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Mapping the Status of EMI Courses at the University of Messina: The EMI@UniMe Project

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Abstract

English-Medium Instruction (EMI) represents a significant development in Higher Education (Pulcini & Campagna, 2015). EMI courses spread across European universities when they embraced education *through* English to enhance their academic offers and encourage student mobility (De Wit, 2011; Dearden, 2014). By carefully implementing and continuously improving EMI courses, universities can strengthen their internationalisation agenda and provide students with valuable skills for their future careers (Bowles & Murphy, 2020). As Higher Education institutions increasingly adopt EMI to improve their international appeal and foster a multicultural academic environment, the University of Messina (UniMe) has similarly incorporated EMI degree programmes as part of its strategy to increase internationalisation and appeal to students. By implementing EMI courses, UniMe aims to improve global competitiveness and align with European education reforms (Macaro et al., 2018). This paper investigates the current situation of EMI courses at UniMe, highlighting

their role in the university's strategic planning, the challenges encountered, and providing useful and practical recommendations for future improvements. By adapting a questionnaire on EMI developed by the University of Trento's *Interdisciplinary Laboratory for the Quality and Innovation of Didactics* (LIQuID, Polli 2021), this study examines EMI lecturers' opinions regarding institutional and pedagogical aims, teaching practices, and learning assessment methods. The analysis of courses offered at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels and lecturers' feedback also highlight both the achievements and challenges associated with the EMI@UniMe project.

Keywords: English-medium instruction, Higher education, Internationalisation, Quantitative research, Lecturers' viewpoint

1. Introduction

English-Medium Instruction (EMI) is an educational approach in which English is used as the primary language of instruction in non-English speaking contexts (Macaro et al., 2018). This method is often adopted in Higher Education (HE) to facilitate the teaching of academic subjects, such as science, engineering, and business, to students who speak languages other than English (Macaro, 2018).

Generally speaking, EMI implementation is often part of the strategies employed to increase the internationalisation prospects of HE, institutions, and students, who can compete in an increasingly globalised job market where English is recognised as the Lingua Franca (ELF) (Molino et al., 2022). Furthermore, if carefully planned, EMI can contribute to improving the quality of education, as it often involves the use of up-to-date teaching materials and international resources (Costa & Mariotti, 2023a). EMI can also assist in attracting international partners, students, staff, and projects. It may also help HE institutions increase their graduates' employability, improve foreign language proficiency, and enhance international reputation and visibility.

However, there are also challenges, such as the need to train competent teachers in English and ensure that students can follow the content without language difficulties (Mariotti, 2024). The inadequate level of English language proficiency of lecturers and domestic and international students, the lack of confidence to learn in a foreign language and the additional workload for lecturers and students are examples of EMI challenges. Using English to teach some subjects may have a negative impact on content comprehension and assessment and may cause anxiety in students who are not proficient in the language (Boggio & Molino, 2018). Among the most important aspects of EMI are the following:

1. Globalisation of education: EMI is often adopted in response to the increasing globalisation of HE. Institutions use English to reach a wider audience and prepare students for international careers (Bowles & Murphy, 2020).

2. Student demographics: EMI programmes generally attract a diverse student body, including both local and international students. This diversity can enrich the learning environment and promote intercultural understanding (Dearden, 2014).

3. Curriculum development: The implementation of EMI requires careful curriculum design to ensure that content is accessible to students with different levels of English proficiency. This may involve the use of scaffolding techniques, additional language support, and the integration of language learning into the subject matter (Campagna & Pulcini, 2014).
4. Teacher education: EMI teachers often need additional training to teach effectively in English. This includes not only language competencie, but also pedagogical strategies that take into consideration the different linguistic backgrounds of students (Costa & Grassi, 2022; Costa & Mariotti, 2023b).
5. Challenges: While EMI can improve language skills and employability, it can also pose challenges. Students may struggle with complex academic language and there may be concerns about the quality of instruction if instructors are not proficient in English (Lasagabaster, 2022).
6. Evaluation: Evaluation of student performance in EMI contexts can be complex, as it may require assessment of both content knowledge and language skills. Institutions often need to develop assessment tools that take these two aspects into account (Curle et al., 2020).

As HE institutions increasingly adopt EMI to improve their international prestige and foster a multicultural academic environment (Guarda, 2022), the University of Messina (UniMe), in Italy, has similarly incorporated EMI courses as part of its strategic planning.

2. Context of the Study

Table 1 summarises UniMe's courses in English so as to provide a general overview of the main areas of interest.

Table 1. Overview of EMI courses at UniMe

EMI courses at UniMe
Bachelor's Degree in Data Analysis
Bachelor's Degree in Political Sciences and International Relations
Bachelor's Degree in Civil Engineering
Bachelor's Degree in Marine Biology and Blue Biotechnologies
Bachelor's Degree in Business Management
Bachelor's Degree in Transnational and European Legal Studies
Single Cycle Degree in Medicine and Surgery (6-year long programme)
Master's Degree in Engineering in Computer Science

Master's Degree in International Management
Master's Degree in Physics (Condensed Matter Physics)
Master's Degree in Geophysical Sciences for Seismic Risk
Master's Degree in Cognitive Science and Theory of Communication
Master's Degree in Data Science
Vocational Master in Banking and Finance
Vocational Master in Food, Quality and International Management

Table 1 provides context on the current situation with EMI@UniMe, revealing the main subject areas as they emerge in the university webpage titled 'English programmes' (Note 1). At the moment of writing, UniMe offers 6 Bachelor's Degrees, 6 Master's Degrees, 2 Vocational Masters (i.e. Master's that provide graduates with additional specific expertise to increase their professionalism), and a Single Cycle degree in Medicine and Surgery. Most EMI courses at UniMe are in the fields of science, engineering, and business. The webpage about English Programmes explicitly states that "The University of Messina offers a growing number of undergraduate and graduate degree courses taught in English". The use of the word 'growing' is highly revealing of UniMe's interest in increasing the number of EMI courses, which mainly attract students from the Mediterranean area. To enroll in EMI programmes, students need to have a B1/B2 knowledge of English.

