

University Teachers' Perceptions at the Early Stages of a Bilingual Teacher Education Programme

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ABSTRACT: This article reports on a qualitative exploration of the perceptions held by a group of eight university teachers concerning the initial stages of a teacher education programme, in which some modules were taught through the medium of English. The still on-going experience started in the 2014-2015 academic year in a group of the Primary Education Degree Course at the University of Málaga (Spain). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight lecturers at the end of the academic year in order to elicit their interpretations of the first stages of a bilingual programme, of themselves as teachers in the programme, and of the conditions in which it was set up and resourced. The study adopted a thematic approach to data analysis. The findings provide an overview of the challenges and opportunities of English as a Medium of Instruction at a particular context that hopefully sheds some light on key issues concerning the quality of bilingual programmes in higher education.

Keywords: English as a Medium of Instruction, university teachers' perceptions, bilingual teacher education programme, qualitative research.

Percepciones de profesorado universitario en las primeras etapas de un programa bilingüe de formación de profesorado

RESUMEN: Este artículo presenta un estudio cualitativo sobre las percepciones de un grupo de ocho docentes universitarios relativas a las etapas iniciales de un programa de formación del profesorado en el cual ciertos módulos eran impartidos en inglés. La experiencia –aún en curso– comenzó en el año académico 2014-2015 en un grupo del Grado en Educación Primaria en la Universidad de Málaga (España). Se llevaron a cabo entrevistas semi-estructuradas con ocho profesores al final del año académico con el fin de obtener sus impresiones sobre las primeras etapas de un programa bilingüe, de ellos mismos como docentes en el programa y de las condiciones en las que se puso en marcha y se financiaba. El estudio adoptó un enfoque temático al análisis de los datos. Los hallazgos reflejan un panorama de retos y oportunidades del Inglés como Medio de Instrucción en un contexto particular, que entendemos que aporta una valiosa información sobre aspectos clave relativos a la calidad de los programas bilingües en educación superior.

Palabras clave: Inglés como Medio de Instrucción, percepciones de profesorado universitario, programa bilingüe de formación de profesorado, investigación cualitativa.

1. INTRODUCTION

Within the current trend of internationalisation, bachelor's and master's degree programmes that are fully or partly taught in English are rapidly spreading at universities in Europe and worldwide (Dearden, 2014; Doiz, Lasagabarte, & Sierra 2011; Ramos-García & Pavón, 2018; Smit & Dafouz, 2012). This spectacular growth in the number of such programmes in our context –they have increased by 239% between 2007 and 2014 in Europe (Wächter & Mainworm, 2014)– has been fuelled by factors such as the European policies to promote bilingualism and both citizen mobility across Europe and mobility within a common European Higher Education Area, quality indicators and international rankings, and the added value of educating professionals to act and communicate in an ever-growing multicultural and multilingual world in response to the rise of competing institutions.

In the European context, Nordic countries and the Netherlands took the lead in delivering programmes and courses in English in the context of Higher Education (henceforth, HE) (Doiz et al., 2011). Following their lead, the English as a Medium of Instruction (henceforth, EMI) trend has now rapidly expanded and, in the survey performed by O'Dowd's (2018) only 7% of the 70 European universities in the study were offering no EMI courses at all.

The University of Málaga started to offer EMI instruction as part of its internationalisation strategy a few years ago (Universidad de Málaga, 2014). In addition, the Bilingual Degree in Primary Education at the University of Málaga also intended to respond to the need generated by language policies promoted by the Education Authority that guarantees more than 1,500 bilingual schools by 2020 (Junta de Andalucía, 2017). The case of this undergraduate programme is no different from other bilingual programmes across Spain in that no formal planning, quality control or specialised training previous to the implementation was conducted. As Dafouz, Camacho and Urquía (2014) explain, “EMI programmes have paradoxically operated from a bottom-up perspective, with individual teachers or departments embarking in EMI on an experimental level” (p. 227). This means that, although fully and partly English-taught programmes have become a substantial part of the policy rhetoric of internationalisation, sound planning and quality assurance measures for EMI are not institutionalised.

