Lecturers' Experiences of EMI: Analysis of a Questionnaire on the Impact of a Training Programme at a Northern Italian University

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Abstract

Over the past 15 years, English-Medium Instruction (EMI) courses have experienced significant growth. This expansion, driven in part by the increasing diversity of international students, has led to a growing need for lecturer training in EMI. Teaching in an EMI context demands a diverse set of competences, underscoring the importance of incorporating lecturers' perspectives into training programmes. This study investigates the responses to a questionnaire administered to 39 lecturers who participated in an EMI training programme at a university in northern Italy. The questionnaire focused on the lecturers' experiences, challenges, and preferences in delivering EMI courses, aiming to capture their post-training teaching habits to assess the impact of the training. The findings reveal that while the training effectively increased lecturers' awareness of the interplay between content and language, areas related to fostering classroom interaction require further development. In particular, despite the training's emphasis on interactive and student-centred approaches, many lecturers still predominantly use minimally interactive teaching methods. This suggests a need for ongoing enhancement of the training programme to better support lecturers in implementing

interaction-fostering strategies.

Keywords: EMI, Post-training questionnaire, EMI lecturers

1. Introduction

Although English-Medium Instruction (EMI) programmes were established in nearly all European countries by the mid-2000s, the recognition of the need for specialised lecturer training in EMI emerged more gradually. It was around 2015 that the first publications on EMI lecturer training began to surface (Costa, 2015; O'Dowd, 2018), and interest has notably increased since 2020. This growing focus is exemplified by the publication of a comprehensive book in 2020, Teacher Training for English-Medium Instruction in Higher Education, edited by Sánchez-Pérez María del Mar (Sánchez-Pérez, 2020). The following year, the Alicante Journal of English Studies dedicated its special issue (no. 34) entirely to EMI teacher training in higher education, under the editorship of Teresa Morell and Ksenia Volchenkova (Morell & Volchenkova, 2021). These developments reflect the expanding recognition of the importance of equipping lecturers with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively deliver EMI courses.

Accompanying the rapidly increasing interest in EMI lecturer training is a parallel trend in research that frames EMI within the internationalisation process (Dafouz, 2021; Jiménez-Muñoz, 2020; Ozer, 2020). This research emphasises the significance of multilingual perspectives (Dafouz, 2021; Nieto Moreno de Diezmas & Fernández Barrera, 2021), highlighting how the evolving landscape of EMI lecturer training is informed by these scholarly developments. The internationalisation process partially results in international students attending lectures partly through English, necessitating a different focus and approach in teaching that must be reflected in EMI lecturer training courses. This new cohort of students implies a type of EMI lecturing that also considers intercultural and multilingual classroom issues.

Lauridsen (2016) introduces the concept of an EMI Bermuda triangle, where language, pedagogy (see also Lauridsen and Lauridsen, 2018), and culture intersect, highlighting the necessity for these elements to be integrated into both teaching and training. Gustafsson (2020, p. 1072) further elaborates on this concept in an analysis of EMI lecturer training needs within the medical field, emphasising the complexities faced by EMI lecturers. Gustafsson observes that lecturers "must be able to capture the complexity of the EMI Bermuda triangle (linguistic descriptions of EMI competence need to be holistic and have the potential to include aspects of pedagogy and culture), while at the same time tackling the issue of the linguistic norm; they must meet the needs of a specific instructional context while in principle being transferable across instructional contexts; and they must lend themselves well to teacher training programs". This perspective underscores the multifaceted challenges of EMI instruction and the corresponding need for comprehensive training programmes that address these diverse demands. Along the same lines, Mariotti (2011, p. 506) underlined that: "it is evident that lecturing in English does not involve just a change in the language of instruction from L1 to L2. On the contrary, it requires specialised and varied competencies, ranging from L2 proficiency to intercultural awareness and knowledge of the pedagogical

principles. Then, it should be clear that being able to write scientific articles and to present papers in English at conferences does not automatically entail the ability to hold a whole university course in this language".

In Turkey, Ozer (2020) surveyed 102 lecturers to examine their teaching practices and preferences for EMI training using open-ended questions. The study highlighted a significant need for further training among lecturers. Galloway and Ruegg (2022) conducted a comprehensive study involving student and lecturer questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups with English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and content instructors in China and Japan. Their findings emphasise that "in addition to knowledge of the subject, the ability to give clear explanations, explain complex subject-specific concepts and be sensitive to students' needs are deemed to be the most important skills for EMI instructors" (Galloway & Ruegg, 2022, p. 9).

In another Asian context, Lo and Othman (2023) conducted a study in Malaysia that highlighted the necessity of EMI lecturer training. Based on a questionnaire completed by 227 respondents, they made several key recommendations. They suggest that EMI lecturer training programmes in fields such as applied sciences, social sciences, and humanities should be specifically tailored to the contexts and needs of the lecturers, incorporating their insider perspectives. They propose that EMI training should consist of two main components: pedagogical and linguistic training. To encourage lecturers to reflect on their teaching practices, they recommend using strategies such as peer observation, coaching, and mentoring between senior and junior lecturers. Furthermore, they propose that accreditation and certification of these training programmes could serve as additional incentives for EMI lecturers to engage in ongoing professional development. Therefore, EMI teaching clearly requires a highly complex skill set, which explains the growing number of EMI lecturer training programmes.