The section 'Study with us' (Figure 1) on UniMe's website provides a general framework of the Italian University System which the international students have to 'experience', along with information on the courses.

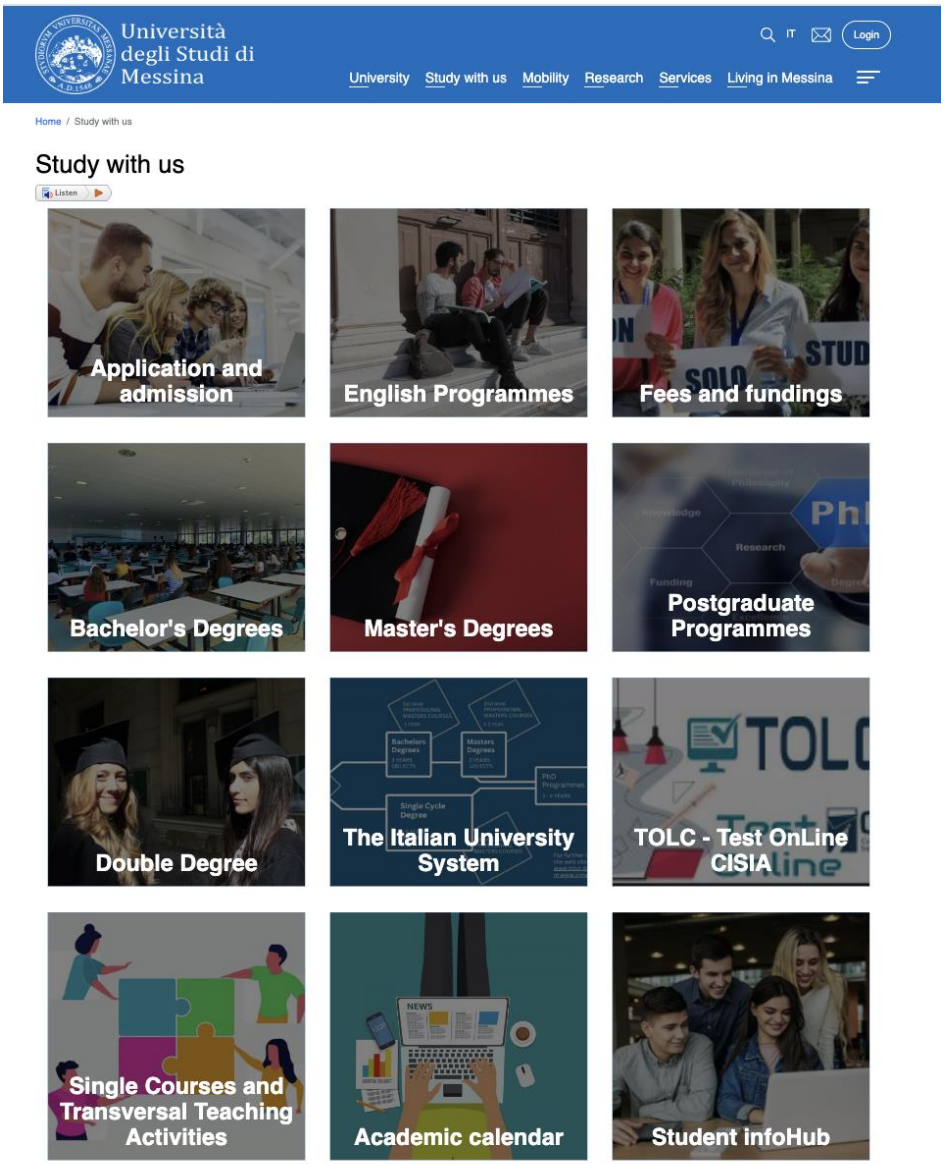

Figure 1. "Study with Us" section of UniMe's website

The Student infoHub assists students throughout their university experience. UniMe is interested in increasing the support provided to students and lecturers involved in EMI and, for this reason, in June 2024 the project EMI@UniMe was launched (Note 2). This paper provides the initial findings of the project by describing in Section 2 the questionnaire used to map the current status of EMI at UniMe and analysing the results in Section 3 and Section 4. Section 5 discusses the findings and provides some highlights.

3. Literature Review

In this section, studies on EMI in Italian university contexts are reviewed. Before focusing on what happens in Italian HE institutions, it is relevant to consider that a substantial body of literature on EMI has been published worldwide and much research offers an extensive overview of EMI studies across Europe, examining its implementation in diverse cultural and

linguistic settings, and comparing its effectiveness and challenges across countries with different educational traditions (e.g., Molino et al., 2022; Hultgren, 2024).

EMI programmes are expanding globally, even in traditionally monolingual countries like Japan, where many universities also offer EMI courses aimed at local students (Brown, 2017). In Europe, EMI adoption is particularly widespread (Doiz, Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2013). The Academic Cooperation Association (ACA), an organization dedicated to the internationalisation of HE, revealed the rapid expansion of EMI programmes in HE institutions just over a decade (Hultgren, 2024).

In the context of EMI's overall expansion, the programmes differ widely depending on the country, academic discipline, and educational level (Dearden & Macaro, 2016; Costa & Mariotti, 2017). Some scholars believe that this variation reflects the unique priorities, resources, and linguistic contexts of each country and institution, highlighting that nations with strong internationalisation agendas may adopt EMI more rapidly, while others may be slower to implement it, especially in disciplines traditionally tied to local languages or cultures (Wächter & Maiworm, 2014; Hultgren, Jensen & Dimova, 2015; Hultgren, Nao, Wingrove, Yuksel, & Zuaro, 2023). Such a perspective emphasises the significant regional disparities in the adoption of EMI across Europe, with a clear north-south division. In a survey Wächter & Maiworm (2014) report the findings of a study on eleven European countries, showing that countries in Northern Europe (Denmark, Sweden and Finland) and the Netherlands lead in the proportion of English-taught programmes, while Southern and Eastern European countries (France, Turkey, Spain, Portugal, Romania, Greece, Bulgaria, and Croatia) lag behind. This disparity is attributed to several factors, including existing levels of English proficiency with higher pre-existing English skills facilitating the spread of EMI in Northern Europe.

