

The Impact of EMI on ELT Professional Development

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, it is our intention to discuss the history of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) and EMI (English Medium Instruction) training at our university and explain how this has led us to realize that there are two possible areas for professional development for the English language teacher (ELT). EMI potentially provides an opportunity for the ELT to become an English language expert (ELE) accompanying EMI instructors or to become an EMI instructor. We consider the steps we have taken in order to foment content classes in English as a means to increasing internationalized education across faculty. The instruction of content courses in English at the higher education level has been the focus of our particular interest for the past few years at our university and the Language Department has been involved in this part of the university's internationalization project. The university's interest in raising its international profile has been top-of-mind for some time now. Not only are the authority figures anxious to improve the university rankings, but they are also interested in attracting foreign students to come to Guadalajara to learn Spanish as a foreign language while they continue studying for credits in their undergraduate programs. These credit-bearing classes, which they study in departments such as mathematics, administration, engineering and so on, are taught in English. The content courses in English (EMI classes) are attended by both foreign and Mexican students, thus providing an international experience for both. Some of the EMI lecturers are native English speakers, but the vast majority are Mexican and English is their second language. Over the years, the university has provided several opportunities for CLIL/EMI training. Faculty members who have undergone this training have realized that EMI requires a change in the instructional methods typically used in a higher education setting. Taking a content class in a language that is not the student's first language

implies a greater challenge; therefore, *how* these classes are given is crucial. Scaffolding learning is of vital importance in order to make input accessible for the students and to help them achieve the required academic production (class related assignments such as, essays, summaries, reports, presentations, discussions in English). This scaffolding process is familiar to the English language teacher but may not be to the EMI instructor; therefore, this is an area of support provided by the ELE. We go on to discuss the importance of this ELE working alongside the faculty instructor to train, advise, observe, and give feedback and support. Becoming an ELE advisor for EMI instructors is one possible area for professional development. The second area of opportunity that we envision is that of the language professional looking at their own background to appreciate if they have a future as a possible EMI lecturer, especially if their first area of academic study is unrelated to a languages background. This paper provides real-life examples of English language teachers in this role at our university.

KEYWORDS

EMI (English Medium Instruction), internationalization, ELE (English Language Expert), CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), paradigm shift, disciplinary discourse, STEM (science, technology, economics, mathematics), scaffolding input, ELT (English Language Teaching) pedagogy, ELT methodology, professional development, higher education, Mexico, university, teacher training

INTRODUCTION

We teach at a private Jesuit university in central western Mexico with thriving undergraduate and postgraduate programs. The instruction of content courses in English at the higher education level (often referred to as EMI – English Medium Instruction) has been the focus of our particular interest for the past few years at our university and the Language Department has been involved in this part of the university’s internationalization project. The university’s interest in raising its international profile has been top-of-mind for some time now. Not only are the authority figures anxious to improve the university rankings, but they are also interested in attracting foreign students to come to Guadalajara to learn Spanish as a foreign language while they continue studying for credits in their undergraduate programs. These credit-bearing classes, which they study in departments such as mathematics, administration, engineering and so on, are

taught in English. This program which we refer to as '3 + 1' allows for up to three credit bearing content courses plus one level of Spanish language for foreign exchange students. The content classes in English (EMI classes) are attended by both foreign and Mexican students. Some of the EMI lecturers are native English speakers, but the vast majority of them are Mexican and English is their second language. Our task, at the Language Department, has been to train these faculty to better teach their subjects by adopting a range of techniques and strategies that we English language teachers are well accustomed to in the classroom.

In this paper, it is our intention to discuss these academic experiences in an attempt to explore two new possible areas of professional development for foreign language teachers. The first being that of the English Language Expert (ELE) whose job it is to accompany and advise the content lecturer as to how best to teach their disciplinary subject area using tried and tested ELT (English Language Teaching) pedagogy and appropriate classroom language. The second area of opportunity that we envision is that of the language professional looking at their own background to appreciate if they have a future as a possible EMI lecturer, especially if their first area of academic study is unrelated to a languages background.

JUSTIFICATION

For the past ten years, like many private universities, our institution has been attempting to attract students from abroad to come to Guadalajara to study their subject areas in English, alongside Mexican students. The dynamic makes for an attractive intercultural experience where students from different nationalities and cultural backgrounds get to learn alongside each other. Invariably, the lecturer of the EMI class has gone through some kind of training course, which is offered by the university's language department.