In this article, the term EMI will be used to refer to the approach to teaching subject content through English adopted by the lectures in the study since –as it will be later revealed– no language learning goals are explicitly planned (Smit & Dafouz, 2012). EMI has been described as “the type of context where content is the priority and where no assessment of students' English competence is made because no language learning outcomes are acknowledged” (Aguilar, 2017:725, based on Greere & Räsänen, 2008).

The implementation of EMI courses and programmes at universities is by no means homogeneous, and differences within and across contexts –in terms of planning, resources, institutional support, organisation, etc.– may be highly significant and may thus give rise to varying interpretations of the experience on the part of the teachers. As experiences of bilingual university teaching are highly personal and context-dependent, they cannot be transferable to contexts characterised by remarkably different conditions. As Dearden and Macaro (2016:478) point out in their study aimed at investigating university teachers' attitudes to EMI in three European countries (Austria, Italy and Poland), “differences exist both within country and across countries in how it [EMI] is being introduced and accepted”; there is

a need, therefore, to explore lectures' perception in their particular contextual situations, as variability in perceptions is likely to occur". Furthermore, we fully agree with Aguilar (2017:723) when she points out that "inquiring into lecturer beliefs seems a necessary previous step for teacher training design and even for sound internationalisation". Additionally, in the context of the outset of an EMI initiative, exploring lecturers' perceptions may provide invaluable data to assess the programme and identify its strengths and weaknesses. And lastly, in the Spanish context –but also elsewhere–, the lecturers in the studies that delve into perceptions and experiences when teaching in English mainly belong to the fields of business and engineering (e.g., Aguilar, 2017; Aguilar & Rodríguez, 2012; Arnó-Macià & Mancho-Barés, 2015; Unterberger, 2014; Vinke, Snippe & Jochems, 1998). Few studies so far have specifically focused on the interpretations of the EMI experience by university teachers of education, with the exceptions being the study by Barrios, López-Gutiérrez and Lechuga (2016), and those by Madrid and Julius (2017). The former presents data on the evaluation of the first year of the implementation of a bilingual education degree course by teaching staff involved; in the latter, the authors set to investigate education university teachers' (and students') factors that –in these stakeholders' view– exercise the greatest influence on the quality and positive results of bilingual/CLIL HE programmes.

Following this reasoning, this paper reports on a qualitative exploration of the perceptions held by a group of eight university teachers concerning the initial stages of a teacher education programme at the University of Málaga (Spain) in which some modules were taught through the medium of English. The still on-going experience started in the 2014-2015 academic year.

2. DESIGN OF THE STUDY

2.1. Participants and context

The bilingual modality of the Bachelor Degree in Primary Education at the University of Málaga (UMA) (Spain) started in the 2014-2015 academic year. In the bilingual strand, around 35% of the 240 ECTS credit points are delivered in English. Access to this strand –limited to only one of the six groups offered at the Degree in Primary Education each year– depends on the student's university entrance score, which is invariably higher than the one required for the mainstream groups (for example, in year 2016-2017, the entrance score for the bilingual group was 10.240 and for the mainstream group, 8.256). No language requirement is to be met for enrolment in this bilingual group although, up until year 2017-2018, a B1 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) was recommended (a B2 level is currently recommended).

Eight lecturers from the Faculty of Education took part in the study; three of them had over 20 years' experience as university teachers and other four had non-permanent positions at the university with contracts running for one academic year. Their age ranged from 30 to 61. The modules they taught included general didactics, school organisation, music education, arts education, language education, social sciences education and history of schooling. Although the Faculty of Education policy actively encouraged departments to offer modules

in English, participation in the programme was essentially on a voluntary basis. A minimum B2 level was recommended (but not mandatory) for lecturers to join the programme.

2.2. Methodology

A qualitative, interpretive research approach was chosen for the study, as it enables the understanding of human thought and action in social and organisational settings (Creswell, 2007; Flick, 2009). By adopting this perspective the research tried to capture the views and perceptions of the lecturers involved in an educational innovation, and the meanings and interpretations they attach to the experience.

