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A Comparative Analysis of English-Medium Instruction at the Universities of Messina and Trento: Lecturers' Opinions, Goals, and Concerns

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Abstract

This paper aims to partake in the ongoing debate on English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in Higher Education (HE), starting from the lecturers' point of view. It is grounded on the empirical data of a quantitative research originally conceived by the Interdisciplinary Laboratory for the Quality and Innovation of Didactics (LIQuID) of the University of Trento and then extended to the University of Messina. As a first step, LIQuID developed a questionnaire to investigate EMI lecturers' opinions on institutional and didactic objectives and teaching practice (codeswitching, in-class interaction, teaching tools), comparing, when possible, their experience of teaching in their first language (L1) and second language (L2). The data collected refer to EMI modules offered in Trento in the academic year 2018-2019. Since several studies about HE in Italy highlighted how the approaches towards EMI vary between Northern and Southern Italian universities (Pulcini & Campagna, 2015; Costa, 2017), as a further expansion of this research project, Trento's questionnaire was proposed to Messina's lecturers who taught EMI classes during the academic year 2023-2024. This enlarged the dataset and made it possible to carry out a comparative analysis of these two HE contexts. This paper provides an overview of this comparison by discussing similarities and differences in the opinions and experiences of EMI lecturers in Trento and Messina. By examining the findings of this ongoing research project, this study ultimately reflects on the role of language in EMI lecturing and the changes in the lecturers' approaches to teaching in L1 and L2.

Keywords: English as a medium of instruction, EMI lecturers, Internationalisation, Higher education, Questionnaire, Comparative analysis

1. Introduction

In contemporary Higher Education (HE) contexts, the adoption of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) is a steadily growing phenomenon worldwide (Galloway & McKinley, 2022; Rose et al., 2023). A general definition of EMI has been provided by Macaro et al. (2018, p. 37), who described it as "[t]he use of the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English".

In Europe, the Bologna Process in 1999 and the subsequent increase of mobility projects and transnational networks in HE accelerated the exponential growth of EMI (Smit & Dafouz, 2012; Wächter & Maiworm, 2014). In this context, the adoption of EMI programmes has become a milestone for universities aiming to boost their international profile (Bowles and Murphy, 2020).

Several studies have emphasised how implementing EMI programmes may usher in potential benefits but also numerous complexities and concerns (Dearden, 2014; Macaro et al., 2018), starting from the dangerous convergence of internationalisation and Englishisation of academia (Murphy & Zuaro, 2021; Wilkinson and Gabriëls, 2021). Literature focusing on EMI policies at a macro-, meso-, and micro-level highlighted potential criticalities linked to the often-rapid (and mostly top-down) introduction of EMI programmes in relation to the quality of education and the attitudes and perceptions of key stakeholders (i.e., teachers, students, policymakers, institutional managers; Molino et al., 2022). In this respect, EMI lecturers' opinions, their preparedness, and the integration between language and disciplinary expertise in EMI educational practice currently represent significant areas of debate (Lasagabaster 2022a, 2022b; Macaro, 2018). However, few guidelines on teaching and learning through English on a logistic and pedagogical level exist (Smit & Dafouz, 2012; Dearden, 2014; Costa, 2015).

Referring to the Italian context, Costa (2024, p. 156) maintained that "the feeling is that EMI is now an established fact, which, however, has spread without being accompanied by a well-reasoned implementation plan". In this respect, in Italy, the adoption of EMI was slower than in other countries and its implementation has not been uniform (Pulcini & Campagna, 2015; Broggini & Costa 2017; Costa, 2024; see Section 2).

To contribute to the body of research on the potentialities and criticalities of EMI in Italy, this study collects the views of EMI lecturers in two different Italian HE contexts, namely the University of Trento (UniTn) and the University of Messina (UniMe). It compares the results of a questionnaire proposed to UniTn and UniMe lecturers in 2019 and 2024, respectively. The questionnaire was created as a part of a small-scale quantitative inquiry originally developed by the Laboratory for the Quality and Innovation of Didactics (LIQuID), as part of UniTn's 2017–21 University Strategic Plan (Note 1). UniTn is a medium-sized public university in the North of Italy, in the autonomous province of Trento, in the region of Trentino-Alto Adige. This pilot project was intended as a first mapping of UniTn's situation, based on which future research and formative actions could be implemented. The early results of the study (Polli, 2021) revealed a multifaceted scenario, confirming a drive towards

internationalisation and an instrumental view of the English language but also a potential for a truly intercultural turn in the shift from the local to the global perspective.