The aim of EMI can also vary depending on the presence of international departments and students, due to a diverse academic environment that can influence the implementation and effectiveness of EMI programmes. Beelen & Jones (2015) argue that many institutions, regardless of their wealth, emphasise the importance of "internationalisation at home" to enhance intercultural and English language skills, as well as the employability of their domestic students.

In Italy, the 'paradigm' of internationalisation has significantly affected universities in recent years, and this led to a strong growth of graduate and postgraduate programs offered in English, including Bachelor's Degrees, Master's Degrees, PhD programs, and winter and summer schools. The Bologna Declaration, signed in 1999, sought to enhance the internationalisation of HE across Europe by promoting the compatibility and comparability of university degrees, thus facilitating student mobility and academic cooperation among member countries. It has contributed to a significant increase in EMI courses in Italian universities over the past 15 years and this rapid expansion of EMI has impacted Language/English for Specific Purposes (LSP/ESP) courses, preparing students for effective communication within their specific fields, enhancing academic skills, developing transversal abilities, and promoting intercultural understanding (Costa & Mastellotto, 2022).

This segment of the educational offer represents an area in which universities are investing to attract international students, though it is often well-received by local students too (Volchenkova & Al-Darraji, 2022). This perspective is discussed in a study conducted by Hartle (2020), showing that EMI is a promising component of internationalisation in Italian universities. However, EMI implementation requires dedicated, systematic support for lecturers to effectively teach EMI courses, and a thoughtful approach to EMI lecturing methodology, particularly one that incorporates blended learning (Hartle, 2020). Pulcini and Campagna (2015) highlighted the need to further explore EMI implications within the Italian HE system, suggesting that understanding the local context is essential for effective internationalisation strategies.

EMI in Italy has been studied from other perspectives, reflecting the complexity of this growing field. Costa (2024) approached the topic through a historical, sociolinguistic, analytical, and theoretical lens to develop a comprehensive understanding of EMI in the Italian context. Her study highlights the need for a more organised, thoughtful approach to EMI, advocating for policies that promote multilingualism, quality training, and upholding educational freedom and fairness. Cicillini (2021), on the other hand, emphasised that EMI in Italy is not a uniform phenomenon but rather one shaped by local practices that influence educational policy.

One of the main concerns is that EMI has often been implemented without a comprehensive, well-considered strategy (Macaro, 2022; Molino, 2023; Rifiyanti & Dewi, 2023). As a result, programs may lack consistency in quality standards, curriculum design, and support for students and departments, which can lead to uneven learning experiences and outcomes. EMI in Italy faces challenges related to linguistic competencies — many instructors, although proficient in English, may not have the training required to teach effectively in a non-native language (Costa, 2015; Guarda & Helm, 2017; O'Dowd, 2018; Cañado, 2020; Hartle, 2020). This gap can affect their ability to convey complex subject matter and to engage students fully in a language that may not be their strongest teaching tool. For students, learning in English can be an additional obstacle, especially if their proficiency level does not meet the demands of an EMI program, potentially impacting their academic performance and overall experience (Costa, & Mariotti, 2020; Cicillini, 2021).

Another critical issue is the preservation of multilingualism and Italian cultural identity (Wilkinson, 2024). Some critics argue that the increasing emphasis on English risks sidelining the Italian language in HE, which could diminish local linguistic and cultural richness **(**Molino, & Campagna, 2014; Chellin, 2018; Macaro et al., 2018; Dalziel et al., 2021). Furthermore, institutional disparities play a significant role. EMI is more prevalent in northern Italian universities, which often have more resources and a greater international presence, while southern and central regions may lag due to fewer resources or infrastructure to support EMI programs effectively (Pulcini & Campagna, 2015; Broggini, & Costa, 2017; Costa, 2024). This disparity risks creating an educational division within the country, where opportunities and the quality of EMI can vary widely based on geographic location and institutional resources. This data are documented in the Universitaly website, showing that in the 2023-2024 academic year, the results report 1.094 EMI courses offered, most of them at

Master's Degree level (869), followed by Bachelor's Degree level (184), Single Cycle Degree in Medicine and Surgery of 6-year long programmes (28) and single cycle degree of 5-year long programmes (13) mostly located in the northern part of Italy, followed by those in the central and southern regions (Table 2). The courses are offered in 152 Italian higher institutions, comprising predominantly 61 state universities, alongside 7 HE institutions of excellence with special status, 20 legally recognised non-state traditional universities, 11 online universities (MUR website; Campagna & Pulcini, 2014) and 53 Higher School for Linguistic Mediator (Universitaly website). A survey of Italian universities revealed a clear north-south difference in the implementation of EMI, with more programs available in the wealthier northern regions suggesting that resources, wealth, and prestige significantly influence the extent to which EMI is adopted in different areas (Costa & Coleman, 2013).

Table 2. EMI courses in Italian HE 2023/2024 (Universitaly, 2024)

Number of EMI courses in Italy	Degree level	Italian Region
1,094	184 Bachelor's	96 North 49 Centre 39 South
	869 Master's	523 North 209 Centre 137 South
	28 Single Cycle Degree in Medicine and Surgery (6-year long programme)	15 North 8 Centre 6 South
	13 Single-Cycle Degree (5-year long programme)	7 North 4 Centre 2 South

This lack of uniformity requires careful planning and consideration of local contexts, language support needs, and equity in educational access. Addressing these criticalities is essential to ensure that EMI programs meet high standards and truly benefit the diverse body of students they serve. In this respect, Di Sabato, Hughes and Macaro (2024) emphasise the importance of *student-centered teaching* and *high-quality interaction* within EMI contexts

and it is argued that achieving this goal in EMI requires teachers to critically reassess their teaching approaches and engage in targeted professional development.

