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Professional Development for EMI

The Choice of a Blended Learning Format for Training EMI Lecturers at the University of Verona

Abstract

The internationalization of higher education (IoIHE) has led to many changes in university teaching, including the introduction of English Medium Instruction (EMI). This refers to the complete or partial delivery of course contents in English in a context where it is not the first language of the institution. The aim behind such courses is twofold: firstly to create courses that are accessible for overseas students wishing to study abroad and secondly to meet the lifelong learning needs of local students, equipping them with the means to export their own expertise and have the specialized language and content skills to participate in a global community. The introduction of such courses in Italian institutions has not been unproblematic, and EMI has been considered to be a top-down imposition, but if EMI is to be effective, it should, in fact, be driven by motivated lecturers themselves who wish to cater for the needs of their students in a globalized world. Professional development for such lecturers is still lacking or implemented non-systematically at local levels. This article briefly examines the phenomenon of EMI against a backdrop of internationalization and then describes the findings of questionnaires on lecturer confidence and their influence on the course design and teaching approach to EMI lecturer training courses at the University of Verona. The curriculum design of these courses, originally introduced to meet the English language needs of lecturers, is based on an ongoing study, which has shown over the years that the original emphasis has shifted to an awareness of the need for a specific EMI methodology. The course participants have consistently expressed an interest in developing a blended learning approach with the integration of the face-to-face and the digital as a suitable teaching and learning framework.

Keywords: *English medium instruction, Internationalization of Higher Education Institution, lecturer beliefs, EMI training course development, blended learning and digital tools*

1. Introduction

The internationalization of Higher Education Institutions (IoHEI) has increasingly led to the introduction of university courses delivered in a second language and on such courses

English is often the vehicular language adopted. English Medium Instruction (EMI) is effectively a key actor in this process of expanding HE internationally because it is frequently the language of academic instruction in countries where the first language is not English as described by Dearden and Macaro (2016, 456). Costa (2015, 128) points out, however, that the term internationalization is often “confused and wrongly identified” with EMI. Internationalization is a phenomenon related to educational policy rather than to a teaching approach *per se*. It is important, therefore, to distinguish between the two concepts. EMI as a teaching approach, furthermore, still suffers from a perceived lack of clarity in specific course aims (Pierce et al. 2015; Soruç and Griffiths 2018). The overall aim of this article, in fact, is to illustrate the case of EMI lecturer development in the local context of the University of Verona, focusing on the evolution of both lecturer training and a move towards blended learning both for lecturer training and for the teaching of EMI.

The article provides a brief overview of EMI to illustrate its role against the backdrop of internationalization and then describes the preliminary findings of a research project set up in 2016 to investigate EMI lecturer needs and practices in our context. These findings were used initially to inform the implementation of EMI lecturer training, and the article illustrates ways in which data from the results informed the topic focus and language work on the courses. The study is ongoing but the initial phase, of interest with reference to course design, took the form of questionnaires which were analysed quantitatively. Later stages included interviews conducted as part of the lecturer mentoring sessions. The content of the interviews is analysed using a grounded theoretical approach based on Glaser and Strauss’s methodology (Glaser and Strauss 1999). The findings of this stage, however, are still ongoing and are beyond the scope of this discussion. The structure of this article is: 1. a brief overview of EMI set against the background of internationalization in higher education and in Italy; 2. EMI at the University of Verona and 3. the choice of blended learning; 4. the research project itself and 5. the development of EMI lecturer training courses as a consequence of the findings from the questionnaires.

The course design was initially informed by the questionnaire results, but we also illustrate the shift in paradigm that occurred as a result of insights that emerged from the courses themselves. The course design, in fact, adapted over the years, to focus not only on lecturer language needs but also on pedagogical support for those studying in a second language (L2).

Blended Learning (BL) is felt to be an appropriate approach for learners working in an L2 in that it enables participants to work at their own pace, according to their language levels and needs. The EMI lecturer training course is, therefore, also delivered in this format, familiarizing

the course participants with a range of pedagogical strategies, both face to face (f2f) in the 'physical' classroom and online.

2. Internationalization and EMI

Internationalization worldwide, particularly in the field of economics has led to the internationalization of Higher Education Institutions (IoHEI), which is commonly defined as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (Knight 2008, 21). The agreements reached by the Bologna Process in Europe have been instrumental in fostering, among other things, student and staff mobility, leading to English-taught programmes being set up in many institutions to further this process and facilitate study for overseas students. Whereas in business the motivation to internationalize may be primarily linked to market expansion or the maximization of profits, in Higher Education (HE) there are other key factors (Romani-Dias et al. 2019) such as the need to train students to become global citizens and the increased quality of an internationally co-constructed education. IoHE is, in the words of de Wit et al., “a continually evolving response to globalisation driven by a dynamic range of rationales and a growing number of stakeholders” (2015, 28). These authors, in a study which was carried out for the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education, examined the phenomenon of IoHE both inside and outside Europe and forecast further growth whilst also calling for a stronger focus on the curriculum and learning outcomes.

