
a cura di

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Il ruolo dei Centri Linguistici nell'internazionalizzazione delle università italiane

The role of language centres
in the internationalization of Italian universities



*La pubblicazione di questo volume è stata resa possibile grazie al contributo
dell'Associazione Italiana dei Centri Linguistici Universitari (AICLU)
e del Centro Linguistico dell'Università di Pavia.*

Copertina: Cristina Bernasconi, Milano

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Tel. 02/5836.5751 - Fax 02/5836.5753
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Pavia University Press
info@paviauniversitypress.it – www.paviauniversitypress.it

Prima edizione: novembre 2025

ISBN: 978-88-6952-188-1

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8. The role of Language Centres in the development of EMI: Pedagogical procedures and perspectives

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EMI (English-Medium Instruction) refers to the use of English to teach academic subjects in contexts where the first language is not English. As one of the consequences of the internationalisation process of higher education, EMI can improve the global visibility of universities, attract a diverse student body and prepare graduates for their future careers. Despite its potential, EMI poses challenges to both lecturers and students, including language barriers, increased complexity in dealing with intercultural settings, and the need to make pedagogical adjustments to lecturers' teaching styles. At the academic level, Language Centres have become increasingly important in providing support to teachers and students, in the form of training programmes and language courses, to help them meet these challenges. Drawing on recent research and informed by both literature and practical experience, this article explores how Language Centres may support teachers and students by providing practical tools to improve their pedagogical effectiveness and self-awareness. It also considers the importance of integrating elements of intercultural communication and adopting technologies to facilitate classroom interactions in increasingly multicultural contexts. For these reasons, two structured self-assessment tools are proposed as a systematic and accessible means for lecturers and students to engage in continuous reflection, increasing both linguistic self-monitoring and pedagogical awareness. The study concludes with recommendations for building inclusive learning ecologies and outlines future research directions in the evolving field of EMI.

Keywords: English-Medium Instruction (EMI); internationalisation; language centres; self-assessment checklist; training programmes.

8.1 Introduction

The vehicular use of English to teach in higher education has become a global phenomenon, both as a driver and a consequence of internationalisation (Dafouz and Gray 2022; Galloway and Rose 2021). English-Medium Instruction (EMI) refers to the use of English to teach academic subjects in contexts where the native language of the majority of the student population is not English (Macaro 2018). Universities worldwide have increasingly adopted EMI to enhance their international competitiveness, attract a more diverse student body, and improve students' English language proficiency (Dearden 2015; Richards and Pun 2023). While EMI is widely promoted as a means of fostering internationalisation, its pedagogical implications, sociolinguistic issues, and impact on educational equity remain subjects of ongoing debate (Dafouz and Gray 2022; Lasagabaster 2022a; Macaro et al. 2018).

As EMI continues to expand globally, research has highlighted both its advantages and its limitations. While it seems that EMI can benefit students' employability in global markets and strengthens institutional prestige (Dearden 2015; Richards and Pun 2023), critical perspectives caution that EMI is often implemented without sufficient attention to pedagogical adaptation, raising concerns about student comprehension, lecturer preparedness, and the dominance of English over local languages (Galloway and Rose 2021; Phillipson 2015). These insights suggest that the effectiveness of EMI depends not only on participants' linguistic proficiency but also on the ability of lecturers and students to cope with communicative needs in intercultural and international contexts.

In response to these challenges, a number of scholars have called for targeted training initiatives that tackle both the linguistic and pedagogical dimensions of EMI (Lasagabaster 2022a, 2022b; Macaro et al. 2018; O'Dowd 2018; Richards and Pun 2022; Sánchez-Pérez 2020). Studies have highlighted the linguistic demands placed on EMI instructors, emphasising that while many lecturers are experts in their academic fields, research indicates that they also need the necessary communicative skills to teach effectively in EMI contexts and to foster student interaction (Ball and Lindsey 2013; Dubow and Gundermann 2017; Lasagabaster 2022a). Without suitable training, lecturers may find it difficult to adapt their teaching strategies to support diverse learners and engage them effectively, particularly in contexts where English is not the first language for either the instructor or the learners (Macaro 2018). However, training programmes across Europe are not evenly provided, and while some countries have made significant efforts to support EMI lecturers, others lag behind (Costa 2015), which can result in disparities in the quality of English-Medium education. In fact, there is still a significant gap in the training of language educators, particularly in the context of EMI (O'Dowd 2018), where lecturers are often expected to teach content in English without adequate pedagogical preparation

(Airey 2011; Lasagabaster 2022a). This lack of training can hinder the quality of instruction and limit the potential of internationalisation efforts (Richards and Pun 2022).

