



# AN EXPLORATION OF THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY'S PERCEPTIONS OF ENGLISH-MEDIUM INSTRUCTION: A MIXED-METHODS APPROACH

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**D**espite the increasing implementation of English-medium instruction (EMI) courses in higher education (HE), insufficient heed has been paid to the perspectives of those most directly impacted by EMI (Dearden and Macaro 2016), and especially in a multilingual context like Catalonia, where a minority language must coexist with Spanish and English. Given the generally low level of English among the Spanish population (Education First 2021) this study aimed to examine the extent to which the academic body of the Universitat de Lleida (UdL), regards EMI as a propitious setting for linguistic development. To this end, a mixed-methods approach (Creswell 2015) is taken. Firstly, attitudes towards the Catalan B2 requirement and EMI were elicited through a questionnaire implemented with 287 undergraduates, which facilitated descriptive quantitative data. Secondly, experiences with and reflections upon English-taught courses were documented through three semi-structured interviews with two undergraduates and one faculty member at UdL. The 'small stories' (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008) emerged were later analysed through Positioning Analysis (Bamberg 1997) and Membership Categorisation Analysis (Sacks 1972).

Overall, the findings indicate that EMI is equally accepted as an agent of linguistic development and a hurdle, which highlights, as in Cots (2013), how the UdL community—and by extension, Spanish universities—may still be unprepared to deal with EMI. It has also been observed that the introduction of English into Catalan HE is not envisaged as a threat to the local culture (Sabaté-Dalmau 2016), and that English being poorly taught at pre-university levels gives rise to an iterative discourse of victimhood among students (Diert-Boté and Martin-Rubió 2018). Despite the limitations, the findings may result in a more nuanced understanding of the impacts of EMI in multilingual environments.

**Keywords:** English-medium instruction; Catalan higher education; attitudes; foreign language learning; victimhood narrative

## 1. Introduction

Over the last decades, the trend in education has gravitated towards the internationalisation of higher education (HE), which is defined by Knight (2003, 2) as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education.” One such way in which the internationalisation of HE institutions (HEI) has materialised is in the implementation of English-medium instruction (EMI) subjects, where English features as a vehicle to “teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority is not English” (Dearden 2015, 2). The Universitat de Lleida (UdL), a Catalan bilingual tertiary education public institution, also introduced EMI courses into its degree curricula.

EMI is both an exponentially growing phenomenon in HE and a fruitful one which is considered to derive language gains. This is particularly relevant for the issue at hand, as UdL students can prove knowledge of a foreign language (FL) after completing 9 credits of English-taught academic courses (see Universitat de Lleida 2021). Nevertheless, concerns continue to be raised about Spaniards’ low level of proficiency in English (Education First 2021).

The case of Catalonia may be a representative example illustrating Spaniards' limited knowledge of English: although competence in a FL at a B2 level was mandatory for all Catalan undergraduates upon completion of their degree, it was observed that many of them did not yet have sufficient FL skills. Therefore, the imposition of the requirement of an accredited B2 had to be postponed for four years (see Generalitat de Catalunya 2018) and later waived.

In the broader sociolinguistic context of the institution under study, namely Catalonia, a bilingual autonomous community in Spain with two official languages—Spanish, a majority nation-state language, and Catalan, a minority national language (Sabaté-Dalmau 2016)—, EMI implementation may also be seen as creating a pressing need for Catalan to coexist with English, a language with strong presence in the academic realm. Yet, despite EMI implementation constituting a profound change in HE, insufficient heed has been paid to university teachers and students' views on EMI implementation, irrespective of their subject position in teaching and learning through EMI (Dearden and Macaro 2016), and especially in a multilingual context like Catalonia. Although EMI in Catalonia is growingly attracting research, students and practitioners' views are still receiving scant attention.

The present article fills the aforementioned gaps in the EMI research by examining the attitudes and beliefs of undergraduates and of one particular lecturer at a Catalan university towards EMI. Therefore, in the remaining sections of the paper, existing literature about EMI beliefs will be reviewed; an account of the methodology will be given; the results and the data derived from the study will be presented, and the paper will close with an exploration of the underlying meanings of the study. Indeed, since it is compelling that the effects of EMI are more researched, this article sheds light on fundamental issues that have yet to be fully addressed in the EMI research scene.