The first course we offered, in 2010, was given by a CLIL expert from Marymount University and approximately 20 lecturers from different faculties attended as well as 3 teachers from the language department. CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) from which EMI has developed, takes into consideration any second language, while EMI refers exclusively to content classes given in English. The English language teachers took the abovementioned course so that they, in turn, would be able to replicate it to other faculty members at a later date. The subject areas that were covered in those 40 hours of tuition were theoretical background of CLIL, learning outcomes, group work (collaborative learning), questioning techniques, discussion and

debate, and lastly alternative assessment. For the language teachers taking the training course, neither the subject area nor the methodology adopted by the Marymount lecturer was new to them. They were all familiar with the teaching approaches that were modelled during the course (loop input). However, for the other faculty members, this was all new. They had been accustomed to 'lecturing' their subjects in Spanish and the scaffolding strategies that they were advised they'd need to adopt, in order to aim for more efficient student learning in a second language, were something of a revelation to them. Although some of them were wary that using these strategies would up take too much classroom time and they wouldn't be able to cover the required course content, many were convinced of the CLIL methodology and went on to successfully teach in English.

Post this course, the Language Department set up informal drop-in sessions for the EMI instructors where they met to share their classroom experiences. They were led by an ELE who had also taken the CLIL course. Subsequent teacher training groups in CLIL methodology were formed and the course was replicated a few more times with faculty staff from other areas. The university was moving, slowly but surely, towards a more robust academic offer in EMI cross-faculty.

Some years later, two events happened at the university which changed the course of our CLIL training. The first incident was in 2014 when a CLIL/EMI expert from the University of St. Mark and St. John, Plymouth came to give a group of ELEs and faculty staff, a more updated course in EMI. This course specifically focused on scaffolding techniques, materials design and adapting materials, lesson planning and in-class observation and feedback. Once again, the teacher training opportunity was taken up by faculty from many different departments as well as teachers from the language department. As a result of this training course, more EMI courses were offered cross-faculty.

The second significant incident was in 2018 when a visiting lecturer from the University of Oxford came to our campus. Among other academic undertakings, he gave two talks that were quite momentous and extremely apt for the times. The first was with the decision-makers (key-players) at the university. He explained to them the importance of the presence of EMI courses on campus and the need for the university to make a complete paradigm shift in key academic areas if ITESO wanted to be serious about internationalization. He also touched upon the importance of

the ELE working alongside the faculty instructor to train, advise, observe, and give feedback and support. He then went on to give a talk to the English language teachers in our department, where he emphasized the importance of their broader role, and what they could do in order to be ELEs, accompanying and advising EMI instructors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Consequently, we started to look into the subject area in much more depth. It is a relatively new area of study within the realm of ELT, and much of the research has taken place in Europe where CLIL and EMI have been present for many more years than in Latin America, although there is now much research going on in Asia.

In their book *Uncovering CLIL – Content and Language Integrated Learning in Bilingual and Multilingual Education*, Mehisto, Marsh and Frigols (2008) share practical knowledge and advice on how both content and second language learning could be combined into a unique learning experience. Not only do they make recommendations for classes at the primary and secondary levels, but they also go into the implications for CLIL at the higher education level. Their book highlights all the positives that, over time, have been associated with this type of learning including: independent and co-operative learning, critical thinking, fusion between content and language, and life-long learning skills. The book offers practical models and strategies, and goes on to provide approaches regarding language support.

In their article “EMI Teacher Training at the University of A Coruña” Crespo and Llanos-Tojeiro (2018) discuss how the EMI program at their university was created and adopted by academics at their institute of higher education. They lay out the steps and principles they followed for this methodology that was new to many of the subject lecturers. They emphasize the shift in focus from teacher-centered to student-centered learning and the important role lecturers play in guiding their students towards successful learning when the focus is two-fold (both content and language).

In our search for a longer reading list on the subject of EMI, we came across numerous publications by Dr John Airey. He is a reader in Physics Education Research at the Department of Physics and Astronomy at Uppsala University and a Senior Lecturer in Science Education, at the Department of Mathematics and Science Education at Stockholm University. His research focuses

