



# Aligning higher education language policies with lecturers' views on EMI practices: A comparative study of ten European Universities

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## ABSTRACT

As a result of the internationalization of higher education (HE), universities are implementing far-reaching changes such as the adoption of English-medium instruction (EMI) programs. In this new educational scenario, teachers are one of the agents most affected, as they clearly experience how the change in the language of instruction impacts their teaching and their students' learning. Although many universities are drafting policies to guide their academic staff in this process, what remains to be examined is whether teacher's views and experiences are aligned with what these policies determine, if they are complementary or far removed from each other. By adopting a qualitative approach, this paper sets out to analyze the current (mis) alignment between EMI language policies and teachers' practices as reported by 28 lecturers in 10 HEIs across Europe, taking part in an online teacher education program. Drawing on thematic analysis, three main categories emerged in the data examined. Findings reveal that the gap between top-down policies and bottom-up classroom experiences is still a reality that needs to be bridged. Some implications can be drawn from the study such as the need to redefine the diverse roles that English plays in this educational context and to include new contents in the training lecturers and students receive and, finally, the inclusion of top-down and bottom-up perspectives in the drafting of new policies.

## 1. Introduction

In the current context of higher education (HE), universities across Europe are undergoing major educational changes to promote internationalization as a response to the needs of a growing social demand in the European context. One such change involves the teaching and learning of disciplinary content through English. This educational approach is already mainstream across previous educational levels in many European countries, namely primary and secondary education, under the name Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). As indicated by the term, in this approach content and language are usually addressed in a balanced manner as learning objectives. However, the situation at tertiary education proves to be fairly different and nothing close to homogeneous when it comes to the function of English (Dafouz & Smit, 2017). There is a raising awareness of the need to incorporate the learning of English to that of the disciplinary content at university to boost internationalization, and pedagogical initiatives are looking for Integrating Content and Language in Higher Education (ICLHE) (Nikula, pp. 213–221, Dafouz, Moore & Smit, 2016). However, in mainstream practice disciplinary content still prevails over language, with the latter merely playing an instrumental role. This scenario

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is often referred to as English-medium instruction (EMI) (Doiz et al., 2012). In this context, English is usually shared as the vehicle of communication among classroom participants from different cultural backgrounds and with different first languages (L1s); thus, acquiring the status of lingua franca (ELF) (Jenkins, 2014; Valcke & Wilkinson, 2017) and placing more weight on communication and fluency rather than accuracy.

As a way to provide some systematicity to this heterogeneous HE scenario in the use of language (Smit & Dafouz, 2012, pp. 1–12), universities have drawn up different reports on language policy with two main objectives. On the one hand, guide the adjustments required for internationalization and, on the other, help frame their particular EMI practices in their particular contexts (Poyatos-Matas & Mason, 2015; Soler et al., 2017). However, there seems to be a research niche when addressing policy and teaching practices jointly (Hu & Lei, 2014). Ideally, while both perspectives should complement each other in such a way that top-down and bottom-up ends meet and support each other coherently, this may not be the case.

To bridge this gap, this paper attempts to examine the internationalization policy frameworks of 10 multilingual European universities and the actual EMI teaching practices as reported by 28 lecturers attending a teacher professional development course. More specifically, the following research questions will be answered:

1. What do the HE policies examined/surveyed explicitly state about the roles of academic language, pedagogy and institutional measures in regard to EMI?
2. What are teachers' reported practices and beliefs about these three themes in regard to EMI? and
3. To what extent are HE policies and teachers' reported practices and beliefs aligned regarding EMI?

In order to answer these questions, a thematic analysis approach (Guest et al., 2011) will be adopted to identify recurrent themes that appear in the data set and provide a comparison to explore the actual alignment between language policy documents and lecturers' educational experiences in a European EMI context. Structurally, the paper sets out to explain the internationalization process in HE in Europe by placing the focus on the diversity of EMI practices and examples of policy documents from the universities<sup>1</sup> our sample lecturers belong to. It continues with a methodological section presenting the data set, the context of the study and its participants, followed by a description of the identification of working themes and the thematic analysis carried out in the study. Thirdly, the findings will be displayed and discussed to finally offer possible practical implications and draw our conclusions.

## 2. The complex EMI scenario across Europe

The implementation of EMI courses is a common practice in the process of internationalization that universities are undergoing. This has led, first, to many classroom-related changes at all levels in educational institutions (Fortanet-Gómez, 2013; Doiz et al., 2012, pp. 213–221) and second, to the elaboration of internationalization plans and language policy documents to explicitly define the strategies to be used by each university.

From a top-down perspective, language policies have been adapted to reflect the ongoing changes in the European context and regulation of what is considered acceptable in their given context. The Bologna process and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) meant the adoption of ECTS credits to favour the promotion of new mobility schemes for university members. Also, the socioeconomic and political forces stemming from globalization have boosted the EMI academic offer (Ruiz de Zarobe & Jiménez Catalán, 2009; Kuteeva, 2019) and the adoption of English for the development of the academic activity in general, and for instruction through an additional language in particular (Dimova et al., 2015). In line with Spolsky's (2004) conceptualization of language policy framework these documents address issues such as language beliefs and the role of languages (English and the local one), observable language practices and language management, i.e. agents involved, language management decisions and mechanisms as well as the implementation of new practices and processes. Therefore, these language policies are to be understood as: "never materially stable, policies are instead conceptualized as always in a state of production" (Hurdus & Lasagabaster, 2018, p. 229).