To understand the complexity of this scenario, the concept of learning ecologies, which views learning as a process that occurs across diverse contexts and interactions (Barron 2006; Siemens, 2007), offers a valuable framework for reconceptualising EMI classrooms as dynamic, multilingual, and multicultural spaces. Rather than viewing EMI solely as an internationalisation strategy, this approach can be expanded through intercultural and transcultural awareness (Baker 2022), to emphasise the ways in which linguistic and cultural diversity can enhance learning outcomes. Scholars such as Baker (2015) and Byram (2021) state that fostering intercultural competence is essential in educational settings to create inclusive environments where students can critically engage with different perspectives. This shift—from simply delivering subject content in English to actively promoting intercultural awareness—aligns with contemporary discussions on plurilingual education and the intercultural dimension of internationalisation (Beelen and Jones 2015; Knight 2011). The promotion of transcultural dialogue (Baker 2022) and peer collaboration can enhance students' language development, but it also supports the broader goals of building inclusive and student-centred learning environments.

8.2 Research gap and purpose

While research on EMI has extensively examined its linguistic and pedagogical dimensions (Lasagabaster 2022a; Macaro et al. 2018; Macaro 2020; Richards and Pun 2023), the specific role of Language Centres in supporting lecturers and students within EMI contexts remains underexplored. Given the substantial demands EMI places on educators—many of whom may not be native English speakers—there is a pressing need to investigate how Language Centres can offer structured support and resources to enhance teaching effectiveness and student participation. Language Centres have played a role in providing this support, offering tailored training programmes that equip lecturers with the skills needed for tackling the challenges of EMI (Deroey 2023; Morell and Volchenkova 2021). These centres can serve as hubs for developing EMI-specific teaching strategies, equipping lecturers with linguistic scaffolding techniques, intercultural communication training, and technological tools that facilitate more interactive and inclusive classroom experiences (Sánchez-Pérez 2020).

This article aims to propose how Language Centres can contribute to the success of EMI by fostering intercultural competence, enhancing pedagogical preparedness, and integrating inclusive teaching practices aided by technology. It begins with a review of existing literature on EMI, focusing on the intersections between language and professional development. Building on insights

from institutional experiences and reflections gathered through engagement with EMI lecturers and students in international contexts, the article suggests practical strategies for Language Centres to assist EMI practitioners in reflecting on and developing their skills. In particular, in response to emerging needs identified in practice, the article introduces two preliminary self-assessment tools which are designed to help practitioners develop critical self-awareness regarding language proficiency, intercultural competence, and teaching and learning strategies. The first of these tools is intended to guide lecturers in identifying areas for improvement and promoting more effective engagement with students, while the other is designed for students to help them become more aware of their learning process.

8.3 Linguistic and pedagogical challenges in EMI

One of the most prominent challenges in EMI research is the linguistic barrier faced by non-native-English-speaking (NNES) lecturers. Teaching in English, particularly in academic settings, requires a high level of linguistic proficiency, including the ability to explain complex concepts, manage classroom interactions, and provide feedback effectively (Macaro 2020). However, many NNES lecturers struggle with these demands, which can impact their confidence and teaching effectiveness (Macaro 2018).

For these reasons, language proficiency has long been regarded as crucial in the overall delivery and comprehension of EMI lectures (Lasagabaster 2022b; Macaro 2018, 2020), because it can have an impact on other aspects that contribute to the success of EMI learning environments. For instance, Airey (2011) found that lecturers teaching in EMI settings often experience reduced fluency and flexibility compared to their native-language instruction. This limitation affects their ability to improvise, incorporate humour, and engage in spontaneous interactions with students, which can hinder classroom dynamics. The lack of interactions and questions in class has also been found in other studies (Dafouz Milne and Sánchez García 2019; Macaro 2018).

Similarly, Helm and Guarda (2015) examined the experiences of Italian EMI lecturers and found that many were less concerned about their academic English proficiency and more apprehensive about their communicative competence in informal settings. This suggests that EMI training programmes should not only focus on academic language use but also incorporate communicative strategies that facilitate spontaneous and interactive discussions with students.

From a pedagogical perspective, many EMI lecturers lack formal training in teaching strategies for multilingual and multicultural classes. As Lasagabaster (2022b) notes, EMI lecturers often prioritise content delivery at the expense of student engagement. Richards and Pun (2022) argue that EMI courses should

adopt student-centred approaches to foster deeper learning, moving away from top-down knowledge transmission.

The role of student language proficiency in EMI classrooms is another key factor because limited English proficiency among students can impede engagement and comprehension in EMI courses (Richards and Pun 2022). While EMI is often promoted as a means to enhance students' English skills (Dearden 2015; O'Dowd 2018), traditional lecture structures and reduced interaction may limit linguistic development opportunities. Addressing this requires pedagogical strategies that encourage student participation, integrate formative assessment, and provide linguistic scaffolding to support comprehension.