The idea of extending this questionnaire to UniMe's contexts stems from the interest in exploring potential divergences in the opinions and approaches towards EMI in Northern and Southern Italian universities (Pulcini & Campagna, 2015; Costa, 2017). In particular, UniMe is a large-sized public university in the autonomous region of Sicily. The questionnaire was proposed as a part of the EMI@UniMe project (see Rizzo, Polli, Cambria, in press, for details) carried out by UniMe's Research Unit on EMI (Note 2) collaborating with the Language in Education (LinE) international network (Note 3).

This paper proposes the main findings of the comparative analysis of these two HE contexts to cast light on their similarities and differences as well as on the role language plays for the lecturers participating in the research. To do so, it first provides an essential overview of EMI scenarios in Italy (Section 2). It subsequently details the methodology and the research questions guiding the discussion of results (Section 3) and presents the results of the quantitative inquiry (Section 4). Finally, these findings are discussed by focusing on these lecturers' views on institutional and learning objectives of EMI education, the differences with respect to teaching in the lecturers' first language (L1) and the role L1 plays in EMI classes, the potential criticalities linked to a scarce consideration of linguistic components with respect to content-teaching, as well as the areas of improvement, thus laying the foundation for future lines of research (Section 5).

2. EMI in Italy: An Overview

In Italy, the first language of academia is Italian (Costa, 2024) and the introduction of EMI was not free from criticism and heated debates (Pulcini & Campagna, 2015; Dearden & Macaro, 2016; Molino et al., 2022).

As for second language (L2) acquisition, in a survey by the European Commission (2012) on self-assessed L2 competencies, Italy ranked second from last among 27 EU nations, with only 38% of Italians claiming to be able to communicate in at least one L2, against an EU average of 54%. According to more recent data from the EF English Proficiency Index (2023), which assesses the general proficiency in English as L2 on a European and worldwide level, Italy is included among the countries with 'moderate proficiency' and is positioned quite low in Europe's rankings (occupying the 25th position among 35 European countries), though with a stable increase.

In Wächter and Maiworm's study (2014) on enrollment in English-taught programmes in non-Anglophone countries in the EU, Italy ranked 21st, with only 0.5% of Italian students enrolled in such programmes. Still, Broggini and Costa (2017) found that, between 2013 and 2017, EMI courses in Italian universities increased from 74% to 85%. They also pointed out that, even though EMI courses were more present in Northern Italy, in the same years, their growth in Southern HE institutions skyrocketed from 22% to 100%. Still, the approaches toward EMI were found to vary between universities in Northern and Southern Italy (Pulcini & Campagna, 2015; Costa, 2017), as well as between public and private universities (Costa

& Coleman, 2012; Broggini & Costa, 2017).

Currently, institutional data provided by the Italian Ministry of Education via the Universitaly web portal (Note 4) refer to 595 degrees taught in English in 62 Universities (last updated in 2023), with an increase of 26% with respect to 2020 and 67% with respect to 2015. EMI is mainly implemented in Master's degree courses, with higher numbers in the Departments of Economics and Engineering (Guarda & Helm, 2016; Broggini & Costa, 2017). Programmes are generally self-funded and, consistently with global trends, their implementation is primarily top-down and aimed at boosting the international prospects of universities and students and, secondarily, attracting incoming foreign students (Dearden & Macaro, 2016; Costa, 2024).

As for EMI lecturers, several studies investigated their needs and perspectives and revealed a positive opinion towards EMI but also linguistic concerns about speaking skills, fluency, grammar, and vocabulary (e.g., Helm & Guarda, 2015; Guarda & Helm, 2016). Francomacaro (2011) found that Italian EMI Engineering lecturers positively evaluated their English proficiency level, in-class interaction, and students' improvements, though "the discussion revealed how the discipline lecturers are unaware of the linguistic implications of their teaching and of their students" (p. 67).

Since in many Italian contexts no benchmark of English proficiency exists and no language certification is required to teach EMI modules, lecturers were found to be unsure of what level might be adequate to teach through English (Dearden & Macaro, 2016).

Concerns regarding the quality of content learning in EMI classes in case of lacking English language proficiency have been raised in several studies (Macaro, 2019; Molino, 2018). This is especially problematic in countries like Italy, where the lack of careful planning and clear guidelines on EMI teaching requirements combine with the paucity of training initiatives for EMI lecturers (Costa and Grassi, 2022).