From a bottom-up perspective, the adoption of EMI has frequently arisen as a grass-root movement, undeniably impacting classroom practices and affecting teachers and students alike. In fact, there is abundant research analyzing the pedagogical, linguistic and cultural factors (Aguilar & Rodríguez, 2012; Baker & Hüttner, 2016; Jensen & Thøgersen, 2011; Lasagabaster et al., 2021; Sánchez-García & Nashaat-Sobhy, 2020) that often become accentuated in the EMI context. A first concern about the effective implementation of EMI was teachers' linguistic competence. Being proficient enough in the English language is a requisite to grant the successful classroom communication practices that lead to the attainment of the teaching and learning processes (Murray, 2016). In order to achieve disciplinary literacy, both fluency and accuracy are fundamental competencies that need to be balanced and addressed formally. As a result, most HE institutions demand stakeholders to certify a specific level of English (Dimova & Kling, 2018). Research also shows that the success of EMI courses does not solely rely on language competence but also on the mastery of discourse strategies (Sánchez-García, 2020, pp. 131–150), pedagogical skills (Carrió-Pastor, 2020) and intercultural competence (Maíz-Arevalo & Orduna-Nocito, 2021). Echoing this empirical evidence, some institutions have created certification mechanisms that assess proficiency in the language of instruction but specifically applied to the teaching activity at university level, thus contemplating all factors involved. Some examples are Test of Oral English Proficiency for Academic Staff (TOEPAS) Certification in Copenhagen university

<sup>1</sup> For further details on each of the studied institutions, please refer to their websites as provided in the reference list: Chalmers, 2020; Ghent, 2020; Haute Ecole Leonardo Da Vinci, 2020; Karolinska Institutet, 2020; Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2016; Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, 2020; University of Bordeaux, 2020; and University of Copenhagen, 2020.

(Kling & Dimova, 2015), HELA (Higher Education Lecturing Accreditation) (González Álvarez, 2014) at the University of Vigo, and CLUC - EMI among the Catalan universities.

To facilitate the internationalization process, HE institutions have enforced certain actions. Regarding teachers, training actions have become key tools of empowerment. They cover multiple areas such as teaching, research, management and the many experiences of university life with the main objective of giving a more international dimension to the university activity. Regarding students and curriculum planning, universities have likewise made a substantial effort to promote Internationalization at Home (Beelen & Jones, 2015) with the purpose of integrating an international vision into the curriculum and including the acquisition of the intercultural competence (Gregersen-Hermans, 2016) for all domestic students, not only for those who benefit from mobility. When it comes to linguistic and cultural preservation, some universities have designed strategies to facilitate the coexistence of the local language with English in an academic context (Bolton & Kuteeva, 2012; Gregersen & Östman, 2018; Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, 2020; University of Bordeaux, 2020; University of Copenhagen, 2020).

In an attempt to align the divergent bottom-up and top-down approaches adopted in each HE institution, universities are designing their own specific internationalization plans and language policies, which help define a working framework for the different agents involved. Despite the manifest convenience of such frameworks, it is required to observe to what extent there is consistency between what these policies outline and lecturers' views on teaching and learning experiences. A few studies have tried to shed light on this issue (Ali, 2013; Costa & Coleman, 2012; De Costa et al., 2021; Hu & Lei, 2014). However, these investigations typically place their focus on educational EMI realities within a single country. For this reason, this paper sets out to analyze the current (mis)alignment between EMI language policies and teachers' reported practices in 10 HEIs across Europe; thus, contributing to bridge the existing research gap.

### 3. Methodology

This section presents the methodology followed to obtain the data and answer the proposed research questions. The first part describes the data used and the context for the study; the second part deals with the themes identified, and finally, the third section presents the coding system and the thematic analysis carried out.

#### 3.1. Description of data and the context for the study

In order to answer the research questions that articulate this study, two types of data were gathered: (1) the policies or internationalization plans of 10 HE institutions and (2) teachers' reflections, from lecturers belonging to these 10 HEIs, on EMI in their professional/educational context in the post-task.

On the one hand, the internationalization policies of 10 HE institutions were collected through a web-based search (see Appendix A). Six were actual paper-based documents<sup>2</sup> reflecting internationalization plans and uploaded on the university's website. For the other 4 institutions, there was not an actual document, so information was extracted from different sections on their websites, particularly those related with their international strategy. In all cases, the documents analysed described institutional policies and measures.

On the other hand, the data gathered regarding teachers' views correspond to 70 written reflections by 28 lecturers belonging to the previously mentioned 10 HEIs who were participating in a training programme called Two2Tango (T2T) (see below). This training action aimed at "academic staff in order to enhance transnational collaboration within EMI" (Valcke & Romero, 2016, p.1). The programme was open to all teachers involved in EMI and participants were recruited by each of the different HE institutions taking part in it. Once the participants from each institution were selected, they were paired in tandems — 2 teachers from 2 different countries and academic disciplines — to work together for 7 months (December–June) on the asynchronous virtual platform *Canvas*. The course unfolded entirely online around 6 modules covering different EMI-related topics and was based on the collaborative work between 40 teachers from 6 different countries, 10 different European HE institutions, and 19 different academic disciplines, thus offering a wide range of European perspectives on EMI. The programme was at the time of the research on its 6th edition. For these reasons, this training action has been chosen as one of the main sources of data collection for teacher's perspectives to carry out the current research. More precisely, the study gathers data from the edition held in the academic year 2019–2020.

From the 6 modules the programme includes, the one dealing with the roles of English as a medium of instruction was selected as it offered a reflection on the possible teaching, learning and researching implications it entailed. To facilitate discussion and reflection, 3 tasks were provided:

- Pre-task: in which participants had to work individually with several resources: 1 scientific article, 5 short podcasts and 1 video - all providing food for thought about EMI teaching and learning implications.
- Task: participants met online with their corresponding tandem partner to discuss the content of the pre-tasks resources and their personal stance. Conversation starters were provided such as, "Explain how you deal with teaching through a language that is not your first language", "What implications does the use of English have in the international classroom?", "Do you think the quality of teaching/learning will suffer because of the new roles of English?"