A growing body of studies on EMI is also documented in The Transnational Alignment of English Competences (TAEC) literature database, which provides an extensive overview of EMI studies across Europe from 1999 to 2018 with 52 publications focused on Italy. Costa (2024) reports that 36 are empirical studies, with a notable increase in research activity beginning in 2017, suggesting a burgeoning interest in EMI among researchers and educators, indicating that this area is becoming more critical in the academic landscape.

It is comprehensible that EMI research in Italy has grown steadily, showing that these studies involve various stakeholders - institutions, students, and lecturers - suggesting a comprehensive approach to understanding EMI impact from multiple viewpoints. This underscores the importance of recognising the diverse experiences and needs of all parties involved in EMI. Nevertheless, independent surveys and studies on HE institutions and their policies offer a more comprehensive understanding of the situation (Santulli, 2015; Broggini & Costa, 2017; Molino, 2018; Costa & Mariotti, 2017; Guarda & Helm, 2017; Costa, 2021; Dalziel et al., 2021; Branka & Molino, 2022).

The data on EMI courses in Italy reveal a significant upward trend in the availability of such programs between the 2020–2021 and 2023–2024 academic years. The initial figure of 673 EMI courses in the 2020–2021 academic year reported in Costa's study (2024) has increased considerably to 1,094 courses in 2023–2024, indicating a robust growth of 62.5% over three years. This surge reflects broader trends in the internationalisation of HE and the increasing demand for English-taught programs among both domestic and international students, which aligns with global trends in terms of internationalisation processes and EMI implementation. It reflects a proactive response by Italian universities to enhance their global competitiveness and attract a diverse student body. As the HE landscape evolves, institutions will likely continue to expand their EMI offerings, which may necessitate improvements in language support services and faculty training to ensure effective teaching and learning.

Given that EMI provides clear advantages in fostering internationalisation and enhancing global competitiveness, this study seeks to map the current state of EMI at UniMe. By offering a thorough understanding of how EMI is implemented and experienced, the study aims to contribute to ongoing discussions on the effectiveness and inclusivity of English-taught programs. Additionally, it serves as a foundation for future opportunities in collaboration, innovation, and the integration of diverse educational experiences, ultimately enriching the academic landscape in Italy.

4. The EMI@UniMe Project: Methodology

To map the status of courses at UniMe, the first step of the project was to administer a questionnaire among EMI lecturers. Questionnaires are a fundamental tool in research, designed to gather information from a broad range of respondents through a set of questions. Becoming popular in the 19th century (Note 3), questionnaires were used for their cost-efficiency, ease of use, and ability to collect large amounts of data quickly (Galton,

2001). Over time, questionnaires have evolved into a fundamental tool across various fields, from social sciences to market research, emphasising their efficiency and cost-effectiveness (Bryman, 2016). However, despite they offer numerous advantages, such as the ability to quantify data for scientific analysis and support theory testing, they also present some limitations (Patten, 2016). For example, there is no guarantee of respondents' honesty or the thoughts they invest in their answers: respondents may forget details or misinterpret questions, leading to subjective responses that may vary widely. Nevertheless, questionnaires remain a useful method for collecting data from a wide audience, particularly when personal interviews are impractical (Kabir, 2016).

This research tool, specifically designed to systematically gather data from respondents through a series of structured or semi-structured questions, allowed researchers to gather both quantitative and qualitative information efficiently, making it valuable for studies across various disciplines such as social sciences, marketing, and education. By employing a range of question types - such as multiple-choice, Likert scales, and open-ended queries - the questionnaire method is effective for gathering detailed information on attitudes, opinions, behaviours, and demographic characteristics even if it has limitations, such as the risk of the response bias and constraints on the depth in responses. If carefully designed and administered, questionnaires can provide robust and actionable data to inform decision-making and research findings.

For the EMI@UniMe project, administering the questionnaire was a strategic decision that offered several advantages in this study. First, the decision was to use an online questionnaire to quickly reach participants to gather immediate feedback, ensuring they could complete it at their convenience, both in terms of time and location. This approach has been suitable for the efficient collection of data from lecturers involved in EMI courses. By deploying semi-structured questionnaires, the researchers involved in the EMI@UniMe project could systematically gather quantitative data on participants' experiences, satisfaction, and challenges related to EMI education. Additionally, the inclusion of open-ended questions provided valuable qualitative insights into specific issues such as language barriers and instructional effectiveness. The anonymity and scalability of the questionnaire made them particularly well-suited for capturing a broad range of perspectives across different departments and courses. This comprehensive data collection method has enabled a thorough evaluation of the EMI project's impact and effectiveness, thus guiding future improvements and ensuring that the courses meet the needs of all stakeholders at UniMe.

The UniMe questionnaire is based on previous research carried out at the University of Trento. By adapting the questionnaire on EMI developed by the Interdisciplinary Laboratory for the Quality and Innovation of Didactics of the University of Trento, Italy (LIQuID, Polli 2021) (Note 4), the UniMe questionnaire investigates the primary needs of EMI lecturers with a particular focus on their opinions regarding institutional and didactics aims, teaching practice, and learning assessment methods. The online Google Form was used to design the questionnaire and collect the data referring to the courses of the academic year 2023/2024 in which the language of instruction and learning was English. Participants accessed the form without requiring any personal identification to ensure anonymity.

The questionnaire is structured to collect accurate, reliable, and useful data (Patten, 2016; Curle & Derakhshan, 2021). Questions are written in Italian, and each one is concise and to the point, minimising confusion or misinterpretation. The use of concise wording ensures that respondents can quickly grasp the meaning of each question, reducing cognitive load and improving the quality of the responses. Additionally, they are formulated to avoid ambiguity and follow a logical sequence, guiding respondents smoothly from one section to the next.

The questionnaire is divided into 8 sections and took approximately 10 minutes to be completed. Participants were asked to answer 26 questions, mostly close-ended, to facilitate the completion of the questionnaire with minimal time consumption. After a section giving details about the questionnaire, a second section included nine questions related to general information, such as the course for which the questionnaire is being completed, the department to which the participant belongs, the type of degree program in which the teaching took place, the type of teaching/training activity (whether it was a compulsory, elective, or optional subject), observations on what linguistic skills the participant believes are necessary to teach in English in an intercultural context, and what skills are adequate to teach in English. Subsequently, two questions referred to linguistic certifications. The respondents were asked to answer if they had language certification, which awarding body issued the certification, and what level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) they achieved. The next sections focused on teaching practice, in-class interaction, the modality of the assessment, teaching in the first language (L1), and observations about the need for support when the teaching process is in a second language.