The role of Italian and codeswitching episodes (Cicillini, 2023) in relation to EMI is another area of inquiry. Empirical studies on recorded EMI classes (Costa, 2012) found evidence of codeswitching from English to L1 (Italian) even in situations in which non-native speakers of Italian (about 25% of the students) were in the audience. As for the language used in the assessment phase, no standard regulation exists and percentages of the use of English were found to vary according to the geographical position of the universities: English was used in 50% of Northern Italy HE contexts, 67% in Central Italy, and 64% in the South (Broggini & Costa, 2017).

Several studies in different EMI contexts around the world agree on the fact that most EMI lecturers attach no importance to content-language integration (Airey, 2012; Dearden, 2014; Aguilar, 2017): EMI lecturing is rarely accompanied by a reflection on the linguistic medium used and the changes it may bring in terms of methodology, content delivery, interaction, and communication (Curle et al., 2020). Costa (2024) confirmed these findings in the case of Italy and maintained that EMI training regards the English language as well as methodological competence and, in this respect, EMI training may trigger positive innovations of all didactics

in a context – Italy – in which formative action for lecturers and a proper reflection of content-language balance are lacking even for L1 teaching.

In general, the approaches towards EMI in Italy are varied and indicative of a fragmented educational scenario (see, for instance, Mastellotto and Zanin, 2021). The comparative analysis developed in the subsequent Sections aims to provide a picture of the situation of EMI in two different Italian HE contexts, UniTn and UniMe, to find common areas of interest and investigate the role of language, the concerns, and the goals of EMI practitioners.

3. Methodology and Research Questions

As anticipated in Section 1, this study stems from a questionnaire created at UniTn by the members of LIQuID, who opted for this data collection method since it has several advantages: it is versatile, easy to construct, time- and cost-effective, and enables the quick collection of a wide amount of data in a systematic and structured way (Rose et al., 2020; Dörnyei and Dewaele, 2022).

UniTn's original version of the questionnaire was designed and processed by using the online survey software tool Qualtrics XM Platform™ (https://www.qualtrics.com/). Respondents were asked to answer a maximum of twenty-six questions, which were specifically developed for this research and provided both in Italian and English (the full list of the questions can be found in the Appendix section in Polli, 2021). Most questions were close-ended to prompt completion (Hyman and Sierra, 2016). Several questions included optional open-ended sub-questions aimed at giving the respondents the chance to add remarks and expand their answers with comments and personal opinions. In the first stage of this research (April-September 2019), the questionnaire was proposed to UniTn's lecturers who taught EMI modules in the academic year 2018-19. Respondents were contacted via an e-mail which included a description of LIQuID's research project, the instructions to fill out the questionnaire, and the link to Qualtrics XM Platform™.

In the second stage of the research (June-August 2024), LIQuID's questionnaire was proposed to UniMe. The questionnaire was expanded with additional queries that were functional to the subsequent development of the EMI@UniMe project. However, the answers to these questions will not be considered in this study given its comparative nature (the discussion of these findings can be read in Rizzo, Polli & Cambria, in press) and only the queries that reflect the original version of LIQuID's questionnaire are examined in the following section. In the case of UniMe's questionnaire, data were gathered and processed by using the free online survey platform Google Forms (https://docs.google.com/forms/u/0/). Lecturers who taught EMI modules in the academic year 2023-24 were invited to complete the questionnaire via e-mail. Even in this case, the e-mail included a description of EMI@UniMe research project, the instructions, and the link to the questionnaire.

In both UniTn's and UniMe's cases, lecturers who held multiple EMI modules were allowed to fill out the questionnaire once or multiple times for each module. All answers were collected and processed by ensuring the participants' full anonymity.

Once EMI lecturers' answers were collected, for both UniTn's and UniMe's datasets,

descriptive statistics were used to examine the findings (further details on data analyses for UniTn's and UniMe's case studies can be found in Polli, 2021 and Rizzo, Polli & Cambria, in press, respectively). For this study, the results of the two case studies were then compared for similarities and discrepancies. Section 4 elaborates on the main findings of the comparative analysis on the basis of the following research questions:

1. Are there differences in UniTn and UniMe lecturers' approach to EMI in terms of teaching and learning objectives, tools, concerns, students' interaction, and the role of L1? Do such approaches change when teaching in L1?

2. Do these data reveal content-language integration in EMI lecturing at UniTn and UniMe and, in general, what is the role linguistic components play for the respondents?

By answering these questions, this analysis aims to reflect upon the role of the EMI in these two educational settings (UniTn and UniMe) and how the use of the English language can influence content teaching and learning.