<sup>2</sup> Pdf documents were found for the following universities: Université de Bordeaux, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Chalmers University of Technology, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore di Milano, Karolinska Institutet and University College Ghent.

- Post-task: after interacting with their tandem, each participant wrote their main personal reflections and posted them in the discussion forum provided in the platform Canvas. Each participant had to further comment on other two randomly-assigned teacher participants' contributions. Communication was always done in English and there was no limit in the number of words participants could write in their contributions. Overall, 70 posts were gathered, which constitute the basic data for the current analysis.

From the initial 40 participants, our sample consisted of 28 teachers, i.e. the ones belonging to the 10 HEIs selected and that submitted the post-tasks on time and followed the specifications given. (see [Table 1 in Appendix A](#)). Additionally, these teachers were all proficient in the English language, ranging from B2 to C1 CEFR level ([Council of Europe, 2001](#)).

### 3.2. Identification of themes

Both the existing internationalization policies and the participants' reflections in the post-tasks were examined following thematic analysis ([Guest et al., 2011](#)) as it is a recognised effective research tool to determine the presence of recurrent and significant themes within some given qualitative data ([Peterson, 2017](#)). Text search queries in policies were made using the NVivo<sup>3</sup> program looking for the frequency of use of words such as "internationalization, teaching practices, instruction, language, communication, lingua franca" and the languages of the participating partners (i.e. Flemish, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Swedish and English). These same words and languages were afterwards searched for in the teachers' contributions. To complement these results, a high frequency terms search was run using the same software. This search provided the raw count of each stemmed word, which was further normalized by the researchers for comparative purposes (see [Appendix B](#)). This list rendered 350 key words associated with EMI, which were further grouped according to their connection to three main ideas: internationalization, English-medium instruction and institutional measures. These ideas allowed us to find thematic links across the two sets of data that could constitute the final research themes (see [Appendix B](#)): the role of academic languages in internationalization, pedagogical approach, and, finally, institutional measures.

1. The role of academic languages in internationalization (hereinafter RAL): this refers to the fact that some universities have adopted English for communication in their teaching activity. It has also been adopted for research and management purposes, particularly when interactants from different countries work together. Nevertheless, in some countries such as Spain or Denmark ([Bolton & Kuteeva, 2012](#); [Gregersen & Östman, 2018](#); [Sánchez-García, 2020](#), pp. 131–150), the L1 is also considered an asset for the university and continues to be used in the academic activity. In any case, stakeholders need to be aware of the role that the local language has in their particular teaching, research and management context. Therefore, this category comprises aspects revolving around the languages (often the local language and English) used by the university community, i.e. the role and the function, as well as the language competence required or the mechanisms used for certification ([Halbach & Lázaro Lafuente, 2015](#); [Bazo et al., 2017](#)). This category presents certain overlapping with that of pedagogical approach so when comments are concerned with the use of English in general contexts, it is assigned to this category. Meanwhile, when comments are particularly applied to the context of the classroom, it is assigned to the category of pedagogical approach.
2. Pedagogical approach (hereinafter PAP): this refers to all the theoretical and practical aspects involved in the teaching and learning process and how these influence the social, political and psychological development of the learner. The pedagogical practices need to match the students' needs, as well as the backgrounds and interests of each individual student. Some of the pedagogical aspects that the literature has seen as key for the international classroom ([Mukerji & Tripathi, 2014](#); [Tsou & Kao, 2017](#)) include: a more student-centered approach, methodologies to boost students' active participation such the flipped classroom, collaborative learning, project and task-based learning, etc. It is also important to highlight the controversy towards the need for content reduction, the dichotomy of language vs. content teaching, the cognitive overload implied, the inclusion of an intercultural dimension, and the kind of assessment required. Finally, the threshold language level required for teachers and students involved in EMI courses is another issue frequently addressed.
3. Institutional measures (hereinafter INM): this refers to any kind of institutional decisions to boost mobility and stays abroad, to implement bilingual degrees and to create shared resources, seminars, etc. Many institutions have set up different kinds of educational support for teachers, students and staff in the form of training courses recognising the importance of certain practices in the success of internationalization. However, these courses need to be adapted to the specific needs of the community and offer a more holistic vision of internationalization. Furthermore, incentives also constitute a key aspect in this category as these officially recognise the load international teaching entails.

### 3.3. Coding system and thematic analysis

As a first step, participants and institutional policies were consecutively numbered to facilitate reference (see codes in [Appendix A](#)). Secondly, the aforementioned frequency searches were run using NVivo 1. Once the three themes were identified, the thematic analysis was carried out manually and individually by each researcher to avoid any bias and to grant inter-rater-reliability.

The following codes were used for identifying tokens within each of the themes in both institutional policies and teachers' post-tasks: RAL for the role of academic languages in internationalization, PAP for pedagogical implications, and INM for institutional

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-qualitative-data-analysis-software/home>.

measure. Thus, each researcher undertook the identification and classification of tokens manually within the previously established categories. The number of the participant or university policy document was also coded. Regarding universities, each was given a unique particular code consisting of several letters (e.g. UCM stands for Universidad Complutense de Madrid. See [Appendix 1](#) for more examples). Next, each participant was coded with a correlative number according to their participation in the post-task, and with their corresponding university code as in: “P” standing for participant, then the participant’s correlative number and, finally, the university code.<sup>4</sup> This code system allowed us to identify the participant’s comment and the university he/she belonged to, which was essential in order to compare his/her views to their particular university language policy. Moreover, the subsequent potential alignment was analysed. The pooling of the two individual analyses resulted in the findings that are described and interpreted in the following section. In specific cases, such as with categories RAL and PAP, discrepancies arose between the two analyses, which were resolved by agreeing on a common and more specific criterion to be followed in identifying and classifying the data, and that was added later to each category definition.