on subject (disciplinary) learning in higher education. He has written numerous articles on the subject including his doctoral thesis “Science, Language and Literacy, Case Studies of Learning in Swedish University Physics” (2009) which follows the learning stories of 22 physics students, comparing the experiences and outcomes of those who studied in English with those who studied in their first language (Swedish). Airey’s research focuses on items such as student learning patterns, bilingual scientific literacy and disciplinary discourse. His interviews and work with focus groups makes for fascinating reading and he ends his thesis with advice for EMI instructors on how they, in turn, can favor student learning. In their 2014 research article, “Disciplinary differences in the use of English in higher education: reflections on recent language policy developments”, Airey along with Kuteeva offer a criticism of the ‘one-size-fits-all’ language policy which many higher education institutions have adopted when implementing EMI courses in their universities. By means of Bernstein’s (1996, 1999, 2000) theory that disciplinary knowledge structures can be horizontal or vertical depending on their disciplinary focus, they argue that the ‘one-size-fits-all’ policy adopted by many universities when offering subject courses in second language English is not appropriate. They contend that they are ignoring the differences in disciplinary use of English or first language in different subject areas. Airey and Kuteeva conclude that the language in which a subject at the university level is taught is dependent on the subject area of study. That is to say, for English medium instruction, subjects in disciplines such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM subject areas), learning in English is especially successful. Not only that, but many of the textbooks for these subjects are only available in English, and the terminology is often in English too (without translation to first language) in the disciplinary area classroom. In addition to these subjects, we have identified the area of business, economics and administration are also contextually apt for EMI here at ITESO.

Methodology in an EMI classroom

As faculty members who have undergone CLIL/EMI training have realized, EMI requires a change in the instructional methods typically used in a higher education setting. Taking a content class in a language that is not the student’s first language implies a greater challenge; therefore, *how* these classes are given is crucial. Scaffolding learning is of vital importance in order to make input accessible for the students and to help them achieve the required academic production (class related assignments such as, essays, summaries, reports, presentations, discussions in English).

Scaffolding refers to the techniques and activities that EMI instructors use to help students move towards attainment of the learning goal or competency. A simple example is when we want students to read an academic text related to the topic being worked on. We should remember that we are talking about an EMI class here, so the text is not in the students' first language, therefore there are two challenges for the student: the disciplinary concepts and the language. For students to be able to work successfully with this text and understand the topic we need to *scaffold* the input by perhaps first eliciting ideas related to the topic to activate students' background knowledge. Then we might present them with some key terminology from the text and have them match the words to their definitions, after this, we would likely ask students to skim the first couple of paragraphs and identify the main ideas, then maybe scan for specific details such as dates. Only after such a sequence, will students read the text in depth and use the information in a spoken or written activity that helps them connect this new knowledge to their existing knowledge. This sequence of activities provides scaffolding for students' learning. In an EMI context, this moving from less challenging to more challenging activities provides essential support for students dealing with input in a foreign language. Such planning ensures opportunities for students to interact with the input and each other in order to negotiate meaning of concepts and build understanding.

Some key features of instructional methods necessary for an EMI context to provide the support described above may seem obvious to the English language teacher, but nonetheless they are rarely present in classes where content is lectured. Airey's physics students, who took classes in English, identified basic aspects that aided their learning, such as: using a course book in English, pre-reading in English on a topic before class, the use of glossaries of key terms related to the topic, and plenty of visual support from the teacher (for example: handouts, well-structured board use, texts with graphs). All of these measures were beneficial to their learning (Airey 2009, pp. 80-84). The following strategies, which will probably be familiar to most EFL teachers, are also essential in the EMI classroom:

- Use visual organizers for input comprehension
- Provide opportunities for pair and group work (both in and out of class)
- Foment a supportive classroom atmosphere where students feel safe and making mistakes is fine

- Promote interaction and space for dialogue and questions (especially question time set apart for the end of class)
- Use questioning techniques that call for different levels of thinking (exploratory, challenging, diagnostic, cause and effect, extension, hypothetical, summary, etc.)

Airey's research with Swedish physics students studying in English (2009) shows how students themselves identified some of the instructional methods outlined above as having helped them. For example, regarding the need to provide visual support, a student comments:

[...] It's easier in a lecture when you have a...when they write things down on the board. That's actually something with(English, that its difficult to sit and spontaneously make notes 'cause you've got enough on your plate trying to first understand the English and then understand the physics. If they only talk it's difficult to translate and make notes, you end up with a bit of a mixture, a bit of Swedish and a bit of English. I think it's easier – actually I think it's always easier when the teacher writes a lot on the board... (Airey & Linder, 2006 in Airey, 2009, p.81)

Airey goes on to suggest that a lack of these methods may hinder learning, as in the case of space not being provided within the class for questioning and dialogue:

“This reduction in asking and answering questions is an important finding. If lecturer-student interaction is reduced in this way—in extreme cases, effectively limiting lectures to a monologue—then, it can be expected that the ‘shared space of learning’ (Tsui, 2004) will also be correspondingly reduced”. (Airey, 2009, p.79)

As can be seen, students need to interact and produce in an EMI classroom, which is why the classical lecturing style of many university content classes is not helpful in an EMI context. These changes in instructional methods are at the heart of a move to EMI. Classes need to be more learner-focused and teachers need to understand their role more as one of managing learning rather than teaching (Searle, 2018).