The paper is structured as follows: the next section reviews the existing literature on various types of EMI training courses and studies that utilise lecturer questionnaires, highlighting how post-training questionnaires are viewed not merely as tools for course feedback but also as a means of gaining insights into lecturers' practices after the training. Following the literature review, the paper outlines the study's methodological approach, provides contextual background on the specific training course related to this study, presents the findings from the questionnaire, and ends with a final discussion and conclusions.

1.1 Characteristics of EMI Lecturer Training Courses

Many international organisations have begun offering EMI lecturer training courses, including the British Council's Academic Teaching Excellence course and the Cambridge Certificate in EMI Skills. In Oxford, a group of professional developers designed an EMI course (see also Dearden & Beaumont, 2024), which provides practical tips on lesson planning, signposting content and language (see also Costa & Mariotti, 2021, for the Q-DRESS system), fostering language awareness, using diverse resources, creating interactive lessons, encouraging critical thinking, and involving lecturers in their training through reflection, self-assessment, and peer observation.

On a more local level, universities have started offering in-house EMI lecturer training courses, with both methodological and linguistic training typically organised by Language Centres. These courses often include microteaching sessions, as is the case with programmes such as those described by Borsetto and Bier (2021). Additionally, some institutions, like the Language Teaching Centre at the University of Freiburg, have implemented quality assurance programmes that include a certification process (Dubow & Gundermann, 2017).

The initial descriptive overviews of EMI training courses in Europe were provided by Costa (2015) and O'Dowd (2018). Costa (2015) gathered data through email communications with a network in Belgium, Croatia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Spain, finding out that most of the EMI training courses were organised by university Language Centres and delivered by professionals with varying linguistic backgrounds. O'Dowd (2018) conducted a survey from 2014 to 2015, examining EMI training, accreditation, requirements, and standards across 70 European universities in Spain, Austria, Italy, Sweden, the Netherlands, Germany, and France. Survey respondents included international office staff, directors of Language Centres, vice-rectors, and programme coordinators. The findings revealed that approximately 40% of the universities had EMI programmes, with only 30% considering training to be unimportant. Around 68% of the universities offered training courses, with 77% of these focusing on linguistic skills. The duration of the courses varied, with 36% providing training that lasted between 15 and 30 hours. Sixty percent of the universities did not assess teaching styles or linguistic abilities, although most required lecturers to have at least a B2-C1 level of proficiency.

More recently, Deroey (2023) conducted a systematic review of 25 articles from 18 countries on teacher training in EMI. The review found that, in terms of content, EMI training programmes broadly included components focused on language, pedagogy, communication, and EMI awareness. Delivery of these programmes occurred equally in pre-service and in-service contexts, with most training being face-to-face, although a significant number were blended. The primary formats included group classes, individual support, and peer learning, with teaching practice being a notable component. Training was predominantly provided by English language professionals and applied linguists, occasionally in collaboration with experts in didactics, EMI, or specific disciplines. New trends identified include the incorporation of multimodal training (Costa & Mair, 2022; Morell, 2020) and an increased use of online blended delivery methods.

1.2 Lecturer Questionnaires and EMI Training

Most research studies on EMI lecturer training courses include an empirical component involving lecturer questionnaires. These questionnaires are utilised both as a needs analysis tool for planning EMI lecturer training courses (Ball & Lindsay, 2013; Costa & Grassi, 2022; Dafouz, 2021; Guarda & Helm, 2017; Ozer, 2020; Pagèze & Lasagabaster, 2017; Piquer-Píriz & Castellano-Risco, 2021; Pusey, 2024) and as a means of gathering feedback post-training (Borsetto & Bier, 2021; Costa & Grassi, 2022; Guarda & Helm, 2017; Pagèze & Lasagabaster, 2017). The studies discussed below are organised by geographical region and presented in chronological order within each region.

Outside of Europe, Pusey (2024) examined an EMI support course in Brazil, providing an overview of professional development (PD) courses through both an environmental analysis (considering situational factors such as time, learner profiles, and the voluntary nature of the course) and a needs analysis, which included a survey of 34 lecturers. The course, which lasted 48 hours, concluded with a final evaluation that included a portfolio containing a lesson plan and microteaching episodes, among other components. The course covered various topics, including the internationalisation of higher education, EMI, English as an additional language, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), EMI and TESOL, methodologies and practices in higher education, and reflective teaching.

1.2.1 Europe

In Europe, a significant portion of research on EMI training is focused on Spain. Ball and Lindsay (2013) offer an early example, detailing the support provided to EMI lecturers at the University of the Basque Country. Their study categorised courses based on the lecturers' levels, informed by a needs analysis questionnaire completed by 44 lecturers. The findings underscored concerns about pronunciation and assessment, issues that were also raised by students. Banks (2018) conducted a comprehensive study at a Spanish university, employing various resources such as lecturer questionnaires, field notes from both microteaching and real teaching, and lesson plans. The study found that while lecturers generally have a positive attitude towards English and recognise its significance, they have reservations about shifting to a more student-centred teaching approach. Furthermore, the study revealed a need for additional linguistic training, especially in pronunciation, and emphasised the high value lecturers placed on microteaching sessions. This study highlights the necessity for EMI training programmes to be tailored rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach.

