

Working with international students

'I always remember in my first tutorials because we had those in the first year. And it was your personal tutor who is a member of staff and four or five other people from your course. And I literally had no idea what was going on! Because in the lectures the lecturers do try and speak a little bit slowly and with good diction and stuff so it wasn't a problem to understand that. But then in the tutorials everyone was talking at the first time and I just find myself sitting there and nodding and saying yes. I do get a bit self-conscious about my accent as well and then if people don't understand me and that sort of thing. So that might stop me from maybe participating in class or something because they will be like what is she saying, I don't understand' –

Psychology Student

Questions for reflection

1. What can this student's experience tell us about working with international students and/or those whose first language is not English?
2. How could universities, academic staff and fellow students support international students and/or those whose first language is not English?
3. What could you do in your role with your students?

Discussion

The transition to living and studying in a new country, particularly one in which a new language is spoken, presents a number of challenges. Whilst all students need a high level of language proficiency in order to apply for university study, in practice students can still feel concerns about not understanding and not being understood.

As in the example above, certain contexts - such as more informal modes of communication like discussion groups – can be more problematic than others. There are also a number of cultural barriers and social norms that students are required to familiarise themselves with.

In the example above, the student is self-conscious about not being understood and this affects her participation in class. She is also concerned that the tutor might see her as a poor student as a result of not taking part in the same way as her peers.

Suggestions for good practice

- Avoid unnecessary jargon. Where complex terminology is used, provide definitions or links to further information.

- Be conscious that there could be multiple reasons for students not participating in group activities. Allow a range of opportunities for participation – from paired discussion, to individual reflection – to allow all students to demonstrate their abilities.
- Avoid singling students out for being different but recognise if students need extra assistance or support through establishing good channels of communication.
- Schedule in group work to encourage students to practice their academic English and to build a sense of community amongst the cohort.
- Provide space for students to reflect on experiences from the perspective of their own culture. This has benefits for the student in making them feel valued, yet also allows other students to learn from diverse perspectives.
- Check your reading list for whether it reflects global scholarship and global concerns on your topic.

Plymouth resources

- [International Plymouth](#)
- [The English Language Centre](#)
- [Seven steps to adopting culturally inclusive teaching practices](#)
- [Seven steps to internationalisation](#)

External resources

- The [Higher Education Academy's guide to teaching international students](#) with specific advice on [lecturing](#), [seminars](#) and [supervision](#).
- [Quality Assurance Agency guide](#) with strategic advice for supporting international students.

Indicative Research

- Carroll, J. & Ryan, J. (2005). *Teaching International Students: Improving Learning for All*. London: Routledge.
- Crozier, G. & Davies, J. (2008). The trouble is they don't mix: self-segregation or enforced exclusion? *Race Ethnicity and Education* 11, 3, 285-301.
- Jones, E. (2010) (ed). *Internationalisation and the student voice: Higher education perspectives*. London: Routledge.