8.4 EMI lecturer training programmes and institutional support

While language proficiency has long been regarded as a crucial element for delivering effective EMI lectures (Macaro 2020), recent studies (such as Aguilar-Pérez and Arnó-Macià 2020) demonstrate that effective lecturing is grounded in communication strategies and teaching presence that transcend the language of delivery. This underlines the necessity of EMI training programmes that address not only English proficiency but also teaching effectiveness and student engagement. There is growing recognition that lecturers also need training in communication strategies, pedagogical methodologies, and technology integration to succeed in multilingual and multicultural classrooms (Morell and Volchenkova 2021; Sánchez-Pérez 2020).

EMI lecturer training has gained prominence as institutions aim to equip instructors with the necessary linguistic, methodological, and intercultural competencies. Studies have been conducted on professional training experiences that can improve the integration of language elements and content delivery in EMI contexts, such as those described in the book edited by Sánchez-Pérez (2020). In fact, as Fortanet-Gómez (2020) notes, effective EMI implementation requires not only language training but also the development of pedagogical strategies that prepare lecturers for future, increasingly diverse international classrooms. Training programmes must be both research-informed and context-sensitive, aligning with institutional internationalisation goals while supporting lecturers' evolving professional identities (Aguilar-Pérez and Arnó-Macià 2020). Moreover, Valcke and Båge (2020) argue that successful EMI requires moving beyond traditional disciplinary silos to build collaborative Continuing Professional Development (CPD) models for both lecturers and educational developers. This collaborative, systems-based approach reinforces the role of Language Centres as key facilitators in training design and implementation.

At the European level, several programmes have been implemented to prepare university lecturers for EMI (Costa 2015). The various forms of EMI

training held in different universities highlight the increasing institutional recognition of the need for structured teacher training programmes and provide insight into the pedagogical approaches employed across different higher education institutions (Morell and Volchenkova 2021; O’Dowd 2018). Several international organisations and university networks have developed EMI lecturer training courses to address these needs. For instance, the *Transnational Alignment of English Competences for University Lecturers (TAEC) Project* has been instrumental in promoting EMI training alignment across European institutions (TAEC 2019). The TAEC Erasmus+ project developed a common framework for EMI quality assurance and support, aiding partners in adapting local EMI training and certification instruments for language assessment for transnational use (2019).

Additionally, the EQUiP – Educational Quality at Universities for Inclusive International Programmes – project (2020), an Erasmus+ initiative, provides modules for educational developers and university lecturers to cultivate inclusive and intercultural learning environments. The EQUiP project (Sánchez-García and Dafouz, 2020) offers a strong model for how internationally oriented educational developers can facilitate inclusive EMI environments through reflective training programmes that prioritise quality in teaching and learning. Language Centres, operating in a similar capacity, can act as institutional anchors for promoting pedagogical innovation and intercultural awareness. In the United Kingdom, the «Academic Teaching Excellence course» and the «Certificate in EMI Skills» offered by the British Council and Cambridge English (discontinued in 2023), respectively, have targeted support for language and pedagogy. These training programmes highlight the commitment to enhancing EMI teaching quality and emphasise the importance of standardising EMI lecturer competencies to ensure consistency in instructional quality across different European and British universities.

A recent systematic review of EMI teacher training provision (Deroey 2023) identified common themes across various programmes, including pedagogical training, communication strategies, and EMI awareness. Her comprehensive survey of 25 initiatives for the training of EMI lecturers across 18 countries provides valuable insights into effective training practices. The study identifies four core components common to successful programmes: language proficiency, pedagogical skills, communication strategies, and EMI awareness. Notably, Deroey observes a shift from earlier findings (e.g., Jiménez-Muñoz 2020; O’Dowd 2018) that highlighted a neglect of pedagogical training, indicating a growing recognition of its importance. The study also shows the benefits of integrating EMI training into broader CPD programmes, fostering collaborations among language and didactic experts, EMI professionals, and disciplinary content experts.

Despite these advancements, there is still a gap between institutional policy goals and the actual methodological and linguistic support provided to lecturers (Lasagabaster 2022a, p. 23). This gap reinforces the need for comprehensive, research-informed EMI training initiatives that cater to the evolving demands of international higher education in different contexts (Aguilar-Pérez and Arnó-Macià 2020), and the need for in-service training models that are responsive to the realities of EMI classrooms and grounded in reflective practices. Through the provision of tailored training programmes, institutions can ensure that their EMI offerings are not only policy-compliant but also pedagogically sound and responsive to both educators' and students' needs.

8.5 Previous research on EMI students' perceptions and learning experiences

Over the past decade, research has increasingly turned to the experiences and perceptions of students as a key factor in evaluating the effectiveness of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) in higher education. Surveys and mixed-methods studies have offered valuable insights into how students experience language challenges, intercultural communication, classroom dynamics, and their own learning development in EMI environments.