Knight (2008) considers 'at home' and 'abroad' to be two principal contexts where IoHE is relevant. Internationalization 'at home' is more curriculum-oriented and refers to the development of intercultural skills and international awareness. Internationalization 'abroad' refers to a range of overlapping elements involving the crossing of borders and such practices as inter-university cooperation in joint degrees, Erasmus exchanges, student, faculty and credit mobility to name just a few. Such practices have become increasingly common both globally and in Europe over the past 35 years (de Wit 2015; Knight 2008). Another key practice in the internationalization process, which is the focus of this article, is English-taught programmes.

2.1 English Medium Instruction (EMI)

EMI, as mentioned above, in Dearden and Macaro's terms means providing academic content in English in jurisdictions where English is not the L1. As such it is instrumental, in promoting and has become synonymous with internationalization (Clark 2018, 564) and it may seem logical to see offering courses in English at HE institutions, where it is not the first language, as one

step towards internationalizing both students and lecturers. EMI increases opportunities for lecturer mobility, equips local university students with the tools to participate in professional contexts both in Europe and the rest of the world. It also leads to courses that are accessible for international students, crossing the borders of language to provide HE content to a wider public. The literature on internationalization, however, does not always see EMI as entirely positive (Macaro 2015). Concerns have been expressed about potential ‘linguistic imperialism’ (Canagarajah 1999; Philipson 2009) or what Hultgren (2014, 391) refers to as ‘Englishisation’ which may impose not only the language but also Anglo-centric teaching methodologies in contexts that may favour different approaches. Added to this are concerns about an uncontrolled growth in the use of English to the detriment of other languages and the impoverishment of research or the content delivered (Formentelli 2017). The challenges faced by students studying complex content in a second language are also a matter of concern (Carloni 2018), Dafouz-Milne and Camacho-Miñano (2016) questioned the intake of academic content delivered in an L2 as compared to that from an L1 course. There is also the question of whose responsibility it is to deliver this content in English or the question of how the use of English impacts study at HE level in a second language (Dearden 2014). Costa and Coleman’s (2013) survey, which was the first large-scale study carried out in the Italian context, also highlighted the lack of language support or training provided for lecturers and the lack of importance attributed to language issues on EMI courses. The EMI phenomenon has, however, despite these concerns, been described as a ‘tsunami’ (Doiz, Lasagabaster and Pavón 2019, 152). Doiz, Lasagabaster and Pavón (2019) underline the fact that it is a phenomenon which is on the rise, particularly in Europe. This may be due partly to its top-down imposition by many universities driven by the desire to increase student and staff mobility and improve their institution’s global rankings (Hughes 2008; Wilkinson 2012; Helm 2019), but it may also stem from a genuine belief by many lecturers in the goals of internationalization, and the desire to offer their courses to a wider audience as well as being able to support local students in the process of becoming international citizens.

2.2 The Italian context

Italy is increasingly applying measures to internationalize education in HE contexts despite the obstacles that have appeared along the way. De Wit et al. (2015, 119) positively stress the efforts being made in this country to reform the HE system in response to drivers for change, such as the European Higher Education and Research programmes (de Wit et al. 2015, 119) underlining the fact that Italy was one of the first to apply the action lines of the Bologna process. Italian

institutions were among the forerunners in both hosting the first conference in this process with considerable support from the Ministry of Education (MIUR 1999) and consequently implementing the Bologna reforms. Despite this rapid response, however, de Wit et al. (2015) report that the reforms had limited success largely due to challenges posed by the new institutional autonomy but also factors, such as a lack of governmental funding and guidance together with a lack of comprehension as to the aims or international nature of the reforms.

EMI is one effective way of internationalising the delivery of HE courses, and yet Italy was somewhat behind other Northern European countries about offering English Taught Programmes (ETPs) as demonstrated by Wächter and Maiworm (2014, 40) based on figures from 2014. The OECD, in the same year, classified Italy as a country which offered “No, or nearly no programmes in English” (2014, 346), with reference to figures from 2012. The 2020 OECD report (2020, 3), however, specifies that the number of international students in Italy in 2018 had increased from 5 to 6% of global figures which is on a par with the OECD average.

Many consider EMI to be an unpopular imposition in Italy, which is partly a result of the widely publicized court case of the Politecnico di Milano (Molino and Campagna 2014; Pulcini 2015). The case was a reaction to the decision of that institution in 2011 to teach all its Master’s and PhD courses in English and led to an ongoing debate in the national and international press at that time (Scammell 2014; Severgnini 2015). The final ruling, in 2018, of the Constitutional Court was that courses could not only be taught in a foreign language as this might “jeopardise the primacy of the Italian language, the freedom of students to learn and the freedom of professors to teach” (Salomone 2018). This case, however, is perhaps an exception to the rule as the Politecnico had attempted to impose the English language on all of its Master’s and PhD courses. The court case did not dispute the advantages and opportunities a knowledge of English can offer today’s students but was, rather, an attempt to protect the Italian language allowing it to maintain a key academic role in Italian universities.