The questionnaire was administered in July 2024. After an online meeting with the Head of Department and the degree program coordinator of EMI courses organised by the Vice-Rector for Teaching and Learning, the EMI@UniMe group presented the project and sent the questionnaire via email to them to forward it to the teaching staff of the department involved in EMI courses. The email content included a description of the study, the instructions to complete the questionnaire, and the link to the Google Form. The questionnaire was sent to the lecturers involved in EMI classes who taught their academic subjects in English in the academic year 2023/2024. The participants in this study (N=98) were all lecturers working at the UniMe and were mostly Italian native speakers.

5. Institutional Aims and Lecturers' Profile

This section explores the key objectives that guide the university's implementation of EMI and the qualification of lecturers who teach in these courses. First, the questionnaire aims to explore how well the EMI approach aligns with the university's goals of fostering internationalisation and enhancing the global competitiveness of its academic programs. Additionally, it provides an outline of the diversity of subjects taught through EMI and the overall language competencies of the lecturers involved.

5.1 UniMe EMI Courses

The data show an overview of the diverse courses and subject areas in which 98 participants were involved, highlighting a remarkable range of disciplines. Participants were involved in

fields ranging from Medicine, Computer Science, and Engineering to Social Sciences, Law, and Humanities. Table 3 summarises the subject under its relevant field, highlighting interdisciplinary topics that combine multiple areas of expertise.

Table 3. EMI programmes at UniMe: Fields and subjects

Field	**Subject and Special Topics**
Medicine	Internal Medicine, Surgery, Pathology, and Endocrinology
Computer Science	Computer Science, Bioinformatics, Machine Learning, Embedded Systems
Engineering	Devices and Circuits for Artificial Intelligence, Spintronics, Industrial Automation
Mathematics	Mathematics
Statistical Physics	Statistical Physics
Social Sciences	Cross-Cultural Communication
Law	European Union Law
Humanities	Architectural Drawing
Earth Science	Soil Dynamics, Geo-forensics
Interdisciplinary	Sustainability Management, Corporate Finance

Based on the data provided, the highest percentage is allocated to the Department of Mathematical and Computer Sciences, Physical Sciences, and Earth Sciences (MIFT) with 26.5%, indicating a significant emphasis in this field. Closely following are the Department of Political and Juridical Sciences (SCIPOG) and Department of Engineering with 19.4% and 16.3% respectively, reflecting substantial attention to these areas. The Department of Chemical, Biological, Pharmaceutical, and Environmental Sciences (BIomorf) and the Department of Cognitive Sciences, Psychological Sciences, Pedagogical Sciences, and Cultural Studies (COSPECS) hold 18.4% and 8.2%, suggesting moderate interest. Meanwhile, the percentages of the Department of Human Pathology of the Adult and Developmental Age and Economics are 5.1% and 7.1%, respectively, indicating a relatively smaller focus. Fields such as Law and Clinical and Experimental Medicine (DIMeD) have minimal representation at 1% each. This distribution highlights varying levels of investment and specialisation across different disciplines.

EMI courses have been organised across various academic programs, with 46.9% offered in two-year Master's Degree programs. Additionally, 37.8% of EMI courses are available in three-year undergraduate programs, reflecting a significant focus on early exposure to English in HE. Meanwhile, 14.3% of these courses are part of Single-Cycle programs, which integrate both undergraduate and graduate studies in a continuous curriculum. There are also two teaching programs offered as a part of a three-year undergraduate degree, one course is available in a Single-Cycle Degree program, and one course is provided in a Master's Degree program which covers 1% of the total courses taught in English. This distribution indicates a strategic emphasis on incorporating EMI across different levels of HE, with a notable concentration in advanced degree programmes.

The EMI course structure indicates that a significant portion of the curriculum, 81.6%, is dedicated to compulsory teaching modules**,** ensuring that students acquire the essential knowledge and skills required for their degree. Additionally, limited elective modules make up 13.3% of the curriculum, allowing students some choice while still guiding them within specific academic parameters. Free elective activities cover 4%, giving students a small degree of freedom to explore subjects of personal interest beyond the core curriculum. Finally, specialised activities constitute 1%, focusing on in-depth learning in a specific area related to the student's field of study. This distribution reflects a strong emphasis on foundational knowledge, with some opportunities for personalised and specialised learning (Costa & Mariotti, 2024).

5.2 UniMe Lecturers' Profile and University Educational Objectives

Based on the data provided, the majority of participants are Italian mother tongue. They represent 95.9% of the group indicating a strong predominance of Italian as the native language among the lecturers. In contrast, English was the first language representing 3.1% of the participants, while Vietnamese was the first language in a single case, amounting to just 1%. The presence of English and Vietnamese as a first language in this group is an unexpected datum, given the overall linguistic composition, which is heavily dominated by Italians. However, without additional relevant data, such as information about the participants' backgrounds, and academic roles, it is difficult to draw any meaningful conclusions. Further information would be necessary to fully understand these data.

The participants were asked to answer the question "What are the main reasons for the university to introduce degree programs in English?". This inquiry prompted them to reflect on the significance of offering courses in English within the university's educational strategy. Each participant was allowed to choose up to three options from the available nine answers. They highlighted several motivations for this initiative. In most cases, the general aims identified were to enhance student mobility and facilitate their integration into the international scientific community (66.3%), expand the international learning and research community (59%), and prepare students for their post-graduation careers and develop an international professional profile (57%). Among the participants, 32.7% of respondents define EMI programs as essential for developing students' ability to learn and utilise specialised terminology in English, 27.6% of respondents considered EMI courses pivotal for

developing students' communicative skills in English, and, for a small group, EMI courses are considered as a tool to develop students' receptive skills in English, such as listening and reading (17.3%), a key to developing students' productive skills in English, including speaking and writing (16.3%) and for developing students' ability to master their academic growth (11.2%). Only 9.2% of respondents think that introducing English-taught degree programs is essential for fostering innovation in teaching practices within multilingual classes.