Research shows significant variation in how EMI is experienced across different institutional and cultural contexts, reflecting disparities in pedagogical practices, language support, and student engagement (Dearden 2015; Macaro et al. 2018). For instance, Macaro et al. (2018) conducted a systematic review highlighting that students often struggle with understanding content delivered in English, especially when instructors lack fluency or rely heavily on lecture-based formats. A similar issue was identified by Ament and Pérez-Vidal (2015) in a Spanish university context, where limited classroom interactivity and the absence of corrective feedback were found to diminish students' opportunities for linguistic development.

Further studies (e.g., Dafouz Milne and Sánchez García 2019; Lasagabaster 2022a) have shown that students value clear instructions, active engagement, and culturally responsive teaching practices—elements that are often missing in EMI environments. Language proficiency remains a decisive factor in shaping student outcomes; in particular, formal and technical vocabulary may be problematic. Evans and Morrison (2011), for instance, found that Hong Kong students experienced difficulties with discipline-specific terminology and academic discourse, which placed additional cognitive demands on their learning process. These findings suggest «the importance of language provision in the form of discipline-specific classes aimed to meet the specific needs of students in specific programmes» (Galloway and Rose 2021, p. 35).

Another study, which was conducted in the 2022-2023 academic year, examined the experiences of international students enrolled in English-Medium

Instruction (EMI) courses at two universities: Taichung University in Taiwan and the University of Verona in Italy (Hartle et al. 2024). The study findings revealed that cultural factors influenced how students valued their contributions within group activities, underscoring the need for EMI lecturers to cultivate inclusive classroom practices. Moreover, learners' responses to our questionnaire revealed that their EMI experience was hindered by linguistic and organisational factors, limiting their ability to interact as expected. The direct impact this had on the level of transcultural interactions and collaboration in class was clearly expressed by the Taiwanese participants of the study who, despite displaying motivation and interest in the subject, were more focused on the comprehension of the content rather than socialising and working in groups, thus possibly undermining the inclusiveness of the EMI learning ecology (Hartle et al. 2024).

Although initiatives to accommodate the demands of EMI students have grown in recent years, many universities still do not employ structured mechanisms to systematically collect student feedback in EMI settings. This lack underlines the value of incorporating tools such as self-assessment checklists and formative assessment methods that are easy to implement and adapt to local contexts. It also suggests the importance of structured support from Language Centres to guide lecturers in designing and delivering EMI courses and the necessity of adopting several strategies to enhance the classroom ecology in EMI settings. In this respect, Language Centres are well-positioned to offer the support needed to address the linguistic, communicative, and technological challenges associated with EMI, because they are the institutional hubs where language and educational tools can be created and disseminated, ensuring that EMI courses meet students' needs and experiences.

8.6 EMI curriculum pedagogy: practical steps and support from Language Centres

The evolving landscape of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) necessitates a shift from traditional language support roles towards more integrative and facilitative approaches, also on the part of the teaching staff in university Language Centres. Traditionally, one of the tasks of university language experts has been to curate repositories of linguistic and methodological resources for autonomous access by students and faculty (Stickler 2022). However, the role of language instructors has evolved from resource providers to facilitators who guide learners in selecting and exploring appropriate educational tools tailored to specific learning contexts, such as EMI environments. As Stickler (2022, pp. 31-32) notes, this 'pedagogy of exploration' requires instructors to help learners identify tools that best suit their individual needs. Building on insights from both

literature and institutional practice, it becomes increasingly evident that fostering inclusive and effective EMI environments requires a multi-dimensional, strategically coordinated approach. Language Centres, as institutional actors positioned between academic departments and university strategy, are uniquely equipped to support this process. They can offer targeted interventions, enhance pedagogical awareness, and provide tools that align with the communicative, cognitive, and intercultural demands of EMI.

This section presents practical recommendations derived from both previous research and initiatives developed within our Language Centre, reflecting on the dynamic interconnections and outlining specific steps that can enhance curriculum design, teaching practice, and student engagement in EMI settings. The findings of our previous study were the starting point to identify three main elements to consider when seeking to understand how university Language Centres can support both teachers and learners in creating transcultural learning ecologies:

1. Teachers' communicative effectiveness: Students reported that clear and engaging communication from lecturers significantly enhanced their understanding of course content and positively shaped their overall learning experience.
2. Students' self-improvement and learning effectiveness: Students valued opportunities for self-assessment and the use of tools that helped them monitor their progress. Encouraging student reflection and engagement can increase confidence and motivation, particularly in culturally diverse classrooms.
3. Transcultural interactions in the classroom: Inclusive classrooms that encourage interactions among students from different cultural backgrounds were associated with more dynamic and engaging learning environments.

