

University lecturers' perceptions of the role of English in their teaching

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This paper describes international university lecturers' perceptions about the role of English in their teaching. The lecturers (N=31) of a Finnish university, representing 20 nationalities, attended a pedagogical development course intended to enhance their understanding of communicative skills used in teaching and English-medium instruction (EMI). University programmes with EMI have tripled in the last decade in Europe (Richter, 2019), yet the focus of university lecturers is rarely on the language but on the content (Doiz & Lasagabaster, 2021). A pre-course written reflection task was used to determine how the lecturers defined communicative teaching and the role of EMI in their teaching. Post-course, following teaching demonstrations and peer feedback, the lecturers completed another reflective written task to examine if their approach to EMI had altered. The results indicate that most international university lecturers, both non-native and native speakers of English, pre-course viewed the role of EMI as minimal in their teaching as they expected students to be able to study their field in English. In the post-course analysis, however, many lecturers noted that they had become more conscious of their language use, rate of speech and clarity to be more mindful of their students studying in another language. The study suggests that university lecturers should increase awareness of their use of English in EMI to enhance the quality of their communication and teaching to support students' learning in a second language.

Keywords: university teaching, English medium instruction, pedagogical training, professional development

1 Introduction

Teaching English as a second language (L2) takes place in all levels of education, typically provided by trained language teachers. In many European higher education institutions (HEIs), teaching L2 English often refers to English for academic purposes (EAP) or English for specific purposes (ESP), again taught by trained language teachers at language centres. Teaching academic content through English, on the other hand, is an established mode of content instruction, typically referred to as English-medium instruction (EMI), and present in most HEIs today. In essence, in EMI English is used for instructional purposes while being the L2 for most participants, including the teacher and the students (Pecorari & Malmström, 2018). In European higher education (HE), EMI

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has an extensive history and various levels of implementation, resulting from the dominant role of English in science (Mortensen & Haberland, 2012) and the mobility of teaching staff and students, even before the Bologna Process precipitated the internationalisation of European universities (Alastrué, 2015; Fortanet-Gómez, 2013; Hultgren et al., 2015).

University programmes with English as the medium of instruction have tripled in continental Europe in the 2000s (Smit & Dafouz, 2012), particularly in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields (Dearden, 2015; Kirkgöz & Dikilitas, 2018). EMI programmes can be argued to attract foreign students, increase intercultural competence with domestic students and promote the profile of the university and thus foster mobility and networking (Bowles & Murphy, 2020; Egroun-Polak, 2012; Macaro, 2018; Wächter & Maiworm, 2014). Yet while EMI programmes represent mainstream educational and societal contexts, they still entail language-related challenges for many stakeholders, particularly teachers and students (Gundermann, 2018).

As EMI programmes have introduced an influx of researchers and students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds to various universities, concern has also raised about whether university lecturers using L2 English and students learning through L2 English are able to fully cooperate in a shared second language (Henriksen et al., 2019; Murray, 2016). Unfortunately, EMI teachers may frequently lack the types of knowledge required to integrate language objectives with content teaching (Morton, 2016), and therefore are not familiar with the strategies or the means to implement language teaching in EMI (Doiz & Lasagabaster, 2021). EMI has often been connected to issues such as inadequate language skills of staff and students, lack of interest in English-medium courses, loss of confidence among students, and teachers' ideological objections against English over their native language (Breeze & Roothoof, 2021; Macaro et al., 2019; Rose, 2021; Soruç et al., 2021).

The widespread use of EMI and English in academia, often preferred over native languages, has indeed raised criticism towards EMI as Englishisation (e.g., Cabral-Cardoso, 2020; Lanvers & Hultgren, 2018) and the notions of power and status connected to the use of English. The use of native-speaker (NS) norms for English has been seen as gatekeeping within academia, particularly as enforced by NS stakeholders (Jenkins, 2007, 2013; Pennycook, 2017), even though non-native speakers (NNS) of English today far outnumber NSs (Macaro, 2018; Mauranen, 2012). Scholars have begun to question the distinction of NS/NNS English (e.g., Jenkins, 2013; McCambridge & Saarinen, 2015), especially within the HE setting as the internationalisation and diversification of HE have established English as a lingua franca (EFL) and its use is prominent and increasingly fluent among scholars, researchers, teachers, and students (Mauranen & Jenkins, 2019). Previous studies have also indicated that the professionalism and preparedness of the university lecturer is viewed as more significant than being a native speaker (Gundermann, 2014; Margić & Vodopija-Krstanović, 2018).

1.1 Support courses for EMI

This rise of EMI in European HE has also led to an increased demand for more robust support systems for university teachers, and already addressed by various HE projects. Providing pedagogical support, especially for new teaching

staff, is vital since HE lecturers, instructors, teachers, or professors typically have limited formal pedagogical education (Brownell & Tanner, 2012; Murtonen & Vilppu, 2020) or academic and field-specific language training to support their EMI implementation (Fortanet-Gómez, 2014; Hahl et al., 2014). The continuous challenge in providing excellent teaching in HE is that university teachers are considered experts because they are experts in their area of research, not necessarily teaching. Therefore, many university teachers begin their careers without pedagogical training as it is assumed they will be suited for lecturing with their qualifications for research (see also Collini, 2012).