## 2. Literature Review

An interest in introducing EMI courses in European universities has been awakened over the last decades. EMI rests on the idea that the teaching of discipline-content courses, usually at the level of tertiary education, occurs through the medium of English as the vehicular language, and, in principle, without language-oriented goals (Moncada-Comas 2020). Conversely, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), which has been gaining momentum at pre-university levels, is a “dual-focused educational approach” targeting the development of discipline-specific knowledge and the students’ improvement of skills in a FL (Coyle, Hood and Marsh 2010, 1). Recently, however, despite the non-explicit linguistic focus of EMI, university lecturers providing students with disciplinary knowledge and developing their competence in English, even if unintentionally, have been documented as teaching in CLIL-ised contexts (Moncada-Comas and Block 2019).

Macaro, Curle, Pun, An and Dearden’s (2018) work conducting a systematic review on the growth of EMI is of help in situating EMI in HE. The evidence from the studies reviewed suggests that EMI implementation may be inevitable in HEI yet that further investigations are required to assert the connections between EMI and linguistic benefits or content learning inhibition.

Research thus far has highlighted EMI sites to be conducive to the development of an intercultural understanding and the broadening of one’s mind (Earls 2016), as well as to an increased sense of achievement (Fidan Uçar and Soruç 2018). Interestingly, Ellili-Cherif and Alkhateeb’s (2015) study yielded that students recognise the advantages of speaking English, despite them seemingly having a predisposition for L1 Medium of Instruction (L1MOI)—purportedly, due to insufficient language skills in the L2.

Further evidence of the positive role played by EMI comes from Chapple (2015), who concluded that the Japanese students under study commonly equated EMI to language gains. This was attested by Dearden and Macaro (2016), who looked at university teachers’ voices from three European countries about teaching their

academic subject through English. What they found was a recurring belief that EMI was a potentially propitious setting for students' linguistic development, largely due to a perception that learners are exposed to relevant input and are forced to 'use' and 'think in' English. This finding was later replicated in Moratinos-Johnson, Juan-Garau and Salazar-Noguera (2018), where English-mediated courses also emerged as a major predictor of students' increased linguistic self-confidence.

Nevertheless, students are claimed to be prone to struggle in a setting where disciplinary content instruction occurs through the medium of English as a FL (Macaro et al. 2018). A surge of academic interest in this area points to a correlation between EMI enrolment and student difficulty in comprehending lectures and materials offered through English (Cho 2012; Cots 2013; Hengsadeekul, Koul and Kaewkuekool 2014; Phuong and Nguyen 2019). Another study by Kirkgöz (2014) follows a similar line: EMI students' voices reflected not only difficulties in understanding English-taught disciplinary knowledge but also a considerably greater demand for effort than in L1MOI-based contexts.

An expanding body of research has also yielded that students hesitate to participate in an English-mediated environment either because of a self-perceived low proficiency—as reported in Dearden and Macaro (2016)—or a fear of being subject to negative evaluation (Hengsadeekul et al. 2014). These results are consistent with those produced at the level of secondary education by Aragão (2011), who emphasises how a low self-image as a speaker of English may be a common anxiety trigger among students because of a fear of becoming their classmates' source of amusement; or by Diert-Boté (2022), whose participants reported feelings of embarrassment in English-speaking environments.

In a similar fashion, however, students' well-documented lack of competence may be extended to EMI practitioners as well, whose English proficiency comes under close scrutiny (Cots 2013). Unsatisfactory competence in English among teachers and students alike is a cause of concern, even if the issue of a lack of benchmark for instructors' required degree of proficiency to teach must also be brought to the fore (Macaro et al. 2018).

The internationalisation of HE (and ergo, EMI implementation) has also been envisaged as generating ‘glocal’ tensions. Though Pulcini and Campagna (2015) state that the desired promotion of one’s own identity may conflict with an aspiration to compete internationally, the evidence in their study shows that the trend among lecturers at the Italian university they examined was not to fear a loss of identity. A similar finding emerged in Sabaté-Dalmau’s (2016) study: the *Englishisation* process was not widely perceived as a menace to minority languages in the Catalan HEI under study.

