

# Teachers' Perceived Impact of an Online Professional Development Course on Content and Language Integration and Pedagogical Translanguaging

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## Abstract

Research has already shown that designing instruction that simultaneously develops students' content and language competences is fundamental especially, but not only, when students are educated in a second, foreign or additional language. Unfortunately, content teachers working in different types of bilingual education programmes hold varying beliefs about the role of language for and in learning and often struggle to successfully integrate language and content objectives. This is particularly the case of content teachers working in the Italian network of educational institutions in the world who struggle to support students to learn content through Italian as the language of instruction, but also tend to fail to recognize the importance of validating their linguistic and cultural background. In this context, the dearth of training is accompanied by a dearth of research on the effects of professional development courses.

This paper aims to fill this gap by reporting on the effectiveness of a short online teacher professional development (OTPD) course aimed at supporting both primary and secondary subject teachers working in Italian international schools abroad to integrate content and language learning from a plurilingual and pluricultural perspective. Specifically, it explores teachers' perceptions in relation to the design and implementation features of the course and to its effects on their beliefs, teaching practice, and professional identity.

**Keywords:** Bilingual education, Translanguaging pedagogy, Teachers' beliefs, Teacher change, OTPD (Online Teacher Professional Development), Italian network of educational institutions in the world

## 1. Introduction

Research has already shown that designing instruction that simultaneously develops students' content and language competences is fundamental especially, but not only, when students are educated in a second, foreign or additional language (Nikula et al., 2016; Mohan & Beckett, 2001). This is because language is not simply an instrument of communication, but a learning tool necessary to represent, mediate, create, and discuss about new and existing knowledge (Beacco et al., 2015, p. 21). From this perspective, the degree to which students learn and understand subject content is highly dependable on teachers' recognition of the language dimension of their subject (idem, p. 15).

Unfortunately, content teachers working in different types of bilingual education programmes hold varying beliefs about the role of language for and in learning (Llinares et al., 2012) and often struggle to successfully integrate language and content objectives (Cammarata & Tedick, 2012). Additionally, several studies show that while bilingual teachers should teach for transfer of concepts and experiences from students' home languages to the language of instruction, there is still a tendency on keeping students' linguistic and cultural capital at the "schoolhouse door" (Cummins in Carder, 2007, p. ix). One of the reasons is that most teachers lack the awareness and the principled pedagogic guidance both for content and language integration (ibid. in Morton, 2016, p- 146) and for the strategic use of students' languages (Cenoz & Santos, 2020).

This is particularly the case of content teachers working in the Italian network of educational institutions in the world (Fazzi, 2021a; Benucci, 2007). In these schools, teachers delivering the Italian-based curriculum are normally trained as subject specialists (see Castellani, 2018) and often receive very little training on how to teach their subject in plurilingual and pluricultural contexts before and during their experience as expat teachers (ibid.; Bailey, 2015).

In a recent study, Fazzi (2021a) found that these teachers not only struggle to support students to learn content through Italian as the language of instruction, but also tend to fail to recognize the importance of promoting their linguistic and cultural background.

The call for appropriate training for teaching staff is quite spread in different types of bilingual education programmes (Cammarata & Haley, 2018; Pérez-Cañado, 2016) and in international schools in general (Carder, 2007). However, there is a dearth of research on the effects of such professional development courses (Lo, 2019), especially in the context of primary and secondary schools that are part of the Italian network of educational institutions in the world.

This paper aims to fill this gap by reporting on the effectiveness of a short online teacher professional development (OTPD) course aimed at supporting subject teachers to integrate content and language learning from a plurilingual and pluricultural perspective. Specifically, it explores teachers' perceptions in relation to the design and implementation features of the course and to its effects on their beliefs, teaching practice, and professional identity.

## 2. Bilingual Teachers' Beliefs and Practices About Content and Language Integration and Pedagogical Translanguaging and the Need for Teacher Professional Development

According to Baker and Wright (2017), “bilingual education is a simplistic label for a complex phenomenon” (idem, p. 197) as with this term we can refer to different types of educational models (i.e. Immersion, Dual Language, CLIL, CBI, etc.), with varying, and often, conflicting aims. However, despite the differences, these models also share strong similarities in their “essential properties” (Cenoz, 2015, p. 12), as they are all based on the idea that some, most, or all of the curriculum is taught through a language other than the students’ mother tongue (Baker & Wright, 66; Garc ía, 2009). It is this aspect that makes teaching in a bilingual educational programme “quite distinct from teaching in a *traditional* (monolingual) setting” (Cammarata & Haley, 2018, p. 334), requiring teachers to develop systematic approaches to integrate content and language (Morton, 2016). Specifically, “integration” is a key concern in all types of educational programmes that have academic achievement and bilingualism and biliteracy as key goals but is also increasingly important in mainstream contexts in which the student population is more and more culturally and linguistically diverse.

