

# **Teaching through English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI)**

**Best Practice GUIDELINES for Faculty**

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# Teaching through English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) Best Practice GUIDELINES for Faculty

*This document is a supporting document to the EMI Framework. It is a reference point for Faculty members in order to facilitate consistency and best practice. These Best Practice Guidelines outline approaches to ensure quality in delivery of course through EMI, which Faculty can adapt or apply to their own contexts.*

*The document is informed by data collected by Centro de Lenguas (CDL) from Faculty regarding best practices in using EMI.*

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## 1 Objectives of teaching through EMI

EMI essentially refers to the teaching of a subject using the medium of the English language, but where there are no explicit language learning aims and where English is not the national language.

While the focus of the teaching is on subject content, teachers cannot ignore some linguistic elements such as cohesion, fluency, logic connections in arguments etc much as they would do in their first language. This means teachers will need to pay some attention to how subject content is expressed so that it considers academic language sub-skills rather than English language per se. This is an important point that affects pedagogy in section 5 below.

## 2 The student perspective

It is critical to think first and foremost about the students – the receivers of the content through EMI and what might affect the quality of their learning and experience. Most classes will have a range of contexts for teaching EMI. These would include classes where all the students are Spanish L1 as well as ones which have a mix of international students, some of whom may be native speakers of English and may have a very limited knowledge of Spanish or none at all.

These students will come from a range of different learning experiences as well as operating in a second language and you will need to take certain factors into account when preparing classes. These features will guide how teaching is conducted in terms of quantity of content per lecture and teaching approach.

- The 15-20 minute attention span for listening and concentration may be reduced when listening in a second language.
- Different languages express similar ideas through different linguistic structures. This means students may have an extra cognitive load when listening and learning in a second language.
- Students will have different learning styles depending on where they come from. They may come from a very teacher-centred approach (eg many S E Asian countries) or from a more didactic or student –centred approach (eg some countries in northern Europe). Their experience of learning style will affect how quickly and effectively they understand information.
- Most students will be focused on content not language learning. They may be frustrated by their language level but nevertheless their concern will be to absorb content.
- Many students, especially those from teacher-centred learning experiences, will have a very heightened sense of the relationship between a students and a teacher. In some cultures asking questions is seen as a threat to the teacher and also a risk for students in case they are displaying a lack of knowledge. This means teachers cannot rely on students to raise questions, for e.g. clarification, even if they have a significant problem.

- For most 1<sup>st</sup> year students everything will be very new, i.e. the whole university experience. Even if they are post-grads, Spain and the way of university life here may be new to them. They will need time to adjust to academic life and expectations as well as operating fully in English so it is best not to overload them in early lectures/sessions.

See 5 Best Practice Pedagogy below

### 3 Retaining integrity of content

Most teachers are concerned about ensuring that their EMI classes cover the same curriculum as would be required in Spanish. This can sometimes present problems if you feel your EMI classes run at a slower pace, or even lower level, than your Spanish-based courses.

It may not be possible to design the course and classes given in EMI in the same way as the Spanish classes, (see section 5 below) especially if the focus is on depth of learning and retention rather than quantity of learning so you may want to consider the following to ensure your EMI classes are properly supported:

- agree a subject specialist vocabulary / terminology within the Faculty (please see Framework document on university policy on this)
- look at ways in which work can be given over to the students to ensure that content is covered either in preparation or in follow up – learner autonomy /independent learning stats

This all ties in with an adjustment to teaching style which is outlined further in section 5 below.

### 4 Language differences and diversity

Students coming to University are already learning a new language – that of the academic or subject specialist style. This can still be true at Masters/postgraduate level. On top of this students may find working in academic English challenging because of specific differences with their first language (L1). You cannot be expected to adjust your style to accommodate these but it is worth thinking about their impact on learning if you feel and individual or group of students is struggling.

#### ➤ *linguistic structures and focus*

Different languages process information differently and this can be reflected in the order of information. For example, many European languages have a Subject Verb Object (SVO) order but some languages eg Greek and Russian might be OVS. In this case students with these L1 backgrounds may be doing extra work to process information. This supports pedagogies which promote slightly slower, more repetitive and more interactive presentations.