As noted, interest in EMI training surged beginning in 2020. Fortanet-Gómez (2020) described a course titled Basic Notions to Introduce EMI in the Classroom for junior teachers at Universitat Jaume I. The empirical component of the study involved a questionnaire administered to 15 lecturers, revealing that their primary concern was their English proficiency.

A longitudinal monitoring programme, conducted by Rubio-Cuenca and Perea-Barberá (2021), spanned six years and tracked the Bilingual Education Programme at Escuela Superior de Ingeniería in Cádiz, Spain. This programme included feedback and discussion sessions with EMI lecturers, divided into two types: one focused on lecturers' views and language biographies, and the other on lesson plans and classroom observations. These sessions underscored the transformative impact of EMI lecturer training on language awareness.

As part of a needs analysis, a survey was distributed to 2,091 lecturers to assess their views on EMI within the broader context of internationalisation (Dafouz, 2021). Initially, EMI lecturer training primarily focused on English language proficiency. However, over time, it has evolved to address pedagogical issues, acknowledging that teaching through English involves a complex set of skills. At Complutense University, a range of courses is available, including academic writing, conference presentation strategies, and the INTER-COM course,

which focuses on communication strategies for teaching and learning in the international classroom. Dafouz (2021) highlights the importance of in-house professional developers, who bring a deep understanding of the context and an appreciation for local teaching traditions.

A survey questionnaire was distributed to assess the training needs of 27 lecturers at the University of Extremadura, revealing insights into lecturers' self-perceptions (Piquer-Píriz & Castellano-Risco, 2021). The findings showed that, although lecturers felt confident in their English language proficiency, they considered themselves less competent in methodological aspects.

Using Qualtrics, a survey was conducted with six lecturers whose English proficiency levels ranged from B2 to C2, with four having prior experience with EMI training (Beltrán-Palanques, 2021). This group emphasised the critical importance of communication and pedagogical skills in EMI settings. They identified discourse, diction, and interactional strategies as essential components of EMI courses, while they viewed materials design, multilingualism, and multiculturalism as less significant. Furthermore, the respondents placed limited importance on multimodality, suggesting a need for greater awareness and training in this area.

In other parts of Europe, Pagèze and Lasagabaster (2017) investigated the impact of EMI training at the University of Bordeaux, which began in 2014. The training course focused on both linguistic and pedagogical aspects, providing support in programme and materials design, offering one-to-one sessions, lunchtime conversation sessions, pairing content and language teachers, and including a three-day course on Teaching Academic Content through English. The study analysed responses from pre-training (167 respondents) and post-training (169 respondents) questionnaires, as well as a six-month follow-up (91 lecturers). The findings indicated a notable shift in perspective due to the training: lecturers moved from initial concerns about their language skills to focusing more on EMI classroom situations and identifying aspects of language that enhance classroom communication. In the follow-up, lecturers reported experimenting with some of the tools introduced during the training and expressed positive feedback about networking opportunities with other lecturers. From a linguistic and identity perspective, they increasingly saw themselves as users of a lingua franca rather than striving to meet the unattainable standards of a native speaker.

A language development programme for EMI lecturers at the University of Rijeka in Croatia was examined, highlighting the essential role of academic English language competence and the need for specialised training (Drljača Margić & Vodopija-Krstanović, 2018). The programme, spanning 30 hours over a month and a half, focused on developing productive skills through role plays, debates (speaking), and academic writing, with an additional focus on materials design. The study involved 60 teacher surveys featuring self-assessment and reflection, alongside 140 feedback forms from microteaching sessions.

1.2.2 Italy

In Italy, the context of the present study, the initial EMI training courses took place, for example, at the University of Padua and the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia.

Guarda and Helm (2017) administered a questionnaire to 115 lecturers before the training and used a survey for post-training feedback. Out of these, 28 lecturers responded, revealing recurring themes such as varied experiences with previous EMI teaching (both positive and negative), concerns about fluency and oral skills, and a need for a more student-centred approach. At the end of the training course, lecturers reported high satisfaction levels, noting benefits such as the creation of a community of practice, the promotion of student-centred learning, the integration of technology, and strategies for internationalising the curriculum. This study emerged from a training project by the University of Padua Language Centre, LEAP, which began in 2013.

The Lecturing in English I course, conducted at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia in 2011, integrated theoretical aspects of the lecture genre with practical components like materials preparation, subject-specific vocabulary, signposting, reformulations, and microteaching sessions. Over time, it expanded into Lecturing in English II and Lecturing in English III, addressing topics like assessment, materials design, managing a multicultural classroom, and enhancing English language competencies (Long, 2017).

