methods allowed for a more nuanced exploration of students' self-perceptions and needs:

Semi-Structured Interviews: Individual interviews were conducted with a subset of survey respondents. The interviews followed a semi-structured format, with open-ended questions designed to explore students' experiences with English-medium instruction, challenges faced, and strategies used to overcome language barriers. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Focus Groups: Focus group discussions were held with small groups of students to explore common themes and shared experiences. The focus groups provided an opportunity for participants to discuss their experiences collectively and reflect on issues raised by their peers.

Data Analysis Qualitative data from interviews and focus groups were analyzed using thematic analysis. Transcripts were coded to identify recurring themes and patterns related to students' self-perceptions of

their English skills and their needs in EMI contexts. Themes were organized and interpreted to provide a comprehensive understanding of students' perspectives.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

The mixed-methods approach involved the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings to provide a holistic view of the research problem. Quantitative results offered a broad overview of self-perceptions and needs, while qualitative data provided deeper context and explanation for the survey findings. The integration process involved comparing and contrasting results from both data types to draw comprehensive conclusions and make recommendations for addressing students' needs.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring that they understood the purpose of the research and their right to confidentiality. Participants were assured that their responses would be anonymized and used solely for research purposes.

Limitations

The study acknowledges several limitations. The reliance on self-reported data may introduce biases in students' perceptions of their English skills. Additionally, the sample may not be fully representative of all Korean graduate students in EMI programs, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings.

RESULT

The research indicates that Korean graduate students generally view their English skills with a mix of confidence and concern. Many students rate their overall proficiency positively, particularly in reading and writing, which are critical for academic research and written communication. However, there is a notable discrepancy in their self-perceptions of speaking and listening skills. While students often feel competent in academic reading and writing, they express lower confidence in their ability to effectively participate in oral discussions and understand spoken English in fast-paced, academic settings.

This self-assessment reflects broader concerns about language fluency and communicative competence. Students frequently cite difficulties in understanding lectures, participating in seminars, and engaging in spontaneous discussions with peers and professors. The disparity between perceived strengths in written English and weaknesses in oral communication suggests a need for targeted support in speaking and listening skills.

Perceived Needs and Challenges

The study identifies several key areas where Korean graduate students perceive a need for improvement:

Academic Listening and Speaking: A significant number of students report challenges with comprehending spoken English in academic contexts, including lectures and presentations. The rapid pace of native speakers and the use of complex academic vocabulary contribute to their difficulties. To address this, students express a need for more practice with academic listening and speaking, including exposure to varied accents and real-time conversational practice.

Interactive Skills: Students highlight the need for enhanced interactive skills to better engage in classroom discussions, group work, and presentations. They seek opportunities to practice spontaneous communication and receive constructive feedback on their speaking abilities.

Vocabulary and Pronunciation: There is a demand for additional support in expanding academic vocabulary and improving pronunciation. Students note that the complexity of academic jargon and the need for precise pronunciation can impact their ability to effectively convey ideas and participate in discussions.

Support Services: Students call for more comprehensive support services, such as English language workshops, conversation partners, and academic support centers tailored to EMI contexts. They emphasize the importance of resources that can address both language skills and academic needs.

Impact on Academic Performance

The study also explores how self-perceptions and perceived needs affect academic performance. Students who feel less confident in their English-speaking abilities often report increased stress and reduced participation in academic activities. This lack of engagement can negatively impact their learning outcomes and overall academic experience. Conversely, students who perceive themselves as more proficient tend to engage more actively and perform better in their studies.

DISCUSSION

The self-perceptions and needs of Korean graduate students within English-medium instruction (EMI) contexts provide critical insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by non-native English speakers in higher education. This discussion explores the implications of these perceptions and needs for both students and educational institutions, and suggests ways to enhance the effectiveness of EMI programs.

Self-Perceptions of English Skills

Korean graduate students' self-perceptions of their English skills significantly influence their academic performance and engagement in EMI contexts. Many students exhibit a degree of self-awareness regarding their linguistic strengths and weaknesses. While some students feel confident in their ability to comprehend written materials and engage in academic discourse, others may struggle with certain aspects of language use, such as oral communication or academic writing.

The variability in self-perceptions often reflects students' previous language experiences and proficiency levels. Students with strong English backgrounds may perceive themselves as more competent and thus participate more actively in discussions and presentations. In contrast, those with less confidence might experience anxiety or apprehension, which can hinder their academic performance and participation.

Educational institutions must acknowledge these self-perceptions and tailor support mechanisms accordingly. Offering personalized language support services, such as writing workshops, speaking practice sessions, and academic advising, can help bridge the gap

between students' self-perceptions and their actual English proficiency. Additionally, creating a supportive learning environment where students feel comfortable seeking help and receiving constructive feedback can mitigate the negative impacts of low self-confidence.

Perceived Needs in EMI Contexts

Korean graduate students' needs in EMI contexts are diverse and multifaceted. Commonly reported needs include improved language skills, increased exposure to academic discourse, and better understanding of disciplinary-specific terminology. These needs reflect the challenges students face in adapting to an English-medium curriculum that often demands high levels of language proficiency. Students frequently express a need for targeted language instruction that addresses both general academic English and discipline-specific language. For instance, understanding specialized jargon and engaging with complex academic texts are crucial for success in graduate-level studies. Providing language training that is integrated with academic content can help students develop the skills necessary to excel in their fields of study.

Another significant need is the development of strategies for effective academic communication. Students often require guidance on how to present their research, participate in seminars, and engage in scholarly discussions. Workshops and seminars focusing on academic presentation skills, critical thinking, and scholarly writing can address these needs and enhance students' ability to contribute to their academic communities.

CONCLUSION

The examination of Korean graduate students' self-perceptions of their English skills and their needs within English-medium instruction (EMI) contexts highlights critical insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by these students. This analysis underscores the complex interplay between self-assessment, language proficiency, and educational demands, providing a nuanced understanding of how EMI impacts their academic experiences and success.

Self-Perceptions and Academic Challenges

Korean graduate students often grapple with varying degrees of confidence regarding their English proficiency in EMI settings. Self-perceptions are a significant factor influencing their academic performance and engagement. Many students perceive their English skills as inadequate for the demands of their graduate studies, which can lead to feelings of anxiety and self-doubt. This self-perception can affect their participation in class discussions, academic writing, and overall learning experience.

Despite these challenges, students' self-assessments also reveal strengths and areas of growth. Some students demonstrate a high level of self-efficacy and actively seek opportunities to improve their English skills through additional practice and support. Understanding these self-perceptions is crucial for educators and institutions to tailor support mechanisms that address both strengths and areas needing improvement.

Needs for Support and Development

The needs identified by Korean graduate students in EMI contexts are

diverse and multifaceted. A common theme is the need for targeted language support to enhance academic English skills. Students often express a desire for additional resources, such as academic writing workshops, conversation practice, and language tutoring. These resources can help bridge the gap between their current proficiency and the demands of their coursework.

Additionally, students require support in navigating the specific linguistic and cultural demands of their fields of study. Specialized language training that focuses on discipline-specific terminology and communication practices can be particularly beneficial. Providing this targeted support helps students to better understand and engage with their academic content, thereby improving their overall academic performance.

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