#### 4. Results and discussion

As mentioned above, the present study adopts a qualitative approach based on thematic analysis. For the sake of clarity, we shall first present the results obtained from the analysis of language policy documents and internationalization plans, responding to RQ1. Secondly, we will answer RQ2 by focusing on the findings from teachers’ comments in the post-tasks. Finally, RQ3 will be addressed by making explicit reference to the similarities and differences found between these reported practices and the policies.

##### 4.1. What do HE policies explicitly state about EMI?

Six universities from our sample (UCM, KI, HoGent, CTH, UCSC, and UB) count on an explicit internationalization plan or a language policy document, giving visibility to the strategies the university intends to follow. Moreover, the websites from these universities also offer further information on their internationalization strategy. For the other four universities, only their websites have been used as a source of data. Following our defined themes (see Methodology), we have searched for ideas aligned in these documents.

##### 4.1.1. Roles of academic languages in internationalization policies

Regarding the role of academic languages, universities declare to adopt English with a communicative function for international purposes. However, three -HoGent, UCM, UB- express their concern about the use of their L1 in the academic context. In particular, UCM explains that the use of English for international communication is assumed along with the use of Spanish as a language for communication and identity. English is, thus, used for the transmission of knowledge in teaching and research, as well as for international administrative tasks. On the other hand, Spanish is still promoted and given a relevant role in the community. Interestingly, HoGent requires a B2 level CEFR of Dutch for teachers whether they teach or not in Dutch, or alternatively to comply with a mandatory integration trajectory which guarantees that level after two years. It is important to remark that their policy regulates the mechanisms to certify the level of competence in the L1. In a more general way, the UB urges the need to: “build language skills across campuses and define a clearly defined language policy for students and staff” but nothing more specific has been found in the data. This concern is also shown in other universities’ websites such as KEA, which counts on the Centre for Internationalization and Parallel Language Use, aimed at preserving the use of the L1 in their context. The “Parallel Use” defines their language policy regarding the simultaneous use of two or more languages within a certain domain, where one language (the LF) will not displace the other (Nordic Languages). Particular strategies for the internationalization process appear explicitly mentioned in CTH and HELV. CTH, among their “Strategies for achieving Higher Quality”, quotes two particularly relevant: first, “internationalization” which is to be adopted “in research, education and utilisation to secure intellectual exchange and new stimuli”, recognising that it helps maintain their high level of quality. The second, “mobility” and the need to “increase mobility at the individual level, both nationally and internationally, and promote exchanges with institutions, industry and the public sector.” Nevertheless, there is no reference to the minimum level of English required for mobility programs or for any other internationalization action. In general, mobility programs are understood as an effective tool in 8 internationalization plans or websites - CTH, KIT, UCSC, HEL, UCM, UB, KIT, UMONS - to attract new talent to the student and teacher body. UCSC specifically sees Visiting professors as an effective strategy. UMONS wants to promote international mobility and internationalization at home, both through the presence of foreign researchers and students. Furthermore, HELV makes special emphasis on the benefits this provides to the learning process: a more open and inclusive understanding of the world and the capacity to create meaningful connections and foster personal resilience.

There is an overall concern for encouraging international collaboration and impact. It is made evident that universities have the urge to boost international networking to make their research activity visible across borders and encourage international projects. A clear reference is found in CTH’s strategy which justifies it on the grounds of the international impact their research has.

##### 4.1.2. Pedagogical approach in internationalization policies

In reference to the pedagogical approach in EMI, little is mentioned in these strategic and language policy documents. It is

<sup>4</sup> The way in which each excerpt was coded is as follows: theme, number participant, institution it came from and finally the comment number s/he made regarding that particular theme, e.g., “I use English mainly for reading and writing scientific articles” was coded as RAL; P1HELVC2.

remarkable that they do mention the need to implement international courses that allow students to:

- (1) “develop insight and an approach that give them the courage and potential to work nationally and internationally.” [...] “To develop activities that contribute to greater inclusion between international and national students and to greater gender equality. [...] To enable global perspectives by drawing up learning objectives and activities for intercultural standards, attitudes and values.” (CTH)

In this case, they openly point to the need for a more international dimension and an intercultural vision to content courses. Similarly, UB talks about the need for a more multicultural learning environment and specifically urges to strengthen programs and services for the international community. In general, policies link the enrichment of the student body with a more diverse multicultural profile, however, as UB, UCSC, CTH and HELV recognise, the international and intercultural dimension entails important changes in the inclusion of new internationalization activities, recruitment and administrative processes. Another important issue regarding the pedagogical approach is the threshold English language level to participate in EMI courses. This issue, which seems crucial, is not regulated in all language policies -albeit it does appear mentioned in three. UCM and HoGent both coincide in demanding a C1 level CEFR for lecturers to be eligible to teach EMI courses. HoGent specifies that only certificates from officially recognised institutions will be valid for this purpose. Interestingly, UCM accepts as valid mechanisms either a language certificate or the certified experience of a minimum of 2 years in university EMI lecturing. KEA has designed TOEPAS, an oral English proficiency certification specially aimed at university lecturers in EMI. For students, the UCM requires a B2 in their language policy and HoGent also regulates the entry language level in their Codex of Higher Education (Kurt de Wit & Verhoeven, 2019, pp. 17–36), along with the admission conditions for students.