At the University of Verona, an EMI course initially focused on language skills was redesigned based on a questionnaire survey sent to 21 participants. The updated course incorporated greater awareness of the CEFR, classroom management, materials adaptation, reflection, and mentoring (Hartle, 2020).

Picciuolo and Johnson (2020) surveyed 120 lecturers from the University of Bologna, specifically in engineering and economics, and conducted interviews. The findings highlighted several key themes, including pronunciation and accent, the use of humor, improvisation, and various pedagogical issues.

Borsetto and Bier (2021) described an academic lecturing programme initiated in 2016 at the University of Venice. The programme aimed to enhance intercultural competence, promote innovation in teaching within multilingual contexts, engage students more effectively, raise awareness of teaching practices, and improve English language proficiency. The course featured nine two-and-a-half-hour sessions delivered in a blended and online format, including microteaching sessions. Following the course, a feedback questionnaire distributed to 111 lecturers via Google Forms received 42 responses.

At the University of Trento, an EMI lecturer survey was conducted by the LIQuID laboratory to explore the implications of EMI teaching (Polli, 2021). With 139 responses from 356 lecturers, findings revealed alignment with the university's internationalisation agenda and identified clarity and intelligibility as key skills, while about 77% reported not using translanguaging with Italian.

Finally, Costa and Grassi (2022) conducted a study involving a student questionnaire administered both before and after the training. The course, organised by a Language Centre at a university in northern Italy, included an introduction to EMI, 14 hours of B2-/C1-level language instruction, and a final micro-teaching session. The initial questionnaire received responses from 57 EMI lecturers, with 7 additional respondents completing the follow-up

questionnaire. The needs identified encompassed both language proficiency and teaching methodology, and lecturers observed a shift in their teaching persona during EMI.

1.3 Research Questions

Considering that teaching in EMI settings requires a diverse set of competences (Ball & Lindsay, 2013; Costa & Grassi, 2022; Dafouz, 2021) and the importance of incorporating lecturers' perspectives in EMI training courses, we set out to carry out this investigation to answer the following research question:

1) Do the post-training teaching views of EMI lecturers reveal that they have incorporated any topics from the training programme?

2) Do they highlight any critical areas that still need improvement?

2. Method

We adopted a mixed-method approach to thoroughly investigate the post-training teaching views of EMI lecturers. Our questionnaire, which included both open-ended and closed questions, was designed to capture rich, contextual data alongside specific, measurable information (Dörnyei, 2007; Creswell, 2014). This methodology allowed us to balance the depth of qualitative insights with the precision of quantitative data, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the incorporation of training topics as well as the identification of areas needing improvement.

2.1 Context Description

The data were collected at a middle-sized university located in northern Italy. This multi-disciplinary institution provides a diverse sample of respondents from various academic fields. Its size offers a representation of the average academic population compared to very large universities in Italian metropolises. Additionally, this university has a geographically diverse population, including both national and international students (Costa & Mariotti, 2020). To enhance the quality of EMI lecturing and support internationalisation, the university has implemented EMI training courses. These courses, which began in a pilot phase in 2021, have now become part of a compulsory quality assurance programme with a certification procedure.

2.2 Description of the EMI Training Programme

Organised by the university's Language Centre, the programme was developed based on a needs analysis informed by the literature on existing EMI training programmes, addressing the complexity of EMI lecturing (Ball & Lindsay, 2013; Dafouz, 2021; Guarda & Helm, 2017; Ozer, 2020; Pagèze & Lasagabaster, 2017; Piquer-Píz & Castellano-Risco, 2021). Recognising the dual need for these programmes to be general yet adaptable to specific contexts, as emphasised by Gustafsson (2020), prior to the first edition, an environmental analysis was also conducted, considering factors such as the number and type of potential participants based on the courses offered by this institution. The programme specifically targets key areas such as language, pedagogy, communication, and EMI awareness. It aims to

develop teaching strategies that include effective signposting of content and language, lesson planning, enhancing language awareness, utilising various resources, creating interactive lessons, stimulating critical thinking, and fostering lecturer engagement through reflection, self-assessment, and peer observation (Costa & Mariotti, 2021; Dearden & Beaumont, 2024). Additionally, the programme places particular emphasis on the psychological aspects of lecturing in English and encourages lecturers to adopt a student-centred perspective. The psychological component focuses on addressing the challenges lecturers face when teaching in English, helping them develop a more confident L2-self (Dörnyei, 2009). Many EMI lecturers report feeling that they cannot 'be themselves' in English, particularly when it comes to using humor and improvisation (Picciuolo & Johnson, 2020). This can hinder their ability to engage in meaningful interaction with students. Student-centred teaching requires lecturers to rethink their teaching styles, becoming more attuned to the difficulties students may encounter in accessing and negotiating knowledge in an L2 (Klaassen & De Graaff, 2001, p. 282). It also encourages students to take a more active role in co-constructing knowledge (Cots, 2013, p. 117), thus shifting away from a top-down approach to knowledge transmission and incorporating more interaction in their lectures.