Despite the several contributions of the above studies to our understanding of EMI contexts, their research was mostly aimed at evaluating beliefs, which may be deeply influenced by a variety of contextual variables. Since further research is needed, this study strives to analyse attitudes about EMI implementation in HE.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Research Questions

The aim of the present study was to document the attitudes of the student body and of one faculty member towards having English-taught content courses at the level of tertiary education. To this end, the following research questions (RQ) were addressed:

1. Is EMI perceived by the academic community of UdL as an opportunity to benefit undergraduates’ lack of linguistic abilities in English?
2. What are the academic body’s views about EMI enrolment in HE, and, indirectly, about the English language, and FL learning?

### 3.2. Participants

A total of 287 undergraduate students, whose average age was 21, completed an online questionnaire<sup>1</sup>. Only UdL Bachelor students whose degree did not have a strong focus on FLs were targeted for the study. Respondents predominantly came from Spain (n= 270), with a great majority of them being Catalan/Spanish bilinguals, yet responses were also received from students from other countries, all belonging to different fields of knowledge.

Additionally, three interviews with two undergraduates and one lecturer were conducted. To ensure anonymity, they will be concealed through pseudonyms. At the time of conducting the interviews, both female undergraduates, Catalan/Spanish bilinguals, studied at UdL: Ona, a 20-year-old, is an Engineering student; Paloma, a 19-year-old, is a Preschool Education student. Martina, the faculty member, is a middle-aged female who works as a part-time adjunct professor in the Department of Private Law at UdL.

### 3.3. Instruments and procedure

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach (Creswell 2015) through a Google form questionnaire distributed in Catalan and three semi-structured interviews, conducted either face-to-face or online, and either in Catalan or Spanish, and lasting around 16-18 minutes each.

The questionnaire, administered online in November 2021 to UdL undergraduates, was designed as a collaborative task among UdL students enrolled in the English as a Global Language 2021-2022 course. It included questions related to certifying language proficiency, relaxing the regulation of the Catalan B2 requirement, and introducing EMI into degrees with a non-linguistic focus, yet items were non-mandatory and had a broader focus than the specific

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<sup>1</sup>The initial sample was of 290 students, but since non-undergraduate students and participants who did not specify their degree were excluded, the number of questionnaire participants lowered to 287.

aim of this research. Therefore, this paper only reports on a few of them, namely on multiple choice questions and 5-point Likert scales.

The semi-structured interviews, conducted in early December 2021 with two undergraduates and one member of the faculty staff, dealt with their perceptions of English being introduced into UdL and the position to which Catalan as a minority language may be relegated.

### 3.4. Analytical tools

Following Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008), the undergraduate interviewees' accounts were treated as 'small stories' that help gain insight into the speakers' identities and the ways in which these are dynamically constructed and maintained through the tellers' contextual positioning. The small stories were transcribed following the conventions in Appendix 1 and later analysed through Bamberg's (1997) proposal of three levels of positioning analysis within Narrative Positioning. These levels involve the positioning of the characters within the story (Positioning level (PL) 1: the tale), the positioning of the teller within the interactive situation (PL 2: the telling), and the construction of the sense of Self in relation to dominant discourses (PL 3: the teller). The undergraduates' narratives were also analysed through Sacks' (1972) development of Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA). MCA is a type of conversation analysis concerned with the study of how individuals make sense of the world through socially recognised categories which are (re)constructed in and through language.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Questionnaire

Most undergraduate participants appeared to be largely supportive of having English-taught content courses, with 60.91% of the



responses being in favour of it. Similarly, 57.14% of the responses proved that students showed themselves optimistic about having courses with English-oriented linguistic outcomes in their degree, irrespective of their field of knowledge. Indeed, despite Spaniards' well-known lack of skills in a FL, 52.01% of respondents who were aware of the B2 requirement were not concerned about proving their knowledge, which contrasts with the 56.89% of participants who favoured the relaxation of the Catalan B2 regulation.

