

*Teaching and Learning Methods Section (EMI)*

**Scaffolding as a Pedagogical Strategy  
in a Course Delivered Using English as a Medium of  
Instruction (EMI)**

Katia Mayumi Umekita  
Independent scholar (Brazil)

**Abstract**

Internationalization has motivated tertiary educational institutions to open their doors to global students and instructors. This movement has led to the adoption of the English language as a lingua franca among many distinct nationalities on the same campus. Consequently, the number of programs using English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in their classrooms has steadily grown, raising pedagogical issues associated with dealing with an academic community with diverse characteristics. Accordingly, the goal of this project is to identify and understand how teachers and students deal with the challenge of teaching and learning via EMI, specifically with regard to two issues: the different levels of English language proficiency in the classroom, and any distinct cultural features among participants that might hinder communication during a lesson. Some pedagogical scaffolding strategies such as the use of students' L1, checking comprehension, co-construction of knowledge are identified. To better understand these pedagogical scaffolding strategies in a program using EMI, I present a case study of a postgraduate group and its instructor.

*Keywords:* internationalization, English as a medium of instruction (EMI), socio-cultural theory of cognitive development, pedagogical strategies, scaffolding

---

Corresponding author: Katia Mayumi Umekita. Email: [askkatia@gmail.com](mailto:askkatia@gmail.com)

Following the contemporary movement towards internationalization, in many universities worldwide, English has been adopted as the language of choice in countries where it is not the first language, since English currently functions as a *lingua franca* of science and business (e.g. Seidlhofer, 2005 Crystal, 2012). Tertiary programs that employ English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI), provide students with opportunities during their regular classes to practice this language while learning the content of a discipline (e.g. Knagg, 2019).

In Brazil, Ramos (2017) mentions that international student partnerships, promoting mobility and visibility, have been frequently part of science policy leaders' discussions and the move towards EMI courses has been implemented as a top-down requirement in most institutions (Ferreira, 2020). In the reality of the classroom, the fact that content is taught in a second language has caused some practical communication difficulties among participating faculty and students.

Such difficulties are commonly associated with the level of the teacher's proficiency in the language of instruction (Knagg, 2019). However, even if the teacher is highly proficient in English, it is not possible to take for granted that a group of students would thereby naturally learn the

content of a subject delivered in English. For example, the range of distinct proficiencies in the English language within the same group can be too great to be managed effectively even by an instructor whose own command of the language is high. A degree of linguistic heterogeneity is common in an EMI environment and "relates to apprehensions surrounding inadequacy of English proficiency, by students and lecturer alike, whether real or perceived." (Martinez, 2016, p.4).

Furthermore, Knagg (2019) observes that the same set of instructions would not necessarily be comprehended and followed by students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Differing base levels of expectations about typical classroom procedures and the status of instructor and student, for example, could also lead to cultural misunderstanding across different groups even if they share a common language.

In addressing such issues, Macaro (2018) suggests that pedagogical strategies can provide useful tools for students to avoid misunderstandings and make them feel more confident having classes in a language that is not their first one. Knagg (2019) adds that targeted pedagogical support in an EMI environment might be a means to fill a possible gap between proficiency in the language and the delivery