4. Analysis of Results

This section presents the data collected in 2019 and 2024. In particular, the questionnaire received a total of 150 replies from UniTn lecturers and 98 replies from UniMe lecturers. The analysis of the data begins with an overview of the composition of the two pools of respondents from UniTn and UniMe, based on the general information provided in the questionnaires about their EMI modules, their L1, and English proficiency levels. Subsequently, proceeding from the research questions of Section 3, the two datasets are compared by focusing on relevant areas of overlapping or dissimilarity in the results.

4.1 Overview of EMI Lecturers and Modules

4.1.1 Respondents' Profile: First Language and English Proficiency

UniTn and UniMe lecturers' L1 was Italian in 82% and 95.5% of cases, respectively. English was their L1 in 11.3% and 3.1% of cases. In the case of UniTn lecturers, other L1 (6.7%) included Dutch, French, German, Hebrew, Spanish, and Turkish, while, at UniMe, 1% of the lecturers' L1 was Vietnamese.

As for their English language proficiency, respondents were asked to evaluate whether they considered their language skills adequate for EMI lecturing. As for their receptive skills, most lecturers answered "yes" and "probably yes" for listening (76% and 22% for UniTn; 60.2% and 36.7% for UniMe) and reading (90.7% and 8.7% for UniTn; 80.6% and 19.4% for UniMe).

Likewise, as for productive skills, the majority of replies were "yes" and "probably yes" for both speaking (66.7% and 28.7% for UniTn; 64.3% and 33% for UniMe) and writing (78% and 19.3% for UniTn; 72.4% and 26.6% for UniMe). The percentages of both receptive and productive skills for lecturers in both HE context were close, with slightly higher percentages of "yes" in the case of UniTn. Their self-evaluation of communication skills (i.e., the integration of both receptive and productive skills) was also perceived positively: 58.67% of

UniTn lecturers and 61.2% for UniMe lecturers answered "yes", while 36.67% of UniTn lecturers and 32.7% of UniMe lecturers answered "probably yes". In this case, UniMe questionnaire showed a slightly higher percentage of "yes" replies with respect to UniTn, though a higher percentage of "probably no" was also registered, as detailed below.

Negative answers ("no" and "probably no") were low in both HE contexts. As for UniTn, 0.7% of lecturers answered "no" for listening, reading, and speaking, and 1.3% for writing and communication skills; no lecturer answered "probably no" for reading skills, while the percentage was 1.3% for listening and writing and slightly higher for speaking and communication skills (4% and 3.3%, respectively). In the case of UniMe, no lecturer answered "no", while percentages of "probably no" were 3.1% for listening, 2% for speaking, 1% for writing, and 6.1% for communication skills. Reading was the only skill with no negative or partially negative results.

When asked what language skills the respondents considered fundamental for a lecturer to teach through English successfully in intercultural settings (maximum of two out of seven replies), UniTn and UniMe lecturers agreed in considering clarity (70% and 73.5%, respectively) and intelligibility (50.7% and 68.4%) as top priorities. Language accuracy (36% and 43.9%) and fluency (29.3% and 35.7%) resulted in lower percentages, and native-like pronunciation was definitely not deemed a fundamental requirement since only 5.3% and 4.1% selected it.

4.1.2 EMI Modules: Departments and Course Types

In 2019, replies by UniTn lecturers referred to all of the Science and Humanities Departments. Most answers came from the Departments of Mathematics (14%), Economics and Management (11.3%), and Cellular, Computational and Integrative Biology (11.3%). In 2024, in the case of UniMe, responses referred to most Departments. Only three Departments (in the Humanities and Natural Science areas) were not featured in the responses. The majority of answers refer to the Departments of Mathematics, Computer Science, Physics and Earth Science (26.5%), Political and Juridical Science (19.4%), Biomedical and Dental Sciences and of Morphological and Functional Images (18.4%).

As for the types of courses in which EMI modules were taught, in accordance with the findings of other studies on EMI in Italy (e.g. Guarda & Helm, 2016; Broggini & Costa, 2017), most of the EMI modules at UniTn and UniMe referred to Master's degree courses (77.3 and 46.9%, respectively). Compared to UniTn, however, UniMe had a higher number of EMI modules in Bachelor's degree (14% and 37.8%, respectively) and five-year degree courses (2% and 14.4%, respectively). The latter result may be explained by the presence of several Departments specialised in the field of Medicine. For both UniTn and UniMe, EMI modules were compulsory (52.7% and 81.6%, respectively) or limited elective (28% and 13.3%, respectively).

