

A STUDY OF BELIEFS ABOUT EMI PROGRAMMES IN A GALICIAN UNIVERSITY

ESTUDIO DE LAS CREENCIAS SOBRE EL APRENDIZAJE DE CONTENIDOS EN INGLÉS EN UNA UNIVERSIDAD GALLEGA

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Abstract

The beliefs that learners hold are a key variable in language learning, and from a socio-cultural perspective, learner beliefs are connected to the context in which learning takes place. This study, which forms part of a more extensive project on beliefs about English as a foreign language (EFL), explores the views of a group of students and instructors at the University of Santiago de Compostela (USC) regarding content learning in English. The beliefs of 373 students and instructors were measured by means of a questionnaire and interview. Despite indicating a generally positive predisposition towards EMI programmes, the responses varied based on the academic field of the course content, students' previous language-learning experience and the type of English instruction used in teaching. In addition, the data revealed a series of issues concerning the implementation of EMI programmes at the USC. This study is the first of its type to be conducted at this institution and one of the few in Galicia. Findings from the study underscore the context-specific nature of beliefs in general while also drawing the USC, together with other Spanish and foreign academic institutions, into a broader assessment and discussion of EMI programmes.

Key words: beliefs, context, English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI), programme implementation.

Resumen

Las creencias del estudiantado son una variable importante en el proceso de aprendizaje de un idioma, y desde un enfoque sociocultural, guardan una estrecha relación con el contexto donde se aprende. Como parte de un proyecto más extenso acerca de las creencias sobre el Inglés como Lengua Extranjera (ILE), en este estudio se exploraron las ideas preconcebidas de un grupo de estudiantes y profesores de la Universidade de Santiago de Compostela (USC) sobre el aprendizaje de contenidos en inglés. Para ello se recopiló información de 373 participantes mediante un cuestionario y una entrevista. Los datos indican que, a pesar de que los participantes mostraron una predisposición favorable hacia los programas EMI, el área académica del alumnado, su experiencia previa en el aprendizaje de idiomas, y el tipo de instrucción en inglés del profesorado marcaron algunas diferencias. Además, se identificaron una serie de cuestiones relacionadas con la implementación de estos programas en la USC. Al ser el primero de su tipo que se realiza en esta institución y uno de los pocos en Galicia, este estudio refuerza el carácter contextual de las creencias y ubica a la USC, junto a otras universidades españolas e internacionales, en la evaluación de los programas EMI.

Palabras clave: creencias, contexto, instrucción en inglés, implementación de programas.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, research has focused on the different ways in which beliefs are formed and how beliefs relate to the actions, emotions and identities of learners and instructors within the social and political contexts in which the teaching-learning process takes place (Ellis and Tanaka 2003; Kalaja et al. 2015). Several studies conducted in Spain have addressed the ways in which beliefs are related to different language-learning variables (Roothoof and Breeze 2016; Doiz et al. 2019; Rodríguez-Izquierdo et al. 2020). However, few have been carried out in Galicia, a region in northwestern Spain. One study, conducted by Cal Varela and Fernández Polo (2007), explored self-perceptions of English proficiency among the teaching staff at the University of Santiago de Compostela (USC) and the ability of these academics to carry out activities related to their work. However, students were not included as participants in the study. Another study, by Loredó Gutiérrez et al. (2007), surveyed the attitudes of Galician students toward multilingualism. The present study intends to fill the research gap by exploring the views of 373 USC students and faculty members regarding English as a medium of instruction (EMI).

As part of a process of internationalisation, Galician universities have enacted various initiatives to enhance their curricula in order to attract more students from outside the country. At the USC, where the present study was carried out, the last decade has seen the introduction of a wide range of extracurricular courses offered in different foreign languages (FLs) and an increasing number of for-credit courses in English. In addition, universities have taken measures to apply the Regulation for Quality Teaching in FLs (LEDUS in Galician), which demands that all university teaching staff demonstrate a CEFR C1 proficiency level if they are to teach a subject in English; to enrol in these courses, students are required to have a B2 level. This expanded course offering in FLs has had a direct impact on the beliefs and attitudes that students and faculty hold about English as a language of instruction for learning course content, and this is the dimension of EFL learning that this project sets out to explore. Evaluating how students and instructors perceive the implementation of academic programs such as EMI is necessary to make informed decisions that have implications for future educational initiatives of this kind.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Content Learning through English Instruction in Higher Education