Unfortunately, while “the existence and stability of content separate from language is an illusion” (Byrnes, 2005 quoted in Nikula et al., 2016, p. xvi), research shows that there is a lack of attention paid to language pedagogy for teachers working in bilingual contexts (Walker & Tedick, 2000; Fortune et al., 2008), especially in international schools (Carder 2007). This leads content teachers to underestimate the role played by language for deeper learning, and to struggle to see themselves as both content and language teachers (Cammarata & Tedick, 2012; Oattes et al., 2018; Seah, 2014). Tan (2011), for example, discovered that both mathematics and science teachers working in Content-based Instruction (CBI) in Malaysia did not perceive language as an important element when teaching content. Similarly, Morton (2012) highlighted how CLIL teachers’ focus on language was mostly incidental as it “largely derived from personal experience and practice and did not generally engage with the public theories and practices” (idem, p. 298). According to Morton (2016), this depends on the fact that teachers trained as subject specialists are not often provided with the type of language knowledge they need to effectively integrate content and language objectives (idem, p. 146). This is the case of the subject teachers working in the Italian network of educational institutions in the world who were interviewed by Fazzi (2021a). Both primary and secondary teachers talked about the difficulties to design learning paths aimed at students with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds and with varying degrees of proficiency in the Italian language. Teachers claimed they lacked both the understanding and the pedagogical tools to make contents comprehensible, to promote both students’ academic and social language, and to support them in building a gradually complex academic competence. Also, teachers said they felt “alone” in the adaptation of the Italian-based curriculum to their specific context, seeing the training received before departure and during their stay in the foreign country as insufficient.

Teachers’ strategic use of students’ home languages, through adopting pedagogical translanguaging (O. Garc ía, 2009), has also gained wide attention in bilingual education. Translanguaging refers to the use of the learner’s full linguistic repertoire in teaching and learning (Garc ía & Wei, 2014) and is based on the idea that recognising the languages of

bilinguals as dynamic and co-existing, instead of treating them as separate systems, can go a long way in maximizing students' cognitive, (meta)linguistic, and socio-affective gains (Baker & Wright, 2017, pp. 198-199; Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; Cenoz & Santoz, 2020). Unfortunately, language separation ideologies still thrive among teachers, stakeholders, and policy makers in many bilingual contexts (Macaro, 2014; Doiz & Lasagabaster, 2017). In Martinez et al.'s (2015) study, for example, dual immersion teachers articulated ideologies of purism, arguing in favour of "sticking to" Spanish, as the minority language, during the time allocated to the Spanish-based curriculum. In the Basque Country (Spain), Doiz and Lasagabaster (2017) asserted that most of the participants in their study, all university content teachers, were inclined to exclude the use of students' L1 unless there was a breach in comprehension. In another study, Egaña et al. (2015) found that monolingual ideologies were pervasive in in-service primary teachers in the Basque Country and Friesland (The Netherlands). In the same way, the teachers in Fazzi's (2021b) study claimed that, in most cases, the Italian- and the local-based curriculum run on parallel directions with a strict separation between the respective languages during the time allocated to either curriculum. While some of the teachers reported to use only Italian during their lessons, others said they were inclined to recur to students' languages when necessary (mainly for comprehension checks). Only few of them said that promoting students' use of their full linguistic repertoire was important to both build trust and to scaffold learning.

### **3. Features of Effective Online Teacher Professional Development**

Teacher Professional Development (TPD) can be identified as any activity which aims at bringing about positive change in "practicing teachers' competences" (Borg 2018, p. 195), in teachers' beliefs and attitudes, and, ultimately, in students' learning outcomes (Guskey, 2002; Opfer et al. 2011). What makes TPD successful is however a matter of discussion. According to Guskey (2002), there are mainly two reasons why teacher educational programmes fail, and these are lack of consideration of what motivates them to engage in professional development and of "the process by which change in teachers typically occurs" (idem, p. 382; see section 4). As for the reasons that usually encourage teachers to engage in professional development there is their desire to become better teachers; that is, they want to acquire knowledge and skills which will likely improve their effectiveness with their students. However, the literature on effective TPD shows that there are other features that are likely to impact on teachers' learning. For example, Garet et al.'s (2001) study revealed that change in teaching practice was the result of training activities, which had both structural features, including format, duration, and the degree to which they promoted teachers' collaborative participation, and core features, such as the connection of the activities to teachers' previous professional development experiences, their focus on strong and reliable academic content, and their support of teachers' active engagement and reflection (Schon, 1987). In reporting similar aspects, Wayne et al. (2008) also underlined that while there is consensus on the fact that TPD should be sustained and intensive, and possibly "integrated into the daily work of teachers" (Hawley & Valli, 1998; Joyce & Showers, 2002 quoted in idem, p. 479), this is not always possible because of both financial and time constraints (Philipsen et al., 2019).

In this context, Online Teacher Professional Development (OTPD) has emerged as a flexible and cost-effective solution (Brown, 2010; Powell & Bodur, 2019). According to Powell and Bodur (2019, p. 21), “OTPD refers to courses, workshops, or learning modules that are delivered in an online format for teacher PD”, and can take many shapes depending on the goals, purposes, content areas, pedagogies, and delivery methods, ranging from asynchronous to synchronous and blended (*ibid.*). Despite this variety, there are certain aspects which seem to generally account for the efficacy of OTPD courses. For example, drawing on Vygotsky’s (1978) Sociocultural Theory, Shabani (2016) outlined the following four: a. teachers should participate in social activities and communities, b. they should be provided with enough time to learn and reflect (Schon, 1987), c. their interaction with the training inputs should be scaffolded, and d. intersubjectivity should be promoted, that is teacher trainees should have the opportunity to share challenges and experiences growing from novices to experts within their community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

However, for these aspects to be successfully implemented, Knight (2020) claims that e-tutors should make sure that teachers have the necessary technical skills to engage in the learning activities and interact with the other participants. Physical and psychological accessibility is indeed one of the main motivating factors for teachers when engaging in OTPD (Banegas & Busleimán, 2014). In this context, asynchronous learning can have positive as well as negative aspects. On the one hand, it can provide teachers with the opportunity to study the materials, complete the activities, and interact with the other participants when they see fit. On the other, it can also be time consuming (Gabriel, 2004; Nunan, 2012) and lead to paucity of participation, which can be linked to a sense of isolation.