These results emphasise the necessity for Language Centres to adopt a comprehensive approach by providing targeted training for lecturers to develop inclusive classroom practices, implement self-assessment tools to encourage student reflection, and integrate technology to enhance content delivery. For instance, the 2019 pilot mentoring programme at the University of Verona demonstrated the efficacy of blended learning approaches in combining face-to-face interaction with digital tools to create flexible and accessible learning environments (Hartle 2020).

One of the specific aspects to which attention needs to be drawn is that of teacher discourse. The reason is two-fold: on the one hand, in teacher talk, students have to face complex discourses both from a conceptual (disciplinary) and a linguistic (foreign language) perspective; on the other hand, it is essential

to raise awareness, especially amongst the content specialists, of how teacher discourse can be used pedagogically to support students in their learning process (Dafouz Milne and Sánchez García 2019, p. 2). Moreover, maximising classroom management in an EMI setting can enhance critical reflection and support the implementation of EMI classes. In our previous study (Hartle et al. 2024), students' perception of participation and interaction in the class seemed to confirm that lecturers who lack effective teaching skills and multi-modal strategies may cause passive learning among students. Studies confirm that interaction should play a key role in the EMI classroom (Lasagabaster 2022a; Macaro 2018) as well as in other learning contexts, since learning is viewed not only as an individual cognitive learning process but also as a social one, and learning occurs during the interactions that take place between individuals. Thus, it is important that teachers promote student participation and foster negotiations of meaning in the classroom so that learners are provided with opportunities to develop their cognitive ability, improve their linguistic skills and boost their learning process (Dafouz Milne and Sánchez García 2019, p. 5).

These elements are strongly supported by broader research in the field of intercultural competence, which highlights the centrality of inclusive pedagogy and student engagement (Baker 2015, 2022), where diverse perspectives are valued and encouraged. According to student feedback, classroom practices that emphasise peer support, group discussions, and valuing individual contributions can help overcome linguistic barriers and foster intercultural growth. To ensure that negotiation of meaning occurs, the creation of intercultural learning ecologies (Baker 2022) is another essential aspect which should be developed for both novice and experienced EMI lecturers. For instructors new to EMI, gaining familiarity with its underlying framework and methodology is crucial to fostering student engagement and inclusivity. At the same time, more experienced EMI lecturers can benefit from continuous professional development that provides further insights into evolving best practices.

Our findings (Hartle et al. 2024) seem to indicate that successful learning ecologies are founded on the principles of inclusivity, leveraging both intercultural and individual diversity. This objective can be achieved through the implementation of strategies that encourage class participation and enhance students' motivation. For example, learner-centred methodologies, such as flipped classrooms, blended learning models, and collaborative group work, can be adopted to accommodate different learning styles and encourage active participation (Hartle 2020). Supported by educational technologies, such practices allow lecturers to personalise tasks, monitor progress effectively, and foster ongoing student reflection and self-assessment (Tao 2025). Through

strategic support, reflective practices, and the promotion of intercultural competencies, Language Centres can act as catalysts for the creation of truly inclusive EMI learning environments—ones that empower both lecturers and students. Ultimately, effective communication within and beyond the classroom fosters a more dynamic and responsive learning environment (Biggs et al. 2022).

8.7 EMI lecturer preliminary self-assessment checklist

Self-awareness plays a crucial role in effective EMI instruction, particularly for lecturers teaching in a non-native language. Farrell (2015) highlights the importance of reflective teaching practices, suggesting that self-assessment can provide a structured way for instructors to evaluate their pedagogical effectiveness and linguistic competence. For instance, Farrell’s framework for reflecting on practice (2020, p. 279) emphasises the importance of systematic reflection in improving teaching practices. Applied to EMI contexts, these approaches suggest that lecturers benefit from regularly examining how language use, cultural responsiveness, and teaching strategies interact to shape students’ learning experiences. In this vein, streamlined self-assessment tools—drawing inspiration from comprehensive frameworks like the TAEC Erasmus+ project (2019) and Rubio-Alcalá and Mallorquín’s (2020) grid of CLIL teachers’ competences—can offer scalable and practical means for lecturers to reflect on and enhance their teaching practices. By distilling complex competency models into concise checklists, educators can more readily engage in self-evaluation and identify areas for professional growth.

The tool developed in this study (cf. Table 8.1) draws upon principles of established reflective frameworks and directly addresses key challenges identified in our previous research (Hartle et al. 2024; Hartle 2020). The preliminary self-assessment checklist proposed in this study serves two primary functions. Firstly, it actively engages instructors in identifying their strengths and areas for development across key domains, including language proficiency, classroom management, and integration of technology, thus fostering greater self-awareness. Secondly, it provides valuable insights into the intersection of linguistic competence and instructional effectiveness, both of which are critical for creating inclusive and dynamic EMI learning environments. Its use also aligns with broader trends in formative assessment and reflective professional development.