This interest led us to formulate the following broad research question: What are the lecturers' views, perceptions, experiences and interpretations with regard to their participation in the teacher education bilingual programme?

Previous studies in the field of university teachers' perspectives concerning EMI experiences have also adopted a similar qualitative orientation (e.g., Aguilar, 2017; Aguilar & Rodriguez, 2012; Arnó-Macià & Mancho-Barés, 2015; Tarnopolsky & Goodman, 2014).

2.3. Data gathering and analysis

Data was collected in three consecutive years (from 2015 through to 2017) by individual semi-structured interviews. These took place at the end of each academic year. Lecturers participated in the interviews voluntarily. The semi-structured interviews consisted of 12 pre-defined questions aimed at obtaining qualitative data on the following issues: a) motivations to join the programme, b) the level of English competence needed for effective EMI; c) the need for linguistic and/or specific methodology training; d) the evaluation of the conditions in which the programme was being implemented and resourced; e) the students' participation in class, and their motivation and commitment; f) the presence of linguistic goals in the modules; g) the development of the communicative competence in English, both in students and in teachers; and finally h) the overall assessment of the experience. Additionally, lectures were actively encouraged to discuss any topic or idea they wished to bring up.

Recordings of the interviews were summarised as a first step in data analysis. Appropriate verbatim quotes were also extracted to validate and illustrate relevant categories. A qualitative thematic analysis was used to identify salient themes in the interview data (Guest, McQueen & Namey, 2011). Concerning the numerical information provided, the researchers endorse Sandelowski, Voils and Knafl's (2009) statement that:

Quantitizing here [in qualitative studies] is done to form qualitative data in ways that will allow analysts to discern and to show regularities or peculiarities in qualitative data they might not otherwise see or be able simply to communicate, or to determine that a pattern or idiosyncrasy they thought was there is not. (p. 210)

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings will be presented in the four major categories that emerged from the data, namely motivations to join the bilingual programme, impact on teaching, institutional facilitating and hindering factors, and assessment of the EMI experience.

3.1. Motivations to join the bilingual programme

As mentioned above, participation in the programme was decided on a voluntary basis. Reasons to join the programme vary significantly among the participants and include the value and worthiness of the EMI experience in light of the current trend of internationalisation at HE (mentioned by three lecturers), the opportunities to boost one's own competence in academic English –mentioned by two lecturers– and the contribution to launch the initiative (mentioned by two) and raise the quality of the programme (mentioned by one) and improve the students' job prospects that teaching in English could guarantee; regarding this latter reason, it is remarkable that, despite the fact that the official justification for the programme was to prepare teachers to satisfy the increasing demand for primary teachers at bilingual schools, this motive was only mentioned by one of the lecturers.

In addition, four lecturers also mentioned personal and professional experiences (of language learning, and of working and studying abroad) when talking about reasons to join the programme. It seems to be the case that the lecturers' personal and professional background concerning not only language learning but, most importantly, academic and professional experiences abroad, do seem to have a significant impact on their willingness to join an EMI initiative.

Studies carried out in Spain and elsewhere have also identified similar motives for lecturers to engage in EMI teaching; that is the case with the current trend towards internationalisation in HE (e.g., Aguilar, 2017; Aguilar & Rodríguez, 2012; Pecorari, Shaw, Irvine, & Malmström, 2011; Yang, 2016) and their desire or need to improve their English proficiency (Aguilar, 2017; Aguilar & Rodríguez, 2012; Arnó-Macià & Mancho-Barés, 2015). Dearden and Macaro (2016: 468) also found out that teachers who had studied abroad were more willing to teach in English and more optimistic about the opportunities opened up by EMI experiences.

3.2. Impact of the programme on teaching

Teaching in English had a significant impact on how lecturers conceive and implement the EMI module, although they insist that the content was not significantly reduced: this perception that the coverage of the content is not sacrificed is also shared by the engineering lecturers in Aguilar and Rodríguez's (2012) study.