According to the Community of Inquiry Model (CoI model; Garrison et al., 2000), deep and meaningful online learning can only take place if the pedagogical affordances associated with technology (teaching presence; Carrillo & Assunção Flores, 2020, p. 478) are exploited to: 1) help trainees interact and collaborate with the other members of the community to construct meaning (social presence; Carrillo & Assunção Flores, 2020) and 2) support them in reflecting on their experience as well as in discussing issues and experimenting possible solutions (cognitive presence).

#### **4. The Complexity of Teacher Change**

Apart from the aspects related to the design and implementation features of the (O)TPD experience, effectiveness is also a matter of the process underlying teacher change (Guskey, 2002). Specifically, teacher change is both dynamic and cyclical (Borg, 2019; Opfer & Pedder, 2011) and depends upon different contextual and situational factors (Kubaniyova, 2012). Research shows that teachers bring their own set of values and beliefs to teaching and learning, and these are not easily altered (Opfer et al., 2011), even when there is evidence that contradicts their previous orientations (Richardson, 2003). According to Opfer et al. (2011, p. 451), “whether or not a teacher learns and then engages in a form of professional change is influenced by their beliefs, practices and experiential context”. As Borg (2003) claims, teachers tend to have their own development pathway, which is influenced by both personal and contextual factors (Lo, 2019). Specifically, Lo (*ibid.*) found that after participating in a

TPD course on the CLIL methodology, content teachers in Asia experienced different degrees of change in their beliefs and language awareness depending on the school context, their own learning and teaching experience and beliefs. These factors influenced the teachers' desire to engage in the training activities and thus on what they learned or the degree to which they changed (Opfer et al., 2011 quoted in idem, p. 821).

In the model of teacher change developed by Kubaniyova (2012), teachers can have different pathways of development depending on three main conditions: a. the training inputs (study materials, tasks to complete, trainers, and peers) are in line with teachers' *Ideal Self*, that is who teachers would like to be, their aspirations and identity goals (Kubaniyova, 2009), b. these inputs produce an emotional dissonance between teachers' actual and *Ideal Self*, and c. teachers perceive they have enough internal and external resources to work towards their *Ideal Self*. According to the researcher, teacher change only takes place if all three conditions are met.

In light of the complexity of teacher change and of the many factors that impact on the effectiveness of an (O)TPD experience, this study sought to investigate: a) the aspects of the course that a group of subject teachers working in primary and secondary Italian schools in the world perceived as effective, and 2) the extent to which the course influenced their beliefs, teaching practice and professional identity with regards to content and language integration and pedagogical translanguaging.

## 5. Research Context

### 5.1 *The Italian Network of Educational Institutions in the World*

The Italian network of educational institutions in the world is a complex organisation, which comprises different types of institutions - private, semi-private, or public - and of bilingual programmes in local schools and universities (Castellani, 2018). These schools began to develop in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a result of the Italian emigrant communities' strong desire to keep their linguistic and cultural heritage alive (Note 1). Initially, students who attended these schools were mostly Italian descendants. In recent years, however, things have changed dramatically (Castellani, 2018). In most countries, especially the ones outside of Europe, Italian schools have the same features of other international schools, with a student population mainly consisting of local students and, only in a minor percentage, of students from other countries or with some connection to Italy (i.e. an Italian parent; idem, p. 38). Currently, teachers are either selected among candidates in the Italian teaching staff through a public process jointly managed by the Italian Ministry of Education and of Foreign Affairs, which aims at evaluating if they meet the requirements (i.e. at least 3 years of teaching experience in Italy, knowledge of a foreign language, etc.; law decree n. 64, 13 April 2017), or locally (no specific requirements) (Note 2). The situation is further complicated by the fact that the schools in the network follow different models of bilingual education depending on the local context and regulations. In addition, the law decree n. 34 of 2017 has recently regulated the implementation of teacher professional development courses for teacher hired through the Italian national system, but there is no clear indication on the timeline and content of such training (see Cinganotto, 2018 for further information). According to Castellani (2018), teachers' level and type of professional preparation is one of the main issues of the Italian

network of educational institutions in the world, together with the lack of communication and sharing of best practices across schools.

### *5.2 The OTPD Course: Teaching a Content Subject Through Italian in International Schools Abroad*

Given the situation described in the previous section and the research reported in section 2, an OTPD experience was designed with the aim of supporting content subject teachers working in the Italian network of educational institutions in the world to integrate content and Italian language learning while promoting students' plurilingual and pluricultural repertoire. Participants were recruited through different channels and were interviewed prior to the course to investigate their beliefs about the role of language in subject learning and the use of students' home languages, the challenges faced in their teaching and their training needs (see the results in Fazzi 2021a and 2021b). The course was delivered fully online over three months using the Moodle platform of the *Laboratorio Itals* (University Ca' Foscari of Venice, Italy) and consisted of the following structure:

Module 1: principles at the basis of bilingual education; the role of language in learning and teaching; potential benefits and issues of employing translanguaging pedagogies in the context of Italian international schools abroad.

Module 2: designing content and language objectives; scaffolding comprehension, production, and interaction; error correction; selecting appropriate translanguaging strategies and techniques to be adapted in different teaching contexts; creating self-, peer- and other types of formative assessment.

Module 3: designing a lesson plan to promote both content and language learning through also using translanguaging strategies and techniques; experimenting the lesson plan; final reflections.

