



English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI)

Module 5: Task 1 – 3 Video Lectures

Video 5.1: *Challenges Students Face when Participating in EMI Courses*

Welcome to our video on Challenges Students Face when Participating in EMI Courses. I'm Dawn Bikowski at Ohio University.

I bet that you all can think of several challenges that students will face when they try to participate in your class. But before we go over those challenges, let's define what we mean by participation. Here, I mean any way that your students speak in class—it can be during large or small group discussions, group projects, or even presentations. Ok, now, let's think of specifics. Pause the video and write down at least 3 reasons that students might not participate in your EMI class. When you get at least 3, re-start the video and you can compare your list with mine.

Welcome back! Let's compare your list with mine about participation challenges for students. I identified seven challenges.

One of the biggest reasons that students don't speak up in class is course design. When we design our EMI course, we have to create it so that we give students many opportunities to participate. We have already discussed the importance of having a class atmosphere that encourages students to be engaged in the course, but there are other things to consider as well. For example, many courses include a grade for "participation," but the way the grade is determined is not clear. That means, students don't know how the instructor decides if their participation is an A level, or B level, or C level, etc. Other courses don't include any opportunities for students to participate in class at all. There are no discussions, no group projects, no presentations, nothing. That would be a problem. Courses that don't have any participation built in are often more boring and less engaging for students. Students participate more when they are engaged, meaning course design with participation in mind is crucial.

Another challenge is how well students understand EMI course materials. Students with lower English proficiency levels and who cannot fully understand the content will obviously struggle to participate. As students gain more English and as they learn more content, instructors can expect more participation from them. And students can be encouraged to participate in whatever ways they can.

A third challenge is student nervousness or low self-confidence in speaking English. Students who feel nervous about their pronunciation, vocabulary, or rate of speaking will be less likely to speak in front of a larger group, but they are often more willing to speak in small groups. As students have more practice speaking and as their speaking improves, they will gain confidence, which leads to more speaking again. It can be a positive cycle.



A fourth challenge is student fears of negative feedback. Students can worry that their instructor will be overly critical of them, will grade them down, or will think poorly of them. Students can also worry that their classmates will be critical of them. This can make them not want to speak in front of the class. As an EMI instructor it is therefore crucial that you provide a supportive atmosphere in your class.

A fifth challenge is cultural considerations. In some cultures, participation and public speaking is expected and is widely practiced in schools. This is the case in the US. In other cultures, there is less public speaking in school or society in general, or students may be expected to wait their turn before speaking. Cultural considerations can also include students worrying that if they talk too much in class, their classmates will get frustrated with them. If you are in a culture where students have not practiced speaking in class much, you will have to spend extra time at the beginning of your course with stating your expectations to students and with supporting them as they learn how to participate.

A sixth challenge is gender equality in class participation. In many cultures, female students speak in class less often than do male students. Instructors therefore need to pay attention to who they are calling on to answer questions and on who is volunteering so that they ensure that both male and female students are answering questions equally.

A seventh challenge is differences in participation expectations. Faculty and students can have different expectations for how much students should participate. Students might not want to speak in class, preferring to just listen and be more passive in class. Or they might have had unsuccessful attempts at group projects in the past. However, students will learn more if they are active in class—so getting them to participate is crucial. Explaining the importance of participation to students and giving them many opportunities to practice will help convince students to speak up. Research shows that students are more likely to participate in class when they believe that speaking up helps them with their own learning [on screen: (Meyer, 2009)].

We've looked at seven challenges to student participation. And of course, students' own personalities play a role in how much they talk in class. But you can keep all of these in mind as you plan your course.

Reference¹

Meyer, K. (2009). Student classroom engagement: Rethinking participation grades and student silence (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Ohio University, Athens, OH.

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