Many European HEIs provide pedagogical training for their teaching staff, including courses and support for EMI (e.g., Dafouz & Pagèze, 2021; Orduna-Nocito & Sánchez-García, 2021). In some courses support has been provided to create teaching materials in English for EMI (Gürtler & Kronewald, 2015), and in others EMI has been approached more pedagogically through discussions, presentations workshops and peer coaching (Ball & Lindsay, 2013; Gundermann, 2014). Support courses and pedagogical development are essential in developing teacher cognition, identity, and skills and in avoiding the automatic adoption of teaching methodology experienced in the teachers' own education, especially if ineffective (Knight, 2002).

Nordic countries, including Finland, have also been prominent in adopting EMI programmes to university education (Hynninen, 2016), and currently the Finnish National Agency for Education (2021) lists over 500 English-medium bachelor's and master's degree programmes in HE, with up to 83% of all Finnish HEIs providing English-taught programmes (Richter, 2019). In Finland, pedagogical training for HE teaching staff has been provided since the 1990s, although it remains voluntary and there are no formal pedagogical qualification requirements in Finnish HE (Mustonen & Vilppu, 2020; Vilppu et al., 2019). However, Finnish HEIs have strived to offer support for EMI lecturers to appreciate the role of both pedagogical training and English in EMI (e.g., Mauranen & Mauko, 2019).

Previously in the Finnish HE context, Postareff et al. (2007) and Vilppu et al. (2019) have discovered that pedagogical training increases lecturers' student-centredness but approaches to teaching and self-efficacy beliefs transform more slowly. Mustonen and Vilppu (2020) have also discovered that pedagogical training helps teachers to recognise teaching as a skill to be developed and not an innate quality or trait. This process also connects to the theoretical concept of the scholarship of teaching (Boyer, 1990; Karm, 2010; Schön, 1983) which encourages HE teachers to develop their knowledge of teaching through reflection and practice.

1.2 Research premise

To introduce one implementation of pedagogically oriented EMI support and to explore how university lecturers in Finland perceive the role of EMI in their teaching before and after pedagogical training, this study describes international university lecturers' perceptions about the role of English in their instruction. The lecturers (N=31), representing 20 different nationalities and teaching experience ranging from 1 to 28 years, attended a pedagogical development course aimed to expand their understanding of communicative skills required in EMI teaching. The course was part of 10 ECTS university pedagogical studies

and thus mandatory for those completing the programme (n=17) but optional for others who wanted to develop their teaching (n=14). Effective communication in HE teaching, including interaction and connection with students, has been shown to enhance students' educational experience and their learning outcomes (Grootenboer & Rowan, 2017; Tuomainen, 2019).

While various theoretical frameworks can be and have been applied to the study of EMI, from constructivism and sociocultural theories on learning and teaching (e.g., Vygotsky, 1978) to L2 acquisition analysis (Macaro, 2018), in this study the focus is on the EMI lecturers' perceptions of EMI. Therefore, the theoretical framework applied here is teacher cognition which investigates teachers' "self-reflections, beliefs and knowledge about teaching, students, content and awareness" (Kagen, 1990, p. 421). The collection of the lecturers' data on EMI through reflective written tasks promotes the teacher as a reflective practitioner, another essential element of teacher cognition (Borg, 2006; Li, 2017). The main research questions are:

- 1) How do university lecturers before pedagogical training perceive the role in English in their teaching, and does EMI have an effect on their teaching and student interaction?
- 2) After a pedagogical training course on communication in teaching and EMI, involving teaching demonstrations and peer feedback, have the university lecturers' understanding of and approach to EMI changed?

2 EMI at European universities

Teaching in English at European universities has seen a development not only in prevalence but also conceptually, with terms such as Teaching academic content in English (TACE), Teaching through English (TTE), and Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) adopted in different decades since the 1990s (Airey, 2015; Smit & Dafouz, 2012). In the 2000s, however, HE policies have sought to distinguish HE teaching and instruction from the CLIL in other educational levels by adopting either the term EMI or Integrating content and language learning in higher education (ICLHE) (Dimova & Kling, 2020; Valcke, 2020). The still more commonly used term EMI is used in this study.

The focus of university EMI has rarely been on teaching the language but on the content and academic subject knowledge, even to the extent that university lecturers reject the notion of teaching language in EMI (Airey, 2012; Lasagabaster & Doiz, 2021). In EMI English is typically the L2 for the instructors and students (Pecorari & Malmström, 2018), making the teacher typically a content specialist who facilitates the understanding of content subjects through English but may not prioritise English in any way (Dearden, 2015; Richards & Pun, 2021). EMI lecturers may also often assume their students will have the necessary skills to study through English, especially since university students, both local and international, are expected to meet the language requirements of their programmes (Barker, 2013). University lecturers therefore may often feel EMI can be taught without particular regard for the language elements, particularly in STEM fields, because the lecturers have learned the discipline-specific language from their own studies and interaction with experts in the field (Block & Mancho-Barés, 2021; Macaro et al., 2019).