#### ➤ *evaluative strategies*

Different languages have a very different approach to how the speaker or writer represents their evaluation of a proposition. We generally do this through epistemic stance with language which

represent certainty and uncertainty, such as *maybe, possibly certainly, probably, it could be that, it might be that*, etc. In general research shows that, for example, Indian speakers use less of these epistemic features and Chinese speakers use them a lot. Academic English prefers to use epistemic features rather than present 'absolute' facts and students need to learn this style. However, Spanish tends to use these features a lot so when you present information in English you are likely to replicate this as it is part of your speaker identity. This means students whose L1s are different may again need more time to process information and your stance on it. Again this supports pedagogies which foster interactive activities that allow students to discuss certainty and uncertainty and place it in their own context.

### ➤ **cohesion: Spanish vs English writing**

Most Spanish L1 academics are aware that Spanish and English, especially English academic writing differs in that English is very concise and wholly focused on the main thread of the propositions. In contrast, Spanish can allow some digressions and further explanations and clarifications. Other languages, which will represent those of the wider student group, also vary enormously in how ideas and information are presented in writing. If students are studying in English they will need to 'learn' an English academic style of writing through reading etc. While it is not the tutors role to 'teach' students English, the students will probably need guidance on how to write concisely and in the very focused way that academic English demands. This can be dealt with via feedback on overall cohesion in their writing and by encouraging detailed planning before they start writing (or doing a formal presentation). CDL can offer courses to support teachers in academic writing skills.

## 5 Best Practice Pedagogy

Most teachers will be aware that there is a significant difference in teaching approaches across different cultures. This can range from the highly interactive UK model to the very teacher-centred model commonly found in S E Asian countries. By teaching in English it is not expected that teachers should adopt an English teaching model and it is not part of EMI methodology to promote one teaching style over another. It is recognised that teachers will have their own teaching style and approach and they will want to retain this. However, teachers will need to think about how students are absorbing information in a second language and it is a good idea to adjust your teaching style to make sure that it allows the students the best and easiest access to the information you are trying to get across. In general this means some or all of the following should be considered when delivering lectures, seminars, etc.

### ➤ **level of interaction**

In order to ensure that teachers can check students understanding, it is critical to build in some staged interaction into lectures especially. This may need to be much more than you would do when teaching in your first language. It can involve short, mini-activities for students to do in pairs or direct problem solving questions or concept checking questions.

### ➤ **Speed of delivery**

Most Spanish first language speakers speak much faster than English speakers and other European languages. In addition students may need slower delivery as they are functioning through a second

language. Remind yourself not to speak too fast and use stressed words for emphasis. (Watching TED talks can give you a good idea of pace and stress timing).

### ➤ **Staging and silence**

Given above we have mentioned concentration spans it is a good idea to explicitly divide your lecture into sections or stages with a min activity or even silence in between. So for example with a one-hour lecture you might want to 'chunk' the information into 3 or 4 parts with space in between for students to absorb what they have just heard. This is less important in lab session where interaction is ongoing and activity changes regularly.

### ➤ **setting expectations**

It is vital that teachers set aside time to outline their expectations clearly at the beginning of a course. This should certainly include features such as rules about speaking in English, the kind of learning you expect them to engage in, a recognition of the challenges they may encounter and encouragement to speak about any issues plus a proposal for a partnership with them as you negotiate English together.

### ➤ **critical thinking & independent learning**

A recent survey of teachers at UPV conducted by CDL reported that teachers considered critical thinking and independent learning the two most essential skills required for academic studies and also the least evident in students. Students need to be made aware that these are skills they need to acquire perhaps by prefacing activities by stating which of these skills the activity, task or project promotes and what you expect from them.

### ➤ **managing questions**

Many teachers can be nervous about dealing with questions when functioning in English and ensuring that their response met student needs. When students ask questions this is, in fact, an opportunity to promote independent learning by asking students to offer suggestions or research and find out the answers rather than the answer always being given by the teacher. This is especially important for students who come from teacher-centred learning cultures who may expect to be 'spoon-fed' answers. Use questions as an opportunity for student ownership of their learning.

### ➤ **pedagogical advice from CRUE**

- Use grouping models and cooperative learning as a strategy for classroom management
- Use project work as stimulation for autonomous learning
- Use integrated tasks and activities to motivate learners in purpose
- Correct and mis-use of academic language eg cohesion in writing, etc.
- Explore using technology for accessing materials in English (or other languages), collective projects across geographies and connections with foreign universities
- Use assessments that integrate learning of contents and language (see section 8)

## FAQs

- Could I use Spanish and English in my classes?