5.3 Language Skills of EMI Lecturers

Participants were subsequently asked to specify the language skills considered essential for a lecturer when teaching in English in an intercultural environment. In this case, a maximum of two out of seven responses were allowed. Most responses indicate that clarity (73.5%) and comprehensibility (68.4%) are very important, while accuracy (43.9%) and fluency (35%) are also valued, though to a lesser extent. Pronunciation, however, is considered less critical; only 4.1% of respondents view native-like pronunciation as important, and just 1% emphasised the need to speak as closely as possible to a native speaker.

The concluding first section of the questionnaire refers to the linguistic skills of participants, specifically focusing on language certifications. The data indicate a generally positive perception of English proficiency among participants. Many of them felt confident in their ability to use English for teaching, particularly in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and communication. In response to the question "Overall, do you feel that your English skills are sufficient for teaching in this language?" 80.6% of participants reported having strong reading skills, 72.4% are confident in their writing abilities, and 64.3 feel comfortable in speaking. Additionally, communication skills and listening are also well represented, with 61.2% and 60.2% of participants, respectively, expressing proficiency in these areas.

However, only 29.6% of the participants own language certifications, while the remaining 70.4% lack documentation to verify their language proficiency. The absence of certification for most participants could imply that their self-assessment might not fully align with standardised language assessment of the CEFR. This could present a potential gap between perceived and actual proficiency, especially in the context of teaching in English, which often requires a higher degree of fluency (Cañado, 2020).

Among the 29.6% with certifications, the majority possess a Cambridge certification obtained from private schools, 6.8% have an IELTS certification, 6.9% have a Trinity College certification, and 16% have a certification issued by the Language Centre at UniMe. Considering the language certifications, the linguistic level reached is not uniform. Specifically, 20.7% have a B1 level, 27.6% have a B2 level, 24.1% have a C1 level, and 6.9% have a C2 level. Additionally, some participants declared they could not remember their level or that at the time they took the certification exam, CEFR levels were not in use.

6. Teaching Practice in EMI Modules

This section details the results of the questionnaire on UniMe lecturers' in-class experiences with EMI teaching. Data refer to the respondents' learning objectives for their EMI modules,

their teaching tools, the role of Italian or their L1 other than English, and the concerns linked to students' language skills in class as well as during the learning assessment phase. To carry out a comparison between EMI and L1 education experiences, respondents were also asked whether they had also taught modules in Italian or in their L1 other than English at UniMe in the last three academic years. Those who answered positively (86.7% of the total) were then invited to complete a subset of questions about their teaching practice in L1.

6.1 Insights Into UniMe's Lecturers Learning Goals

UniMe's lecturers were asked to select the specific learning objectives of their EMI modules (maximum of three out of nine responses). The respondents' answers reflected the internationalisation drive linked to EMI implementation. Most answers (64.3%) regarded the possibility of offering students in their module the opportunity to work towards their future careers and to develop an international professional profile. Several lecturers also indicated that their learning objectives include offering students the opportunity to be part of an international learning and research community (i.e., involvement of incoming Erasmus students or contributions from international experts; 44.9%), as well as promoting the mobility of students (i.e. outgoing Erasmus students) and their involvement in the international scientific community (41.8%).

Responses referring to the development of the students' ability to learn and use subject-specific English were noteworthy (40.8%), though other options referring to language-specific goals were significantly less prominent. These regarded the possibility of developing students' ability to master the subject-specific bibliography in English (13.3%), to develop students' communication skills in English (expressing or exchanging information, ideas, thoughts, feelings, etc.; 26.5%), to develop students' productive skills in English (speaking, writing; 13.3%), and to develop students' receptive skills in English (listening, reading; 16.3%).

In addition, 33.7% of the respondents selected the ability to develop students' intercultural competence (i.e. the ability to interact effectively with people from other cultures) as a didactic aim, thus showing to take into account the intercultural dimension of EMI. By contrast, fewer respondents (12.2%) considered promoting innovative teaching practices and learning activities as primary objectives.

6.2 Materials for Personal Reference in EMI Teaching

A section of the questionnaire explored the tools used for personal reference while teaching (maximum of three answers out of twelve options) and how such tools were used by lecturers (maximum of two answers out of eight options). As for EMI lecturing, the respondents selected notes and outlines on the lecture topics in English as their main teaching tools (71.9%). A further 4% used notes in Italian or languages other than English. Even in L1 lecturing, 72.9% of respondents used notes and outlines. Consistently, for both EMI and L1 modules, the other tools most frequently used are notes and comments added to the slides (31.6% and 34.1%, respectively), and quotations and references from papers (27.6% and 29.4%, respectively). Results on EMI modules showed that, in 13.3% of cases, EMI lecturers

used specialised terms and vocabulary in English. However, the questionnaire also revealed how the use of other language-specific tools was extremely low: in particular, only 1% of the respondents used English pronunciation notes, 5.1% used prototypical English expressions and phrases to provide examples, be persuasive, or place emphasis; 3.1% used dictionaries; 2% used signposting language notes in English (i.e., expressions and phrases employed to signal progression through the lecture: e.g., beginning, moving forward, conclusion).

Likewise, as for the use lecturers made of these tools, results were consistent with the answer to the previous question and indicated that lecturing materials were not conceived as English-language support: no respondent employed these tools as guidance with pronunciation, while 5.1% of lecturers used them as a reference for specialised terms and vocabulary and only 1% for syntax and grammar. By contrast, in both EMI and L1 lectures, lecturing tools were used as memos or outlines of the soon-to-be-covered topics (58.2% and 63.5%, respectively), for improving the intelligibility of the lecture (44.9% and 45.9%, respectively), and as a source for quotations and references (28.6% and 40%, respectively).