#### 4.1.3. Institutional measures in internationalization policies

With regards to institutional measures, universities manifest the need to increase the offer of training courses for both students and teachers. Moreover, they are concerned with searching for new channels of contact and relations with potential prospects from foreign countries and, at the same time, mechanisms and policies to assess and manage performance levels, rewarding and encouraging high potential individuals; this is specifically mentioned in UB. Incentives are also an aspect that institutions focus on. UCM has set a programme of incentives for EMI teachers by recognising the overload this teaching entails and guaranteeing the continuity of that lecturing for at least 2 years. Also, this EMI teaching is recognised as a merit in internal promotion. At the same time, there are incentives for administrative staff and students who join any international action. In UCM and UB, these incentives are connected with recruitment or promotion policies. Finally, it is widely recognised that more support is still needed for the international community. There are many bureaucratic obstacles that hinder the enrolment of students, the collaboration with international partners, the management of international projects, and the integration of domestic and international community members.

One last aspect to highlight is the explicit concern of 2 universities for appearing in University Quality Rankings. For instance, UCSC pursues to improve, in an incisive way, the positioning of two indicators subject to analysis by the Qs Ranking: Academic Reputation and Employer Reputation. This ranking<sup>5</sup> closely looks at internationalization, considering Domestic/International student ratio, and Domestic/International Staff Ratio as two key elements for the final rank of the university. At a more general level CTH also quotes the need for improving its positioning in international rankings.

## 4.2. What are teachers' reported practices and beliefs regarding EMI?

In this section, we explore the teachers' perspectives regarding the adoption of the EMI, its pedagogical implications in their teaching activity and their views on the institutional measures required. The findings from teachers' reports in the post-tasks aim at responding RQ2 and are presented below around three main themes:

### 4.2.1. 1. Roles of academic languages as reported by teachers

As part of teachers' beliefs, it is recognised that the function of English in HE is often that of a lingua franca, that is, to facilitate communication in international environments, particularly, when interacting with people from different backgrounds in professional contexts. This international communication is seen as a need for our globalised society and explicitly mentioned by 16 teachers.

- (2) “the way how the phrases is built can change depending on background and culture and the turns that speakers will adopt. [...] The structure of ELF will be in fact influenced by different communicative and cultural norms” (P26UMONS)

Within this communicative approach, it is highlighted that effective communication should prevail over accuracy of language (P17CTH, P3KEA and P20HoGent).

<sup>5</sup> For further reference see: <http://www.iu.qs.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/>.

- (3) “most students are quite confident they speak English well enough to engage in exchange programs. They know of course the English they speak is not perfect and certainly not on an academic level, but good enough to get the message passed on.” (P20HoGent)

Likewise, 6 teachers recognise the role of English as a lingua franca in academic life and also in research and conferences, for reading and writing papers, giving presentations, etc.

- (4) “I use frequently English for my job as research for writing papers, presentations in congresses and international meetings. And in my opinion, it is also very important for me to prepare my students trying to improve their English skills for their future job”. (P22CTH)

In relation to the use of language for communication purposes, the phenomenon of language accommodation appears to be especially relevant for 10 lecturers:

- (5) “Even if I do not speak with a high English level, I can use many pragmatic strategies to compensate. My goal is to be understood. I will try to increase my ability to change the way I speak for being understood. Thanks to accommodation”. (P13HELV)

This phenomenon is associated with ideas such as tolerance (P21CTH), flexibility (P12CTH and P27UCSC), patience and creativity (P16UCM), cooperation (P26UMONS) and an open mindset (P25CTH) in teachers’ beliefs.

By and large, lecturers associate the use of English with a particular type of discourse. To their mind, oral discourse in class implies certain accommodation skills (to what participant P4UCSC refers to as “approximation”), so it is more natural and spontaneous (P16UCM), while at conferences or in written texts for academic journals, a higher level of accuracy is required (P4UCSC and P27UCSC). This is something they admit happening also in their L1 (P16UCM). This idea of accuracy in written discourse is expressed by 5 participants, as in:

- (6) “As a matter of fact, the use of English as a lingua franca implies a certain amount of approximation during lessons. It is a different situation while delivering a conference paper, or while submitting a paper to an academic journal: in these cases, the level of accuracy can (and must) be very high”. (P4UCSC)

Interestingly, at least 2 participants (P1HELV and P2CTH) believe that the way the listener perceives the language competence of the speaker is based on the listener’s actual level. This also appears as one of the notes in the pedagogical implications when applied to particular classroom settings.

- (7) “the most important matter for non-native English speakers is to transfer the main message. But I believe there is always an exception and that’s when the level of the English in the audience is higher than the speaker’s and both parties are non-English speakers”. (P2CTH)

From lecturers’ contributions, it seems clear that English is gaining ground in academic life. However, there is also concern in 6 teachers for the role of the L1. Coinciding with what language policy documents stated, lecturing in the L1 also continues in the 10 European institutions. Lecturers in Sweden (P25CTH) and Spain (P23UCM) explain that the use of their L1 is also an asset to the institution and, in some cases, a big attraction for mobility students, thus a balance needs to be found between the L1 and ELF.

- (8) “One issue at my university is that the bachelor’s program is supposed to be entirely in Swedish. So, when they learn about technical writing, that is only done in Swedish”. (P25CTH)

However, at least two participants (P3KEA and P9HoGent) consider that the use of English is at the expense of the L1:

- (9) “This risk is increased as today it is found in many countries that students have become less proficient in their mother tongue and therefore this could have an impact on the level of English as well”. (P9HoGent)

In contrast, the value of being bilingual or even multilingual is also recognised as it implies that speakers are capable of code-switching from one language to another (P18UCSC) and are more open-minded (P18UCSC and P19UCSC). Finally, it was very interesting to read about the case of Belgium where English is often used as an LF among native speakers of each of the three official languages:

- (10) “Even in Belgium where we have three official languages, i.e. Dutch, French and English, English is very often used as a Lingua Franca to overcome language issues.” (P9HoGent)

#### 4.2.2. Pedagogical approach as reported by teachers

Within the category of pedagogical approach, lecturers seem to largely agree on the fact that the use of English in their educational practices has a determining impact on a number of crucial issues as we shall see. To start with, 4 lecturers concur that low English

proficiency can compromise their students' learning process. This goes in line with the B2 level that language policies require for students in EMI courses, as mentioned before (See Results 4.1.). 11 teachers recognise that although their language competence level may not be highly proficient, they can resort to pragmatic, communicative and pedagogical resources to compensate for the particular limitations encountered. In fact, as teachers (P10UCM and P3KEA) comment, being able to communicate effectively is much more valued than mastering the grammatical system of the language.