It is Ok to code-switch but it should be kept to a minimum and within a class. This should be for key explanations if students indicate confusion. It is not acceptable to either:

- a) to start a class in English and switch to Spanish half way through
- b) to start a whole course in English and then switch to Spanish after a few weeks.

- Should I correct their terminology in English?

Terminology is important and it is vital, as in a first language, to ensure students use the correct terminology. However, teachers should not use their time to correct students general English; advise them to contact CDL and take extra lessons if you are worried about them.

## 6 Quality Assurance

It is sensible for teachers to measure themselves against some university-wide standards to reassure themselves that students are getting a consistent offer. This can help increase your confidence in your approach plus consistency helps to reduce anxiety and complaints from students. The accompanying Framework for EMI document outlines specific measures for standards across course and disciplines. However, it is also worth thinking about a self-evaluation of your consistent 'standards' within a class or course. For each course:

- **share with students:**
  - set standards of learning outcomes in English
  - details of what you expect students to understand
  - information about how they will be assessed (e.g. ongoing, project, final exam etc)
- **have a systemised approach to feedback** which students have access to. Feedback is very important for students and it needs to go beyond 'right vs wrong'. They need details of how to improve and can share work as peers to help with this. Explain to them what kind of feedback you will give and how you expect them to respond to this feedback e.g. by repeating work, double checking gaps/errors in next assignment etc. See Appendix B for suggestions.
- **collaborate with colleagues** on intra-departmental checks both for yourself and to check consistency for students. Share standards and expectations so that students get a consistent and coherent message. You do not need to do everything the same but there should be some broad approaches which are consistent for the students and which explicitly support their learning. See Appendix C for suggestions.
- **collaborate with peers** on challenges and assessments. Make sure you have same goals even if achieved differently and share ideas for resolving challenges (NB see sections 7 & 8 below)
- **make clear what it is that you expect from the students** via learning objectives, assessment criteria, aspects of independent learning, etc.

- **foster wider academic skills in students.** In our survey teachers identified the following skills as essential for students progression or success. Teachers should ensure students are aware of their need to acquire these skills and should help students in that journey. These skills need to be actively and overtly practised by building them into any work or tasks. If students successfully acquire these it will make learning more effective. The skills identified are in order:
  - independent learning
  - critical thinking, analysis and evaluation
  - constructing an argument in writing and organising written work
  - active listening and taking notes
  - summarizing in writing and using source texts

## 7 Collaboration and Dissemination

Although this may involve initial work, once set up the following options these can be used to save time and improve quality. Work with colleagues to set up processes within your Faculty that can advance and support skills in teaching in EMI e.g.:

- **a system for cascade training**
- **a mentor programme** where teachers with experience in teaching EMI can be a support system for those new to the process. NB this does not have to be within the same department or Faculty.
- **develop wiki pages** (or an excel) for terminology used across your field. This may vary, e.g. UK vs USA English, but it is important to have a consistent reference point which can eventually be shared with students and which they have to take responsibility for learning.
- **video your class** and watch back yourself and/or share with others

## 8 Assessment in EMI contexts

Any assessment tasks, whether in English, Spanish or another language need to adhere to the four key testing principles in order to make sure they are valid, fair and reliable. Subject areas will assess learners in different ways and at different times but these principles apply to all assessment whether part of learning progression or summative (end of year). See also Appendix D.

The four principles are **validity, reliability, practicality, impact**, which have been developed from normal ethical research principles.

**Validity** refers to whether the test is valid in two ways:

- A) ensuring that you are testing what you think you are testing
- B) Ensuring that the test it test task reflects a real life task and/or classroom practice



Test tasks that focus on one skill should not be overburdened with the need to understand relevant skills. This may mean it is necessary to stage or break up tasks.

Test tasks should also require the test taker to represent what they might do in a real life situation or tasks that they have done in class. A good example in an academic setting is a presentation or writing a report which reflects both usual class practice and the real world of work which graduates hope to enter.

The requirement of validity also means that any results or feedback should be contained within the extent of the test task so e.g. if multiple choice used to check of knowledge then the results should not be used to draw other conclusions.