All three modules were based on asynchronous tasks and interaction was facilitated by the researcher acting as the e-tutor, except for the weeks devoted to pedagogical translanguaging which were designed and delivered in collaboration with Claudia Meneghetti (a Ca' Foscari PhD Student currently working on pedagogical translanguaging). The first module mainly engaged teachers in reflective tasks based on multimodal study materials (video lessons, articles, digital infographics, etc.). In the second module, teachers were asked to adapt or design activities and strategies. The last module required teachers to create their own lesson plan, implement it with their students and share their reflections with their fellow teachers. Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, only one teacher was able to carry out the experimentation, while the other teachers decided to postpone this phase to a later time. In all modules, the e-tutor provided individual as well as collective feedback offering further support when necessary. Apart from the learning modules, the Moodle course page also provided teachers with a learning diary, which they were invited to use to self-evaluate their learning journey, a Facebook page for social informal interaction, and a support forum. A synchronous meeting was organised at the end of the second module to discuss teachers' potential doubts and guide them in preparing their lesson plan.

## 6. The Study

According to Borg (2018), professional development interventions can have different types of impact. In this study, impact was investigated in terms of teachers' perceptions in relation to the design and implementation features of the course and to its effects on their beliefs, teaching practice, and professional identity. A mixed-methods approach (Dörnyei, 2007) was employed to analyse data from different perspectives. Specifically, the quantitative data helped in drawing an overall picture of the impact of the course on teachers' perceptions while the qualitative data served to further explore and contextualise them.

### 6.1 Research Questions

The research questions of the study were as following:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of the design and implementation features of an OTPD course on content and language integration and pedagogical translanguaging?
2. What is teachers' perceived impact of the OTPD course on their beliefs, teaching practice, and professional identity?

### 6.2 Participants

A total of 27 teachers working in both primary and secondary Italian international schools abroad enrolled in the training programme. Of these teachers, 9 never participated, 5 attended only the first two modules, and 13 completed the entire course. Additional information about the teachers who completed the course is given in the tables below.

Table 1. Additional information about primary school teachers

PRIMARY Teacher	Type of school-Country	Subjects	Teaching contract	Languages	Previous training in CLIL or Teaching Italian as a FL
TP1	Private bilingual school (US)	History, Geography, Math, Science, Italian	Local contract	Mother tongue: Italian Other languages: Spanish, English	yes
TP2	Italian government school (Argentina)	History, Geography, Math, Science, Italian	Government contract; 21-30 years teaching in the public school system in Italy; 5+ years teaching abroad	Mother tongue: Italian Other languages: Spanish, English	yes
TP3	Private bilingual school (Argentina)	History, Geography, Math, Science, Italian	Government contract; 21-30 years teaching in the public school system in Italy; 3 years teaching abroad	Mother tongue: Italian Other languages: Spanish, English	yes
TP4	Italian government	History, Geography, Math,	Government contract	Mother tongue: Italian	no

	school (Spain)	Science, Italian		Other languages: Spanish, English	
TP5	Private bilingual school (Russia)	Math, Science	Local contract; 4 years teaching abroad	Mother tongue: Italian Other languages: Russian, English	no
TP6	Private bilingual school (Turkey)	History, Geography, Math, Science	Local contract; less than a year teaching in Italy and abroad	Mother tongue: Italian Other languages: Turkish, English, Spanish, French	yes

Table 2. Additional information about secondary school teachers

SECONDARY Teachers	Country	Subjects	Teaching experience	Languages	Previous training in CLIL or Teaching Italian as a FL
TS1	Italian government school (Argentina)	Math, Physics	Government contract; 21-30 years teaching in the public school system in Italy; 2 years teaching abroad	Mother tongue: Italian Other languages: French, Spanish	no
TS2	Private bilingual school (Uruguay)	History of Art, Arts & Design	Local contract; less than a year experience teaching in Italy and abroad	Mother tongue: Italian Other languages: English, French, Spanish	no
TS3	Private bilingual school (Uruguay)	History, Philosophy	Local contract; less than a year experience teaching in Italy; 5 years teaching abroad	Mother tongue: Italian Other languages: English, Spanish, German	no
TS4	Italian government school (Turkey)	Math, Physics	Government contract; 21-30 years teaching in the public school system in Italy; 2-3 years teaching abroad	Mother tongue: Italian Other languages: English	yes
TS5	Italian government school (Turkey)	Math, Physics	Government contract; 21-30 years teaching in the public school system in Italy; 2-3 years teaching abroad	Mother tongue: Italian Other languages: English	yes
TS6	Italian government school (Spain)	Special needs, arts	Government contract; 21-30 years teaching in the public school system in Italy; 2 years teaching abroad	Mother tongue: Italian Other languages: Spanish, English	yes
TS7	Italian government school (Spain)	Math, Physics	Government contract	N/A	N/A

### 6.3 Data Collection Procedures

Three main procedures of data collection were used: feedback questionnaires, focus groups and the researcher's journal. Each procedure is described below.

#### 6.3.1 Feedback Questionnaires

The questionnaire was designed to investigate teachers' satisfaction of the OTPD course and the impact they perceived it had on their beliefs, teaching practice, and professional identity. The questionnaire consisted of 12 closed (dichotomic yes/no questions and Likert scales) and open-ended questions (Dörnyei, 2007). Teachers were asked to evaluate the overall experience of the course and then to indicate the extent to which they were satisfied with the different features of the course (topics covered, study materials, interaction with peers and with e-tutor, etc.). Following questions regarded teachers' perceptions of the impact of the course on their beliefs and perceived teaching practice as regards the role of languages in learning and teaching. Finally, teachers were asked if they would be willing to participate in future OTPD opportunities and the topics they believed would be important to further explore in the context of teaching through Italian abroad. The questionnaire was administered online via Google Form at the end of the course and was filled out by 11 participants (primary teachers: 5; secondary teachers: 6).