In addition, five lecturers highlight that the experience of teaching in English has made them search for and access new materials and resources: three mention having rethought their practice in order to teach the module in English. One of the lecturers explained that he carried out a simplification process concerning the module content that, in his view, was extremely valuable for him from a pedagogic viewpoint as he managed to distil those contents that were essential to understand the discipline and acquire the targeted skills. Only one of the lecturers explicitly declares that he has not changed his methodology and that only the language of instruction differs from his teaching in Spanish. This latter view is also commonly held among participants in previous studies (Dafouz, Hüttner & Smit, 2016; Klassen, 2008; Jiang, Zhang & May, 2016; Yang, 2016), although lecturers also widely acknowledge some forms of adaptations to facilitate student learning (e.g., Dafouz et al., 2016).

Despite the quite substantial changes that most participants admit having made to their practice, the need for a specific, differentiated methodology when teaching in English is neither perceived nor accepted unanimously. One teacher was particularly forceful both in asserting that methodology is always key, irrespective of the language you teach in, and also in firmly opposing going along with the idea that methodology assumes a more relevant role in EMI teaching than in regular L1 teaching. In addition, she insisted that comprehension problems do also happen when instruction is in L1; this view concurs with Hellekjær's (2010:25) conclusion from his study at three Norwegian and two German institutions of HE, regarding lecture comprehension difficulties caused by the use of English in EMI programmes, that "many of the same problems are evident in L1 lectures as well [...] investigating EM lecture comprehension under the assumption that comprehension in the L1 is more or less perfect, will probably lead to inaccurate conclusions".

With regard to methodological training for EMI teaching, two lecturers stress that they need linguistic rather than methodological training, and two others mention a reasonably high language competence as the only requirement to become an EMI lecturer. In contrast, four other lecturers, one of them a specialist in EFL teaching, were fully convinced of the need for some kind of specialist training in EMI instruction, and two of them see the acquisition of new teaching skills and abilities as a key quality factor in an EMI programme. Two of them mention having introduced significant changes in their teaching in the bilingual programme as a result of participating in an EMI training course organised by the university.

Previous studies have also highlighted that not all lecturers are aware of the need to change the methodological and pedagogical approach, so that students can cope with content delivered through the medium of a second language (Aguilar & Rodríguez, 2012; Fortanet-Gómez, 2013; Dearden & Macaro, 2016). Additionally, despite the fact that there is overall consensus among experts that teaching content in a second language demands a different form of scaffolding, and a well-managed interactive methodology for the students to learn content effectively (Björkman, 2013; Corrales, Paba & Santiago, 2016), yet some lecturers share the opinion that "English language proficiency is the only skill that needs refreshment" (Klaassen, 2008:33) and they do not feel the need for specific methodological preparation (e.g., Aguilar, 2017; Aguilar & Rodríguez, 2012; Fortanet-Gómez, 2013).

This neglect for methodological preparation is coherent with the lack of a distinct awareness concerning the concrete language support strategies used when delivering content in English. When asked about the language support they provide their students with, four teachers refer to glossaries, which, in two cases, are compiled by the students themselves. Furthermore, as also found out by Aguilar (2017) in her study on engineering lecturers' views, glossaries, together with the use of oral presentations, are the strategies that lecturers in this study refer to most frequently when trying to justify that they are integrating language in their instruction. This finding is in line with previous research that documents the importance attached to technical vocabulary by EMI lecturers (Aguilar, 2017; Pecorari et al., 2011) and the use of scaffolding strategies aimed at supporting subject content learning and class participation rather than at language learning (Aguilar, 2017). Furthermore, only two of the lecturers seem to be aware of the interactional modifications they use to make their input in English comprehensible to the learners (modifying the speed rate, placing emphasis on important words and repeating them, providing synonyms and translations, paraphrasing and reducing linguistic complexity are the modifications mentioned).

As to the use of English and despite the official English-only policy for these modules, some lecturers admit that both they and their students resort to code-switching and that part of the assignments the students had to complete were in Spanish, as they understood they were too complex for them to be adequately done in English; in the same way, part of the information the students were supplied with was also in Spanish. Code-switching to L1 motivated by the perception of low student proficiency was also reported in a study with university teachers in the Ukraine (Tarnopolsky & Goodman, 2014), in Korea (Kim & Tatar, 2017), in Vietnam (Vu & Burns, 2014) and in the Gulf (Belhiah & Elhami, 2015).