4.2 Institutional and Learning Objectives of EMI Education

A section of the questionnaire was designed to explore EMI lecturers' opinions on EMI education's institutional and specific learning objectives. As for the replies on institutional

objectives (maximum of three out of nine options), according to UniTn respondents, in most cases, the general objectives identified were to offer students the opportunity to work towards their future careers and to develop a professional international profile (57.3%) and to enable UniTn to enlarge its international learning and research community (i.e., by admitting more incoming Erasmus students or international researchers) (55.3%). Thus, in their view, EMI policies are linked to internationalisation, with a focus on professional development and incoming students and researchers.

In the case of UniMe, while many replies encompassed these two perspectives (58.2% and 60.2%, respectively), the majority of respondents opted for promoting the mobility of their students (i.e. outgoing Erasmus students) and fostering their involvement in the international scientific community (66.3%) as the main institutional objective. Thus, EMI is connected to internationalisation in terms of students' professional outgoing opportunities.

The linguistic and communicative dimension was found to be a secondary goal of EMI policy implementation in both HE contexts: in particular, for UniTn and UniMe, 39.3% and 27.6% of the respondents referred to the development of their students' communication skills in English, 38% and 32.7% to students' ability to learn and use English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and 14% and 11.2% to the ability to master the subject-specific bibliography in English. Finally, only 4.7% and 9.2% of UniTn and UniMe respondents considered promoting innovation in teaching practices and learning activities as the main reason for implementing EMI classes.

As for EMI lecturers' specific learning objectives (maximum of three out nine replies), both UniTn and UniMe lecturers prioritised the possibility of offering students the opportunity to work towards their future careers and to develop a professional international profile (52.7% and 64.3%, respectively). In the case of UniTn, the linguistic considerations acquired prominence since 52% of respondents also considered the development of their student's ability to learn and use subject-specific English as a core goal. For UniMe lecturers, this objective (selected by 40.8% of respondents) was considered secondary with respect to the promotion of outgoing (41.8%; 36% in the case of UniTn) and incoming (44.6%; 42% in the case of UniTn) opportunities. Still, it is worth mentioning that although the outgoing dimension was central for UniMe lecturers in terms of institutional goals, it lost centrality in terms of specific learning objectives. Other options connected to communication skills (36% and 26.5%) and subject-specific English-language bibliography (17.3% and 13.3%) remained almost unvaried. Likewise, the incorporation of innovative teaching practices and learning activities in lecturers' modules was considered a key goal only by a limited percentage of UniTn and UniMe respondents (5.3% and 12.2%, respectively).

4.3 Teaching and Learning in L1 and L2

To enable a comparison between teaching experiences in EMI and L1 classes, the participants were asked whether they had taught through Italian (or through their L1, other than English) at UniTn and UniMe over the last three academic years. Answers were positive in 97 cases at UniTn (65.1%) and 85 at UniMe (86.7%). In these cases, in addition to the questions about their EMI teaching practice, respondents were also redirected to a set of questions about their

teaching experience in L1.

4.3.1 Teaching Tools

Lecturers were asked which tools they employed for personal reference while teaching (maximum three out of twelve replies) and what such tools were used for (maximum two out of eight replies). As for L1 classes, both UniTn and UniMe lecturers privileged notes and outlines on the lecture topics (57.7% and 72.9%, respectively), notes and comments added to the slides (24.7% and 34.1% respectively), quotations and references from papers (21.6% and 29.4%, respectively). These tools were used as memos or outlines of the soon-to-be-covered topics (54.6% and 63.5%, respectively), for improving the intelligibility of the lecture (32% and 45.9%, respectively), and as a source for quotations and references (26.8% and 40%, respectively).

We initially expected a variation of such percentages when referring to EMI classes, with higher percentages of language tools. However, in both UnTn and UniMe, results were essentially unvaried: notes and outlines on the lecture topics were selected by 55.3% and 71.4% of respondents, notes and comments added to the slides by 35.3% and 31.6%, quotations and references from papers by 31.3% and 27.6%, respectively. These findings showed often extremely low percentages regarding the use of language tools: 12% and 13.3% of UniTn and UniMe lecturers used specialised terms and vocabulary in English; 7.3% and 1% used English pronunciation notes; 4% and 5.1% employed typical English expressions and phrases to provide examples, be persuasive, or place emphasis; 3.3% and 3.1% used dictionaries; in both cases, only 2% used signposting language notes in English (i.e., expressions and phrases to signal progression through the lecture: e.g., beginning, moving forward, conclusion). Likewise, teaching tools were not conceived as language support: as in the case of L1 modules, teaching materials were employed as memos or outlines (54% and 58.2%, respectively), tools for improving the intelligibility of the lecture (40% and 44.9%, respectively), and sources for quotations and references (24.6% and 28.6%, respectively). Only 7.3% of UniTn lecturers and none of UniMe lecturers considered these tools as a guidance for a more ‘native-like’ pronunciation. Finally, 3.3% and 5.1% of UniTn and UniMe lecturers used these tools as guidance with specialised terms and vocabulary and 2% and 1% with syntax and grammar. These low percentages may be explained in light of the high percentages regarding EMI lecturers’ self-evaluation of their English language proficiency levels and the secondary role given to pronunciation and fluency as fundamental skills in EMI settings. Therefore, language support may be perceived as less important.