Table 8.1 EMI lecturer preliminary self-assessment checklist

EMI lecturer preliminary self-assessment checklist			
	Yes, I can do this confidently.	No, not yet.	Un-sure / Can't say.
Linguistic competence			
I feel confident explaining complex concepts in English.			
I use the language effectively when giving instructions for group work or other activities.			
I feel confident when using the language to interact with students.			
I adapt my language to accommodate students with varying proficiency levels.			
Pedagogical Strategies and Intercultural Awareness			
I use a variety of methods to encourage student interaction.			
I value and build upon students' contributions during class.			
I acknowledge and integrate students' diverse cultural backgrounds.			
I address communication barriers that may arise in multicultural settings.			
Classroom management			
I manage time effectively to allow for discussion and reflection.			
I regularly invite student feedback and adapt my teaching accordingly.			
I use appropriate assessment methods to evaluate students' understanding.			
Technology skills			
I incorporate visual aids or technology to support student comprehension.			
I use specific IT tools to monitor student performance and participation.			

This checklist is designed to help EMI lecturers reflect on their current teaching practices, linguistic proficiency, and classroom strategies. It can be used at the beginning of EMI training programmes to identify areas of strength and areas for development, thereby informing personalised professional support. Administering the checklist at an early stage in EMI professional development programmes enables Language Centres to gather baseline data, provide tailored support and guidance, and assist EMI instructors in selecting appropriate resources and tools to maximise teaching effectiveness.

Encouraging lecturers to engage with structured self-assessment tools can help develop deeper self-awareness and continuous professional growth, thereby enhancing overall instructional quality. This is particularly relevant for the creation of inclusive learning ecologies, where formative assessment mechanisms—including those enhanced by AI technologies—can play a critical role. The integration of AI-driven formative assessment technologies allows lecturers to monitor student progress in real time, adapt teaching strategies, and implement data-informed instructional decisions (Tao 2025). These technologies support the same goals as traditional self-assessment frameworks: fostering greater responsiveness, inclusivity, and targeted pedagogical intervention. Effective assessment should evaluate both linguistic proficiency and content comprehension, as inadequate language skills can impact both instructors' ability to deliver content and students' engagement. AI-powered platforms, such as adaptive learning platforms and intelligent tutoring systems, provide highly customisable resources, allowing lecturers to create personalised learning tasks while systematically collecting feedback to refine their instructional approaches (Tao 2025). When coupled with human-led reflective practices, such technologies can significantly enhance EMI course effectiveness. By systematically linking reflective practice with both formative assessment and technological innovation, Language Centres can contribute to building more inclusive, learner-centred, and effective EMI environments that better meet the needs of increasingly diverse academic communities.

8.8 Supporting students' self-awareness and learning development

Alongside lecturers' communicative effectiveness, students' perception of their own improvement and learning development is another key aspect to consider, monitor and support. When designing an EMI course, it is important to consider how students assess their progress, and which tools can be set up to assist them in overcoming language barriers, while engaging with the content of the course. Incorporating reflective mechanisms into the learning process not only values students' personal contributions but also provides ongoing feedback that

lecturers can use to adjust instructional practices and classroom dynamics. Students might want to assess their improvement by answering questions on their command of the language and their engagement in group work.

As our previous study suggested (Hartle et al. 2024), students who felt more confident in their use of English were more likely to be actively engaged in class activities, highlighting language proficiency as a barrier influencing participation and interactions in transcultural classrooms. Notably, students enrolled in degree courses where languages are commonly used (e.g., Foreign languages, Linguistics, and Journalism) were more likely to view EMI classrooms as inclusive learning spaces. One of the findings from our previous study shows that, according to students' perceptions, a successful EMI lecture experience is the result of encouraged interactions, which can be achieved so as to provide a more inclusive and fruitful learning ecology for both lecturers and students (Siemens 2007).

These findings align with broader research on learner engagement and social learning ecologies. Siemens' (2007) connectivist theory of learning underscores the importance of interaction and collaboration as central to knowledge construction, suggesting that learning environments which promote peer dialogue and networked participation are more likely to foster inclusive, dynamic learning experiences. Similarly, Deardorff (2006) emphasises that intercultural competence development is intricately linked to opportunities for meaningful interaction, reflection, and feedback in diverse settings.

In order to systematically support students' reflective processes within EMI courses, we propose a second checklist (cf. Table 8.2), designed for Language Centres to implement and customise according to specific institutional contexts, so as to diversify curricula and foster inclusive learning. This tool focuses on capturing students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the EMI course they are attending, their self-assessment of language improvement, and their evaluation of the support provided throughout the course. For this reason, administering the student checklist during the course, rather than at the end, offers a formative evaluation mechanism that enables lecturers and Language Centres to monitor the effectiveness of practices initiated in the preliminary stages of course design. One key area addressed by the checklist is students' perception of transcultural interactions (cf. Baker 2022), which can play a significant role in shaping their overall EMI experience and contribute to the development of inclusive EMI learning environments that are responsive and participatory.