Further items that prove immediately relevant to the aim of the present study include those in Table 1.

Item	Mean and SD	Unanswered
31	M = 2.34 SD = 1.36	n = 7
38	M = 3.30 SD = 1.26	n = 5
32	M = 3.86 SD = 1.26	n = 5

Table 1. Results obtained in Likert scales

## 4.2. Semi-structured interviews

### 4.2.1. Ona's conceptualisation of teachers and learners of English

Ona indicates that efforts must be made at all educational levels to ensure students' good command of English upon degree completion. Additionally, she does not anticipate English as a killer language, as it has limited presence in Catalan HE.

#### 4.2.1.1. PL 1: the tale

A small story arises when Ona is asked to share her insights on Catalan undergraduates' inability to prove knowledge of a B2 in English. To illustrate that students' lack of motivation to learn languages may be attributed to teachers' lack of sufficient English skills, she recounts how in high school, she had a Biology teacher who had to teach her subject in English and made many mistakes. This would elicit laughter on the part of her and her peers, who would simply flip out. In her small story, Ona refers to a time when the instructor asked the students whether she could erase the classroom's board. She phrased her question in a striking way, as a) she borrowed two words from Catalan ("Can I borr the pissarr?" in the teacher's discourse versus 'Puc borrar la pissarra?' in Catalan), and b) the similarities between 'borrar' and 'pissarra' in Catalan ('erase' and 'board' in English, respectively) and "borr" and "pissarr" in the teacher's strategy for, seemingly, filling a gap in her knowledge, seemed apparent to Ona and her fellow students (see Excerpt 1).

Ona en la ESO (.) em tuve una profesora de biología que recuerdo que soltaba ^cada bu^rrada que nos quedábamos todos flipando y nos reíamos bastante la verdad (.) y bueno ahora [smiles] ahora que pienso una vez en clase e iba a borrar la pizarra y y claro como tenían que dar la clase en inglés nos dijo *can I borr the pissarr?* (.) y recuerdo que todos nos quedamos fli^pando (.)

Excerpt 1. 'Can I borr the pissarr?'

#### 4.2.1.2. PL 2: the telling

Ona's emphasis on the teacher's error, as well as her non-verbal behaviour in situ and the students' reaction, may signal not only incredulity at the thought of a teacher with a poor command of English being forced to use English-mediated instruction, but also amusement at a prior high school experience. From the intonational stress being placed on the fact that the teacher "*soltaba cada burrada*", while grinning, may follow the inference that she may

find it hard to believe that secondary education teachers must teach through English despite making grammatical mistakes.

#### 4.2.1.3. PL 3: the teller

Ona's confession that she laughed at the teacher's blunder may be contextually used to substantiate her positioning—perhaps in a condescending tone—as a proficient and confident user of English who takes great pride in taking FL-mediated lessons with remarkable ease, which may reveal how the teacher's unsatisfactory competence in the language of instruction generates in the narrator a diffidently emerging discourse of victimhood. This claim is nurtured by how, throughout the interview, her self-reported practices in class (she participates in class but disconnects when basic concepts are covered) may be drawn upon as a resource to see her as a member of the membership category (MC) 'high-level student' (MC proposed by author), within the Membership Categorisation Device (MCD) 'types of students of English' (see Table 2). Such a MC may be seen as resembling a teller who believes that “investment pays off” (Martin-Rubió and Diert-Boté 2021).

MC	Category-Bound Activities/Category-Bound Predicates
high-level students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are forced to work on a level they already have</li> <li>• already master the verb 'to be'</li> <li>• get bored in class because of repeated instruction</li> <li>• may mock their teachers of English if they make errors</li> <li>• know about the importance of languages</li> </ul>
low-level students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• regard English-mediated lessons as a challenge</li> <li>• lose track of the English lesson</li> <li>• lack motivation and interest (in languages and in life)</li> <li>• are ashamed of being mocked by peers</li> </ul>

Table 1. Ascribed categories to MCD “types of students of English”, as interactionally constructed by Ona throughout the interview

### 4.2.2. Paloma and the lack of participation in her EMI course

Since Paloma repeatedly reports poor competence in English, she describes the Catalan B2 regulation being withdrawn as “a divine sign” and admits preferring EMI enrolment at university. Concerning the multilingualism encouraged in HE, she believes that the introduction of English “will not take away what you really are and what you feel.”