Given the instructional methods considered above, which are often second nature to the English foreign language teacher, it became clear to us that the growing area of EMI could provide an

interesting opportunity for ELT instructors' professional development and the possibility to branch out in their career path. The ELT instructor may become the ELE providing support for the EMI content teacher, support which is considered a key element for successful implementation of EMI classes. ELE support may include activities such as:

- Suggesting instructional methods
- Accompanying/coaching
- Reviewing materials
- Providing Micro-teaching
- Carrying out classroom observation and feedback
- Providing linguistic support

In their paper, Crespo and Llanos-Tojeiro (2018) propose a useful framework for stages in an ELE-EMI instructor coaching process, which includes activities such as those mentioned above.

Alternatively, the EFL instructor with a background in another academic field could move into EMI instruction. This might be successfully achieved through drawing on both their professional knowledge and skill set as English language instructors, *and* on their professional knowledge and/or experience from having studied and/or worked in a different field prior to their experience in ELT. Either career path, i.e. ELE-EMI coach or EMI instructor, helps strengthen an EMI program, as we have seen at ITESO. Several of the language department English instructors have collaborated in a support role with faculty from other academic areas in the initial stages of their EMI classes, whilst other language department faculty have moved, either partially or fully, into other areas as EMI instructors.

Some real-life cases of EFL to EMI instructor we have come across in the past few years

In addition to the university's internationalization policy demands, EMI classes have also increased due to the fact that the level of English proficiency of our incoming students has risen. Around 30% of the incoming student population already has a B2 level of English, and are therefore ready to study subjects in their disciplinary areas in English. Consequently, the number of EFL

classes has dropped which has led to EFL instructors looking for other teaching opportunities at the university, and they have found themselves moving into teaching a subject area in English. In our Language Department, we have EFL teachers from many different backgrounds. Not only do most of them have a certified C2 level of English, a Master's degree, a teaching certificate and experience in EFL, but a number of them also have a completely different academic background prior to their ELT experience. Teaching English as a foreign language tends to be a career that some people simply *fall into*. Circumstances, location and the need to work often lead people down the ELT path. Here we discuss the profiles of three teachers who started in EFL, but have moved on to teaching content courses (EMI classes) in different disciplinary areas in our university.

Amongst our staff, we have a young native speaker who holds a master's degree in Latin American studies. When he arrived in Mexico, he took a course in ELT in order to be able to make a living here. After teaching EFL classes for a few semesters, we suspected he might be an interesting candidate to teach EMI content courses in the International Relations department. We suggested that he brush up his CV and send it off to the other faculty with a letter of recommendation from us. They were interested in his profile and a few months later, they interviewed him and invited him to develop and teach a module of a new course in 'international issues'. He now teaches in three different departments at the university, and EFL classes account for less than half of his workload.

Our second instance of an EFL teacher becoming a successful EMI instructor is someone who had been teaching English for many years at ITESO before successfully completing a Master's degree in communication studies. For his dissertation thesis, he specialized in ecological issues. He has now chosen to end his teaching days in EFL and teaches exclusively in the Environmental Science undergraduate program.

Our third case in point is an experienced teacher who, before coming to Mexico, had been working in the finance world of New York. She came to Guadalajara to seek a quieter life, and studied and obtained an EFL certificate and a Master's degree in education in order to be able to get a well-paying job abroad. She taught EFL classes for a while, but once we informed other departments about her profile, and they read her CV, she was invited to give classes elsewhere on campus. She currently teaches a class on the challenges of globalization and another on human rights, both in the humanities department.

The common thread throughout is threefold: academic knowledge in a content area that is of interest to university students, a tried and tested EFL teaching skill set that ensures good scaffolding techniques, and a student-centered pedagogy. All of this makes them ideal candidates for English medium instruction.

To summarize, it seems apparent that there are options for the EFL instructor who is interested in professional development and adopting a career path other than the 'run-of-the-mill' foreign language class. Be it as an ELE or as an EMI instructor, in either case, the individual needs to be open to new academic challenges and willing to engage with a community of learning that is growing as the need for EMI grows in the university setting as higher education institutions strive more and more towards internationalization.

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