Table 8.2 Checklist for students' feedback

Checklist for students' feedback			
Language Confidence	Yes	No	Can't say
I understand the main points of lectures in English.			
I feel comfortable expressing my ideas in English during class.			
I can interact with my teacher and classmates without fear of making language mistakes.			
I am confident in using English for academic reading and writing tasks.			
Learning support and technology use	Yes	No	Can't say
I know how to access academic resources and ask for help when needed.			
I feel that the learning materials provided are accessible and user-friendly.			
I use tools (e.g., glossaries, recordings) to support my autonomous learning.			
I can use technology responsibly to enhance my understanding of course content.			
Transcultural interactions	Yes	No	Can't say
I feel that my personal contributions are valued and encouraged.			
I feel included and respected during class discussions.			
I actively engage with peers from diverse cultural backgrounds during collaborative tasks.			
I enjoy collaborating with peers from different cultural backgrounds.			

This student-focused checklist is designed to support learners in reflecting on their language development, classroom engagement, and intercultural experiences throughout the course. The checklist prompts learners to assess their confidence in using English, their participation in group work, and their comfort in interacting with peers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In turn, this reflective process empowers students to take greater ownership of their learning and enhances transparency between students and instructors. Aggregated responses may also help identify shared challenges or overlooked needs, offering valuable insights for instructors aiming to adjust course delivery. When used systematically, it becomes possible to embed student reflection into the design and delivery of EMI courses, which can enhance language development and transcultural awareness and help Language Centres and instructors shift from teacher-centred to learner-centred pedagogy.

8.9 EMI teaching techniques: final considerations

Recent studies across diverse institutional contexts (Fortanet-Gómez 2020; Sánchez-García and Dafouz 2020) have consistently emphasised the need for teacher development programmes that are research-informed, competence-based, and context-responsive. These initiatives often focus on professional development strategies that address both language proficiency and pedagogical preparation. Deroey (2023) further underscores the necessity of tailoring training to personal and contextual needs, cautioning against a one-size-fits-all approach. She advocates for needs assessments through surveys, consultations, teaching observations, and peer mentoring to ensure relevance and effectiveness. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of addressing affective factors such as lecturers' self-image, confidence, and sense of self-efficacy, recommending the creation of safe training environments that avoid remedial connotations. To evaluate the impact of training, Deroey (2023) suggests incorporating real-life teaching practices and establishing rigorous assessment criteria, which could facilitate EMI accreditation and certification processes. Finally, the study calls for flexible, modular training approaches and institutional incentives to motivate lecturer participation and engagement.

The reflective tools proposed in this study contribute to that goal by offering practical reference points for Language Centres to support EMI lecturers in navigating linguistic, pedagogical, and intercultural complexity. Considering the pedagogical insights provided so far, some teaching strategies are proposed that EMI experts could introduce in their training course activities. For instance, to make communication more effective, lecturers could develop classroom management techniques that enable them to clearly define expectations, give instructions and deal with transcultural interactions. This can be achieved by using accommodation strategies (Jenkins 2010), explaining complex jargon (Woodward-Kron 2008), and through subject-specific glossaries for technical terms, which allow students to fully comprehend the content being conveyed and engage in productive exchanges with their classmates (cf. Biggs et al. 2022).

Encouraging group activities and providing language scaffolds can support student engagement across proficiency levels. For instance, assigning multilingual study groups or peer support sessions could boost confidence and foster interaction. Additionally, creating glossaries for technical terms and offering targeted feedback may alleviate language anxiety, particularly for students of non-linguistic subjects, who are less used to reflecting on their language competencies. Finally, integrating cultural exchange activities as a core component of EMI courses can help students appreciate and leverage diversity in classroom interactions, fostering an inclusive environment conducive to both academic success and meaningful transcultural experiences.

Students' personal contributions should be valued and stimulated with the overall aim of delivering content in a structured manner. To this end, EMI lecturers might want to consider implementing scaffolding strategies to boost class participation by explaining hands-on to their students how a task is intended to be carried out and have them execute it in smaller groups and, only at the end, ask them to perform it individually (cf. Rubio-Alcalá and Mal-lorquín 2020). Indeed, our previous findings suggest that implementing peer support sessions might boost their confidence and foster cooperation (Hartle et al. 2024).

Interactive assignments which involve the use of technology and visual aids might help to outline the work and guide students throughout the activity. Lecturers can design, organise and monitor progress by relying on presentation tools to deliver content through visuals and organisation tools to upload handouts and materials. They might also promote a more inquisitive approach to the subject content thanks to their linguistic support. Also, making materials and handouts available beforehand – in a blended learning environment – offers opportunities for interactions and great accessibility which, in turn, can favour a more inclusive learning setting where students and teachers are motivated to share knowledge, targeting both academic success and meaningful interpersonal experiences (Hartle, 2020). For example, in flipped classrooms, students can acquire knowledge before the class and use classroom time to implement the content-related skills needed to support teacher and peer interaction (Baig and Yadegaridehkordi, 2023).