#### 4.2.2.1. PL 1: the tale

In Excerpt 2, a small story emerges after Paloma is asked to pronounce herself on EMI implementation in HE. Paloma explains that in her Psychology lecture, her native English-speaking teacher, on seeing the limited degree of participation among students because of their inability to understand the tasks, decided to change the language of instruction (from English to Spanish) in the hope that understanding would increase.

Paloma a la meva carrera (.) que fan com he dit abans una assignatura de (.) amb anglès psicologia (.) teòricament hauria de ser tot en anglès però degut a que les meves companyes i ^jo incloent-me (.) no sabem pràcticament res d'anglès lo bàsic (.) llavors la professora s'ha cansat de parla'ns amb anglès [looks away] perquè ningú diu res al respecte sempre estem escoltant-la ^fent veure que l'escoltem em que l'ente^nem i això (.) [looks away] així que la professora s'ha cansat i no fem pràcticament res amb anglès (.) llavors no sé (.) trobo bé que s'hagi amoldat a nosaltres però [sighs] no sé *my degree (.) which offers as I said before a course in (.) English Psychology (.) theoretically it should all be in English but because my classmates ^me included (.) know virtually no English the basics (.) then the teacher got tired of speaking in English to us [looks away] because no one ever says anything we're always listening to her pre^tending we're listening to her em that we under^stand her and stuff (.) [looks away] so the teacher got tired and we barely do anything in English*

*(.) so I don't know (.) it's OK that she adapted to us but [sighs] I don't know*

Excerpt 2. 'Fent veure que l'entenem'

#### 4.2.2.2. PL 2: the telling

The fact that Paloma repeated looks away from the camera and overall evokes negative learning experiences may be informative of her careless attitude as a learner, which may also affect her lack of motivation and (self-assessed) command of the language. This light-hearted non-verbal communicative cue may be conducive to affirming that she is not concerned that her low level of English impedes her understanding of the lectures.

Paloma stands in a position of liminality regarding her instructors' decision to shift from English to Spanish. Although the teller justifies it by saying that the teacher strove to avoid "talking to a wall" and acknowledges the difficulty to teach in a language that is not one's L1, she seems sceptical about it, perhaps because this may hamper students' joint content and language learning. Through this belief, she is constructing the role of teachers as that of shapers of students' perceptions of and ways of navigating their (FL) learning environment. In fact, her personal experiences point to how some of her past teachers of English have failed to motivate students, grouped them based on their proficiency level, have been apathetic and displayed insensitivity towards them, or even been late to classes. On the contrary, being a native teacher, a good person and passionate about teaching English are interactionally constructed by her as expected predicates of 'good teachers' (MC proposed by author).

#### 4.2.2.3. PL 3: the teller

Paloma distances herself from the blame for not having enough language skills. The victim's narrative is therefore made apparent across the whole interview, as she recurrently documents how her teachers of English were unsuccessful in cultivating a relationship of care with her. By labelling her language learning

journey as “disastrous, disastrous, very sad”, Paloma identifies as a student who was not helped to move beyond her limitations and develop a positive self-image.

Paloma might also be positioning herself and her classmates as students enacting the role of the savers, as she later declares that since the teacher replaced the medium of instruction—English—with Spanish, they reward the teacher with their participation. This may also point to how Paloma may be seen by Ona herself as a member of a category like ‘low-level students’, as Paloma regards English as a hindrance and does not seem concerned about being in class only pretending that she understands the teacher. Through this, she may fit in the description of a teller who does not know English—and ergo does not like it—yet still lacks the determination to strengthen either her motivation or language skills (Martin-Rubió and Diert-Boté 2021).