Yet it can be argued that all EMI lecturers should pay attention to the language they use to facilitate and support students' learning (Fortanet-Gómez, 2013). Recently more university lecturers have included language as part of their content teaching (Baker & Hüttner, 2019), and occasionally language is also listed as a clear focus in university teaching (Dafouz et al., 2016). However, the language levels and skills of both teaching staff and students are still a concern in EMI (Briggs et al., 2018; Murray, 2016). Lecturers may feel pressured to communicate effectively in a language other than their mother tongue (L1), including precise pronunciation (Gundermann, 2018; Jenkins, 2013; Tuomainen, 2018). EMI lecturers are expected to be both field-specific experts and fluent communicators in English, and ideally, the language levels of everyone involved would be sufficient to support meaningful learning (Doiz et al., 2013).

Having to reconcile with a relative or presumed weakness of their L2 skills can be part of the challenge of EMI for many scholars and academics (Jensen et al., 2011; Pulcini & Campagna, 2015). Younger EMI lecturers have noted fewer challenges with EMI and have held more positive views than their older colleagues, potentially because of higher language proficiency levels (Henriksen et al., 2019; Jensen & Thøgersen, 2011; Kling, 2015). Yet previous studies on EMI have indicated that some lecturers have refused to teach through EMI despite having good English competence (Pulcini & Campagna, 2015). NNS lecturers may also feel ill-prepared for EMI (Cots, 2013) or EMI instruction is seen to decrease the lecturer's ability to communicate academic content as fully and accurately as with the L1 (Jensen et al., 2011; Tange, 2010). EMI has also been seen to increase the workload for the lecturers and students (Gürtler & Kronewald, 2015; Margić & Zezelic, 2015), especially if the joint L2 creates issues for all involved.

3 Role of communication in teaching and EMI

In recent years scholars have maintained that EMI lecturers must adapt their teaching to include language awareness and interactive pedagogy (e.g., Dearden, 2018; Vázquez & Ellison, 2021). Naturally, effective university teaching can take various forms. Biggs and Tang (2011) and Marton (2015) have argued the teachers should be able to indicate the value of the learned content and have insights into various ways of learning. Further, if we follow Prosser and Trigwell's (1999) well-established characteristics of good teaching in HE and its principles of being aware of students' learning situations and diversity, the language of instruction and its delivery arguably have significance in effective teaching practices.

Through EMI, many universities have dramatically increased the enrolment of international students creating cultural diversity in the classroom (Killick, 2015; Schartner & Young, 2020). This internationalisation also forces lecturers to consider the diverse student body, including multiculturalism and multilingualism, which should also show in the manner they approach their language of instruction (Dearden, 2018; Margić & Vodopija-Krstanović, 2017). Teaching an international classroom requires awareness of heterogeneous backgrounds, language skills and diversity in the students' learning styles, which in turn requires proficiency in content, language, and pedagogy from the EMI lecturers (Mellow et al., 2015). Tuomainen (2019) has claimed that clarity in content and delivery, interest, engagement, and classroom climate are essential

dimensions in effective EMI teaching. Grootenboer and Rowan (2017) also maintain that rapport and student engagement are essential if high-quality university teaching and learning are to be achieved.

However, in university education effective communication may be challenging in lectures attended by large numbers of students. Lectures with large groups demand more from communicative teaching as communication and discussion are restricted, eye contact is more challenging and increased attention should be paid to well-designed materials and encouraging questions (Race & Pickford, 2007; Su & Wood, 2012). Typically lecturers that students find helpful utilise a variety of teaching and communication processes and are clearly organised (Brookfield, 2015). Communicative excellence in teaching is challenging to define as perceptions differ between HE disciplines (Parpala et al., 2011; Wood, 2017). Yet generally it can be argued that effective communication is a significant component of effective teaching and that a student-centred orientation promotes students' learning, participation, and engagement.

4 Pedagogical development course on communication and EMI

To assist university lecturers in Finland in developing their teaching and communication in EMI, a mid-sized multidisciplinary science university offers a course on pedagogical communication in English as part of university pedagogy studies. The course emphasises the role of reflection, teaching practice, observation, and feedback in the professional development of the lecturers' pedagogical proficiency. The implementation includes a four-hour first meeting, attended by all participants and continues with teaching demonstration sessions in peer groups of four lecturers and the instructor. After the demonstrations, discussions and feedback, the peer groups continue to work together for approximately two months to observe each other's teaching sessions and provide feedback. The course concludes with a final four-hour webinar for all participants.

4.1 Participants

In spring 2020 and spring 2021, the course was attended in total by 31 participants (16 and 15, respectively). 14 of the participants were women and 17 men, with ages ranging from 27 to 51 years old. All were employed by the university in either combined research and teaching positions or as PhD students, with titles ranging from early stage researcher to associate professor. The participants' years of overall teaching experience ranged from one to 28 years, indicating a distinction between PhD students and established scholars. Most participants were teaching or would be teaching courses aimed at master's level or PhD students, with English as the language of instruction.