Moreover, as learning environments extend beyond physical classrooms to embrace more inclusive and dynamic scenarios, the role of technology in designing and implementing EMI curricula becomes increasingly critical. Inclusive learning settings can be achieved by promoting personalised learning pathways, which, in turn, might be fuelled by a mindful integration of technology. Drawing on our experience mentoring professors in the University of Verona's internationalisation programme in 2018, we found that equipping lecturers with the expertise to implement AI tools is a strategic priority, as it has also been emphasised in a recent document of the European Commission (2022). Given the fast-paced nature of Artificial Intelligence and the contingent need for EMI lecturers to fully comprehend its applications, future research should broaden to include the study of AI-driven developments in EMI. To design and deliver successful EMI curricula that take into consideration students' understanding of content and participation in classroom activities, it is essential to address their specific needs through personalised instruction. Learning analytics, for instance, uses individualised data to tailor instruction to each learner's needs, preferences, and abilities (Tao 2025). This aligns with the findings of our study, which emphasises the importance of fostering inclusive learning environments through high levels of communication and personalised learning settings (Hartle et al. 2024).

8.10 Conclusion and future directions

In conclusion, this paper has explored the challenges lecturers face when teaching their courses within the ongoing internationalisation process of universities, with particular reference to the role that Language Centres might undertake to support them. It has proposed a series of practices, i.e. self-assessment tools, which can be implemented to build on lecturers' self-awareness to foster productive EMI environments grounded in transcultural interactions and effective communication.

The findings of our previous study served as the starting point to outline three main trends to be considered before formulating support strategies: teachers' communicative effectiveness, students' self-improvement and learning effectiveness, and transcultural interactions in the classroom. Based on the literature, our previous research findings and through practical experiences, it appears that EMI initiatives can be best supported when all three areas are addressed.

Language Centres can work at different levels and stages to ensure lecturers are familiarised with the unique learning ecology which inspires the concept of internationalisation of universities, whilst providing structured learning spaces and practical tools for designing engaging lectures. A viable approach for Language Centres is to support teachers in addressing potential shortcomings in their EMI courses by administering self-assessment tools early in their training, to help identify strengths and challenges across a range of variables: their command of the language, their familiarity with educational technologies, and their ability to foster student interactions and value personal contributions. For the students, the checklist provides support in reflecting on their learning experiences in EMI courses. It encourages awareness of linguistic development, participation, and intercultural engagement. Its results can guide adjustments to teaching strategies and learning support mid-course.

In this scenario, the choice of tailor-made self-assessment tools must target both content and language competencies to be effective, as not only the lack of language proficiency, but also of teaching methodology, may hinder teachers' content delivery on one end and learners' understanding on the other. In fact, both our findings and research in the field of EMI suggest the importance for lecturers, especially those using a vehicular language to teach their academic subjects, to implement specific strategies (Richards and Pun 2022) and to increase research on EMI (Lasagabaster 2022a), which can be used to gather relevant information to be processed with the support of Language Centres. The tools proposed in this study aim to address the need to integrate EMI instructors' teaching skills with the support of specialised language trainers who can help lecturers build critical self-awareness and develop their competencies (Dafouz 2021).

Future research should explore the practical applications of these tools within EMI training programmes, identifying optimal moments for their administration and assessing their impact on both lecturers and students. Action research initiatives could investigate how self-assessment and feedback mechanisms influence teaching practices, engagement levels, and overall course effectiveness. The integration of these tools at the beginning of an EMI course, for instance, could provide valuable data on lecturers' preparedness and inform tailored support strategies throughout the academic term.

As universities continue to expand their EMI offerings, the role of Language Centres in providing structured, tailor-made language support will become increasingly significant. By combining evidence-based pedagogical strategies with the thoughtful integration of technological tools, universities can design more inclusive and effective EMI frameworks that meet the diverse needs of students and lecturers. Further investigation into how self-assessment and AI-enhanced formative assessment can contribute to effective EMI pedagogy will be essential for advancing teaching and learning in internationalised higher education.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank colleagues who contributed to the research and the overall drafting and proofreading of the paper. In particular, Elena Borsetto was responsible for sections 8.1, 8.3, and 8.4, Daniela Vescio was responsible for section 8.6, 8.7 and 8.8, Prof. Sharon Hartle was responsible for sections 8.2 and 8.5, and Prof. Roberta Facchinetti was responsible for section 8.9. Section 8.10 was jointly written. Special thanks to Prof. Jane Lu Hsu, for her suggestions and for revising the paper. We also appreciate the support provided by those who assisted with manuscript preparation.

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