Before the course begins, lecturers are required to take a placement test to assess their level of proficiency, with participation permitted only for those at a minimum B2 level . Considering that EMI training programmes should be highly personalised (Banks, 2018), participants are not grouped by proficiency level. Instead, instructors tailor the language lessons based on test results and observations during the initial classes, providing targeted assignments and reinforcement suited to individual needs. Two courses are offered each year, with a maximum of 12 participants per group. Participation is voluntary, and the course spans 26 hours over three weeks. At the end of the course, participants receive a certificate issued by the university's Language Centre.

The first two classes are conducted by two English language lecturers specialising in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), one of whom is also an expert in Psychology. These sessions provide an overview of the course, incorporating critical thinking activities and discussions that explore individual opinions and experiences. Subsequently, lecturers are divided into two groups: humanities (history and linguistics) and STEM (engineering, biology, medicine and physics) fields. Each group receives training from native English-speaking experts. In line with observations from other training programmes (Borsetto & Bier, 2021; Deroey, 2023), and based on lecturer needs highlighted in the literature (Banks, 2018), at the end of the course, participants are required to conduct a microteaching session. They receive feedback from both peers and instructors, with a pair of instructors assigned to each group. This activity aims to encourage participants to apply and test the strategies learned during the course with their peers and instructors. The course is conducted entirely online to accommodate the needs of lecturers, many of whom, such as physicians, have additional professional duties. Instructors use and promote the use of multimodal materials (Costa & Mair, 2022; Morell, 2020).

2.3 Questionnaire Design and Sampling Procedure

An anonymous questionnaire consisting of 24 questions (20 closed and 4 open-ended) was administered in Italian to 39 lecturers after the course to gain insights into their views and identify critical areas that might need further attention. Both criterion and convenience sampling methods were used in selecting the sample, resulting in an 80% response rate. The questionnaire covered topics such as the profile of participating lecturers and their courses, experiences and challenges in EMI teaching, types of lectures conducted after the EMI training, the relationship between content and language, and type of assessment. To minimise the fatigue that respondents may experience when completing lengthy or complex items, the questionnaire was designed to be concise and straightforward (Converse & Presser, 1986). Closed-ended questions utilised a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (minimum) to 5 (maximum) agreement, to effectively capture attitudes and opinions (Dörnyei, 2003).

2.4 Statistics and Data Analysis

Closed-ended questions were analysed using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis between numerical variables. For the correlation analysis, independent variables were plotted on the x-axis and dependent variables on the y-axis. Linear regression models were employed to identify trends, with a focus on variable pairs demonstrating a correlation greater than 50%.

Open-ended responses were analysed through thematic analysis, adopting a lexical-semantic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This process was inductive and iterative, involving multiple readings of the data to develop initial and axial codes (Saldaña, 2021).

3. Results

In this section, we present the results of the post-training questionnaire. The analysis explores the following thematic areas: the type of lecture and interaction in EMI, the relationship between content and language in EMI, and the type of assessment in EMI.

3.1 Profile of EMI Lecturers

Participants are predominantly Italophones, with one respondent identifying English as their first language and another as Greek. Experiences abroad among respondents were mixed, with 21 having international experience and 18 having none. Teaching experience in EMI courses varied from 0 to 10 years, with an average of approximately 2 years and a median of 1 year. This median suggests that at least half of the respondents were relatively new to teaching in English, which may impact their teaching methodologies and interaction with students.

Figure 1. Years of teaching experience

The respondents ranged in age from 31 to 69 years, with an average age of approximately 49 years. The age distribution was relatively uniform and broad, reflecting a diverse range of experience levels among the participants.
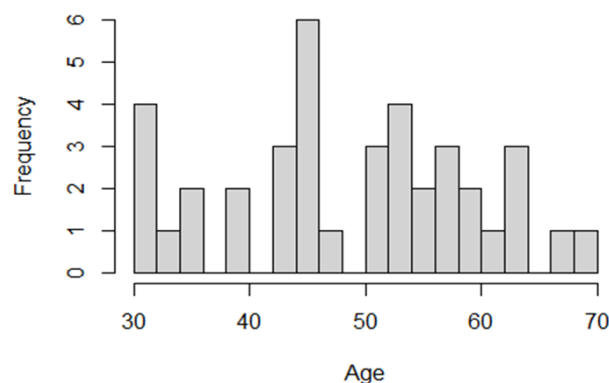

Figure 2. Age range of respondents

The number of course credits taught by the respondents varied from 1.5 to 21, with 6 credits being the most common. The majority of the courses were at the Master's level (34), followed by 2 at the Bachelor's level and 3 at the Doctoral level.

Regarding the presence of international students, 12 lecturers reported that more than 50% of their students were international, 9 indicated between 25% and 50%, and 4 stated between 10% and 25%. The remaining respondents either could not specify or reported having no international students.

Class sizes were generally small, with only one respondent indicating a class size of more than 100 students. Eighteen lecturers reported having classes with 1 to 15 students, 10 had classes with 16 to 30 students, and 3 had class sizes ranging from 61 to 100 students.