- (11) In settings where English is used as vehicular language, communicative effectiveness takes precedence over accuracy, fluency and language complexity. It is indeed a relief to realize that, despite the use of correct English is of course, important, it is sometimes more relevant to be able to use the language in a communicative (effective) way in our classes. (P10UCM)

Interestingly, 1 teacher (P2CTH) sets the threshold language level with reference to the level that students bring to class and is convinced that having a lower competence than their students is a real challenge.

In line with previous studies, 8 lecturers believe that teaching through an additional language is in itself a daunting task as they experience loss of humor, jokes and meaning nuances. However, the task becomes even more challenging when the student cohort is of a multilingual and multicultural nature. Faced with such a scenario, lecturers are forced to accommodate their discourse and their pedagogical practices to cater for their students' characteristics and needs.

As a complement to their discourse, teachers also adapt their pedagogical and methodological practices to facilitate learning. 8 lecturers highlight the need to promote a more student-centered approach by encouraging student active participation. Besides, they try to make effective use of ICT sources (P7UCM and P17CTH) to scaffold and facilitate students' acquisition of knowledge, as in:

- (12) "I see negative effects in the quality of my teaching in English, when linking technical topics and reporting examples. I'm trying to improve structuring the lecture and using different learning approaches, such as cases, videos and discussions". (P17CTH)

Despite the measures lecturers take to adapt to their students' needs, there is the common belief that it is also students' responsibility to come equipped with a sufficient level of language competence so as to participate in and follow a class. Moreover, 4 teachers coincide in thinking that students should have a high level of not only general English, but also, and more importantly, academic English. Agreement on this aspect, however, brings about lecturers' lively debate in terms of the well-known controversy of whether content experts should also be responsible for language teaching. All existing positions, as illustrated in the comment below, rest either upon avoiding possible language mistakes because it is not the teacher's expertise or just correcting those linguistic aspects that may prevent understanding and intelligibility.

- (13) "I told my students that I was not there to teach them English, but "Chemistry in English" and that their use of the English language (written and spoken) had to be good enough to be understandable and legible". (P7UCM)

This matter becomes much more complicated for lecturers when they find out that students' low level of language competence can negatively impinge upon their learning process.

- (14) "Does one lower the level of course material to the lowest level, or does one assume that all have a decent level of ELF?" (P6HoGent)

Likewise, a deep concern shared by 18 lecturers reveals the difficulty they tackle when planning their teaching and when assessing students' learning. Both the limited (academic) language level of students and their diverse multicultural backgrounds can place a strain on teachers' duties, as they often see themselves, on the one hand, forced to reduce the subject content and, on the other hand, unable to discern up to what extent the vehicular language interferes with the students' learning. In the words of teachers P14UB and P6HoGent.

- (15) "In my opinion, the quality of teaching is not lower with English, but the quantity is necessarily lower. The teaching is different. In reality we can't teach the same amount of knowledge than when we teach in our native language, but we have to be very precise and concrete". (P14UB)

- (16) "How can one assess properly the level of English in a multicultural, multinational group, coming from different educational systems. How can one assess if the group understands the course content? How can one assess the verbal and written level of understanding of the individual student?" (P6HoGent)

Although the pedagogical approach category in general seems to prove quite challenging for lecturers, there is a positive note acknowledged: the use of English transforms the teaching and learning process into a more congenial and enriching experience for both teachers and students. All stakeholders come to realize that they are together in this EMI scenario and that everyone should do their part to benefit from it. Evidence of it comes in the following teacher's statement:

- (17) "What doesn't change is empathy: among a group of non-native speakers it's possible, and maybe easier, that everybody shares the necessity to communicate in a language which is a foreign language for everybody in a classroom, and this could be a factor that creates unity of intents among students and teachers". (P4UCSC)

#### 4.2.3. Institutional measures as reported by teachers

One of the main institutional measures that could most positively impact the teaching and learning processes in the internationalization context entails offering educational support to lecturers and students. It is interesting to note that only 1 teacher (P18UCSC) makes the explicit claim that it.

(18) “is up to institutions to help teachers to do their job with all the necessary support.”. (P18UCSC)

and 6 others simply point out what would be beneficial for them and their students according to their daily challenges and constraints. Another 5 teachers consider that students need assistance with their (academic) language competence. As discussed in the pedagogical approach, lecturers overtly argue that they are not deemed responsible for providing instruction in language. As P10UCM puts it.

(19) “I realized that some of the students had difficulties to follow my classes because of their own English level. Sometimes, I could not even understand their questions. Despite I tried to make myself clear by speaking slowly and clearly, I could not do much in that respect, but just trying to get continuous feed-back from the students”. (P10UCM)

However, 5 lecturers explicitly recognise the vital importance that language acquires in learning since knowledge is realized through that language. From this follows that students can benefit from two different types of training courses. First, from general English language courses that will contribute to students’ linguistic competence progress and will make them proficient speakers, thus, facilitating their international mobility; second, from specific academic language courses related to their discipline so that students gain expertise in the particular text types and conventions they will need to master to succeed in their studies and in their future professional life. P17CTH voices this disciplinary-related language need noting the following.