#### 6.3.2 Focus Groups

To explore teachers' perceptions further, two focus groups were organised: one with the primary teachers and one with the secondary teachers. Both focus groups were conducted online (Robinson, 2020; Matthews et al., 2018) using the Zoom platform and were videorecorded to enable future analysis. As for the participants, four primary and three secondary teachers agreed to join in the online discussions. A couple of days before the focus group, participants were asked to answer an introductory question on what they liked the most about the course on a Padlet wall and were sent specific technical information for their successful contribution to the online discussion. During the focus group, the researcher explained the objectives and ground rules of the discussion and asked for participants' confirmation of their consent to be videorecorded. Teachers were then invited to comment on their answer on the Padlet, discuss the challenges they experienced in participating in the course and the aspects they disliked, or thought could be improved, of the course in general, the impact the course had had on their teaching practice, and, finally, the future they envisioned for the project. Teachers were encouraged to speak one at the time and to intervene both orally and in writing by using the Zoom chat. The focus group with the secondary teachers was conducted in April 2021 and lasted one hour and a half, while the focus group with the primary teachers was conducted in May 2021 and lasted one hour. After the focus group, teachers received an e-mail thanking them for their participation and contribution.

#### 6.3.3 Research Journal

A journal (Dörnyei, 2007) was kept by the researcher to monitor teachers' behaviour, reflections, and participation during the course (e.g. forum posts on Moodle, e-mails,

informal discussion during the final synchronous meeting) and was mainly used in the discussion of the results.

#### 6.4 Data Analysis Procedures

As for the quantitative data collected through the questionnaire, the analysis was mainly descriptive. As for the qualitative data collected through the open-ended questions of the questionnaire and the focus groups, they were first transcribed and then analysed through Content Analysis (Krippendorff, 2004) using the MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2020 software. A bottom-up approach was followed, starting from the identification of descriptive themes, which were later interpreted, aggregated, and reduced, leading to more abstract categorisations.

### 7. Results

The first research question was: *What are teachers' perceptions of the design and implementation features of an OTPD course on content and language integration and pedagogical translanguaging?*

To answer this question, both feedback questionnaires and focus groups were used. As for the questionnaires, teachers gave different reasons for participating in the course (questions 1 and 2), such as the need to learn new skills to improve their teaching practice and the desire to network and share their experience with other teachers living and working abroad. Interestingly, two secondary teachers also described the course as an opportunity to respond to the lack of training received in relation to teaching in pluricultural and plurilingual contexts. The same issue emerged during the focus group:

*The Italian schools abroad have the same problems of those in Italy, that is not all teachers are motivated or equally trained. However, when you teach abroad you need to have certain competences [because you are dealing with students with different language abilities and who come from different cultures], but none of us [Italian government teachers] has them. We learned by experimenting on students (Focus Group secondary teachers)*

Other two teachers said they were interested in better understanding the role played by the language dimension in learning and teaching their subject. Teachers rated their overall experience of the course (question 3a) mostly as very positive (n=6) and positive (n=4), with only one participant claiming the experience had been negative. When asked to motivate their answers (question 3b), teachers referred positively to the relationship with the e-tutor, the materials provided and the reflective tasks. Teachers also particularly valued the practical aspect of the course:

*We did not simply have to study. We had different materials we could choose from, which were an excellent point of reference, but in the end, we also had to put into practice what we were learning and whether we had really understood. It was interesting. (Focus Group secondary teachers)*

However, not all aspects of the course were equally appreciated. As can be seen in Figure 1 (question 4a), peer collaboration, the timeline of the course, and the activities related to designing and experimenting the final lesson plans received mixed reviews.

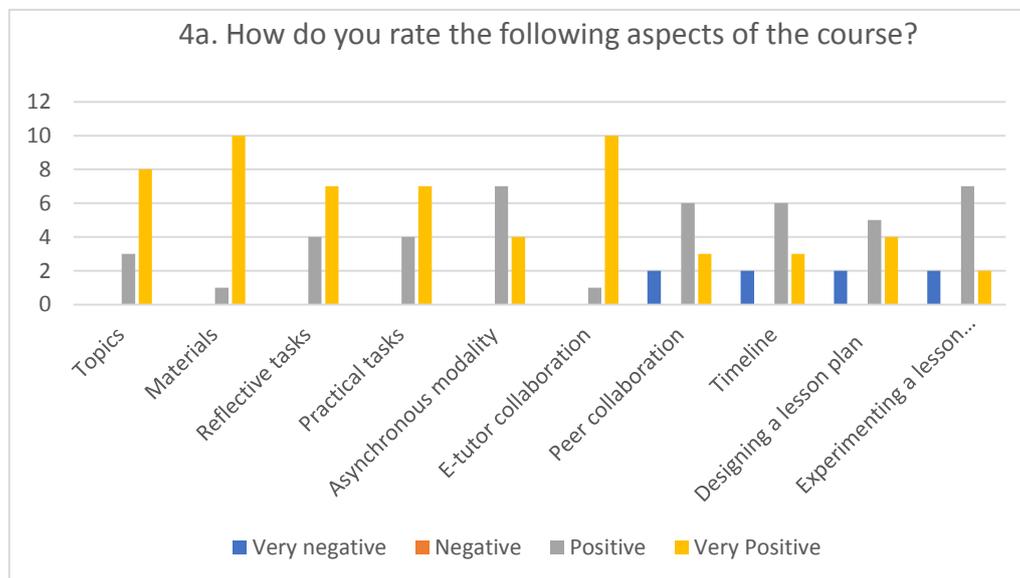


Figure 1. Answers from questionnaires (question 4a)