The presence of EMI programmes in higher education curricula has expanded in recent times in step with the process of internationalisation. Yet, findings from studies on their effectiveness for learning have been rather ambiguous. On the one hand, EMI programmes are generally welcomed by students and educators (Doiz et al. 2011; Aguilar 2017; An and Thomas 2021) and have been associated with significant improvements in all four main English skills (Rogier 2012). Students have also acknowledged that EMI-based teaching has certain advantages, such as high student motivation due to the instrumental role of English, as EMI increases students' opportunities to practice their linguistic skills, thus making them better prepared for mobility and more competitive within the job market (Avello et al. 2016; Fernández-Costales 2017; Serna Bermejo and Lasagabaster 2023). University faculty also report that EMI programmes help them develop their linguistic competence, giving them an added feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction; additionally, these programmes are often tied to certain administrative and/or financial incentives (Dearden and Macaro 2016; Macaro et al. 2019).

On the other hand, several common issues surrounding the implementation of these programmes have been identified, mainly concerning the English

proficiency of learners and the preparedness and attitudes of instructors, together with issues relating to policy implementation and the involvement of other stakeholders. Regarding linguistic competence in English, much concern has been voiced about the ability of learners to assimilate content and develop linguistic skills through EMI (Doiz et al. 2011; Murata 2019; Wang 2021). In addition, challenges related to the development of disciplinary literacy and the distribution of EMI subjects across the curriculum are also seen as problematic (Airey 2011; Dearden 2018; Dafouz and Smit 2020).

The introduction of EMI programmes also leads to a change in the role of lecturers and professors. Different studies (Doiz et al. 2013b; Kirkgöz and Dikilitaş 2018; Murata 2019; Bowles and Murphy 2020) have identified both positive and negative aspects of EMI in this regard. The disadvantages include, for example, the general tendency for instructors who teach through EMI to sidestep linguistic issues in their practice (Doiz et al. 2011; Dafouz 2014; Aguilar 2017), largely because they are not English specialists. In addition, merely possessing linguistic expertise in English does not make an instructor qualified to deliver this type of teaching (Dearden and Macaro 2016; Akincioğlu 2024). Other issues such as the need for effective EMI assessment tasks, educators' concerns about the additional responsibilities and workload that EMI entails and the lack of administrative and financial support from other stakeholders (Aguilar 2017; Mede et al. 2018; Shohamy 2019) have also been detected.

Most of the concerns identified thus far in research seem to point to problems stemming from inconsistencies in policy implementation, which results in limited or incongruent procedures that hamper successful teaching and learning. This, coupled with the need to monitor and assess these programmes, plus the need for more human and financial resources, are pressing concerns in many institutions of higher education today (Roberts and Palmer 2011; Doiz et al. 2013a; Ekoç 2018), including the USC, as the present study seeks to show.

2.2. The Concept of Beliefs

In simple terms, a belief can be understood as a strong opinion about what is considered right, good or appropriate. In EFL, the beliefs of students and instructors are central to their approaches to and expectations about the learning process (Ellis 2008; Sadeghi and Abdi 2015). Beliefs have been found to play a key role, for instance, in the mismatch between the aims and behaviour of students and educators in the classroom, in the way students choose and deploy learning strategies, in levels of student anxiety, and in the degree of autonomy in the learning process (Barcelos and Kalaja 2006; Dafouz et al. 2016; Sydorenko et al. 2017; Doiz and Lasagabaster 2018; Moncada-Comas 2022). Woods (1996)

showed that teachers' beliefs about knowledge (BAK) were closely linked to their decisions when organising and delivering the course and also to their professional identity, which has been supported by more recent studies (Huang et al. 2021; Er 2024).

According to Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (SCT), beliefs change under the influence of *significant others* (Barcelos and Kalaja 2011), that is, individuals or conditions relevant to the learner, such as other learners, friends, teachers, advisors and academic programmes. These sources provide varied interpretations, experiences, or circumstances related to the learning event, which learners and teachers assimilate and act upon. Among these significant others, scholars have identified, for example, the language-learning context (ESL vs EFL), classroom instruction, institutional policies, socio-cultural factors and new situational experiences (e.g. university transfer due to changing cities, migration or Erasmus programmes) (Orduna-Nocito and Sánchez-García 2022; Sato and Storch 2022; Cots and Mancho-Barés 2024).