3.2 Type of Lecture and Interaction

When asked about the type of lecture they conduct after completing the EMI training course, 35 out of 39 lecturers (90%) reported that their lectures are predominantly monologic in style. Only 4 lecturers indicated that they conduct interactive lectures. This suggests that most lecturers either continue to use traditional monologic lecture formats, which remain common in Italy, or have reduced the level of interaction in their EMI lectures. This low amount of teacher-students interaction mirrors the way lecturers generally deliver the lectures in Italian and may be fostered by the insecurities regarding their proficiency in English.
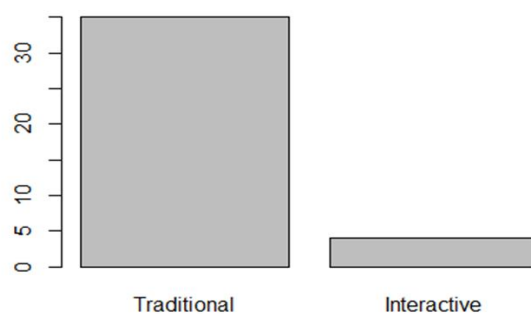
Figure 3. Type of lecture

This difficulty with the English language is supported by several open-ended responses from the lecturers:

−   I have some lexical issues and I use some syntactic constructions which come from Italian (lecturer 4)

−   I lack the vocabulary needed to feel at ease in improvising (lecturer 31)

−   I lack fluency and the use of irony (lecturer 23)

−   I do not have the time to reflect on how to construct the sentences so I am worried of making grammar mistakes (lecturer 22)

−   I have issues with a correct pronunciation (lecturer 5)

−   Issues with limited vocabulary (lecturer 13)

−   Sometimes I need to have a look at my notes so as to not lose the thread of discourse (lecturer 29)

When asked whether they believed it was important to have linguistic support from an expert in English, the majority of respondents (32) answered affirmatively, while only 7 did not.

Regarding interaction strategies, lecturers were asked to rate their difficulties in responding to students' questions by rephrasing on a Likert scale. The scores ranged from 1 to 4, with an average score of 2.026. This suggests that rephrasing is not commonly used among this sample of respondents to improve understanding.
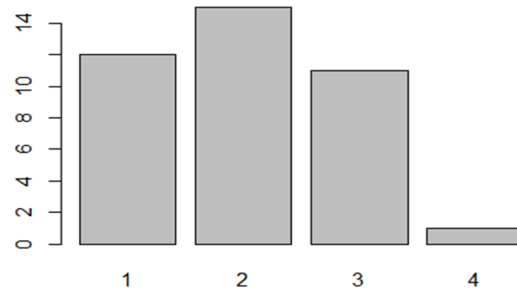
Figure 4. Answering students' questions by rephrasing

The question on the challenges of involving students in discussions, critical reflections, and group work received scores ranging from 1 to 5, with an average of 2.615. This indicates that, despite the training, lecturers still find it challenging to effectively engage students in these activities within an EMI class.

Additionally, there was a negative correlation between the scores on the difficulty of involving students in discussions, critical reflections, and group work and the number of years respondents had been teaching EMI courses. The regression model reveals that as the number of years teaching EMI increases, the perceived importance of student involvement tends to decrease. The low p-value (0.0006) on the model F statistic (14.07) supports rejecting the null hypothesis of no linear relationship, indicating a significant dependence between the two variables. This finding suggests a "fatigue" effect among more experienced lecturers, where longer teaching experience correlates with a decreased emphasis on interactive methods in EMI courses.
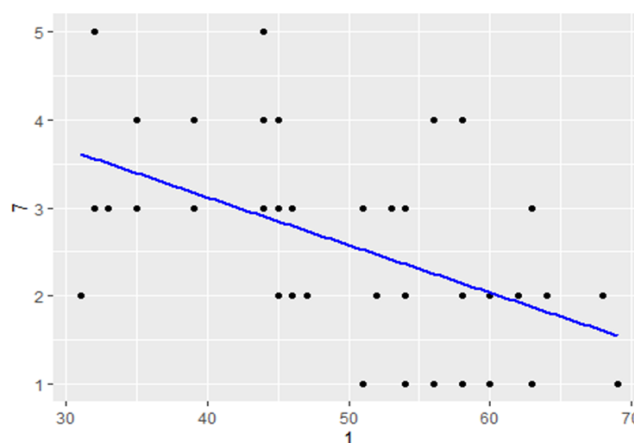

Figure 5. Regression model for questions 7 and 1

When asked about the use of Italian in their EMI lectures, 12 lecturers responded affirmatively while 27 reported that they do not use Italian. This suggests a notable inclination towards using English exclusively, which may be an attempt to address linguistic

challenges and potentially enhance interaction. However, one lecturer noted:

− I have issues in expressing the same empathy that I have in Italian, so I do not improvise and I just explain concepts with no frills (Lecturer 1)

This comment highlights the struggle to convey nuanced expressions and engagement in English, reflecting the difficulties faced by lecturers in fully utilising their language skills.