**Reliability** is focused on the quality of a test which ensures it is that same for each test taker. This might be across Year groups or within a year. It also overlaps with validity in the case that the test task must be rigorous enough to draw reliable conclusions, i.e. there must not be elements of the test creating 'noise' or co strict irrelevancies which affect the results. This is a key factor in a bilingual setting where language can interfere with content and thus create risks around the results

The third principle is **practicality** which means that the test must be able to be conducted within a reasonable time frame for both test taker and assessor so that fatigue does not affect assessment etc. practical for number of takers, e.g. a large class

The fourth principle is now seen as increasingly important in assessment theory and refers to the **impact** that the test had on learning. So for example a test biased towards multiple choice might overly focus student on this type of learning or practice. It also refers more broadly to how a test affects the wider learning context e.g. how a summative test may affect self-esteem future learning etc.

These four principles overlap and support each other in an ideal test and should be borne in mind when constructing any test via a checklist (see appendix D) which test designers can use to validate their tasks.

### ➤ **Tasks and test purpose**

It is important to connect task to testing purpose and the kind of information you need about students' learning, progress or achievement.

Task type	Useful for testing
Multiple choice questions	Facts, details and understanding concepts
Visual such as graphs, graphics etc	Details
Labeling diagrams, matching features etc	Details and cognitive understanding
Open answers (ie short sentences)	Main points and details
Reports or essays	Holistic skills and understanding, summary skills, evaluative skills, expressing & supporting ideas and opinions
Presentations	Focus, clarity and summary skills; detail and main points
Collaborative tasks	Team work and holistic skills; expressing and supporting ideas and opinions

### ➤ **Risks**

When a cohort of students are operating in a second language there is a test risk that it may be hard to assess content knowledge if language interferes. This aspect where language knowledge may interfere with expressing subject knowledge is classified as high, low or medium risk and teachers need to be aware that this can cause issues in reliability in assessing subject knowledge.

Task type	Linguistic risk
Multiple choice questions	Can be high or low depending on if factual or conceptual (effect of English in test items)
Visual such as graphs, graphics etc	Generally low
Labeling diagrams, matching features etc	Generally low
Open answers (ie short sentences)	Medium or high (effect of students expressive English)
Reports or essays	High (effect of students expressive English)
Presentations	High (effect of students expressive English + anxiety)
Collaborative tasks	Generally low as have team for support and repair

### ➤ **Assessment criteria**

All tests should be developed with the performance criteria as a starting point, i.e. what are you trying to assess and what kind of performance is acceptable? Criteria can be Holistic (general performance such as when you mark an essay) or Analytic (specific to aspects of the subject knowledge). Assessment criteria should ALWAYS be communicated to the students in very specific terms (eg via a handout) for each assessment task. It is not enough to assessment hat they understand criteria form a generic student handbook. You need to let them know exactly what you are assessing them on so they have every chance to perform to these standards.

Teachers can vary how the assessment is applied, e.g. by self, peer or by the teacher and it is a good idea to vary this across the course. You will also need to consider the weighting or balance of your criteria. Generally if you heavily weight one criteria (e.g. organization of work) then students will pay most attention to that so this can be a good way to 'correct' any gaps or weaknesses that the class has.

### ➤ **Collaboration for reliability**

Collaboration is a key feature in ensuring reliability in all forms of assessment.

- In task design, this means checking with peers that the task makes sense and is an effective assessment tool. You can also check any standardization with similar courses.
- In assessment: this is probably the most important area to collaborate on. Time is of course always an issue but it is worth, for example, asking a colleague to simply double mark one essay or report to ensure you agree standards or to swap sets of assignments to mark. The more collaboration

that can be built in the better for standards and reliability. This collaboration also is a support for the teacher of a student wants to question a mark. Collaboration can evidence reliability.

### ➤ *Support strategies*

- **Simplify instructions** eg lower level words, shorter sentences, bullet points, etc
- **Create glossaries** if terminology ambiguous
- **Encourage pair work**
- **Demonstrate and give examples**
- **Use a variety of testing methods** across the year
- **Collaborate on marking** with colleagues

## 9 Continuing Professional Development (CPD)/training support

The university via Centro de Lenguas (CDL) offers a full range of support for teachers who wish to develop both language and other skills in teaching via EMI. There are also external CPD opportunities. Training provision is based on teachers' needs so it is helpful if you can approach CDL if you have a particular requirement as solutions can then be proposed which may incorporate wider group. See Appendix E for options.

## 10 Tutor checklist

A final '**checklist**' for tutors to consider when considering their EMI course content, e.g.