In the Spanish context, in their analysis of different learning environments (EFL formal instruction, Study-abroad (SA) and English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI)), Pérez Vidal et al. (2018) reported on more pragmatic benefits and more self-confidence for EMI students as compared to students with SA experience. In addition, Doiz and Lasagabaster (2018) and Serna Bermejo and Lasagabaster (2023) found a relationship between L2 motivation and EMI contexts among Spanish learners. More recently, interest has focused on the socio-academic context and perceptions of students and teachers (Pérez-Llantada 2018; Rubio-Cuenca and Perea-Barberá 2021; Velilla Sánchez 2021) to identify issues and implement initiatives to improve the quality of EMI programmes.

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3. The Study

EMI programmes are a type of *significant other* according to SCT and discussed above. That is, they are a learning environment which will inevitably affect the beliefs of students and instructors. In turn, their beliefs about these courses will influence their choice of learning and teaching strategies, as well as their motivation and attitude towards the learning process. With this in mind, the present study focused on two main research questions:

- RQ1. What are the beliefs of USC students and instructors from different academic disciplines about learning course content in English?
- RQ2. How do USC students and teaching staff evaluate the implementation and functioning of EMI programmes?

3.1. Participants

Of the 649 USC informants who participated in the main study about beliefs, 57% (n=373) provided data about their beliefs regarding content learning in English, 338 of whom were students and 35 were instructors. Table 1 below outlines the main demographic characteristics of this population sample.

STUDENTS (n = 338)			
Academic level	Sex	Nationality	Academic areas
1 st year n=124 (37%)	Females n=238 (70%)	Foreign n=32 (10%)	English Studies n=99 (29%) Other lang and lit n=20 (6%) Cultural studies n=7 (2%) Chemistry n=78 (23%) Physics n=16 (5%) Double degrees (Nat Sc) n=9 (2%) Engineering n=17 (5%) Journalism and AdV Comm n=6 (2%) Criminology and Law n=19 (6%) Odontology n=27 (8%) Educational Sciences n=40 (12%)
2 nd year n=75 (22%)	Males n=100 (30%)	Spanish n=306 (90%)	
3 rd year n=70 (21%)			
4 th year n=61 (18%)			
Master P. n=8 (2%)			
INSTRUCTORS (n=35)			
Level taught	Sex	Nationality	Type of English instruction
Undergraduate n=17 (48%)	Females n=17 (49%)	Foreign n=4 (11%)	EMI programmes n=16 (45%)
Under- and postgraduate n=17 (48%)	Males n=18 (51%)	Spanish n=31 (88%)	General English programmes (Philology, ESP) n=19 (55%)
Postgraduate only n=1 (3%)			

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the USC population sample

3.2. Methodology

A total of 338 students completed an online questionnaire on beliefs, of whom 56 were also interviewed. Meanwhile, 35 faculty members responded to the questionnaire, 22 of whom participated in an interview. The student questionnaire was a 39-item inventory based on the Beliefs About Learning Language Inventory

(BALLI) for FL students (Horwitz 1988). It included four items on beliefs about EMI programmes, of which one close-ended question (36) was an opener to another three (37-39). The 34-item questionnaire version for instructors included two items related to EMI programmes. To tailor the study to the USC context, the two questionnaires were available in multilingual format (Galician, Spanish, English) and included a final section for open comments. The reliability of each tool, which was measured using Cronbach's alpha, ranged between 0.6 and 0.7.

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were carried out with students and instructors, using a set of 16 questions for students and 12 for instructors; each set included one question and a number of prompts about EMI programmes. The shortest conversations with students lasted about 27-30 minutes, and 31 of these shortest conversations were held individually. The longest interviews lasted approximately 52 minutes, six of them were held with two students and three of them with focus groups of 4-5 students. Meanwhile, the instructors discussed EMI programmes during individual interviews that lasted about 37 minutes. The interviews were also offered in multilingual versions, and all answers were transcribed orthographically for analysis.

As stipulated by the ethical guidelines of the USC (Código de Boas Prácticas Na Investigación 2018: 11-12), consent was obtained from all participants prior to collecting the study data, and informant anonymity was guaranteed through data coding. Quantitative data were analysed using a variety of statistical tests available in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) with an alpha level set at .05, while NVivo software was used for thematic analysis of the interview data. Based on the research questions, three variables were used to contrast each group of participants, that is, the students' field of study, their foreign language experience, and their sex; in the case of instructors, the variables used were years of professional experience, type of English instruction, and sex.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. The Pattern of Beliefs of Students and Instructors about EMI

As regards the student questionnaire, three main statements (STs) were used to explore their perceptions about learning through EMI.