To see EMI only as a top-down imposition, however, is detrimental to an approach that can work as a useful driver of internationalization. Some Italian lecturers currently teach part of their programmes in English and choose to do so freely. It is the element of bottom-up motivation and freedom of choice, in fact, which is key for effective EMI. Post-graduate degree courses in Italy are, in fact, increasingly being offered either partially or completely in English, although, as mentioned above, they are relatively new compared to northern European countries. The National Agency for the Evaluation of Universities and Research Institutes (ANVUR) listed 504 courses taught completely or partially in English in 2018 (2018, 22) with most of these courses being in sciences, followed by law and economics, which was a 60% increase compared to 2016.

2.3 EMI at the University of Verona

The University of Verona offers seven complete post-graduate programmes taught in English at the time of writing, of which two are in the field of economics, two in medical fields, one in mathematics, one in comparative European and non-European Literatures and one in Linguistics. Although this may not seem to be a large figure when compared with the 21 programmes taught entirely in English at the University of Trento or the 25 in Padua, there are also universities that teach far fewer courses in English (Universitaly 2020). In order to implement effective EMI, various challenges need to be met and difficult questions have to be asked. Macaro (2015, 4) called for “quality research involving all stakeholders (teachers, students, parents, policy makers, the world of business) associated with the education venture.” Our aim, at the University of Verona, is to do this with reference to lecturer support and training. In 2016 training was requested by several departments in the university and, as a result, a study was set up to investigate lecturer confidence and to inform EMI professional development course design. This process began with a questionnaire, which was circulated in 2016 throughout the university. It investigated lecturer beliefs about their own linguistic competence which had been reported to be their main requirement. As a result of this survey, a pilot training course for EMI lecturers was provided in the 2016-2017 academic year. Since then, further courses have been offered each year, progressively adapting the design according to lecturer response. The aim in 2016 was to introduce the pilot course to establish the real needs of lecturers already teaching in English and to provide support to those intending to introduce either complete or partial EMI courses both in the sciences and in the humanities. Over the years, however, the course design aims have adapted, and our research now focuses on discovering what strategies are considered to be useful by EMI lecturers both to develop their language and pedagogical skills, and how far these strategies are being adopted in their teaching.

3. Why blended learning?

BL is commonly conceived of in ELT educational contexts as the combination of an online with a f2f teaching space (Sharma and Barrett 2007). This definition is still widespread, but nowadays the distinction between the online and the physical contexts is no longer so clear-cut. Increasingly, the ‘blend’ is interpreted as the interaction between online and f2f components and the ways in which using digital tools together with classroom-based work is transforming the learning process (McCarthy 2016). In addition to this, the COVID-19 emergency has led to further modifications in HE teaching procedures, which is causing a change in the nature of BL.

The f2f is no longer considered simply to be a physical classroom alone but may also refer to f2f by remote teaching with video conferencing tools, where the blend becomes rather one of synchronous and asynchronous activity. Our course began before the COVID-19 crisis, but the interest in blending digital tools and classroom methodology which emerged over the three years has gone some way towards providing course participants with pedagogical tools they could use when adapting their teaching in remote teaching contexts during the 2020 crisis. When using BL approaches, in fact, whether a physical context is involved or a remote one, it is important to know how to develop a cycle where the different components can be combined, by providing online work that can be accessed before a f2f session, for instance, and which can then be integrated into that session (Day and Sharma 2014; Mishan 2016). Using a variety of tools effectively is what determines the effectiveness of the blend. If a content management system (CMS) is simply used to store materials for independent use, but those materials are not then integrated into f2f sessions, the process is not efficiently blended and is simply a case of support materials provided separately for students. Developing such blended learning management skills was thought to be a key area for those intending to use the format for their own EMI course delivery and as a result following the pilot courses in 2016 the training course delivery shifted increasingly to a blended learning format.

3.1 BL as a format for EMI: a task-based approach

Professional development for EMI is largely a matter of local choice and, as demonstrated by Costa (2015), the approaches to lecturer training throughout Europe differ considerably. Dafouz and Smit (2020) have recently developed an innovative ROADMAPPING framework for EMI education, but this is not a framework for professional development. EMI language training, as far as language competence is concerned and its development in Italian universities, may be considered to fall under the umbrella term of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (Long 2020), and the methodology adopted for such courses has traditionally reflected the methodology of General English Language Teaching (ELT) (Littlewood 2014; Ennis and Mikel Petrie 2020). This is mainly because the majority of the practitioners involved came from general English teaching backgrounds. Whilst the general ELT pedagogy has much to share with ESP, few specific didactic frameworks have been developed (Littlewood 2014). Littlewood, in fact advocates a teaching framework as a “communicative continuum” (Littlewood 2014, 296). This continuum ranges from analytical learning, which involves non-communicative activities to experiential learning, which involves authentic communication. The content of this framework, such as the lexis required, needs to be negotiated in contexts that rely on specific areas of

discourse. The approach, however, should also reflect the goals the learners need to achieve outside the classroom. This is a useful framework to base an EMI training approach on, as it is not linear but a process where these factors continually interact. In our course this analytical-experiential framework was combined with a task-based approach where participants simulated real-life tasks integrating the new language studied as they did so.