The lecturers represented all four faculties of the university: the Faculty of Science and Forestry (n=13), the Faculty of Health Sciences (n=10), the Philosophical Faculty (n=6), and the Faculty of Social Sciences and Business Studies (n=2). As can be seen in the participants, the prevalence of EMI in the university in question appears highlighted in STEM and medical fields with the significance of English in said disciplines. Three of the 31 participants were NSs of English and 28 NNSs. A total of 20 different nationalities were represented, with 18 different L1s.

4.2 Data collection

To determine the lecturers' perceptions about the role of EMI in their teaching, all completed a pre-course reflective learning task (N=31). After reading a selection of research papers on communication as part of university teaching and on EMI, the lecturers were asked to reflect on various questions in essay form, including the following on EMI: 1) What role does teaching in English have in how you approach and perceive teaching? and 2) In your opinion and in your teaching, does EMI affect the teacher-student interaction in any way? Does teaching in English pose any challenges for you (or your students)?

The pre-course learning task and the lecturers' perceptions were also discussed in small groups during the first meeting of the course. The course continued in peer groups of four lecturers, who first delivered a 15-minute teaching demonstration of their own teaching to the peer group and the course instructor. After this practice session, each peer group continued to work together to deliver either two different teaching demonstrations or invited the others to observe two of their classes, for the purpose of peer observation and feedback. The peer groups were assigned to include maximum variation in the lecturers' disciplines and teaching experience.

Post-course, all participants again completed a reflective writing task (N=31) on the course process, how they had experienced the teaching, peer observations and feedback and how they viewed the role of communication in teaching and the role of EMI after the course. The reflective learning task included a variety of questions about the course, and the following about EMI: 1) Has your understanding of the role of English in your teaching changed in any way from the beginning of the course? and 2) Based on the course process, what are your strengths as a lecturer teaching through English?

The pre-course and post-course reflective writing tasks were intended to allow the lecturers to analyse their perceptions, theoretical knowledge and personal responses related to teaching, professional identity, and the role of EMI. Writing can have a particular reference to reflection as the process forces lecturers to organise and create visible thoughts to support self-understanding (Farrell, 2013). Earlier studies have emphasised that reflection as part of pedagogical development must include analysis of identity and professional values so as to avoid simply being a reinforcement of existing ideas, behaviours, and patterns (Chak, 2006; Karm, 2010).

4.3 Data analysis

The pre-course and post-course reflective learning tasks provided the qualitative data in this study on the university lecturers' perceptions of the role of EMI in their teaching. Expressed consent was provided by the lecturers to use their texts as data in this study. The questions were the same for all participants and text data in connection to EMI in total ranged from one half to two pages of text per person. The text data were analysed using a thematic framework to identify recurring patterns and develop meaningful themes from the reflective texts. By carefully reviewing the text data, an initial set of codes was identified, such as 'EMI has no role', 'EMI has some role', and 'EMI has a significant role'.

The data analysis was conducted in phases and the unit of analysis was conceptual themes that would consist of one to several sentences. The codes and

data were analysed, compared and contrasted to integrate different themes to illustrate the lecturers' understandings of EMI in their teaching. The initial set of codes were further compared, contrasted and discourse patterns related to mentions of 'EMI', 'English', 'language' or 'linguistic' were merged to demonstrate the participants' perceptions, drawing on existing literature on EMI teaching and teacher cognition.

Throughout the analysis the data, the codes and themes alternated but ultimately themes arose from the data analysis in connection with EMI, from both the pre-course and the post-course data, and on personal and contextual levels. To promote the validity and reliability of the study and results, an outside coder (a researcher in applied education) was invited to perform analysis on the data and after comparisons and discussions a consensus was reached. The main themes from the data analysis are discussed next in the study results. Each participant has been randomly assigned an identifier Le1-31 (lecturer 1-31) to display in the results where relevant.

5 Results

5.1 Lecturers' pre-course perceptions of the role of EMI

In the pre-course reflective learning task, all participants (N=31) were asked to consider their position on EMI in their own teaching at university, along with other questions on the role of communication in teaching. To support their reflection, the participants were provided a selection of recent research papers on the topics, including one exclusively discussing EMI at university level. All participants wrote about the role of EMI in their teaching in the pre-course task, with the sections ranging from one sentence of 13 words ("The course is an English taught course and does not pose any challenge") to 44 sentences of 720 words.

5.1.1 EMI a non-issue in teaching

Although the participants on the pedagogical training course represented 20 different nationalities and 18 different L1 speakers all were using English as their working and teaching language at the university. Most university lecturers (n=16) explicitly mentioned in the pre-course task that English-medium instruction did not pose any problems in their teaching. In this category, all lecturers were NNSs of English and had an average of 4.75 years of university teaching (minimum one academic year, maximum 15 years).

The most commonly mentioned reason for the non-issue of EMI was the lecturer's own comfort with English because of previous university studies and work in English (n=7) so that the lecturer was used to communicating in the field in English. Many lecturers in this category also expressed their comfort with English use in general, up to the point of preferring to teach university content in English over their L1 (n=6), and even feeling uneasy if their L1 was required at university.