4.3.2 Students’ Linguistic, Communication, and Interpersonal Skills and Concerns

The questionnaire explored the linguistic, communication, and interpersonal skills that lecturers evaluated in their students (maximum of three out of eight replies). As for both EMI modules and L1 modules, the aspect most frequently considered was the ability to learn and use the subject-specific language (for 42% and 54.6% of UniTn lecturers, respectively, and for 58.2% and 62.4% of UniMe lecturers, respectively) and communication skills, intended as the ability to express or exchange information, ideas, thoughts, feelings (for 38.7% and 42.3% of UniTn lecturers, respectively, and for 34.7% and 50.6% of UniMe lecturers, respectively).

In EMI modules, a significant percentage of UniTn and UniMe lecturers (28% and 24.5%, respectively) affirmed that they do not assess linguistic, communication, and interpersonal competencies. This percentage was lower in L1 modules (25.8% and 12.9%, respectively), especially in the case of UniMe. This probably indicates that lecturers are more condescending with the lack of language-specific skills when English is used, while they tend to evaluate such skills when the L1 is used.

As for the respondents' concerns about their students' English language use in EMI classes (maximum of three out of nine answers), data from UniTn and UniMe diverge. In the former case, concerns regarded students' reluctance to use English – due to shyness, fear of making mistakes, insecurity, etc. – (46.7%), difficulties in articulating complex arguments (39.4%), and expressing their opinion or holding a discussion in English (28%). By contrast, in the case of UniMe, most lecturers had no concerns (36.7%; 24.7% in the case of UniTn). The criticalities most frequently selected were difficulty articulating complex arguments (29.6%) in English and reluctance to use English (26.5%).

Among the possible options, we also included concerns regarding the students' ability to speak English more fluently than the lecturers, though in both HE contexts these resulted to be the lower percentages (6% for UniTn and 11.2% for UniMe).

In L1 classes, both UniTn and UniMe lecturers confirmed the students' reluctance to speak (48.5% and 38.8%, respectively) as the main concern, followed by the difficulty in using subject-specific language (22.7% and 37.6%, respectively, against a percentage of 14% 23.5% in EMI classes). Compared to EMI classes, a higher percentage of UniTn respondents found no concern (26.8%), whereas such percentage decreased in the case of UniMe (30.6%).

In both EMI and L1 modules, most respondents (62.5% and 64.3% for UniTn, respectively; and 55.1% and 71.8% for UniMe, respectively) noticed an improvement in students' criticalities as their classes progressed, though a number of lecturers stated that they did not know, especially in the case of EMI classes (25.9% and 18.6% for UniTn, respectively; and 32.7% and 20% for UniMe, respectively)

4.4 The Role of L1 in EMI Teaching and Learning

To investigate codeswitching and the role of the Italian language (or L1 other than English), the questionnaire included a set of questions referring to i) the lecturers' use of Italian (or L1 other than English) in their EMI classes; ii) the students' possibility to use Italian during EMI classes; and iii) the students' possibility to use Italian during the learning assessment phase in EMI modules. For both UniTn and UniMe lecturers, the answers to these questions were mostly negative. Results indicated that 77.3% of UniTn lecturers did not use Italian in class, against a percentage of 89.9% for UniMe lecturers. According to 62.4% of UniTn lecturers and 86.7% of UniMe lecturers, students were discouraged from using Italian in class. Likewise, 69.8% of UniTn lecturers and 87.8% of UniMe lecturers did not allow their students to take the exam (or part of it) in Italian. All three queries were also accompanied by the possibility of answering an open-ended question about the reason and extent to which Italian was (or was not) employed.

As for UniTn, 30 respondents answered the optional question about the use they made of Italian by claiming that Italian is used for clarifications, individual explanations, jokes, greetings and casual talks, details about the exam, and other technical issues, to stimulate quicker responses and when no international student was present. Likewise, as for UniMe, the respondents (9) stated that Italian is employed for clarifications and explanations of complex or unclear notions, to 'lighten' the class, during informal interactions, and in absence of international students.