3.2 Application of the blended learning format on the University of Verona EMI professional development course

Our training course was delivered in a blended learning format comprising an online platform that provided participants with access to both materials, pedagogical tools and a noticeboard for administrative matters. This online context enabled access to materials that could then be integrated into the f2f context.

The task-based approach focused on specific professional tasks required by the lecturers, such as giving effective lectures, interacting informally with students, or managing office hours. New language was clarified and was then applied and experimented with in specific tasks. Politeness and the differing registers between formal and informal language that may be used in spoken interactions between lecturers and students was one such language area, for instance. Language input was studied cognitively by means of analytical exercises and was then practised experientially in activities, such as role plays simulating managing office hour meetings. The training approach included a range of strategies which can be placed along the analytical-experiential continuum, enabling the course participants to move from analysis to practice and then discussion in an integrated learning cycle. One key strategy was 'loop input', which Woodward describes as "a specific type of experiential teacher training process that involves an alignment of the process and content of learning" (2003, 301). On our course this entailed, for instance, using a PowerPoint presentation to demonstrate effective use of slides in the classroom. Discussion of how the slides were developed and how effective they were followed, and a third stage considered discussions of ways in which such slides could be produced for the specific disciplines of the course participants. This approach proved to be effective with the participants on the courses and the ways in which these course design choices reflect the results of the research findings will be explored below.

4. The research project

The research has been conducted in three main phases so far and was begun initially to inform the course design in the first phase, then to monitor the interest in the second phase. We are

currently in the third phase, which involves monitoring the tools and practices being adopted and implemented by lecturers in the EMI classes. The research questions, each of which corresponds to one of these phases, are:

1. How confident are lecturers about their English language competence?
2. Which areas of the training course are of greatest interest?
3. Which tools and practices presented on the course are being implemented?

This article, as mentioned above, reports the findings of the first phase, which focused on lecturer confidence in their English language competence. This was chosen to meet the needs expressed by the EMI lecturers and was used initially as a basis for the design of the EMI professional development course. In this first phase, an initial questionnaire was made available through Google Forms to the entire staff of the university. 62 respondents took part and, as can be seen in Figure 1. below which illustrates the breakdown of their disciplines, they fall into two broad categories: those teaching natural sciences, medicine and IT and, on the other hand, those teaching social sciences.

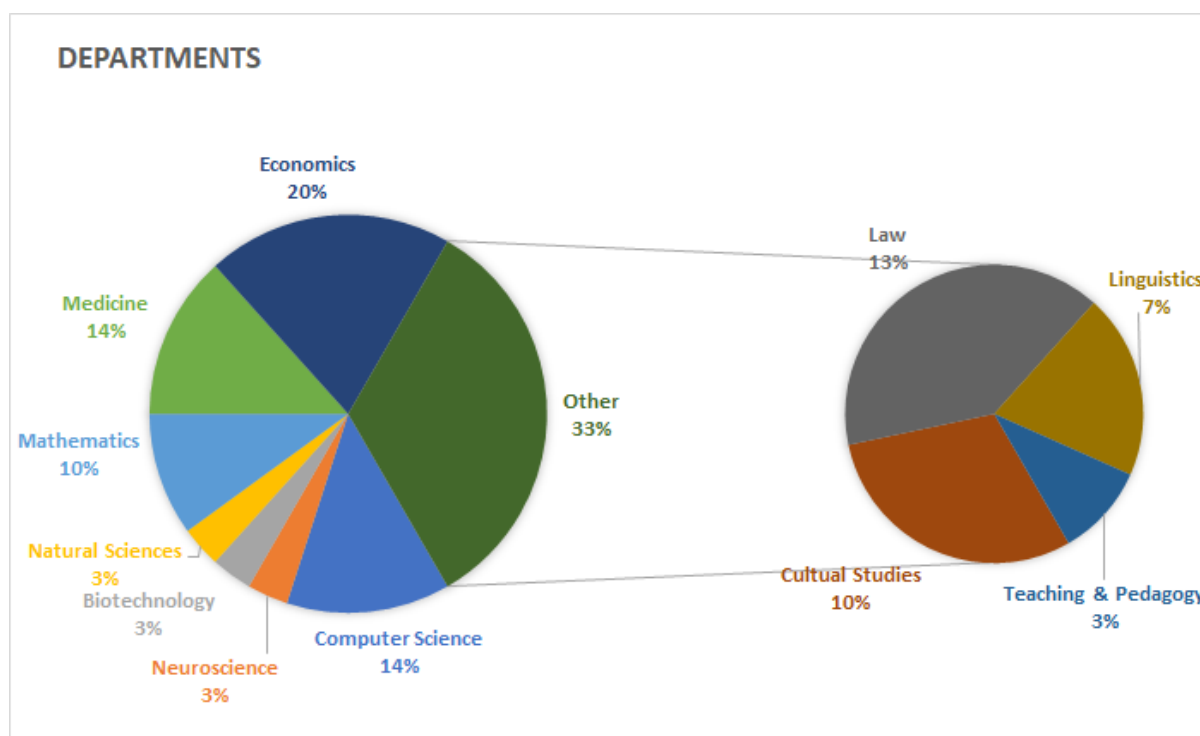


Fig. 1: Disciplines of respondents to Questionnaire 1

The questionnaire took the form of Likert scales with nine statements, such as: ‘I feel confident when I present content I have previously prepared from a linguistic viewpoint.’¹