When asked whether they would feel comfortable delivering a lecture in English to a class primarily composed of Italophones, 14 lecturers responded negatively, while 18 felt they would be at ease. However, two lecturers shared concerns, noting that:

− The students do not master the English language (lecturer 23)

− The students have problems speaking in English, so they often reply in Italian (lecturer 7)

These comments reflect apprehensions about the students' English proficiency and the potential impact on communication and interaction in the classroom.

3.3 Interplay Between Content and Language

This section examines the relationship between content and language in EMI classes following the training course, as reflected in the dataset. When lecturers were asked about their experiences with using interaction to check students' understanding of the content (measured on a Likert scale), the scores ranged from 1 to 5, with an average of 2. This average suggests that while respondents generally do not experience significant difficulties in interacting with students to ensure comprehension of the course material, they also do not find it particularly easy. This finding is noteworthy given that ensuring students' understanding of content is a crucial aspect of effective classroom management

Similarly, when lecturers were asked about their difficulties with using interaction to assess students' language comprehension (measured on a Likert scale), the scores ranged from 1 to 4, with an average of 2.179. This figure is close to the average score for interaction aimed at content comprehension, suggesting that the challenges in interacting to gauge language comprehension are nearly equivalent to those encountered when ensuring understanding of the course material.

Given the descriptive statistics results, a correlation analysis was performed between the interaction with students to verify their understanding of content (independent variable) and the interaction to assess their understanding of language (dependent variable). The regression model indicates a positive linear relationship: as the emphasis on ensuring content comprehension increases, so does the attention to language comprehension. The regression coefficient has value 0.676, while the intercept of the model is 0.827. The model F-statistic is 56.52, with p-value 0.0000000058, well below the standard threshold of 0.05: the independent variable has a significant effect on the response.
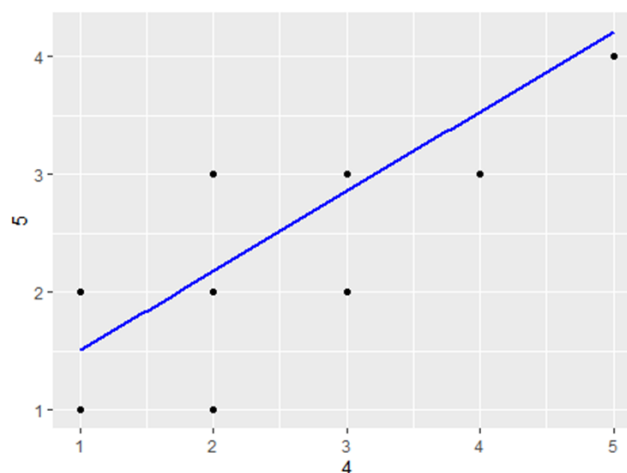
Figure 6. Regression model for questions 5 and 4

Regarding the relationship between content and language, lecturers frequently noted in their open-ended responses how these elements are closely intertwined and inseparable. This perspective might be a by-product of the training course, reflecting an increased awareness of the interplay between content delivery and language use in EMI settings.

−   If I get tired, and this happens more often than when I teach through Italian, I have diffculties in keeping control of both the language and the subject-matter at the same time (lecturer 11)

−   Issues in expressing conceptual nuances with language (lecturer 28)

−   Issues in finding the right words to express complex concepts in a comprehensible way (lecturer 14)

−   Difficulties in trying to concentrate on content without having to worry to find the right words (lecturer 7).

3.4 Assessment

According to the respondents, students are assessed through various methods: 11 lecturers use oral exams, 9 use written exams, and 10 use a combination of both. Additionally, 6 lecturers require students to prepare a presentation. A correlation analysis was conducted to explore the relationship between the perceived importance of understanding content and the perceived importance of student assessment. The regression model indicates that as the importance placed on ensuring students' understanding of content increases, so does the perceived importance of student assessment. The regression coefficient has value 0.706, while the intercept of the model is 0.483. The model F-statistic is 29.55, with p-value 0.0000039, well below the standard threshold of 0.05: the independent variable has a significant effect on the response.
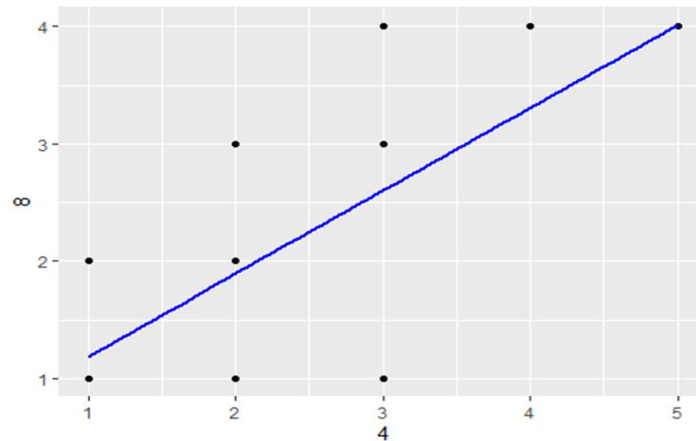
Figure 7. Regression model for questions 8 and 4