In answering question 4b (*Why?*), teachers described the interaction with other colleagues as poor or lacking. While some said this was due to their workload at school, which had increased during the last year as a result of the Covid-19 emergency, others argued it was the asynchronous modality which did not allow for much dialogue. The same emerged also in the focus groups:

*I would have loved to interact a bit more. The synchronous webinar gives you the opportunity to chat and it is what we are more used to because it is a more direct way to exchange views. In my experience, this is how you build a community of educators. (Focus group with primary teachers)*

Other reasons teachers gave for the lack of interaction were the time of the year in which the course took place, and the fact that secondary teachers were not divided by subject. For example, TS4 underlined that it was difficult to understand the e-tutor's feedback on other teachers' practical outputs when these focused on subjects different from their own, suggesting that a division by subject might work better for practical tasks. Also, some teachers agreed that they struggled to meet the deadlines for the completion of the tasks and that a course this intense would be easier to attend during the summer break. As regards the lesson plan tasks (designing and experimenting), some of the teachers did not enjoy having to prepare a lesson plan. One primary teacher said that a good teacher has to go with the flow of the lesson, and it is difficult to plan ahead because teaching needs to be flexible. As for the secondary teachers, one said that she found the planning task unnecessarily difficult, and she could not understand its rationale. However, not all teachers saw the lesson planning task as negative. During the focus group, TP3, for example, said that the lesson plan was useful in as much it offered a

springboard for reflection on her practice. When asked about the external features of the course (e.g. the Facebook page and the learning diary), teachers unanimously said they did not use them (question 5a). Different reasons were given (question 5b): two teachers said they were not aware of their existence, two said they did not feel the need, one that she did not participate because no one else did, and the remaining referred to time issues due to the Covid-19 emergency.

As for question 8, teachers felt that the topics that were most important for their teaching practice were: “theories of bilingual education”, “role of language in learning” and “scaffolding comprehension and production” (see Table 3).

Table 3. Answers from questionnaire (question 8)

	Not at all important	Not important	Important	Very important
Theories of bilingual education	/	/	1	10
Role of language in learning	/	/	2	9
Integrated objectives	/	/	4	7
Scaffolding comprehension	/	/	3	8
Scaffolding production	/	/	3	8
Promoting interaction	/	/	4	7
Error correction	/	/	4	7
Translanguaging strategies	/	/	4	7
Content and Language integrated assessment	/	1	5	4
Lesson planning	/	2	2	6
Experimentation + reflection	/	/	7	4

When asked if any of the contents had resulted difficult to apply (question 9a), 7 said no, while 4 said yes, but mainly referred to difficulties related to the Covid-19 emergency, which made it impossible to try out some of the related strategies and techniques (question 9b). In answering question 10a (*Would you take part in another course on language and content integration and pedagogical translanguaging*), the majority said yes, pointing at the necessity to deepen their understanding of pedagogical translanguaging and assessment (both formative and summative) (question 10b).

The second research question was: *What is teachers' perceived impact of the OTPD course on their beliefs, teaching practice, and professional identity?*

To answer this question both feedback questionnaires and focus groups were used. The majority of the teachers described the course as a professional eye-opening experience. In answering question 6a (*Do you feel the course has had an impact on your teaching practice?*), all teachers but one responded affirmatively, saying (question 6b) that they now had a better understanding of the role played by language(s) in content learning. One teacher for example said:

*I believe I have developed a deeper awareness...I see students from a different perspective, and I will no longer treat them as native speakers, but I will use the methodological tools explored during this course, I will go slower, I will make the contents more redundant through different activities and exercises, also using students' L1 when appropriate. (Feedback questionnaire, TS3)*

Teachers also said that they now tended to plan lessons paying much more attention to the language dimension, feeling it necessary to also design clear language objectives (TS7). Other teachers specifically referred to the impact the e-materials and e-reflections on pedagogical translanguaging had had towards the use of students' L1, which before the course was deemed as negative. TP3 said that the course motivated her to look for ways to validate the use of students' home languages to support both their content and Italian language learning. Also, she was now looking for more opportunities to collaborate with the local teachers to build bridges between the two curricula (the one in Italian and the one in the local language). In describing their perceived change after the course (questions 7a and 7b), some of the teachers capitalised on its importance in challenging their monolingual ideologies:

*Before I thought that for students to learn through Italian, an only Italian rule was necessary. Now I think that students' mother tongue is necessary for their full academic and linguistic growth. (Feedback questionnaire, TP1)*

*Before I thought that languages were separate entities and that to be able to understand a subject through an additional language you had to concentrate only on the language of instruction. Now, I'm certain that supporting students to compare languages could enrich their understanding. (Feedback questionnaire, TS2)*

In terms of teachers' professional identity, some teachers outlined how the course changed their own perception as simply content teachers into also language teachers. In the focus group, TS5 said that the course raised questions she had never even considered, and now she felt she was better able to attend to her students' difficulties with the language of instruction:

*My attitude towards the way I manage the lesson has totally changed. Before the course I was somewhere aware of my students' linguistic difficulties and I tried to attend to them as best as I could, but I only now realise I didn't do it systematically or organically. (Focus Group secondary teachers)*

Another teacher wrote a long reflection about the interconnectedness between mathematics and language, saying that if students do not have the linguistic means to express mathematics contents, then their learning suffers (TS4). This realisation brought this teacher, as well as others, to look for ways to integrate language objectives in her day-to-day work by also collaborating with the Italian language teacher(s) in her school. However, not everyone felt their approach to teaching had to change. One teacher, for example, claimed he had already attended CLIL methodological courses before and so was already aware of the role played by language in content learning (TS6). Another, instead, felt very strongly about not acting as a teacher of Italian for foreigners (TP2).