Respondents classified the statements according to the following scale:

- strongly disagree
- disagree
- neutral
- agree
- strongly agree

The questionnaire was limited to nine items in the interests of encouraging participants to take part. A second questionnaire which had a similar format was administered at the end of the 2018-2019 edition of the course, which was completed by the 21 course participants who also came broadly from the same two categories as the initial questionnaire.

This questionnaire addressed the wider range of issues which had emerged over the courses and included a focus on supporting learners with lower levels and materials. It was designed in a Likert scale format which was similar to the initial questionnaire, with the same initial statements aimed at investigating levels of confidence. However, two statements were added at the end to investigate course participant satisfaction as well.

4.1 Methodology

The methodology adopted on this research project is mixed methods based on Dörnyei’s rationale that this allows for “a potentially more comprehensive means of legitimizing findings than do either QUAL or QUAN methods alone” (2007, 62). The analysis of the questionnaires, however, was primarily quantitative. The first stage was to design the questionnaires and to test their reliability. In a preliminary analysis, the internal consistency of the questionnaires was found to be satisfactory where a Cronbach alpha value was calculated as 0.768 on the first one, which is generally considered to be satisfactory. The score was 0.684 on the second. This is slightly less consistent, but it could be due to the addition of items measuring course and tutorial satisfaction. The next stage was to administer the questionnaires and analyse the results. Once the respondents had returned their data, the analysis involved assigning numerical values to the responses given to the questionnaire items. The numbers assigned were: 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4= agree, and 5= strongly agree.

¹ See Appendix A for other sample questions from the survey.

In the first questionnaire item 2, however, which can be seen in Appendix A, was reverse ordered in the coding process to allow for internal consistency. The data were analysed quantitatively according to the assigned values for frequency and dispersion by means of descriptive statistical analysis using the social science software package Jamovi,² which is an R-based programme. These data were then interpreted qualitatively to inform the course design. The second questionnaire was treated in the same way, but no reverse ordering was required.

4.2 Results of the questionnaires

4.2.1 Results of the pre-course questionnaire

The respondents indicated their confidence in a range of language competences, such as ‘clear pronunciation’ or ‘using field specific lexis,’ which can be seen in the headings on Table 1 below. The descriptive statistics shown in Table 1 illustrate the results of the analysis for frequency and dispersion over the questionnaire items. From this data it can be seen that although anecdotally, when requesting a training course, lecturers had claimed not to be confident about their linguistic competence, in fact the results overall did not reflect this. Little variability in dispersion exists, as can be seen by the standard deviation over all the questions answered, and the mode values show that by far the most common response was one of agreement with the statement. The median scores, which are useful in this case, given the overall lack of dispersion, show which issues reflected less confidence and tend to correspond fairly consistently to the mean scores, which show that lecturers were fairly confident (3.73), when the content of a lecture had been previously prepared and more confident when using field specific lexis (3.97). They were less confident, however, when using spoken English (3.08), or speaking informally both inside and outside the classroom (3.21). They also expressed concerns about the clarity of their pronunciation (3.10).

	Prepared Content	Using Spoken English	Using Field Specific English	Informal Interaction	Clear Pronunciation	Giving Explanations	Giving Examples	Giving Instructions	Informal Exchanges Outside Class
N	62	62	62	62	62	62	62	62	62
Mean	3.73	3.08	3.97	3.21	3.10	3.27	3.37	3.35	3.18
Median	4.00	3.00	4.00	3.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	3.00	3.00
Mode	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.00
SD	0.853	0.980	0.677	0.852	0.900	0.872	0.773	0.680	0.915

Tab 1: Analysis of the initial questionnaire

² <https://www.jamovi.org/>

4.2.2 Results of the end-of-course questionnaire

The results of the descriptive analysis of the end of the course questionnaire can be seen in Table 2 below. The descriptive statistics shown in Table 2 also illustrate the results of the analysis for frequency and dispersion over the questionnaire items. Little variability in dispersion exists, as can be seen by the standard deviation over all the questions answered, and the mode value (4) shows that on this questionnaire as well, the most common response was one of agreement with the statement for items 1-7. The mode value (5) for the final items 8 and 9, however, is perhaps misleading as this refers to opinions of course and tutorial usefulness, and respondents may have given such a high grade as a result of demand characteristics, which is a limitation in the item design of this questionnaire. This has been corrected in the research project by introducing these topics into the interviews. The mean values of 3.52 on spoken English show that this is still an area of concern as is less formal interaction (3.95), although confidence levels had improved over the course itself. The question of register, which had been added to the questionnaire because it had arisen during the courses themselves, was also an area of concern with a mean value of 3.86.