Not too surprisingly, none of the teachers interviewed referred to including linguistic objectives in his or her module description or activities. In this sense, rather than a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) type of instruction, that necessarily implies the dual focus on language and content, they adopt an EMI approach (Smit & Dafouz, 2012) in that they deliver their lessons in English similarly to the way they would do it in Spanish with some adaptations in terms of resources and materials, whereas no intentional language and content integration is claimed. This approach is also reported in many other studies (e.g., Jiang et al., 2016; Aguilar, 2017; Dearden & Macaro, 2016). With the exception of the specialised vocabulary, which is addressed by glossaries in the case of some teachers, little concern is given to scaffolding the language needed to understand the discourse characteristic of the discipline and to complete the academic assignments in English.

Accordingly, they provide no feedback on the language, although language assistants in their lessons are asked to revise the students' oral and written production and provide students with feedback on it. Lecturers' refusal to teach and correct English has also been documented in previous studies (e.g., Airey, 2011, 2012; Aguilar, 2017; Yang, 2016). Also in line with lecturers in previous studies (e.g., Aguilar & Rodríguez, 2012; Dearden & Macaro, 2016; Yang, 2016), the lecturers in our study acknowledged that they do not apply assessment criteria for English. In connection with the lecturers' attitude towards their students' English learning, our study coincides with Dearden and Macaro's (2016:473) conclusion when they state that "we found virtually no evidence of teachers feeling any sense of responsibility for improving their students' English". Experts, however, insist on the need for an English-taught programme "to have a language plan of its own" (Marsh, Pavón & Frigols, 2013:15). This challenging of the relevance of catering for both content and language learning evidenced by some participants in our study was also found in the conceptualisations of the international group of lecturers in Dafouz et al.'s research (2016); in turn, as these authors hold, this lack of agency on the part of the lecturers concerning students' academic acculturation into discipline-specific language use in the foreign language "arguably... limits teacher responsibility for facilitating the process of learning both L2 and academic content" (p. 132).

In accordance with this view, no need is felt among the participating lecturers for a language component or language support as an integral part of the bilingual programme curriculum. Six of them, however, mention the need for the students to be offered extracurricular activities such as academic writing courses, conversation lessons, talks in English, etc., or experiences in English-speaking countries, but never as a compulsory part of the curriculum. The language specialist, though, was very emphatic about the need to support students with instruction on academic English, thus agreeing with Ball and Lindsay (2013) when they state: "in very simple terms, you cannot teach the same conceptual material to a native speaker in the same way as you can to a non-native speaker" (p. 46). She also

expressed her doubts that the rest of the lecturers in the bilingual programme shared her concern, and believed that they took for granted a level of English academic competence in students that she was convinced they lacked.

3.3. Impact of institutional conditions on the programme

In the interviews, the participant lecturers discussed factors that both contribute to, and hinder the successful and quality-oriented implementation of the bilingual programme.

The low level in English proficiency of at least part of the students was pointed out by the interviewees as one of the factors that they felt that impacted the highest on the quality of learning and teaching in the bilingual programme.

Five teachers mentioned that, albeit not the only factor, students' language proficiency considerably influenced their understanding of content and the quality of their written and oral assignments, particularly when they needed to express abstract thoughts and deep analysis. Four lecturers also mentioned lower levels of student participation in class discussions, as compared with mainstream groups. Avoidance of oral participation due to language problem is one of the losses for students that have been highlighted in the literature since the early stages of EMI (e.g., Sercu, 2004, quoted in Aguilar & Rodríguez, 2012:184).