(20) “understanding English is making me aware of possible challenges that first year master’s students can face in understanding academic papers and that some of them need more time for understanding and making connections”. (P17CTH)

Although teachers do not verbalize the training support they would like to be provided with, they mention aspects they find challenging and from which education support initiatives can be derived, as will be later highlighted in the conclusion. These challenging areas are, first, pronunciation and intonation features of English, as indicated by P7UCM and P21CTH:

(21) “the most difficult part has been to learn the correct pronunciation of some disciplinary language that I do not normally use.” (P7UCM)

(22) “my main challenge is my accent, which I neglect sometimes” (P21CTH).

and, second, discourse and communicative strategies because.

(23) “making the technology and engineering courses clearly understandable is a challenge considering the vocabulary related explicitness and the technical content”. (P11CTH)

Additionally, measures towards the promotion of mobility and intercultural contact are of great importance, as advocated by P9HoGent, who emphasizes the need to offer a more inclusive education, as pointed out by P8UCM.

(24) “the use of English in higher education as international mobility and communication between different cultures is extremely important and very educational.” (P9HoGent)

(25) “the use of English has become widespread as the medium of instruction in the last two decades. I believe that this has been partly motivated by the increase on mobility programmes such as Erasmus and the need to teach in a language that facilitate the attendance of people from different countries”. (P8UCM)

#### 4.3. The (mis)alignment of HE internationalization policies and teachers’ reported practices regarding EMI

In this section we will focus the discussion on the aspects that are (mis)aligned in official strategic documents with teachers’ beliefs, in reference to the three themes identified for this paper: role of academic languages, pedagogical implications and institutional measures. The most distinctive issues will be highlighted in order to answer RQ3.

##### 4.3.1. Alignment regarding the roles of academic languages

If we compare findings regarding roles of academic languages (see Table 5 in Appendix C), it could be stated that all 10 institutions declare to adopt EMI with a communicative purpose and express their concern for the L1, something which is widely assumed by 16 lecturers as reported in the post-task. However, lecturers and policies do not seem to agree on the English level or on the mechanisms needed to certify the language competence for teaching and mobility purposes. Furthermore, there is no agreement on the extent to which national and international collaboration is required to guarantee a high level of quality in their academic programmes.

#### 4.3.2. Alignment regarding pedagogical approach

When comparing internationalization policy documents and teacher's beliefs regarding pedagogical approaches (see [Table 6](#) in [Appendix C](#)), both viewpoints seem to concur on two main points: (1) the importance of including an intercultural dimension to university studies and the learning experience, as well as (2) the need to demand a minimum level of language competence for teachers' and students' participating in EMI courses - B2 and C1 seem to be the threshold levels most commonly mentioned. What teachers are also appreciative of, but policies seem to overlook, is the compensatory role that pragmatic, communicative and pedagogical strategies can play in EMI. Additionally, lecturers express their concern about what and how to assess in these EMI courses where the intercultural competence is included as a learning outcome and a more international dimension is adopted, not finding any guidance in official documents.

#### 4.3.3. Alignment regarding institutional measures

When comparing data in terms of institutional measures (see [Table 7](#) in [Appendix C](#)), it can be concluded that the lecturer's point of view revolves around basically two ideas, namely, (1) the request for more specific educational support, and (2) the promotion of mobility. Both of these are also included among the internationalization strategies. However, it is true that lecturers (except for one) do not make explicit mention of the need for this educational support, it is rather implicitly stated in their writings by referring to various aspects they find challenging in EMI teaching and for which they require training.

When it comes to the issue of incentives, it is dismissed on the part of the teachers as no comments appear in their post-tasks. On the contrary, policies devote some lines to its importance and even offer specific incentives for lecturers in career promotion and the allocation of workload, with the final aims of promoting comprehensive internationalization and facilitating EMI.

Likewise, teachers do not express any particular concern on the position that their institutions might hold in reputable quality rankings. In contrast, this aspect is given special emphasis in official policies and is used by universities to stand out the importance of their institutional image and indirectly connect the quality of their teaching to a position in these rankings.

## 5. Conclusion

This study has thrown light on how HE policies and teachers conceive the roles of academic languages, pedagogy and institutional measures in the context of university internationalization and EMI, coinciding in the main aspects with previous studies on these topics ([Airey, 2012](#); [Doiz et al., 2012](#); [Sánchez-García & Nashaat-Sobhy, 2020](#)). However, this study has provided a new contribution to the field by identifying the misalignment between policies and teachers' reported practices and beliefs from a multi-sited perspective. While the roles of academic languages, pedagogy and institutional measures are generally addressed by teachers and in policies, major differences emerge on closer examination. In fact, while teachers' views and policies might be aligned in regard to some topics, they approach them from different perspectives (see [Appendix C](#)). Furthermore, there seems to be a wide gap between institutional policies and teachers' experiences in relation to the internationalization process, the understanding of the different strategies implied, and the implementation of EMI programmes. As a result, a series of implications can be suggested around three main areas.

First, from a policy perspective, this study advances that even though HE internationalization process is well underway across Europe, there is still the need for universities to articulate policies that guide this process and that help teachers navigate the implementation of EMI ([Sahan, 2021](#)). In those scenarios where policies are already in place, more effort should be exerted on their dissemination throughout the entire HE community, making sure that these policies are available and come to be known by all stakeholders participating in the educational context. Additionally, the drafting of these policies needs to be reinforced and further elaborated. Teachers' needs and challenges should be carefully listened to by policy and decision makers to give them a proper institutional framework and the support required. Only in this way can bottom-up and top-down perspectives meet and work in the same direction for the benefit of HE internationalization.

