

**English-medium practices & perceptions of Year 1 Economics students: learners' participation in classroom discourse in an EAP class at the University of Hong Kong**

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**Abstract**

The University of Hong Kong, an English medium of instruction (EMI) institution in the Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, has embarked upon an ambitious program designed to strengthen the university's international profile. In support of this aim, a recent review of language education at the university recommended that measures be adopted to encourage the use of English in all courses as well as in professional and social settings (University of Hong Kong, 2004). This study investigates the challenges and prospects for promoting the participation of undergraduate learners in classroom discussion at the university. An ethnographic approach is taken as the study explores the experiences of a group of eight Economics and Finance students and two English language teachers as they participated in oral interaction within their English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classroom. Data were collected throughout the entire EAP course via interviews, audiovisual recording of classroom discussions, classroom observation, documentary analysis, and questionnaires.

The study, grounded in Layder's (1993, 2006) theory of social domain analysis, adopts a multi-level investment perspective on participants involvement in classroom discussion. Learner and teacher investment in such discussion is therefore examined from various perspectives, including the individual, the interactional, and the institutional. The findings challenge previous research which have portrayed Hong Kong learners as reticent to take part in classroom discussion. These conclusions lead to the development of a theoretical framework that reflects, from these different perspectives, the constraints and enablements to learner investment in oral interaction in the EAP classroom. It is argued that this framework has implications for promoting learner investment in classroom discourse beyond the language classroom. A series of pedagogical recommendations are therefore proposed designed to promote investment in spoken discourse by undergraduate students in Economics and Finance classrooms. These recommendations, drawing upon successful examples from the EAP classroom, propose that a form of bounded learner control over the processes and products of oral classroom investment may be one of the best ways of attaining the university's aims for oral language proficiency and enhancement amongst its undergraduate population.