Finally, questions 11a and 11b asked teachers if they had had the opportunity to put into practice or talk about what they had learnt during the course. Of the 6 teachers who answered “yes”, the majority left very enthusiastic comments. For two teachers, the course had opened a discussion about strengthening the collaboration with the Italian language teachers in their school. For another, it had led to a discussion with the school department and to the necessity to organise a teacher training for the entire staff. TP4 said she had shared materials and reflections from the course with her colleagues, while TS3 claimed that there was now talk in her department to share lesson plans and discuss more about the role of language in content learning and the possible teaching implications.

## 8. Discussion

The data collected during the study has allowed us to understand the effectiveness of an OTPD course in relation to two aspects: subject teachers’ perceptions of the design and implementation features of the course, and its impact on their beliefs, instructional skills, and role as regards the integration of content and language integration and pedagogical translanguaging.

As for the first research question, it was found that the OTPD course was rated as mostly successful. Teachers highly valued the contents presented, saying that they were in line with their expectations and needs. Some of the teachers said that this was the first real opportunity they had had to learn and discuss about the objectives and main features of bilingual education confirming the existing gap in professional development for teachers working in the Italian network of educational institutions in the world (Castellani, 2018; Fazzi, 2021a).

In terms of teaching presence (see the CoI model in section 3), while teachers’ opinions were mostly positive about the role and functions of the e-tutor, the contents presented, and the range of materials offered, the asynchronous modality was perceived as less positive. This is in line with Menegale and Bier’s (2020) study, which found that teachers involved in online training on CLIL through a minority language were either not aware of the learning potential of online forum discussions or were not yet comfortable with them. In terms of social presence, while the e-trainer tried to implement strategies and prompts that would promote participants’ sharing of information rather than their mere reflection on content understanding (Yoon et al., 2020), teachers mostly responded during the weekend with the forum being silent during the week. Also, trainees rarely commented on or referred to their colleagues’ reflections and outputs, and only seldom opted to work collaboratively on practical tasks. If,

on the one hand, the asynchronous modality allowed teachers from different countries to participate in the same course and study the materials at their own pace (Meritt, 2016), on the other, it also made it more difficult for them “to connect with peers in deep and meaningful ways” (Kop, 2011 cited in Yoon et al., 2020, 352). Overall, social presence and interaction was perceived as low by teachers, and this led to a mild dissatisfaction and to a decreased level of participation (Yin et al., 2019) with a few teachers dropping out towards the end of the course. Unfortunately, as Akcaoglu and Lee (2018) point out, Learning Management Systems (LMSs) that mainly rely on asynchronous and text-based forums “often suffer from low levels of social interactions”, as they involve a limited number of sensory channels, which is likely to cause participants to feel both frustration and a lack of immediacy (Sung & Mayer, 2012 in idem, p. 2). Also, LMSs are not built around social concerns, unlike Facebook, Twitter, and other social media. This was also the reason why it was decided to combine the use of Moodle with that of a private Facebook group in our OTPD experience. However, while this strategy was successful in other courses, such as Techno CLIL (Cinganotto & Cuccurullo, 2019), it was not in ours. In Techno CLIL, teachers (around 7500) from different countries perceived Facebook as supporting, facilitating, and integrating the more formal communication taking place on Moodle. On the contrary, in our OTPD course, trainees either did not join the Facebook group or did not use it. When asked about the reasons, they either said they did not see the point of joining this external group because of time issues and lack of personal interest, or that no one else was posting and so they did not either (Akcaoglu & Lee, 2018).

Teachers in our study acknowledged that their lack of interaction was also due to the conditions brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. Certainly, the intensity of the course did not help, but they also felt overwhelmed by the increased teaching workload caused by the health emergency, leading many of them to psychological distress and professional burnout (see Pressley, 2021 for recent research on the challenges faced by teachers during the pandemic).

Finally, as regards cognitive presence, teachers highly appreciated the mixture of reflective and practical tasks and found that the feedback they received at the end of each week had been particularly useful in revising their work and evaluating their progression. Unfortunately, the metacognitive instrument (i.e. the learning diary) was not used by teachers either for lack of time or lack of understanding of its function. As research shows, writing reflective journals can be of great value for teachers on several aspects (Moon, 2013) such as making connections between existing and new understandings, tracking their learning over time and control it (Dyment & O’Connell, 2014), as well as developing positive attitudes towards lifelong learning. However, the use of reflective journals can be challenging for teachers as it requires being able to write critically, which is both time consuming and cognitively demanding. This is the reason why journal writing needs to be scaffolded through specific guidelines (Anderson, 1992), something that was not properly done during our OTPD experience.