English is my primary language and so I am more confident teaching in this language. Interestingly, it is instances where I can't use English and must revert to Finnish that are most stressful for me. (Le23)

In fact, I feel more comfortable teaching in English than if I would teach in Danish. (Le27)

Many lecturers in this subcategory were native speakers of Nordic or Germanic languages (Finnish, Danish, German), which can be seen to reflect similar levels of comfort with English and EMI seen in other studies of Nordic university instructors (Jensen & Thøgersen, 2011; Kling, 2015; Mauranen & Mauko, 2019). This can also be seen to relate to the notion of feeling more comfortable with English as part of university duties because of the prominent role of English in science, and particularly in STEM fields, as mentioned in this data (n=5). The result also supports the notion of a reduced need to distinguish NS/NNS of English within HE as the role of EFL is prominent (cf. Braine, 2005; McCambridge & Saarinen, 2015).

Many of the same lecturers who felt comfortable with EMI also perceived no issues in the language for their students (n=6). Most lecturers were teaching master's or doctoral level students in English, and in Finnish HE the majority of programmes at this level are mostly taught in English (Filippou, 2019). Therefore, many felt their students had sufficiently good English skills to effectively follow teaching and learn new content. Some of the reasons proposed included the students' assumed or perceived good overall English knowledge, understanding of the role of English in their studies and research, and having met the language criteria prior to starting the current study programme.

5.1.2 Actively thinking of EMI in teaching

While for many lecturers in the pre-course task EMI was not considered an issue or an element to consciously consider in teaching, some lecturers were making explicit efforts to take EMI into consideration in their teaching (n=4). The lecturers who were actively thinking about EMI were one NS and three NNSs of English and had an average of 8.25 years of teaching experience at university level. All the lecturers mentioned students as the primary reason for considering their language use and language of instruction, often referring to the students' potentially limited language skills and emphasising rapport, support, and student engagement.

I consider myself among the teachers who actively attribute critical role to the language when teaching. In my teachings, I often put additional effort to encourage students with limited language skills. (Le8)

I believe that one must encourage their students to make themselves at least, understood, and then continue growing on that step by step. If you are struggling with English, it would not be forever if you start fixing it now, and we have all been there, try to make the student feel that you share their experience as a student. (Le21)

This type of recognition of student diversity and variety in L2 skills echoes previous studies on the implementation of ICLHE programmes (Dimova & Kling, 2020; Doiz & Lasagabaster, 2021) and the enhanced role of language within the teaching and learning processes. With the lecturers in this study who had a more conscious process of EMI, one lecturer had attended a course on how to teach through English, and two others had not previously considered EMI but based on the readings and the reflective task, would begin to do so. One NS lecturer noted that because English was the L1, he had not considered the language at all previously in his teaching but reading the provided article on EMI made him empathise more with his students. An NNS lecturer, with self-professed comfort

with teaching in English, wrote in his reflection that he would begin to “consider the students and not just myself” (Le15). These reflections also support the notion of teacher cognition and the scholarship of teaching as a tool with which teachers can develop professionally as they analytically process their existing practices (cf. Farrell, 2020).

5.1.3 Potential problems with EMI

In the pre-course reflective writing task, most lecturers also discussed what could potentially cause problems for EMI teachers in HEIs but considered the problems more theoretically outside their own teaching and language use (n=17). Most lecturers highlighted that issues with EMI could arise from the teacher’s insufficient language skills (n=8), referred to in the data as lack of fluency, language insecurities, limitation of language expertise or proficiency, or fear of lacking English proficiency. Issues with language proficiency were often seen connected to L1 such as translating first from L1 to English (also in Kim & Tatar, 2017).

The fear of having limited vocabulary or capacity to express and transmit ideas through EMI were also noted and potentially some fellow lecturers could resort to only lecturing for this reason, to avoid interaction with students. Furthermore, a lack of linguistic skills was directly associated with a reduced quality of teaching. Similar results about the issues connected with EMI have been found in previous studies (e.g., Doiz & Lasagabaster, 2021; Henriksen et al., 2019), and the process of analysing not only personal aspects but contextual and institutional ones is a significant component of teacher cognition (Li, 2017).

Three lecturers also contemplated that the reason for some university lecturers’ lack of proficiency in EMI could have resulted from resistance to English use due to cultural identity and linguistic heritage of the L1 and resistance to English as a colonising language. Similar notions on EMI have been seen in studies by Bolton and Kuteeva (2012), Jensen and Thøgersen (2011), and Margić and Zezelic (2015). However, critique was also aimed at insufficient language training or incentives to help teachers with EMI. According to lecturers, universities should provide more “training, classes or assessments on how the level of English skills of the teachers influence on the students’ learning processes” (Le9), and better recognise the efforts made to create high-quality teaching in English. However, the realities of modern academic life were also referenced so that anyone struggling with English as part of their academic career “has to find a way to overcome the language issue in the publish or perish environment” (Le27).

