English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) at Politecnico: lecturer views

Interviews with 25 Politecnico EMI lecturers

Report: EMI at Politecnico di Torino
Language goals of Politecnico EMI lecturers

EMI lecturers want to:
- convey interest in the subject
- teach at the same level in both English and Italian
- conduct oral exams successfully
- be spontaneous
- respond to student questions in class
- explain concepts in a variety of ways
- produce standard pronunciation of technical terms
Vox pop: lecturer comments on EMI

- It is difficult to make jokes (in English)
- Technical explanations are not too demanding linguistically
- Slides are restricting and take away interaction
- Giving examples and explanations with limited vocabulary is not always possible. I can’t say things in English in lots of different ways, as I can in Italian
- In English my lessons are drier and less motivating for students
- If your English is not good you need to modify your method more. The way you teach is dependent on your level of English
- My tone of voice is flat as I have to concentrate on vocabulary and grammar
- Some students accents are very hard to understand
- I know an academic who is brilliant but when he teaches in English he’s terrible
Politecnico lecturer expectations of EMI student language skills

Students should be able to...

- Take useful notes in English
- Understand the content of the lecture
- Perform successfully in oral exams
- Communicate clearly in writing
- Ask questions spontaneously in class
- Produce comprehensible spoken English
Vox pop: lecturer comments on student level of English

- Students find listening to more than one teacher is difficult
- Low student level of English is an impediment to learning
- Students have a mixed level of English
- My students’ level of English is awful
- Taking notes presents problems
- Some students need help in writing
Future institutional requirements for EMI students?

- Students should have a B2 entry level?
- Students should attend a compulsory study skills in English course?
Using visual techniques
- Slides
- Coloured chalks on the board
- Pictures and graphics

Paying more attention to clarity and comprehension
- Speaking more slowly
- Repeating concepts more often
- Asking more questions in class

Involving the students more
- More Interactive lessons
- More practical exercises in class
- Asking more questions
- Using breaks to speak to students

Changing Content
- Cutting content
- Using more international examples

How Politecnico lecturers are adapting to EMI classes
Cultural issues

Different cultural backgrounds

- Students do not always understand what is expected of them
- Students of the same background often form closed groups
- Communication can be problematic

Different academic backgrounds

- Teachers face diverse cultures of learning
- Learning outcome not uniform for Italian and non-Italian students
Remember these are people; all individuals with their own backgrounds, some very far from home...

It’s hard to say how much is subject knowledge and how much is the way people learn.

Students remain physically separated by nationality.

The classroom context changes every year.

Foreign students are more reluctant to ask questions.

For some foreign students it is culturally unacceptable to question teachers.

Foreign students often don’t do well in oral exams.

Some students have translated my slides and put them on internet unofficially.

Foreign students don’t respond well to probing in oral exams and memorize answers.

Some foreign students find it unacceptable to come to class and then not pass the exam.

Most foreign students are better at written side of English; not so good at speaking.

Vox pop: Cultural issues
Institutional issues: Lecturer concerns

**Student selection**
- Entry level for English not adequate
- Some students lack the necessary academic skills for Politecnico courses
- Courses in English do not always reflect student interests

**EMI teacher preparation**
- No official standard of English for EMI lecturers
- Little institutional support for EMI lecturers
- EMI teachers often work in isolation

**Lack of policy**
- EMI is not standard: done in different ways in different departments
- EMI is not joined-up throughout the Politecnico
- EMI issues may affect quality of Politecnico graduates
Vox pop: Institutional issues

- Inadequate student recruitment policy has led to students re-taking exams many times.
- There is a real language barrier and it prevents learning. The scientific message is not being conveyed.
- Sometimes students study subjects that do not interest them just because they are available in English.
- Politecnico gives students an initial test but no way of really selecting good students.
- I’m surprised there are no checks for teachers using EMI.
- Taking on classes from colleagues who teach badly in English means taking on students who have big gaps in their learning.
- At Politecnico: we first created the course and then found the students...it hasn’t worked well.
- Foreign qualifications are awarded with unknowable criteria which may be very different from those of Italian institutions.
- We should do some statistics to find out which nationalities take longer to pass their exams.
- Students complain that teachers cannot teach their programme in English.
- No attention has been paid by Politecnico to how to teach in English – it has been a top-down decision.
What support would Politecnico EMI lecturers like to have?

- **Classes**
  - To improve/maintain language level

- **Opportunities**
  - To discuss and improve teaching methodology

- **Acknowledgement**
  - For the extra time dedicated to the preparation of EMI courses

- **A service**
  - To check the English on teaching materials and course information
Vox pop: Teacher support required

- A mother tongue teacher should check our lessons in English; experts should show us how to teach.
- It’s not just about speaking in English: it’s about teaching.
- It’s difficult to improve English and teaching alone.
- The first year of teaching in English is difficult – it takes a long time to find terms and materials.

- I need to plan EMI lessons much more than lessons in Italian.
- The Politecnico should support my English language maintenance. It comes out of my own pocket.
- No one revises my English in slides and dispense and this is a problem.
- I have been given no help to teach in English.

- Nobody has ever taught me how to teach.
- There is no space at the Politecnico to discuss teaching.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lecturer suggestions for an EMI training course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>observation in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>role play student/teacher interaction language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more interaction in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>how to improve autonomously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>how to say equations in English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>group dynamics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>how to stimulate interaction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Next stages

One-to-one consultancy service
Politecnico Workshop for current EMI teachers
Politecnico training course for future EMI teachers