#### **4.2.3. Martina and the synergy benefits of English**

Martina assumes that the root cause of this unresolved issue—students’ poor English—must be addressed from pre-school educational levels. Even if she regards EMI as a valuable instrument for content and language integration, she also recognises that students’ low level not only deters them from completing a university English-taught course, but also affects instructors, who must adapt the content. Martina also espouses the viewpoint that university students from 21st-century society are genuinely concerned with language learning, but do not receive the formal education to do so.

When Martina is asked to share her views on the impact of English on the micro-reality of a community like Catalonia and its minority language, she outlines that Catalonia is still far from approximating the nature of 21st-century societies, their modernity and Europeanism and presents English as a language which does not lower the status of Catalan and whose effective implementation in universities results in a synergy that can be very productive.

## 5. Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine the extent to which the academic body regards the links between EMI contexts and linguistic gains as straightforward. The quantitative evidence and participants' views indicate that mixed feelings may be articulated about EMI, which was both perceived as yielding positive linguistic outcomes and highlighted as inhibiting undergraduates' learning process. What this points towards is that for the first RQ framed in this study, which asked whether EMI enrolment at university may be seen as triggering linguistic benefits, no conclusive evidence was found.

Even if the perception that EMI may derive positive linguistic outcomes may be in line with previously cited studies, further research concerning the role of EMI in undergraduates' language development would prove useful. Still, one plausible explanation for thinking it wise to claim that linguistic skills are liable to be benefitted from English-taught content courses may be the nature of EMI itself: since its focus is not linguistic, the context in which it is implemented may be seen as providing a window of opportunity to be exposed to authentic communicative situations where the goal is content-oriented. Indeed, this may explain respondents' overall positive outlook towards EMI, yet this poses many questions in need of further elucidation. What form of English-mediated instruction is desirable in HE, if any at all?

Similarly, EMI may be regarded as hindering students' content learning process because of teachers' low level of proficiency, but more notably, students' initial command of the language of instruction: students with low English proficiency upon EMI enrolment may be more prone to perceiving EMI as a hurdle, given their difficulty to understand lectures which are not taught through their L1. It may now seem that Cots' (2013) suggestion that Spanish HEIs may still be unprepared for EMI may be corroborated by the present study, which, conducted almost a decade later, has yielded similar findings.

Regarding the second RQ, which enquired what the academic body thinks of EMI in HE, the issues raised by the interviewees

(remarkably, teachers' lack of a strong competence in English and enhanced career prospects if one speaks English) broadly concur with research cited in the literature review, thus denoting that EMI may mobilise conflicting discourses. Hence, whilst the current study was unable to confirm EMI being clearly perceived as leading to language gains, it served to partially substantiate Macaro et al.'s (2018) contention that the perspectives of those most directly impacted by EMI continue to provide fertile soil for further work.

Of note, some of the issues emerging from this paper relate to how the English language becomes a commodification: the functions socially attached to it and the idea that it is a marker of career prospects is constantly being sold to students. Indeed, despite these enthusiastically received assertions, the collection of the interviewees' voices in the present study on having English-taught courses point to a lack of a concerted effort to educate competent users of English as a lingua franca in previous academic years, so that undergraduates do not perceive the need to prove knowledge in a FL as a hurdle.

Though the present study has also shown that English is not widely perceived as a threat to the minority language, it runs counter to Cots (2013), who highlighted the vulnerable status of Catalan as another potential source of tension in Catalan HE. The interviewees' perception that English does not act as a language predator can be explained by the fact that English features as the medium of instruction in limited courses in Catalan HE, and Catalan and Spanish remain Catalan inhabitants' dominant languages in the public spheres.

This paper showed how the difficulties posed by EMI in Catalan HEI flow in a double direction. Outwardly, in one respect, students must adapt to a language they do not master and to content lecturers (CL) who may be insufficiently competent in the language of instruction; in another, CLs must adapt to students' limited level of proficiency and, occasionally, their own lack of sufficient skills. Indeed, teachers of English and CLs have been put under the spotlight for either low proficiency levels or attributed poor qualities and practices, and, surprisingly, native models have emerged in



Paloma's discourse as true legitimate EMI practitioners. Although this may indicate how learners of English may still be "guided by idealised, native-speaker oriented visions" (Llurda 2016, 60), no such reference to native teachers of English was made by other participants.