As for students' use of Italian in class, responses from UniTn (45 answers) and UniMe (12 answers) lecturers were similar: in both cases, Italian was allowed during one-to-one conversations between native Italian speakers, to ask questions and demand clarifications. In the case of UniTn, students could also use Italian during teamwork discussions and informal communicative exchanges after class as well as in the case of students who were shy or less familiar with English. In both contexts, some respondents stated that they act as intermediaries between Italian and international students by translating communicative exchanges from one language to the other.

As for the role of Italian during exams, for most UniTn lecturers (27 out of 29 optional replies) and a number of UniMe lecturers (two out of nine replies), students were allowed to choose the exam language to avoid penalisations caused by their lack of English proficiency, especially since language competence was not under assessment. One UniMe lecturer stated that exams are in Italian because the students are Italian.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

By comparing the results of LIQuID's questionnaire on EMI regarding UniTn and UniMe lecturers' opinions and experiences as EMI practitioners, we managed to explore the similarities and differences in their approach to EMI teaching as well as the role they give to the English language in this educational setting.

In accordance with findings on other HE contexts (Dearden & Macaro, 2016; Costa, 2024), internationalisation was considered the main drive behind EMI implementation on an institutional level at UniTn and UniMe, with a focus on students' professional and outgoing opportunities, respectively. In this respect, English is conceived as a Lingua Franca (Jenkins et al., 2011) that can give access to transnational occupational and academic networks. However, no language-centred goal is considered primary, thus revealing an instrumental conceptualisation of English that is not necessarily accompanied by a reflection on linguistic components of EMI lecturing. This very premise is reflected in the specific learning goals of EMI modules at UniMe: lecturers' goal is the creation of opportunities for incoming and outgoing students and, above all, educational practice that can help them professionally. As for UniTn, lecturers laid emphasis on mastering subject-specific language and, thus, on ESP.

In line with the principle of constructive alignment (Biggs & Tang, 2011), UniTn lecturers' learning goals matched the linguistic, communication, and interpersonal skills that lecturers assessed in their students, since the aspect most frequently considered was found to be the ability to learn and use the subject-specific language, followed by the ability to express or

exchange information, ideas, thoughts, feelings. UniMe lecturers' answers were similar in this case, thus revealing a common sensibility towards the proper use of ESP and communication skills. However, the fact that the same results were reached for L1 classes combined with the noteworthy percentages of respondents that do not assess linguistic, communication, and interpersonal competencies in EMI classes can also indicate that this sensibility may not be related specifically to English but to more in general to the proper use of scientific language and communication. Likewise, as stated beforehand, the fact that several lecturers do not consider students' competencies in EMI classes may also indicate that they are more prone to 'turn a blind eye' or be condescending with communication skills when their students use English than when they use their L1. They may be unwilling (or unable) to assess linguistic competencies in a language (English) that is an L2 for them as well as for their students.

Data on concerns about students' English language use in EMI classes were also striking. In this respect, UniTn lecturers shared concerns about students' reluctance to speak, difficulties in developing complex argumentation, expressing their opinions, and holding a discussion. While the use of subject-specific language was a core concern in L1, criticalities in EMI classes are rather indicators of criticalities in students' general English proficiency levels. The idea of the English language as a source of inhibition in interaction and communication challenges the very idea of EMI as a catalyst for potential intercultural exchanges and opening to international prospects. Still, the fact that students' reluctance to speak is also the main concern in L1 classes may also indicate a general discomfort of students in class. In this respect, such findings should prompt a reflection on how to create an inclusive, student-centred environment where students feel confident to interact with no fear of penalisation or perception of linguistic, communicative, or intercultural barriers both in EMI and L1 settings. Although these considerations are also valid in the case of UniMe, the fact that most lecturers found no concerns may be a positive result but may also confirm the unwillingness (or inability) to evaluate potential criticalities in EMI students. In this respect, it is worth noting that a number of lecturers could not evaluate potential improvements in their students' criticalities.