The notion of the necessity of English in today’s academia was also referred in a more encouraging manner so that using English as an L2 with varying levels of proficiency has “brought all of us here and created a common medium for scientific and social interaction” (Le14). With one NS lecturer, however, using EFL felt constrictive compared to his native language use:

What EMI means for me, is that when I lecture in English, I try to keep it as international and less native as I can. That is hard. [...] On one hand international English makes it hard to make the lecture interesting, by using colourful native English expressions, but on the other hand it means that we simplify complicated discussions for a wider audience. (Le18)

Here English as the L1 within academia was perhaps less gatekeeping (cf. McCambridge & Saarinen, 2015) as having to reign in “colourful native English

expressions” such as idioms, expressions of humour, dialect, and colloquialisms inherent to the lecturer’s field and narrative style of teaching within the Humanities.

5.1.4 EMI an issue for the lecturer or students

While the majority of the university lecturers in this study, working and teaching through English, found EMI unproblematic, in the pre-course task two lecturers explicitly mentioned that EMI was an issue for them. The main issue was not feeling as comfortable with English in teaching as with the L1. Although the other lecturer mentioned having fluent English skills, the aim for perfection in the language use was an issue so that the aim was “perfect language” that would provide more confidence and professionalism. Similar results have been previously published within Nordic HE in that despite the active role of English in HE, lecturers may not be fully comfortable with spontaneous, face-to-face interaction in English with their students (Henriksen et al., 2019), perhaps partly because of the perceived status of NS English as “perfect language” (see also Gundermann, 2018; Jenkins, 2013).

Similarly to the potential problems of EMI mentioned by other lecturers, the other lecturer here also found the use of L2 in EMI to restrict delivery, ideas, and the use of terminology. Additionally, the role of English and the requirements posed by working and teaching in academia with NSs of English were also mentioned as additional pressure:

[...] the natural human feeling of embarrassment as a teacher when not being able to speak as confidently language-wise as I aim for in front of students, especially if there was a native speaker watching for my words. (Le16)

Additionally, while most lecturers were comfortable with their own English use and EMI, many were also explicitly aware that their students’ language levels were at times insufficient (n=15). Most students for the lecturers were master’s and doctoral level students, with explicit English language requirements. International students in master’s programmes at the university must pass a language test such as IELTS, TOEFL or PTE prior to acceptance and Finnish students should have at least a B2 level of English on the CEFR scale. Prospective international PhD students also must demonstrate their English proficiency either with relevant academic degrees, theses, other documentation, or a language test. However, although students have passed the English language requirements, the reality of their language competence could be different. As problems with students the university lecturers mentioned reluctance to speak English (f=11), general deficiency of English skills (f=4) and difficulty writing texts (f=3).

For students’ reluctance to speak English in class or with the lecturer a variety of situations was mentioned, such as general shyness to speak English, passiveness during lectures, avoiding asking questions, help or clarifications, switching to their L1, and unwillingness to present orally in English. In previous studies, university students’ willingness to communicate in an EMI class has been influenced by low self-efficacy or lack of knowledge or interest in the topic (Chien & Valcke, 2020). However, some lecturers also contemplated how much of the passiveness and reluctance was based on the students’ language skills, the lecturer’s own teaching style or the students’ general reluctance of public speaking.

Perhaps, in the classroom, hesitation to ask questions may be impacted by the need for English and also then the student's willingness to participate in oral presentations is low. However, these can also be affected by issues of public speaking and not related to language. (Le23)

Students' language issues or their hesitance to use English also caused created feelings of uncertainty and frustration for the lecturers. Three lecturers mentioned they felt frustrated by students' lack of questions or inability to speak, or that misunderstanding a student's question or remark could generate distrust in the teacher-student relationship. Additionally, if the students switched to their L1 in the classroom, the lecturer was uncertain whether it was because of discomfort with English or difficulty in communicating with the lecturer. Five lecturers were also concerned how the lack of suitable English skills would affect students' learning and academic performance, also previously shown by, for example, Briggs et al. (2018).

Their English skills sometimes hamper their understanding of the taught concepts because they do not understand the English words. That is also reflected in their exam performance where it is obvious that they struggle with expressing their thoughts. (Le12)

On the other hand, some lecturers felt the students would need to understand the significance of good academic and field-specific English skills and would need to actively develop their skills to understand the course materials and be less reliant on their teachers for knowledge. Having advanced English skills would also create more career opportunities because of the role of English in science and academia (cf. Vázquez & Ellison, 2021).

The mere knowledge of English as a language is not enough, the scientific and the discipline-oriented English is very important. It provides students with accessibility to different sources of knowledge, international research, and make them able to communicate with peers from different countries in any scientific setting. (Le14)

5.2 *Lecturers' post-course perceptions of EMI*

Following the pedagogical training course on communication and EMI in teaching, all participants in the spring 2020 and 2021 courses (N=31) completed a post-course reflective written task. In the task they were asked to reflect on their own teaching in general, the teaching sessions, peer observations and feedback during the course and whether their understanding of the role of communication and EMI in teaching had changed.