6.3 Evaluation of EMI Students' Communication Skills

Respondents were asked to select the aspects of linguistic, communication, and interpersonal competence evaluated in their students of EMI modules and, when possible, L1 modules (maximum of three out of eight answers). In both scenarios, the aspects most frequently considered by respondents were the ability to learn and use subject-specific language (58.2% and 62.4%, respectively) and communication skills (expressing or exchanging information, ideas, thoughts, feelings, etc.) (34.7% and 50.6%, respectively). A noteworthy number of lecturers (24.5%) stated that, in EMI modules, they did not assess linguistic, communication, and interpersonal competence. In L1 modules, this percentage (12.8%) is slightly lower.

As for the concerns regarding the students' English language use and communication skills in EMI classes (maximum of three out of nine answers), the majority of lecturers (36.7%) stated that they found no concern. Still, many respondents admitted that their students had difficulty articulating complex arguments (29.6%), were reluctant to use English (due to shyness, fear of making mistakes, insecurity, etc.; 26.5%), and had difficulty using subject-specific English (23.5%). Other concerns regarded the students' ability to express their opinions or hold a discussion in English (16.3%) and – to a lesser extent – their difficulty in communicating (expressing or exchanging information, ideas, thoughts, feelings, etc.) in English (12.2%) and problems linked to misunderstanding the issues discussed and/or the teacher's questions in English (12.2%).

EMI lecturers were also asked whether they perceived as a concern that students may speak English more fluently than they do. In this case, 11.2% of respondents regarded this possibility as a concern. When asked if they noticed an improvement in students' language use and in-class interaction as their classes progressed, most respondents (55.1%) answered positively, though a good portion of them (32.7%) stated that they did not know.

Even in L1 modules, a noteworthy number of respondents (30.6%) did not find concerns with students' in-class communication skills. However, in this case, the majority of lecturers

considered students' reluctance to speak (38.8%) and difficulty in using subject-specific language (37.6%) as their main concerns, together with the difficulty of articulating complex arguments (28.2%). The percentage of concerns linked to expressing their opinion or holding a discussion (16.5%) is close to the one of EMI classes, while difficulties linked to communicating (expressing or exchanging information, ideas, thoughts, feelings, etc.; 10.6%), the misunderstanding of the issues discussed and/or the teacher's questions (4.7%), and fluency (1.2%) were lower than in EMI classes.

In this case, a higher percentage of respondents (71.8%) noticed an improvement in the students' communication skills as the module progressed, while 20% of lecturers did not know.

6.4 EMI Versus L1: The Role and Functions of the Italian Language in EMI Classes

A section of the questionnaire was devoted to the role of Italian (or L1 other than English) during EMI classes and exams. This set of queries was accompanied by open-ended questions to enable the respondents to discuss their replies. Most EMI lecturers (89.9%) claimed not to use Italian (or their L1, other than English) during their EMI classes. A number of respondents (9) filled out the optional section regarding the extent and reason why they used Italian and stated that Italian is used to clarify complex concepts, provide explanations of unclear notions, 'lighten' the class, as well as during informal communicative exchanges, and when international students are absent.

In 86.7% of cases, the respondents claimed that students were not allowed to use Italian during EMI classes. The optional responses (12 in total), on the occasions in which students were allowed to use Italian in class, included the need for clarifications and one-to-one conversations between native Italian speakers. On one occasion, the respondent stated that communicative exchanges in Italian were then translated into English by the lecturer to ease the comprehension for international students.

Finally, the respondents were asked whether, during the learning assessment phase, students of EMI modules were allowed to choose to take the exam (or part of it) in Italian (or in a language other than English). Even in this case, the answer was negative for 87.8% of the respondents. In the optional open-ended section (9 replies) about the reason and extent to which Italian was used during the learning assessment phase, the respondents stated that Italian was used if explicitly requested by the students and in case of linguistic barriers due to a lack of English language proficiency of the students under assessment. In one case, an EMI lecturer stated that the exam is in Italian because the students are Italian. Those who answered negatively to the above-mentioned question about the possibility of using Italian during the exam were redirected to an open-ended question about potential problems related to the exclusive use of English as the examination language. Some of them revealed issues linked to the students' lack of English proficiency (8 out of 31 answers), but the majority did not detect any problems.

7. Discussion and Way Forward

In this study, we provided the first mapping of EMI education at UniMe by using a

quantitative method, i.e., questionnaires directed at the lecturers involved in EMI teaching. As highlighted in several studies on EMI (e.g., Mastellotto & Zanin, 2021), the use of a case-study-based approach proves useful because it enables the exploration of the specificities of a given EMI setting and the implementation of future actions tailored to the needs, potentialities, and criticalities emerged during this pilot investigation.

Based on the list of relevant aspects linked to EMI education pinpointed in Section 1, we can confirm that UniMe lecturers conceive the use of English in teaching and learning as a means to achieve internationalisation goals and is thus related to the phenomenon of globalisation of education (for a comparison with other Italian case-studies see Pulcini & Campagna, 2015; Broggini & Costa, 2017). According to the respondents, both institutional and didactic objectives are especially connected with students' demographics and mobility (in terms of outgoing and incoming opportunities) and curriculum development. In accordance with several findings on EMI contexts, English is thus instrumental to the boost of international professional prospects and the broadening of the academic community (Bowles & Murphy, 2020; Molino et al., 2022), but language-specific goals are secondary (Airey, 2012; Dearden, 2014; Aguilar, 2017).

This finding is confirmed by the answers given to other queries in the questionnaire, especially those casting light on the evaluation of students' use of English and communicative skills. In particular, the fact that, in EMI lectures, most respondents found no concerns related to the use of English was unexpected. While this may seem encouraging, it may also indicate that lecturers were either unable or unwilling to evaluate students' difficulties. In fact, results about L1 modules show that, in classes held in Italian, criticalities linked to students' reluctance to speak and their use of subject-specific language increase, and fewer respondents express no concern. In this light, we may argue that lecturers are prone to detect students' issues in L1 education, whereas they are more condescending or less aware of linguistic problems during EMI classes.