Second, from a pedagogical perspective, this study has confirmed that although universities offer training support to their teachers ([Lauridsen, 2017](#); [Sánchez-Pérez, 2020](#)), there is a need for more. On the one hand, the training offer for teachers should be more solid and varied, including courses on pronunciation, discourse strategies and direct measures on how to accommodate diversity and integrate multicultural competence in the classroom. Furthermore, there is a need to raise awareness on the challenges that the use of disciplinary language might entail for young university students ([Airey, 2020](#)). On the other hand, the training offer should also be extended to students, who could also benefit from academic and discipline-specific English courses ([Humphrey, 2021](#)) to become competent members in their community of practice. Therefore, we claim the value of ESP and EAP courses, which in many EMI contexts in Europe have been withdrawn from official curricula ([González-Ardeo, 2013](#)).

Third, from a linguistic perspective, it is important to address the roles that English plays in each educational context and examine the conceptualization that may best fit the teaching and learning processes. Teachers' assumption that English merely plays a communicative role may alleviate their linguistic concerns regarding not qualifying as language experts. However, the linguistic aspects that construe discipline-specific epistemology cannot be overlooked and should be formally addressed ([Sánchez-García, 2020](#), pp. 131–150). For this reason, exclusively relying on the conceptualization of English as a lingua franca may fall short. Instead, all the multifaceted roles that it plays in EMI should be fully recognised and, in addition, English should be conceived of in relation to all the different linguistic resources available to EMI stakeholders.

The main limitations of this study include the difficulty in accessing HE institutions' policies, either because their online visibility is poor or because they do not exist. Additionally, this paper has gathered a limited number of written contributions (70). Future T2T editions will render more teacher comments that could be relevant data for further research on this topic. Finally, more studies need to be carried out on the present topic to analyze the current scenarios in a larger number of HE institutions and contribute to bridging the



Table 2 (continued)

ROLE OF ACADEMIC LANGUAGES IN INTERNATIONALIZATION <RAL>				
	POLICIES		TEACHERS	
<b>WORD STEM</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>(%)</b>
Certification	6	1,3	0	0,0
Communication	18	3,8	73	6,2
Competence	9	1,9	13	1,1
Diversity	35	7,3	3	0,3
Dutch	9	1,9	3	0,3
English (inglés)	31	6,5	306	26,2
Foreign (extranjera)	63	13,2	21	1,8
Language (lengua)	82	17,1	144	12,3
Level (nivel)	165	34,5	51	4,4
Lingua franca		0,0	33	2,8
Local	20	4,2	1	0,1
Skills	24	5,0	17	1,5
Spanish (español)	11	2,3	10	0,9
Speaking		0,0	69	5,9
Swedish	10	2,1	6	0,5

Table 3

Word Count for key words in PAP

PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH <PAP>				
	POLICIES		TEACHERS	
<b>WORD COUNT</b>	4782		11691	
<b>WORD STEM</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>(%)</b>
Degree	17	3,6	2	0,2
Didactics (Didattica)	20	4,2	1	0,1
Discipline	14	2,9	3	0,3
Intercultural	10	2,1	2	0,2
Learn (enseñanza)	8	1,7	43	3,7
Methodology		0,0	2	0,2
participation	14	2,9	4	0,3
Pedagogical		0,0	2	0,2
Programmes	51	10,7	6	0,5
Student (alumnado)	13	2,7	116	9,9
Subject (asignatura)	15	3,1	17	1,5
Teachers/Professors /profesorado/docenti	77	16,1	34	2,9
Teaching (docencia)	45	9,4	67	5,7
Undergraduate (grado)	31	6,5	0	0,0

Table 4

Word Count for key words in INM

INSTITUTIONAL MEASURES <INM>				
	POLICIES		TEACHERS	
<b>WORD COUNT</b>	4782		11691	
<b>WORD STEM</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>(%)</b>
Actions	38	7,946465914		0,0
Co-operation	41	8,573818486	7	0,6
Incentives	7	1,463822668		0,0
Indicators	35	7,319113342		0,0
International	70	14,63822668	0	0,0
Internationalization	206	43,07820995	27	2,3
Mobility	17	3,554997909	3	0,3
Network	41	8,573818486		0,0
Partnerships	82	17,14763697		0,0
Policy	197	41,19615224	0	0,0
Publications	56	11,71058135		0,0
Rankings	27	5,646173149		0,0
Relations	27	5,646173149		0,0
Training	48	10,03764115	0	0,0

## Appendix C. Themes compared in language policy and teacher's beliefs

## C.1. Comparison of theme 1 RAL in language policy and teacher's beliefs

Table 5

Comparison of theme 1 RAL in language policy and teacher's beliefs.

THEME 1	ISSUES	POLICIES	TEACHERS
Role of Academic Languages RAL	Adoption of ELF with a communicative functional and international purposes	YES	YES
	Concern about the role and use of L1 in the academic context (ELF along with L1)	YES	YES
	Clear regulations of the mechanisms accepted to certify language levels	YES	NO
	Recognition of national and international collaboration to maintain the level of quality	YES	NO

## C.2. Comparison of theme 2 PAP in language policy and teacher's beliefs

Table 6

Comparison of theme 2 PAP in language policy and teacher's beliefs

THEME 2	ISSUES	POLICIES	TEACHERS
Pedagogical approach PAP	Inclusion of a more international dimension and intercultural vision to content courses	YES	YES
	Threshold level in FL to participate in EMI courses	YES	YES
	Accommodation strategies	NO	YES
	Assessment	NO	YES

## C.3. Comparison of theme 3 INM in language policy and teacher's beliefs

Table 7

Comparison of theme 3 INM in language policy and teacher's beliefs.

THEME 3	ISSUES	POLICIES	TEACHERS
Institutional measures INM	Need to increase institutional measures to train teachers and students	YES	YES
	Institutional incentives	YES	NO
	Concern about unis appearance in international rankings.	YES	NO
	Mobility and intercultural contact	YES	YES

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