	Content Present- ation	Using Spoken English	Using Field Specific English	Informal Interac- tion	Support Lower Level Students	Clear Materials	Using Approp- riate Register	Course Useful- ness	Tutorial Usefulness
N	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21
Mean	4.14	3.52	4.00	3.95	4.10	4.10	3.86	4.81	4.67
Median	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	5.00
SD	0.655	0.814	0.725	0.759	0.436	0.539	0.727	0.402	0.577

Tab 2: Results of the end-of-course questionnaire

4.3 Discussion

The aim of the questionnaires was to inform EMI professional development course design in our context. As Lasagabaster underlines, despite the growth of EMI courses at a global level, most universities provide “hardly any pre-service or in-service course to help practitioners cope with this challenge” (2018, 400), which is a matter of considerable concern (Dearden 2014, 2; Long 2020, 20). Costa underlines the fact that English taught classes in Europe are generally delivered by subject lecturers rather than language specialists and calls for professional development to be “rethought as an exercise in self-awareness, self-discovery and self-reflection” (Costa 2015, 129). Guarda and Helm (2017) report the fact that lecturers in their study originally focused on language needs but that they were also very much aware of the need to develop and reflect on new pedagogical approaches to support learners approaching HE content

in an L2. This was reflected in our findings as well. The lecturers had originally focused on language competence and the items of greatest interest on the first questionnaire, as shown in the results, are items which reflect the language areas of spoken English, informal interaction and pronunciation rather than methodological areas, such as giving explanations, examples or instructions. Consequently, it was decided at the level of course design to integrate skills work to develop specifically these areas. As far as question 8 was concerned, it actually emerged during the course that not everyone had understood what was intended by 'giving instructions,' which, in this case, referred to the classroom management of students working in a second language, where clear instructions need to be mediated in a different way than they perhaps would in a monolingual class.

On the second questionnaire, regarding language competence, the results were higher, in fact, than those obtained on the initial questionnaire. There was still less confidence when interacting informally in English, however, and spontaneous spoken English was seen as more challenging than rehearsed lecture content presentation. In fact, one of the key aims of the course was the specific fostering of confidence in and the development of the specific language skills required to teach specific HE content to those studying in a second language. The aim was neither to reach native speaker proficiency nor to mimic Anglo-centric HE teaching methodologies, as it was felt to be more useful to share existing practices and to work on a peer informed construction of EMI teaching strategies, based on existing ones in place in monolingual classrooms.

Register is also key as it is important to be able to gauge and use it. A lack of confidence or even awareness of this had already emerged in the pilot courses and appeared once again in the other courses. Most of the course participants remarked informally that this was something 'to work on.' The respondents had showed concern for the support required by learners on EMI courses for the reasons already discussed above and by the end of the course felt much more confident of their ability to provide such support particularly in a BL context and by integrating digital tools into their f2f lessons as well. Finally, the course and tutorial (mentoring) usefulness scores were the two highest, which suggests that the course design was effective for these lecturers. The results of the questionnaires, together with the experience acquired over each course informed the course design, as will be explored below.

5. Development and description of the course following the questionnaire results and aspects implemented to meet emergent needs

The focus on the initial course was to provide English language support for the specific academic tasks lecturers carried out. The approach comprised f2f lessons which aimed to provide language input and tasks. The online support provided asynchronous analytical work together with reflection and discussion activities which were then extended and integrated into the synchronous context. In line with the results of the first questionnaire, the training focus was on spoken skills and pronunciation in lecture discourse. Confidence was built by means of scaffolded tasks in small groups, and there was an explicit focus on and practice of the spontaneous language required for interactions outside class and during office hours. Work on classroom management language involved a focus on instructions language in the classroom and how to simplify these for L2 learning contexts. Although the process is not linear and spoken skills were worked on constantly, for instance, in group work during the sessions, the typical progression of this approach can be seen in Table 3 below. This includes examples of the approach to developing confidence in lecture discourse and delivery. This table also shows which elements are conducted asynchronously online and which are more suited to a synchronous context in the BL framework.