Of the 31 participants, 20 had explicit mentions of the words EMI, English, language or linguistic in their post-course tasks, while 11 lecturers had no explicit mentions of EMI. Those with content about EMI had sections ranging from one sentence of 10 words ("I was corrected in my English what was really good") to 151 words in eight sentences. Overall, in both spring 2020 and spring 2021 courses the post-course reflective writing tasks were significantly shorter than the pre-course tasks, and mostly focused on the pedagogical development process undergone during the course, as well as experiences of the teaching sessions, peer observations and feedback. Also, understandably, in both sets of post-course tasks, the COVID-19 situation and changes introduced by it to the lecturers' work and teaching, including online teaching, were raised as issues

even more than the role of EMI. Since March 2020, the university had adopted a primarily online presence for most work and teaching, and this forced the teaching practices and sessions on the course to also take place online.

5.2.1 More awareness of EMI

Of the 20 university lecturers who had explicit mentions of EMI or English in their post-course reflection, 11 mentioned more awareness of EMI after the course and indicated they would take language use more into consideration in future teaching. Elements of EMI and pedagogical communication mentioned included:

- Speaking more slowly and clearly and adding more pauses (f=2)
- Consciously using more signposting phrases (f=2)
- Considering terminology more carefully (f=2)
- Taking students' cultural backgrounds and L1s into consideration (f=2)
- Adjusting language to suit students with lesser English proficiency (f=2)
- Avoiding speaking with an accent (f=1)
- Developing EMI because of its significance in university teaching (f=1)
- Realising how colleagues stress about EMI and international students (f=1)

Compared to the data in the pre-course reflective task where four lecturers were consciously thinking of EMI in their teaching, the increase to 11 lecturers indicates some change in the approach to EMI. More consideration was particularly reserved for students and supporting their understanding and learning; a similar shift to a more student-centric approach to teaching after pedagogical training has been shown earlier by, for example, Postareff et al. (2007), Stewart (2014), and Vilppu et al. (2019). In prior research, increased recognition of EMI components has also been linked to lecturers' professional development and the development of teaching competences (Margić & Vodopija-Krstanović, 2017).

This course [...] has made me more aware of the possible difficulties a student coming from abroad might face if their language skills are not fully developed. I think the course has made me more aware of the challenges some might face in having to teach and learn in a foreign language. (Le7)

5.2.2 No explicit consideration of EMI

While 11 lecturers mentioned more awareness of EMI in their post-course reflection, seven lecturers wrote they still had no explicit consideration of EMI after the course. All these lecturers were part of the 16 who in the pre-course reflective task had not considered EMI as an issue in their teaching (see section 5.1.1). Most in the post-course task mentioned English was their daily working and teaching language and that being comfortable with it resulted in a limited need to consider it in teaching. This can be seen as encouraging if diverse and international university staff using accomplished academic English is the norm (e.g., Mauranen & Jenkins, 2019). Additionally, these lecturers felt they would not need to change the way they use English in their teaching:

I don't think I intentionally processed the role of English during teaching or in preparation, nor I recognized any change in the way I utilize English for teaching. (Le11)

The prominent role of English in STEM fields was also mentioned so that EMI is the most natural manner of teaching in STEM programmes and other languages would feel “clumsy” (Le5). As in the pre-course reflection, mentions were also given to having previously studied in English and feeling comfortable talking about one’s research field in English rather than L1. English use with students and staff at Finnish universities has also been previously shown to be relatively effortless and positive (Mauranen & Mauko, 2019). Some lecturers (n=4) in their post-course reflection also referenced EMI and English in connection to having been complemented on their language skills by their peers during the course’s teaching demonstrations and sessions. Thus, these lecturers arguably perceived that the suitable level of their English use had been confirmed by their peers although they made no conscious effort to consider EMI in their teaching.

I figured out that my English skills are excellent and that I am capable of teaching in a foreign language. I did not experience any change in the way I use English in my teaching. (Le6)

6 Discussion and conclusions

The drivers of EMI within European HE are global, European, national, institutional, and classroom-based (Hultgren et al., 2015). Accordingly, by teaching through English, HEIs can educate future academics for research and workforce for international trade and cooperation, within Europe or globally, while the HEIs themselves benefit from the increased mobility that studying through English offers (Richter, 2019). This internationalisation of HE also naturally transfers to teaching which can include NS and NNSs of English teaching academic content to students who are also prominently L2 speakers of English. The distinctions between NS/NNS English within academia should however be discarded as the numbers of NNSs have surpassed NSs (Jenkins, 2006; Macaro, 2018), and the notion that NS nations cannot control the usage of an international language has been elevated. Using EFL while teaching through English is a much more frequent occurrence for both teachers and students and therefore becoming to some extent normalised. Academic discourse is not connected to nationality and as Mauranen (2012) has stated, “there are no native speakers of *academic language*” (p. 69, emphasis in original).

Consequently, teaching international students from diverse backgrounds has become an essential part of university teaching (Barker, 2013; Biggs & Tang, 2011; Bowles & Murphy, 2020). This diversity is also reflected in the students’ English language proficiency and whether it truly matches the requirements of advanced academic study, despite passed language tests or other qualifications. This concern for English skills as an issue within EMI was expressed by the university lecturers in this study, as also seen in previous research (e.g., Briggs et al., 2018; Kim & Tatar, 2017; Richter, 2014; Symon & Weinberg, 2014). Murray (2016) has claimed that the rising number of non-English-speaking students with weak English skills creates a strain on academics and forces them to adapt their language to ensure student comprehension. He refers to this as “the English language problem” (2016, p. 35). This is an issue that must be addressed by educational policy makers, HEIs and EMI teachers alike so that the benefits of EMI on paper and in policies are not diluted by the difficulties experienced in reality.