Similarly, when examining the correlation between the perceived importance of language comprehension and the perceived importance of assessment, the regression model reveals a significant relationship. As the perceived importance of assessing students' language comprehension increases, so does the perceived importance of overall student assessment. The regression coefficient has value 0.728, while the intercept of the model is 0.303. The model F-statistic is 20.55, with p-value 0.000062, well below the standard threshold of 0.05: the independent variable has a significant effect on the response. This indicates a significant dependence between the importance placed on language comprehension and the importance of assessment.
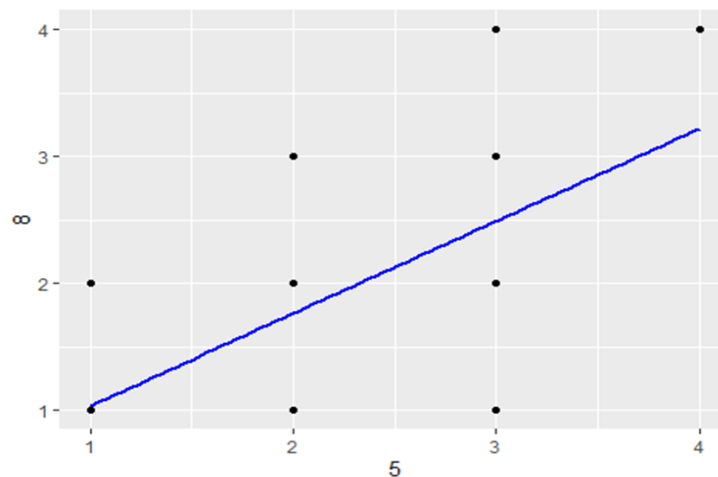

Figure 8. Regression model for questions 8 and 5

These results highlight a notable interest in assessment within EMI contexts, reflecting its integral role in evaluating both content and language comprehension. The data suggest that the training course effectively contributed to lecturers' awareness and emphasis on assessment, demonstrating its value in addressing both content and language challenges in EMI environments.

4. Discussion

Our research question investigates the impact of EMI training courses at a medium-sized university in northern Italy, specifically focusing on how these courses effect change among participants and raise awareness of critical areas needing improvement. The study highlights various aspects of EMI teaching, including the types of lectures delivered, class interaction dynamics, the perceived relationship between content and language, and the assessment methods employed in EMI courses.

Our data reveal that, despite the emphasis of the training programme on fostering interaction and promoting a student-centred approach, most surveyed lecturers still tend to conduct formal, minimally interactive lectures. This aligns with previous research by Long (2017), who noted similar trends where lecturers exhibited reluctance to adopt more interactive methodologies, even when training emphasised their importance. Our closed-question responses indicate that strategies such as rephrasing to clarify messages, involving students in discussions and group work, and switching to Italian to resolve communication issues remain underutilised. Moreover, the data highlights the challenges students face in expressing themselves in English during class. This reluctance to promote interaction may stem from the lecturers' insecurities about their English proficiency, a concern echoed in the literature by Hartle (2020), who found that many lecturers felt unprepared to facilitate interactive environments in EMI settings. This is further supported by open-ended responses, where 32 out of 39 participants expressed a desire for additional support from an English language expert. This suggests that the EMI training programme should continue to emphasise and potentially enhance its focus on interaction strategies. Given that the classes are small, with an average maximum of 30 students, they are well-suited for organising and monitoring interactive activities, presenting a significant opportunity for lecturers to develop these strategies further. Interestingly, our data also suggest that less experienced lecturers may be more open to experimenting with these interactive methods, while those with more experience may find them less feasible, a finding that resonates with Dafouz's (2021) observations regarding the varying adaptability of lecturers based on their teaching experience.

Furthermore, the data indicate a significant relationship between the importance of content comprehension and language comprehension in interactive settings. As the focus on understanding the content increases, so does the emphasis on comprehending the language used. This suggests that participants perceive content and language as interconnected, a perspective that may have been influenced by the training course, as reflected in the open-ended responses. This view aligns with the findings of Rubio-Cuenca and Perea-Barberá (2021), who noted the importance of addressing both content and language in EMI training. Finally, an analysis of assessment data reveals that the perceived importance of student assessment correlates with the necessity of checking students' understanding of both content and language. This correlation further underscores the awareness of the interplay between content and language in EMI, which was a key focus of the training programme and supports the conclusions drawn by Borsetto and Bier (2021) regarding the need for a holistic approach in EMI assessment practices.

5. Conclusions

The findings of this study highlight the positive impact of the training programme on lecturers' awareness of the EMI Bermuda triangle (Lauridsen, 2016) — the complex skill set necessary for effective EMI teaching. It has notably enhanced their understanding of the interplay between content and language (Rubio-Cuenca & Perea-Barberá, 2021) while also identifying areas that require further attention, particularly in fostering interaction. However, there are limitations to the findings, including a small sample size from a single university, which may not fully represent the national context. Despite these limitations, the results suggest that the training programme has made a meaningful contribution. Moving forward, it is essential for the training programme to continue emphasising the theoretical rationale behind student-centred lecturing approaches and to provide practical strategies for enhancing classroom interaction. This focus will help ensure that lecturers are well-equipped to navigate the complexities of EMI teaching and effectively engage their students.

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