As Dearden and Macaro (2016:458) note, "A question which the literature to date does not seem to have answered sufficiently is what level of English is expected of students on EMI courses, both at entry and at exit". In our study, all participants agreed that, in terms of English competence, bilingual groups were very heterogeneous regarding language ability and some saw this as a challenge, in line with the lecturers in the study by Vu and Burns (2014) conducted in Taiwan. Most of them coincided that a minimum language threshold should be met in order to be eligible for the programme. Five of them set this level at B2 level according to the CEFR. Up until academic year 2018-2019, a B1 level was recommended –not even required– for enrolment in the bilingual programme. The lecturers interviewed by Aguilar (2017:730-731) also mentioned the requirement of a high command of English from the students as a measure to guarantee quality in EMI.

Another hindering factor mentioned was the number of students enrolled in the module –it can reach as many as 75 students– According to the participants' view, the higher level of attention required to follow a lesson in a language that is not the mother tongue is not favoured by a large group; additionally, in their view, the students' oral participation was also negatively affected when being part of a large group.

The lecturers' level of English is a further factor that impinges upon quality learning and teaching experiences (Marsh et al., 2013:16-17). The teacher L2 level ranked the highest among the factors that both students and teachers identified as having the greatest effect on the quality of bilingual programmes (Madrid & Julius, 2017). However, as Macaro, Curle, Pun, An and Dearden (2018:54) recognise in their systematic review of EMI in HE, "There is no HE research [...] that matches some kind of language proficiency test with actual practice in order to determine a minimum level needed to teach [EMI]".

In our study, and in line with the lecturers in Aguilar's (2017:728) study, this level is set at a C1 by five of the interviewees, all of whom complied with this language requirement. Four lectures recognised having improved their fluency in English as a result of their EMI experience, two mentioned the difficulty they find in mastering the specialised discourse of

their field and one affirmed that, despite his C1 level of competence, he sometimes failed to express abstract thoughts and deep ideas, and lacked the ability to use informal language in English. Insufficient language proficiency has been found to negatively affect instruction in several ways, some of which are also apparent in our study: lecturers find it difficult to express themselves clearly and accurately (Airey, 2011; Macaro & Dearden, 2011; Vinke et al., 1998), the treatment of the subject content is more superficial (Airey, 2011), their speaking rate is slower and their register is more formal than in L1 teaching (Hincks, 2010; Thøgersen & Airey, 2011; Vinke et al., 1998) and they use fewer questions (Airey, 2011).

Reporting difficulties when teaching through English is also quite common among EMI lecturers; as Macaro et al. (2018) conclude from their review of EMI in HE, "more studies reported lecturers as identifying that they had linguistic problems than those that did not" (p. 54). This might constitute a serious problem in contexts –such as our own–, in which student evaluation of lecturers is the only indicator of instructional quality in terms of accreditation of non-permanent and tenured university lecturers since, it may be the case that, as in Jensen, Denver, Mees & Werther's (2013) study "Students' attitudes towards their lecturers' general lecturing competence are affected by their perceptions of the lecturers' proficiency in English" (p. 103).

Lecturers in our study also admitted that their workload increased dramatically in EMI modules and most of them agreed that this is by no means offset by the official recognition of an extra 25% in the workload for EMI lecturers. EMI has been found to increase the workload for lecturers in other studies (e.g., Aguilar & Rodríguez, 2012:189; Dafouz et al., 2016; Dearden & Macaro, 2016:460; Doiz, Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2013; Vinke, Snippe & Jochems, 1998; Vu & Burn, 2014; Yang, 2016). Overall, more incentives were demanded that compensate for the extra time and effort invested on preparing lessons, searching for materials and resources and designing activities. A more significant reduction of the workload, smaller class groups and preferential treatment for academic visits within the Erasmus framework were the most frequently mentioned incentives by the interviewed lecturers. Complaints about lack of incentives from the university seem to be common among EMI lecturers (e.g., Aguilar & Rodríguez, 2012:189; Fernández-Costales & González-Riaño, 2015:102).