The difficulty to follow EMI teaching, write scientific texts, or communicate in class with peers and the teacher were raised in this study as problems with students studying through English. Particularly the reluctance to speak English was highlighted, with some mentions of Finnish students, but the nationalities were not always specified. As some lecturers speculated, how much of the shyness or reluctance was related to a general fear of public speaking or an L1 style of communication was difficult to determine. After all, English is the most studied foreign language in Finland in all educational levels and enjoys a popular and valued status in society (McCambridge & Saarinen, 2015; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2021). Yet, typically, Finnish speakers overall have a more passive style of communication (Paakki, 2020), which can be surprising or disheartening to foreign lecturers. However, the issue is not exclusive to Finland as in other European EMI programmes similar occurrences of unwillingness to communicate have been recorded (e.g., Chien & Valcke, 2020).

In this study, EMI was more prevalent in STEM fields and health and natural sciences because of the significance of English in those disciplines, both in research and in teaching. Therefore, as many lecturers in this study had been educated through English, they also found EMI a natural occurrence in their teaching and not warranting a special mention or conscious thought, both pre- and post-course. In previous studies within Finnish HE, similar results of limited change despite pedagogical training have been reported (e.g., Postareff et al., 2007; Vilppu et al., 2019). The effective implementation of EMI can be challenging, yet there are naturally also those at universities who have limited need to develop their language or pedagogical considerations, such as in this study and previously (e.g., Airey, 2012; Bolton et al., 2017; Kling, 2015). Similarly, some EMI teachers in this study were not alone in asserting that they were unconcerned with students' language proficiency (cf. Baker & Hüttner, 2019; Block & Mancho-Barés, 2021), especially in the pre-course task, as they expected students to match expected language requirements.

It is also possible that the EMI teachers in this study with no explicit consideration for EMI may have already adapted their teaching skills to international classrooms, perhaps unaware of the role of language in the process. If teachers modify their approach by, for example, clarifying slides, checking comprehension, structuring content more clearly, engaging with students and asking and answering questions (cf. Hativa, 2000), they are in fact adapting their teaching to EMI and multicultural student groups. It however pays to note that lecturers with little consideration for EMI were fairly new teachers with an average of 4.75 years of teaching experience, and those with active awareness of EMI had on average 8.25 years of teaching experience. Professional development and teacher cognition of practices and identity are known to develop with increased service years (Borg, 2006).

Although many EMI lecturers in this study and in recent research continue to be reluctant to teach language in their classes (Breeze & Roothoof, 2021; Lasagabaster & Doiz, 2021), it is crucial that teachers acknowledge the variety of students in their classes, from their content skills to their language skills. The use of an L2 in teaching can potentially diminish the communication and rapport between students and teachers, especially if the fluency of the language is insufficient with either group (cf. Shohamy, 2012). In contrast, if the lecturer's skills are high, as also seen in this study, but they are unaware of the skills of their students, difficulties can occur (cf. Fortanet-Gómez, 2013). Therefore, it is

encouraging that many lecturers both pre-course and post-course were aware of the potential problems created by EMI for their students, and especially post-course many had adopted a more student-centred view to teaching.

The course was part of 10 ECTS university pedagogical studies and thus mandatory for those wishing to complete the programme but optional for others. It is commendable that these international university lecturers, with varied teaching experience and positions at the university, actively sought to participate in a pedagogical training course to enhance their understanding of effective teaching, communication in teaching and the role of EMI. Issues with EMI include the assumptions made in national education policy levels and HEI levels that EMI will create no difficulties for the teaching staff or students (Hellekjær, 2010; Saarinen & Nikula, 2012), and that the numerous benefits cited about increased internationalisation, mobility and employability will outweigh any concerns or problems in the implementation of EMI. As Biggs and Tang (2011) have maintained, improving teaching in HE must include institution-wide infrastructure, policies, procedures, and active practical implementations. EMI teachers should also be able to have support and the possibility to reflect on their teaching to build resources to face challenges in their profession (Farrell, 2020). EMI programmes should include language objectives and ideally all EMI teachers should also have disciplinary language awareness and professional development to assist with this process.

There remains a need for even more comprehensive support systems to address the language and pedagogical concerns of university staff involved with EMI. EMI programmes across European HE have been implemented to promote wider access to HE but they continue to face language-related challenges, even in Finland where English is highly appreciated in society and in the educational system. Further development of EMI teaching and learning can come from courses such as those described in this study in which lecturers reflect on their own positions, and have their peers observe authentic teaching and provide feedback from student and colleague perspectives. Increasing opportunities should be provided for HE lecturers to develop both their language proficiency and pedagogical awareness. This study was limited in size and scope, and as the data were open-ended qualitative data, the perceptions of the participating lecturers were neither measurable nor generalisable. However, the results appear to indicate that through reflection, pedagogical training and peer support, encouraging developments in the understanding of the role of EMI in teaching can be achieved.

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