Lesson Stage	Classroom Activity	Example	Synchronous or Asynchronous
1. Clarification and experimentation 1	Explicit clarification: language or skills	Guided discovery of signposting language for lectures: analysis and practice.	Asynchronous flipped content followed by synchronous discussion.
2. Clarification and experimentation 2	Explicit focus on language	Focus on signposting phrases: analysis and practice.	Asynchronous flipped content followed by synchronous discussion.
3. Focus on Pronunciation 1	Feedback and development of participant error	Inductive analysis of participant errors noted during stages 1 and 2.	Synchronous discussion work. Asynchronous review work.
4. Focus on Pronunciation 2	Extension and practice of work from stage 3	Further practice of the stage 3 areas and a focus on voice and delivery of lectures: speed, pitch, tone, rhythm and pauses	Synchronous clarification and practice.
5. Project work	Specific topic-related task	Mini lectures, developed, rehearsed and performed in small groups in class.	Asynchronous models provided for synchronous group presentations in class.
6. Feedback and discussion	Focus on error, reflection and discussion	Errors or key points noticed during unobtrusive monitoring are clarified and discussed. Reflection questions are provided for individual work and then discussed.	Asynchronous feedback and reflection questions for online discussion followed by synchronous discussion.

Tab. 3: Typical progression of classroom work on the EMI training course

5.1 Adapting the syllabus to emergent needs

What soon emerged from the discussions and reflections undertaken in class was a shift in focus as participant concerns moved away from their own competence towards providing support for learners by means of an appropriate EMI pedagogy. The input on the course has adapted accordingly over the years to focus on such aspects as not only the specific language required for the various topics but also methodological strategies for teaching in an L2. Such areas are shown in Table 4 below and still reflect a focus on language skills but also a growing interest in strategies and tools that can support those studying in an L2.

Emergent Focus	Classroom activity	Synchronous or Asynchronous³
Awareness of CEFR levels	Inductive analysis of learner production at different CEFR levels.	Asynchronous analysis work followed by synchronous discussion.
Classroom management	Focus on group and pairwork, clear instructions, correction and feedback techniques.	Synchronous clarification and discussion combined with practice. Group work simulations.
Materials adaptation	Scaffolding materials to facilitate study, or providing review activities.	Asynchronous analysis of adapted materials, such as gapped lecture slides, or review quizzes. Synchronous discussion and practice.
Providing pre- and post-study discussion and reflection questions	Pre-reading questions and activities and follow-up to reading questions including comprehension and discussion.	Asynchronous analysis of reading texts with pre- and post-reading activities. Synchronous discussion and experimentation of how to implement such practices in local contexts.
Regulating lesson pace	Providing a variety of activities in class with various pedagogical tools: formative assessment quizzes, videos, digital tools, such as Mentimeter ⁴ , Kahoot ⁵ , Socrative ⁶ and Quizlet ⁷ .	Synchronous clarification and demonstration followed by asynchronous experimentation with materials provided online. Integration into the synchronous context with discussion and presentation of activities and plans developed individually.
Mentoring	One-to-one sessions held with a tutor three times during the course.	Synchronous discussion of specific needs or aspects of EMI that individuals need to develop.

Tab. 4: Emergent areas integrated into the course

The aim, at our university, had never been to impose a pedagogical model on lecturers but to provide them with a space to compare and co-construct different pedagogical strategies based on the existing ones. This approach, which combines systematic experimentation, reflection and discussion, was designed primarily to enable course participants to do precisely that. As has

³ Synchronous in this course referred to the f2f context of being physically present in a classroom but could just as easily refer to online synchronous contexts provided by means of video-conferencing tools.

⁴ <https://www.mentimeter.com/>. All websites were visited on 15/11/2020

⁵ <https://kahoot.com/>.

⁶ <https://www.socrative.com/>.

⁷ https://quizlet.com.

already been mentioned, one of the concerns regarding the use of EMI is an alleged imposition of an Anglo-centric pedagogy which does not necessarily meet local needs. The continual adaptation and discussion process enabled lecturers to develop practices that are suitable for our context and to adapt some of them to support those studying in an L2.

6. Conclusions

In the University of Verona EMI is a relatively recent approach to course delivery but it is a key component of the HE Internationalisation process both for incoming and outgoing students and staff. The opportunity of being able to work or teach in English in specific areas creates graduates who are able to play key roles in an international scenario and also fosters mobility. Despite the ambivalent attitudes towards EMI in Italy, if it is to be an effective driver of internationalization it must be a bottom-up approach, where lecturers are concerned to provide the most effective teaching for their students and are aware of the advantages working in English can lead to. In Verona, the very fact that a need was felt for training and support, and was requested by the lecturers themselves, confirms that the attitudes are perhaps becoming more positive.

BL is widespread in HE but to differing extents, ranging from those who use the CMS merely as a container for lecture slides to those who use it as a springboard leading to other activities, some of which can be done online and others in a f2f context. Implementing a BL approach to EMI training enabled course participants to experience a blended asynchronous and synchronous level first-hand, which implicitly encouraged the use of this system of delivery in their teaching. BL was used well before the current COVID-19 crisis, but it provides essential didactic skills for those working in education at the moment.

Both the results of the questionnaires and the issues that have arisen during the courses themselves have shown a clear need for EMI lecturers to focus not only on their language skills but also on providing support for their students who are also studying specialist subjects in a second language. This has led to a shift toward developing an effective EMI training approach. In the light of our experience, it was felt that BL, when combined with an analytical-experiential, task-based approach that focused on both language skills and also on developing pedagogical skills, was an effective format. The focus on methodology, however, was not top-down but one of co-construction of effective EMI practices to meet local needs.