When asked about the students' assessment phase, in both EMI and L1 modules, most UniMe lecturers claimed that communication skills and subject-specific language are the key aspects they evaluate. However, a relevant number of respondents stated that they do not evaluate their students' linguistic, communication, and interpersonal competencies in EMI contexts. We noticed how the percentage referring to the latter result halves in L1 educational settings, thus confirming that lecturers pay more attention to such competencies when the L1 is the language of assessment but tend to overlook them when English is employed. In light of these findings, further inquiries are required. In this respect, the project EMI@UniMe plans to expand its investigation by encompassing the students' perspective to investigate i) potential criticalities undetected by lecturers, and ii) content-language balance in the assessment phase.

We hypothesise that lecturers may feel uncomfortable in evaluating English proficiency and may not be equipped to detect potential problems. In this respect, teacher education represents an essential step that needs to be implemented in order to assist EMI lecturers in the shift from L1 to L2 teaching. Our questionnaire showed that lecturers' self-evaluated level of English proficiency is deemed adequate for working in EMI settings. Although this result

is encouraging, some negative results were found for speaking, listening, and communication skills – all playing a pivotal role in educational settings. Moreover, most lecturers do not possess language certifications and, for those who have one, their English proficiency level is often lower than the B2 level of the CEFR.

In Italy, few training courses have been activated to provide assistance and formative opportunities to lecturers (Costa & Grassi, 2022; Lasagabaster, 2022). In this respect, EMI@UniMe aims to further delve into the quantitative and qualitative study of UniMe lecturers' needs (e.g., via interviews) and, subsequently, create teacher training formats tailored to such specific needs by providing i) assistance for language-specific issues thanks to the collaboration with foreign language instructors, and ii) courses that encompass methodological insights into teaching in EMI settings. Based on the findings of this questionnaire and the preliminary needs analysis performed by looking at these data, we find several potential areas of intervention.

The first regards teaching materials: the questionnaire revealed that most UniMe lecturers use no linguistic tools for personal reference and, in both L1 and L2 teaching, they privilege content-specific materials (i.e., notes and outlines on the lecture topics, comments on the slides, and references from paper). Thus, formative actions should provide insight into adopting tools such as signposting language notes and typical expressions that can be used to ease lecturers' content delivery in English and increase clarity, intelligibility, and students' comprehension. Clarity and intelligibility were the skills considered fundamental for EMI teaching by the respondents to the questionnaire. This can only be achieved through content-language integration. Hence, EMI education and lecturer training cannot disregard the need for a thorough reflection on the role played by language in EMI classes, which clearly entails considering the position of L1 and, in general, languages other than English.

The findings of the questionnaire indicated that the great majority of lecturers do not use languages other than English in class. Likewise, students are not allowed to use their L1 in class and during the assessment phase. Although this is a common practice in most EMI contexts, the Englishisation of academia (Murphy & Zuaro, 2021) and the potential risks it entails (e.g., loss of prestige of other languages, impoverishment of cultural perspectives and identitarian heritage, inequity for non-native English speakers, intellectual narrowing, among others) should not hinder the ideal aim of EMI, i.e., the creation of intercultural settings and exchanges. Another area of intervention in lecturers' training regards the development of strategies to balance EMI, multilingualism, and multiculturalism in class.

This topic is also connected to lecturer-student and student-student interaction (Costa & Mariotti, 2023). As highlighted beforehand, most lecturers argued that they did not detect any particular concern about students' linguistic, communicative, and intercultural competencies. Nonetheless, a noteworthy number of respondents claimed that, in addition to issues related to English proficiency levels (e.g., difficulty in expressing complex arguments in English), students are reluctant to speak due to shyness or insecurity. Teacher training is thus expected to help lecturers reflect on how to adopt a student-centred approach to boost interaction and ease the process of shifting to English as the language of in-class exchanges with an

international audience. Clearly, this shift may be difficult for lecturers as well. In this respect, we also asked them whether the presence of students with a higher proficiency level or native speakers of English may be perceived as a source of concern for lecturers. Although only a small percentage of lecturers confirmed that this represents an issue, it is still important to accept that the shift to an international and intercultural educational setting may be bewildering.

In this respect, future research will address the potential challenges of EMI. This questionnaire represents a first step toward this analysis and, based on our preliminary set of data, we may argue that some of the main criticalities for UniMe EMI education are related to three 'needs': i) the need to integrate content and language, without privileging or neglecting either, so as to guarantee the quality of education, develop the sensibility to detect potential communicative concerns, and overcome a merely instrumental view of language; ii) the need to rediscuss teaching methodology (e.g., teaching tools) and approaches (shift towards a student-centred approach); iii) the need to reflect on the risks of 'English only' policies and the ways in which EMI can truly be the catalyst of positive internationalisation practices, rather than the cause of inequity, marginalisation of other languages, impoverishment of education and cultural diversity.

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Notes

Note 1. Further information at https://international.unime.it/study-us/english-programmes [last access 09/11/2024]

Note 2. The project EMI@UniMe was born as a part of the cluster EMI of Language in Education (LinE) research centre (https://languageineducation.eu). The Messina Unit involves Mariavita Cambria, Marcella D'Arrigo, Chiara Polli and Rosalba Rizzo.

Note 3. Francis Galton invented the questionnaire in the 19th century as a systematic method for gathering data, particularly for his studies in statistics and human differences. His innovative approach standardised information collection, enabling effective analysis of responses. By creating structured questions, Galton aimed to quantify subjective aspects of human behavior, such as intelligence and personality traits. This method not only facilitated large-scale data collection but also laid the groundwork for future research methodologies.

Note 4. The original version of the questionnaire was designed by the following members of LIQuID: Andrea Binelli, Maria Micaela Coppola, Antonella Degl'Innocenti, Francesca Di Blasio, Sabrina Francesconi, Carla Gubert, Greta Perletti, Federica Ricci Garotti, Sara Dellantonio, Patrizia Maria Margherita Ghislandi, Carla Locatelli, Chiara Polli, Giuseppe Ritella. English version translated by Maria Micaela Coppola and Anna Masetti.