Despite the heterogeneity of the stories presented (a CLIL setting in ESO within Ona's tale versus an EMI setting in HE within Paloma's), commonalities across the narratives become evident. English being poorly taught at pre-university levels or CLs struggling to deliver lessons in English have emerged in this paper as the central tenets of, perhaps, a generalised and echoed discourse of victimhood among students. Through small stories and categorisation systems, the students interviewed positioned themselves as victims of a) a teacher whose proficiency level is, allegedly, lower than that of some students, b) of teachers who fail to motivate their students, and c) perhaps, in a broader sense, like in Diert-Boté and Martin-Rubió (2018), of an education system presenting several flaws.

What the findings from the present study, along with those in Aragão (2011) and Diert-Boté (2022), may help explain, even if only tentatively, is the causal relationship (if any) between the students' accumulated past poor learning experiences with English language learning settings and their later beliefs about and practices in EMI contexts in the tertiary education domain, where Spaniards are known to have a poor command of English. This is to be taken with caution, though, and much as the participants' narratives may deliberately enhance the significant impact of previous FL learning experiences on (Catalan) undergraduates' lack of FL skills, there is abundant room for further longitudinal studies that may corroborate the potential links.

It has also been observed that the same ideas recur in the discourse of different subjects. These could be understood as emotionally loaded instances of a possible prevalent circulating discourse projected onto the individual speakers' accounts, and not as mere isolated manifestations (Diert-Boté and Martin-Rubió 2018). This repetition of a tellers' small story has been referred to as 'iterativity' by Georgakopoulou (2013) and later by Diert-Boté

and Martin-Rubió (2018) to argue that it can also encapsulate a recurrence in beliefs across the discourse of different subjects in similar environments.

Although the recurrent ideas emanated from this study do not all take the form of small stories (specially, the questionnaire), they may also be defined as iterative, which may derive better informed decisions that support teaching practices accommodating students and practitioners' attitudes. These ideas further stress that students do not come to lessons as blank canvases, but as complex social beings with multiple—and overlapping—identities echoing the roles, relationships and experiences they have had within and outside the classroom. Ultimately, understanding the dynamics of their student selves (Diert-Boté 2021) may help redeem Spanish undergraduates' lack of skills in a FL.

## 6. Conclusions

This study investigated the perceived linguistic impact of English-taught courses in a Catalan university and yielded that EMI was not conclusively regarded as an agent of linguistic development. The results, however, must be considered within the limitations of the study: with such a small sample size, they may not be transferable to a large proportion of the Catalan student body or faculty staff, which have remained a population comparatively neglected due to time and resources constraints. Consequently, it is recommended that further qualitative research be undertaken into the perceptions of EMI participants in a bid to gain a more nuanced understanding of the psycho-pedagogical implications of EMI within HE.

The present study, however, has provided valuable insights into the academic community's stances towards EMI, unveiling latent attitudes towards issues such as social hierarchies within HE or education (in)equality. Through tales and categorial work, the interviewees constructed their situated social identity as members of their socio-cultural milieu, thus providing a more comprehensive picture of the effects of the EMI phenomenon on both macro and

micro levels. Yet, since beliefs are of a changing nature, conclusions should not be generalised too broadly.

From the present study, it may be inferred that EMI may be valuable for undergraduates' joint development of content and language knowledge. Yet, even if the current findings have added to an under-researched strand of the literature, the debate must be moved forward. One possible future study may document the effects of EMI on language proficiency in comparison with L1MOI ones by administering, alongside a pre- and post-test that reflect knowledge of English before and after enrolling in an EMI course, a delayed post-test, to clarify whether the language proficiency acquired (if any) endures.

Despite the limitations, the findings derived from this study have direct practical implications for future practice, and the results should thus be interpreted as an important step in setting the agenda for ongoing research on the impact(s) of EMI on its key actors: students and lecturers.

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## Appendix 1: Transcription conventions

(.)	pause
^	syllable given prominence
<i>italics</i>	non-Catalan/Spanish speech
[smiles]	relevant non-verbal behaviour

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