The University of Verona generally establishes the entry level to English taught post-graduate courses at the intermediate B1 level. Even though many students have higher levels, the lecturers are very much aware of the need to provide support for those who struggle to keep up

with the pace in the f2f context. Using blended delivery formats was viewed as an effective approach to EMI training, but is also a useful framework for EMI education itself, in that it enables learners to exercise greater degrees of autonomy and choice when studying and, in particular, provides resources that cater for varying pace requirements and language levels. The training courses have undergone a clear evolution over the years, moving towards BL support for lecturers to build on and extend their own practice through discussion and strategy building among peers, in order to extend the best practices already in place in the local context rather than imposing an external Anglo-centric pedagogy. One challenging but also motivational aspect of the courses was that they were mixed, with participants from various academic disciplines. This was positive insofar as it provided a context for comparison and the sharing of strategies and insights but was also limiting in that it did not focus on the specific needs of one single domain.

For this reason, in the 2018-2019 course, a mentoring service was introduced to provide support at an individual level where lecturers were able to focus on their own specific needs. Learning how to support L2 study in EMI emerged very clearly as a key area of interest, both in the mentoring sessions as well as on the questionnaires. The focus in the mentoring sessions, in fact, was often pedagogy, rather than language skills, as lecturers explored new ways of planning lessons and implementing strategies and tools. One of the main questions addressed in these sessions, in fact, was how lecturers could use the specific pedagogical tools introduced during the course itself in their own contexts, and which strategies and materials adaptations were the most suitable ones for their specific needs. The most popular strategies were related to classroom management, such as ways of organising student interactions in pairs or groups, which are innovative for many in our context but, when presented as an opportunity to co-construct knowledge and skills rather than as 'language practice opportunities' proved popular. This was partly due to the fact that the lecturers themselves were experiencing the benefits of working in small groups during the course. The necessity of providing clear instructions was another area of interest for these lecturers, and particularly ways of giving effective instructions that were not too complex, but were broken down into smaller parts or by demonstrating what was required.

By far the most popular pedagogical tools, however, on our training courses, were the digital ones that could be integrated into the classroom as well as into the online context, such as Mentimeter, which increases individual participation in large class formats. Course participants also realized how effective PowerPoint presentations can be when the tool is used to its full potential, rather than simply being used to create notes for lecturers in class and

students when studying independently. The question of adapting materials both for classroom and online use was also key, and such strategies as providing ‘gap-filler exercises’ to help students process new content or providing pre-reading and post-reading work was felt to be a useful support mechanism.

BL, as mentioned above, is undergoing its own evolution, largely as a result of the COVID-19 emergency so that the blend is no longer, at least in the present situation, a matter of online combined with physical f2f. It is rather becoming a matter of the synchronous online work conducted f2f via video-conferencing, which is being blended with the asynchronous work provided on CMS platforms. Going forward the lessons being learned from the present situation as to how this blend can be effectively managed may well inform many aspects of HE pedagogy in the future, and this includes EMI pedagogy as well. In Verona, however, the next task in our study is to determine how far the techniques and methodology explored in the training courses are being implemented in the lecturers’ actual EMI teaching, and to that end, we are at present carrying out focused interviews with various course participants. The results of these interviews will help to shape the training provided in the future. Macaro (2015) referred to EMI as an “unstoppable train,” and he added that in order to ensure a safe journey for all those involved the best way to implement it needs to be determined. Providing ongoing lecturer support is one step towards doing this, as is a continuous analysis of what the bottom-up requirements and concerns are of all those involved in the process. Our study originated from the very practical needs of ascertaining how best to develop the support system for our lecturers in a local context. However, it may contribute to the international conversation on these wider issues of how to develop the whole EMI process with the choice of a BL format being particularly suited to educational requirements at this point in time.

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Appendix A

On both questionnaires respondents were asked to rate each statement from 1-5.

1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: neutral, 4: agree, 5: strongly agree

The initial questionnaire items

1. I feel confident when I present content I have previously prepared from a linguistic viewpoint.
2. I feel anxious about using spoken English in my teaching.
3. I feel confident when using the specific vocabulary of my field of expertise.
4. I feel confident when I interact less formally with students in class.
5. I feel confident that my pronunciation is clear.
6. I feel confident when I give explanations.
7. I feel confident when I give examples.
8. I feel confident when I give instructions.
9. I feel confident when I interact less formally with students in situations outside class, such as office hours, tutorials etc.

The end of course questionnaire items

1. I feel more confident now when I present content I have previously prepared from a linguistic viewpoint.
2. I feel more confident about using spoken English in my teaching.

3. I feel more confident when using the specific vocabulary of my field of expertise.
4. I feel more confident when I interact less formally with students.
5. I feel able to support learning when language levels are not advanced.
6. I feel confident that my materials are clear.
7. I am confident that I can use register appropriately.
8. I have found the course to be useful.
9. I have found the tutorials to be useful.