Another institutional factor that, in the participating lecturers' opinion, has a rather negative impact on the programme is that of the participating staff instability; as mentioned above, three of the lecturers interviewed had non-permanent positions at the university with contracts running for one academic year. This certainly prevents long-term planning, endangers the continuity and stability of the programme and has far-reaching implications for the teacher education curriculum as the English modules being offered in English may change from one year to the next. This finding is in line with research conducted in universities in Taiwan where the interviewed lecturers pointed out non-permanence of teachers as one of their main concerns regarding English-taught programmes (Yang, 2016) and in Korea, where the recruitment of instructors with relevant language skills to conduct lessons entirely in English is seen as the most challenging issue for implementing EMI (Byun, Chu, Kim, Park, Kim & Jung, 2011). Mellion (2008) also refers to staff stability as one of the conditions upon which the success of this type of programme depends.

In contrast, two circumstances were highlighted by the interviewed lecturers in our study as facilitating factors: the support provided by language assistants in their lessons and an officially recognised innovation project that fostered coordination among EMI lecturers.

Language assistants were given the responsibility to provide the students with feedback on their oral and written use of English, help them when working in groups, edit teaching materials and resources, and search for relevant information about the topics covered in lessons. As to the innovation project, it allowed participants to share ideas, activities and resources concerning EMI, get to know experiences from colleagues from other universities and, those who volunteered, be observed and provided feedback on their teaching by an EMI expert. Teachers of a new undergraduate EMI program in Vietnam also regarded the sharing of good practice with fellow staff a worthwhile experience (Vu & Burns, 2014). In our study, despite this initiative, two interviewees mentioned the need to strengthen coordination among the teachers participating in EMI.

3.4. Assessment of the experience

Despite acknowledging concerns and considerable challenges associated with teaching in the bilingual group, and the increased effort and preparation time it requires, the interviewees' overall assessment of the experience was fairly positive. This perception concurs with previous research on EMI practitioners' perceptions (e.g., Aguilar, 2017; Aguilar & Rodríguez, 2012; Byun et al., 2011; Corrales et al., 2016; Dearden, 2014; Dearden & Macaro, 2016; Fernández-Costales & GonzálezRiaño, 2015; Jensen & Thøgersen, 2011; Yang, 2016). The lecturers in our study described the EMI experience as enjoyable, rewarding and satisfactory. Two of them admitted that EMI is rather less complicated than initially expected and two others pointed out that they would like to teach all their modules in English; one of them even says: "It is by far my favourite module".

When asked about the impact of the programme on learning, lecturers seem convinced that disciplinary learning is not impaired when instruction is delivered in English: this perception is in line with Dafouz et al.'s (2014) and Dafouz and Camacho-Miñano's (2016) studies with accounting, finance, and history students at Madrid's Complutense University that found no statistical differences in academic outcomes between EMI students and students taught through Spanish. Contradictory evidence exists as to the cost in academic performance for students following partly or fully English-taught programmes, though, as there are studies that attest to such cost (Arco-Tirado et al., 2018; Byun et al., 2011), yet other studies find beneficial effect for students on this parameter (Airey, 2009; Del Campo, Cancer, Pascual-Ezama, & Urquía-Grande, 2015; Klaassen, 2001). As experts have pointed out (e.g. Arco-Tirado et al., 2018; Kremer & Valcke, 2014), there is insufficient research available on the effects of EMI on disciplinary learning.

Additionally, in agreement with previous studies (e.g., Dearden & Macaro, 2016) the lectures in this study referred to a considerable impact of the programme on the students' linguistic competence in English. Three of them even perceived that the persistent use of English in the lessons, together with the required assignments in English, had a positive impact on the overall competence level of their students that could already be noticed after 15 weeks, particularly as regards confidence when speaking in public. One of the lecturers though, pointed out that the programme has a potential benefit on English competence, but only if the student has a strong motivation and invests the necessary effort to improve. The participants thus share the beliefs concerning students' improvement in English identified in EMI lecturers from three different countries (Austria, Italy and Poland) by Dearden & Macaro (2016:466-467):

Most interviewees were convinced that students would improve their English simply by being exposed to it as “*they will be exposed to more input, relevant input*” and “*because they are forced to communicate with me in English and forced to think in English.*”

This lack of attention to planning communication and language learning outcomes is also described in many other HE contexts in which subject content is full or partly taught through the medium of English in HE (e.g., Kuteeva, 2014; Pecorari et al., 2011).