As for the second research question, it was found that the OTPD experience had a positive impact on teachers’ beliefs, teaching practice, and professional identity. Before taking part in

our OTPD course, teachers perceived themselves as lacking both the theoretical and practical understanding of how to address the needs of their plurilingual and pluricultural classrooms (Fazzi, 2021a, 2021b). Fazzi's (2021a) results show that teachers had varying understanding of the role played by language in learning (Morton, 2016), also depending on whether they had already received training in CLIL and/or in Teaching Italian to foreigners. In general, teachers saw the course as an "eye opening" experience (Cammarata & Tedick, 2012). Some mentioned that thanks to the reflection on the role of language(s) in learning they now felt more aware of the difficulties language may pose on students and of the interrelationship between language and cognition (Llinares et al., 2012; Andrews & Lin, 2017). This new developed awareness also seems to have had an impact on teachers' perceived practice. Some teachers reported they would now try to integrate language objectives in their lesson planning and to implement different strategies to support both comprehension and production in the target language. Interestingly, one teacher said that she now felt "responsible" for her students' linguistic growth seeing herself as both a content and a language teacher. Moreover, trainees also claimed that after participating in the OTPD experience they realised how important it is to collaborate with the Italian language teacher(s) in their school to create connections and redundancy throughout the Italian-based curriculum with the aim of promoting students' academic as well as social language development (Cummins, 2000). In general, it can be claimed that almost all teachers who completed the course felt some sense of emotional dissonance (Kubaniyova, 2012) between their *actual* and *ideal* self, leading them to put into practice some of the inputs explored during the course. However, there were other teachers that perceived a limited or non-existing change in terms of their language awareness, teaching role or teaching practice due to personal or contextual factors as established by previous research (Opfer et al., 2011; Lo, 2019). One teacher (TP2), in particular, claimed she felt very strongly about teaching in the same way she would in Italy, despite the very different linguistic and cultural context. In talking about her role as a subject teacher, she often repeated how important it was for her not to lose her identity by adopting a methodology that would be more in line with that of a teacher of Italian to foreigners. In other words, she felt that by changing her responsibilities she would fail to respect her professional integrity, that is her teacher-persona and professional practice (Moate, 2011, p. 334). This feeling is not that uncommon in bilingual contexts in which teachers are asked to take on the responsibility of promoting language as well as content learning (Skinnari & Bovellan, 2016) and it can lead to a sense of vulnerability (Keltchtermans, 1996 quoted in idem, p. 335), especially when there is confusion about what is expected of teachers (Banegas, 2012). This seems to be the case of some of the teachers working in the context of the Italian network of educational institutions in the world, in which the lack of specific guidelines and initial training leaves them alone in negotiating their new role as bilingual teachers (Fazzi, 2021a).

In relation to pedagogical *translanguaging*, while most teachers challenged their monolingual beliefs and recognised the value of the strategies presented to promote both students' cognitive and linguistic scaffolding and affective gains, they felt unsure of how best to implement them. Indeed, teachers argued that most of the practical examples seen during the course related to teaching contexts that were very different from their own (Seltzer & Celic, 2011), and they believed it would be difficult for them to implement the same strategies in their classroom. This

is in line with other studies that have found that TPD effectiveness also depends on the use of inputs that are highly contextualized in teachers' day-to-day practice (see section 3). However, it also uncovers the need of teachers to experiment new strategies and reflect on them through an action research framework, which unfortunately was not implemented in our OTPD course because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Another result of the OTPD experience seems to have been a stronger collaborative ethos within the individual schools (Borg, 2018). Many of the participating teachers claimed that they had often shared what they were learning with other colleagues, and that in some cases this had led to a wider discussion on the implementation of the school curriculum and on the strategies to use to better promote students' linguistic development throughout the curriculum. However, it is challenging to assess the extent to which organizational change occurred as a result of our OTPD course "given the soft nature of PDI impacts of this kind" (Borg, 2018, p. 209).

## 9. Conclusion

This paper has focused on the effectiveness of an OTPD experience aimed at supporting subject teachers' integration of content and language learning from a plurilingual and pluricultural perspective in the context of the Italian network of educational institutions in the world. Specifically, effectiveness was explored in terms of teachers' perceptions of the design and implementation features of the course and of its impact on their beliefs, teaching practice, and professional identity.

The results collected through the questionnaires and focus groups demonstrate that the course was overall in line with teachers' needs and expectations. Teachers highly valued most of the design and implementation features, such as the contents presented, the types of tasks provided, and the relationship with the e-tutor. However, the asynchronous modality was not fully appreciated and was perceived by many as a hindrance to peer collaboration and interaction.

Despite this limitation, which was in part amplified by the Covid-19 emergency, teachers described the course as an eye-opening experience (Cammarata & Tedick, 2012). On the one hand, they said they had increased their awareness and skills in relation to content and language integration. On the other, they claimed that they had challenged their beliefs about their identity as content teachers *only*. Nevertheless, not everyone perceived the same degree of impact, confirming that teachers have different pathways of development depending on numerous personal and contextual factors (Kubaniyova, 2012; Lo, 2019). Moreover, while teachers said they had revisited their monolingual beliefs as a result of the OTPD experience, they also pointed at the need of receiving further support to successfully implement pedagogical translanguaging in their specific context.

The findings of this study have to be seen in light of two main limitations. The first one relates to the small number of participants, while the second one is that impact of the OTPD course was only investigated in terms of teachers' own perceptions. Future studies should collect different types of evidence at different points in time during the training so as to build

a more comprehensive picture of the process underlying bilingual teacher change. Despite these limitations, we feel our study has contributed to the ongoing debate of the factors that influence the effectiveness of an OTPD course by pointing out at the possible hindrances of asynchronous online activities. It has also underlined how subject teachers working in the Italian network of educational institutions in the world need to develop both a theoretical and practical understanding of bilingual education as it applies to their specific context and role. Further research is needed to understand how this can be accomplished taking into consideration the geographical distances and the contextual differences experienced by teachers working in the network.

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## Notes

Note 1. See this link for further information: <https://italiana.esteri.it/italiana/en/about-us/activities/history-italian-school-in-the-world/>

Note 2. See this link for further information: <https://italiana.esteri.it/italiana/en/opportunity/italian-schools-worldwide/>

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