- Does your course offer a variety of student interaction? When? How?
- Does your presentation have 'silence' or gaps for content absorption?
- Have you 'staged' your content presentations into 15/20min sub-topics?
- Do you ask a range of questions, including ones which are easy to answer as well as concept checking questions?
- Have you included activities to promote critical thinking and/or independent learning?
- Have you got a process for offering meaningful feedback that improves learning?
- Have you explained clearly to students the assessment criteria for any assignments you want them to complete?

## Appendix A: Best practice teaching suggestions

The following practices were observed as part of the data collection process which supports these Guidelines.

- constant asking of questions
- re-caps and summaries between each topic
- using jokes to check understanding in minimally responsive classes
- use of explicit discourse markers and/or signposting
- using Poliformat to structure class eg tasking students to go through main points or process and clarify before starting each new topic
- use of videos to increase % of English without relying on teacher
- use of videos and PPT ref as support for differing levels of English
- teacher correcting students terminology; use of synonyms
- concept checking was good where it occurred
- thorough setting up via explanation and checking
- PPT used as aid not main content
- consistent interaction (eg 3 times each 10 mins)
- smiling, relaxed, informal atmosphere
- pacing to 'enliven' lecture
- combined presentation sources eg PPT, whiteboard, blackboard, flip chart
- challenging students with questions or problems
- giving examples

## Appendix B QA: Giving feedback

### Purpose and expectations

Students should always receive proper and meaningful feedback on work they have done. Research indicates that student satisfaction improves significantly if this is the case.

Feedback should be both generic to the class and individual. It should go beyond scoring or grading and offer clear points that will improve learning. As part of building independent learning and also to ensure students take ownership of some of their learning, students can be encouraged individually or in groups to think of how they can improve even when they do well in tasks.

Feedback should always be connected to the stated objectives of any task set and the basis on which students are being graded or assessed MUST be clear to students before they start

This highly communicative and transparent approach engenders better student engagement and also prevents complaints about marks, assessment or teaching.

#### 1 *Individual from teacher*

- oral vs written
- quantitative vs qualitative

#### 2 *generic to class from teacher*

- only focus on main issues
- be prepared to repeat work if necessary but ask the class to engage in HOW that work should be repeated

#### 3 *Peer*

- using checklists and/or criteria to give to students to assess each others' work
- make sure peer partners swap regularly
- use peer assessment to reinforce learning goals

#### 4 *Self*

- give a checklist and/or criteria to support
- ensure students detail how they understand they can improve their work



## Appendix C QA: intradepartmental collaboration

**True quality is achieved through collaboration and sharing of ideas and standards. This can be achieved by:**

- **Visiting other lectures**, observing, discussing teaching issues
- **Sharing ideas** that work well eg online or in meetings
- **Setting up forums** for discussion and exchange
- **Using mentoring** to help newer teachers or teacher new to EMI
- **Publishing** and sharing approaches to EMI
- **Agreeing standardisation processes** eg by single marking each other's students, by agreeing procedures for insisting on English
- **Agreeing approaches to independent learning** so that students get a consistent message and support

## Appendix D: Assessment

### Why are you testing?

Reason	Type of test
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to find out strengths and weaknesses</li> <li>to find out what they know about a subject</li> </ul>	diagnostic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>as a learning/improvement tool</li> <li>in order to give them feedback</li> <li>to monitor their progress</li> <li>to motivate and encourage them</li> </ul>	student-focused formative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to check understanding of input</li> <li>to monitor their progress</li> </ul>	teacher-focused formative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>as a hurdle or stage in progression</li> <li>to give them pass or fail</li> <li>for university records</li> </ul>	summative

### Testing Principles

<b>Validity</b>	Is the test fair? What are you testing? How do you know you are testing what you think you are testing? Does the task reflect classroom/course practice?
<b>Reliability</b>	Is the task/test the same for every student whenever the test is taken?
<b>Practicality/Feasibility</b>	Are the timing and conditions of the test fair?
<b>Impact</b>	What effect will the test have on classroom/course preparation?

## Appendix E: CDL support

### Range of courses to support tutors teaching via EMI offered by CDL

- Teaching in English (EMI) B2 Stage 1
- Teaching in English (EMI) B2 Stage 2
- Teaching in English (EMI) C1 Stage 1
- Teaching in English (EMI) C1 Stage 2
- Improving pronunciation [with Forbrain]
- Improving oral skills [with Tomatis]
- Improving your English C2
- Presentation skills B2/B2+
- Presentation skills C1/C1+
- Teaching in EMI workshops
- Issues in Assessment in EMI workshops
- Observation & Feedback programme
- Academic Writing Skills