In this framework, data regarding EMI lecturers' and students' use of Italian in class and during exams suggest that, although both HE contexts mainly embrace an 'English only' policy, codeswitching may be a strategy to stimulate interaction with students and avoid penalisation at the exam. With respect to UniMe, UnitTn lecturers showed a higher proclivity towards the switch to L1, likely on account of the aforementioned concerns. The implementation of strict 'English only' policies and the ban of other languages (with the consequent risk of delegitimising them as languages of knowledge) is clearly a topic that needs further debate. In general, students bring to class their linguistic and cultural heritage, and the value of multilingualism and multiculturalism should not be threatened by a 'blind' Englishisation of teaching and learning practice. Still, a frequent switch to L1 in EMI contexts may jeopardise the opportunity to interact with and put at ease foreign students, who may feel excluded or penalised by the excessive use of non-familiar languages. In the case of UniMe and UniTn, further empirical research should assess the extent and context of

codeswitching and delve into a thorough study of its role and implications.

Among the possible options regarding the aforementioned concerns in EMI classes, we also included the possibility that students speak English more fluently than the lecturers. Though in the cases of both UniMe and UniTn such concern was secondary with respect to other issues, this apparent provocation served to stimulate a debate on the likelihood that, as the academic communities become more international, lecturers may face the challenge of relating to native speakers of English or different 'world Englishes' (Kirkpatrick, 2010). In such scenario, lecturers should be trained and equipped to face this challenge.

The great majority of respondents in both HE settings demonstrated a certain confidence in their language proficiency levels in both productive and receptive skills, with limited percentages of negative results. However, the fact that a minority of respondents admitted difficulties in speaking, listening, and communication skills (i.e., the skills predominantly required in EMI classes) may still be an indicator of the need to assist and train EMI practitioners in their teaching practice through English.

Results on the tools used for personal reference while teaching indicate that, regardless of the language used (English or L1), lecturers opted for outlines on the lecture topics, notes and comments on the slides, quotations and references from papers. Surprisingly, the employment of language tools to support EMI lecturing (list of specialised terms and vocabulary, pronunciation notes, English expressions and phrases to provide examples, be persuasive, or place emphasis, dictionaries, and signposting language notes in English) was reportedly quite limited. This may be the byproduct of high English proficiency levels and the fact that most lecturers stated that they prioritise clarity and intelligibility over pronunciation and language accuracy. However, such findings may also indicate a scarce interest in language with respect to the contents to be taught or even the lack of awareness of how language-specific tools can ease and improve content delivery. Even when language proficiency is high and a native-like pronunciation is not a primary requirement for a lecturer, EMI specialists (Baird, Page & Borthwick, 2017) have strongly encouraged the use of language tools such as signposting language to signal progression through the lecture and ease students' comprehension, and ready-to-use English expressions that may be useful to provide examples, clarifications, and anecdotes in a language that may be unfamiliar for the speakers as well as for their audience. In the case of UniTn, subsequent qualitative inquiries (semi-structured interviews) involving a pool of 18 EMI lecturers with a background in Science and Humanities revealed that the interviewees had never actually reflected on the linguistic component of their lecture but, as interviews progressed, admitted that their performance was often 'staged', limited to the use of ESP, and lacking spontaneity (Polli & Coppola, 2024).

In this light, further qualitative investigations are required for both UniTn and UniMe so as to encourage an active dialogue with them, delve into the specific needs and potential challenges that EMI lecturers may have encountered, and, accordingly, plan future actions. In this respect, the implementation of EMI training activities for lecturers may support them not just in terms of language proficiency improvement but also by increasing awareness of their needs and helping them re-think content delivery and teaching methodology to improve the

quality of their lectures.

In several questions about institutional and learning objectives and students' competencies, we included options regarding EMI as a way of promoting innovative teaching and learning settings. However, these options were scarcely considered by lecturers of both HE contexts. This indicates that EMI is synonymous with internationalisation but is hardly associated with innovation. Still, in light of the increasing technology-driven changes to education and the progressive switch to a student-centred approach to teaching experiences, the implementation of EMI training activities may prompt a debate on the potentially beneficial innovative practices.

In conclusion, to answer the research questions of this article, in both HE contexts, lecturers' goals and concerns primarily regard content-teaching and the internationalisation prospects brought by EMI. In this framework, their view of the English language was similar and resulted in being instrumental and essentially conceived as ESP. While the profile of these lecturers was found to be similar as for their proficiency levels, the importance given to language and communication skills, the role of L1, and approaches to EMI as well as L1 lecturing, their opinions diverge when addressing students' linguistic, communicative, and intercultural skills and, above all, in the types of concerns they assessed. In this light, further studies on the student community are also encouraged so as to collect and compare their opinions and perspectives.

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Notes

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Note 3. https://www.languageineducation.eu/ [last access 24/08/2024].

Note 4. www.universitaly.it [last access 25/08/2024].

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