Some experts, however, argue that language learning may not take place unless the necessary conditions are intentionally established for it to happen (e.g., Pecorari et al., 2011). As Dearden and Macaro point out (2016), there is no conclusive evidence as to the improvement of the students’ English as a result of participating in EMI courses and programmes; therefore, the language gains identified by some studies “merely tell us that in four years of exposure to English, students improved their language proficiency, not that learning through EMI is better than, say, a programme of L1 content instruction plus English as a foreign language (EFL) support” (p. 459).

As mentioned above, some lecturers also highlighted the improvement of their own proficiency in English as a positive effect of the EMI experience thus confirming findings from other studies (e.g., Aguilar, 2017; Arnó-Macià & Mancho-Barés, 2015).

With regard to student satisfaction, the majority of lecturers had the impression that the students were moderately satisfied with the bilingual programme although, particularly at the very beginning, students demanded that they should obtain a differentiated degree which would ensure them better job opportunities in public bilingual schools and an advantage over their mainstream colleague students. Only one teacher, the language specialists, thought that the bilingual degree, as a whole, had not been positive so far for the students. According to her, students constantly complained that the amount of work and effort they had to do was considerably higher than that of their counterparts in ordinary groups and that the lecturers were not sufficiently well prepared to instruct in English, which is consistent with the findings obtained from students’ questionnaire responses in a previous study (Barrios, López-Gutiérrez, & Lechuga, 2016).

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study provides a glimpse into the early stages of the implementation of an EMI initiative from the lecturers’ perspective. Even though the study focused on a single institution and findings are not intended to be generalizable, some of the insights gained may be of value to tertiary settings elsewhere, particularly to those which are in the planning or initial stages of offering EMI programmes and courses. Examining one singular case can thus serve to draw out implications that may be relevant to other contexts. In fact, as noted throughout the discussion, some of our findings corroborate those of previous studies.

Of the five main types of CLIL contexts identified by Greere and Räsänen (2008:6) in HE, the bilingual programme approach being implemented at the Faculty of Education at UMA would count as Pre-CLIL (more than 25% of exposure to the foreign language, incidental language learning is expected although no language learning outcomes are specified). As it

is commonly the case in tertiary education, it is assumed that unplanned language learning will result from activities carried out in English.

As it has also been noticed in other studies on EMI perceptions, lecturers have an overall positive perception of the EMI experience and some even express enthusiasm; however, they also acknowledge challenges (most notably, increased workload and insufficient language competence on the part of students and lecturers to express complex meanings). The benefits of EMI, however, seem to outweigh the drawbacks. Additionally, according to the lecturers in the study, academic content is not sacrificed as a result of being taught through the English language.

Most importantly, lecturers in the study, as has been reported in other studies, seem to downplay the significance of the language and content interface in EMI; this evidences itself in denying the existence of differences between EMI and monolingual teaching, or in conceptualising the integration of language and content in terms of technical vocabulary building and demonstration of oral presentation skills in English, while there is no conscious, explicit instructional focus on promoting the students' academic acculturation into the discourse of the particular disciplines.

Finally, interviewed lecturers concur that the university should support EMI initiatives with more investment, more incentives for teachers and more linguistic support. If EMI programmes and courses are to be sustainable and quality-oriented, the necessary human and financial resources need to be allocated to this complex and ambitious undertaking (see Méndez and Casal (2018) for a thorough overview of provisos for the implementation of quality bilingual programmes at tertiary level). A specific linguistic and methodological training programme should be compulsory for EMI lectures. As Macaro et al., (2018) state, “the greatest amount of planning and resourcing needs to go into university teacher preparation and professional development” (p. 67). However, the burden of quality EMI provision and the sustainability of EMI initiatives must neither rest on the lecturers’ shoulders exclusively nor rely on their voluntarism. A system of substantial incentives should be in place in order to compensate the additional time and effort required for training and teaching in English. And finally, universities should invest significantly more resources in setting up a carefully planned, long-term and solid internationalisation strategy in which EMI is given priority attention.

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