ST37. My level of satisfaction about learning English through another subject is (*very low /low/a bit low/a bit high/high/very high*).

ST38. When I learn other subjects in English, my English skills develop (*not a bit/very little/a bit/moderately/much/very much*).

ST39. When I learn a subject in English, I learn the content of this subject (*I can't learn it/with much difficulty/with difficulty/with some difficulty/easily/very easily*).

Concerning the first research question, the findings show a generally homogenous pattern of beliefs both among students and teaching staff about EMI, with differences emerging based on variables such as disciplinary area and the type of instruction.

4.1.1.1. *Quantitative Data from Students' Questionnaire Responses*

The reported level of satisfaction with learning content through English among students was rather minimal ($M=3.7$). Whereas the informants expressed that they are capable of learning the content of the academic subjects relatively well ($M=4.21$), they believed the development of their language competence in English to be limited ($M=4.05$). As one of the informants commented,

...having other subjects in English serves to learn specific vocabulary rather than to develop skills, in my opinion and personal experience. (QtSt282)

The analysis of the variables confirmed this general belief pattern, while certain contrasts also became evident.

4.1.1.1.1. *Variable 1: Learners' Area of Study*

Regarding the areas of study in which learners were enrolled, a comparison of responses across three main discipline areas yielded significant statistical differences. As expected, responses to ST37 by Humanities and Social Sciences students contrasted with those of the other groups in all three items related to EMI (Table 2).

GROUPS: G1 HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES (n=126) G2 NATURAL SCIENCES (n=103) G3 APPLIED SCIENCES (n=109)		
Questionnaire statement (ST)	Mean value	Significant differences
ST37. My level of satisfaction with learning English through another subject is...	G1 ($M=4.03$)	G1-G2 ($p<.001$)
	G2 ($M=3.28$)	
	G3 ($M=3.74$)	
ST38. When I learn other subjects in English, my English skills develop...	G1($M=4.48$)	G1-G2 ($p<.001$)
	G2 ($M=3.63$)	G1-G3 ($p<.001$)
	G3 ($M=3.94$)	
ST39. When I learn a subject in English, I learn the content of this subject...	G1($M=4.47$)	G1-G2 ($p=.01$)
	G2($M=4.13$)	G1-G3 ($p<.001$)
	G3($M=3.99$)	

Table 2. Statistically significant differences in responses across the three main disciplinary areas

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To obtain a more detailed account of students' beliefs across specific academic fields, the questionnaire responses were also organised into 11 different academic subgroups containing one or two related degrees. The statistically significant differences found are shown in Figure 1 below.

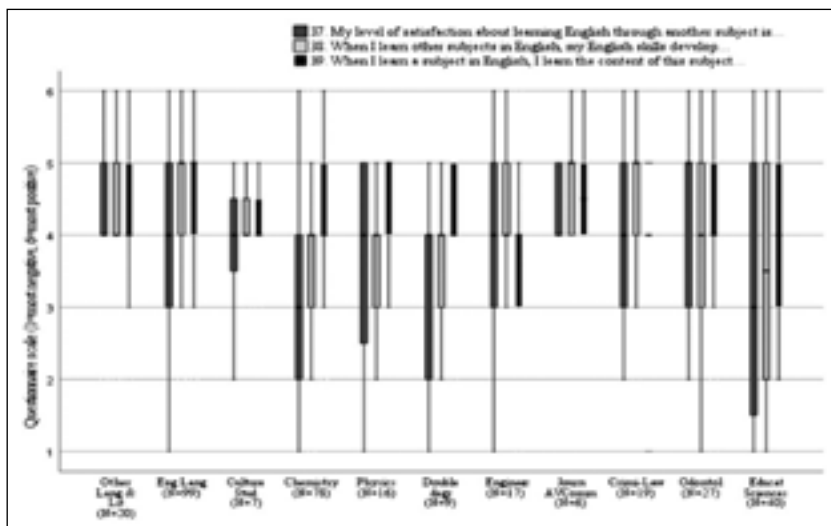


Figure 1. Statistical differences in responses across the 11 academic areas (n=338)

As can be observed, the responses to ST37 varied across the different disciplinary fields. The learners who reported the strongest dissatisfaction with the EMI experience were those enrolled in chemistry ($M=3.21$) and educational sciences ($M=3.08$). However, fewer significant differences were found for statements 38 and 39, and the pattern described in Table 2 above was confirmed, with students in English studies acknowledging greater development of their language skills ($M=4.56$) and more effective learning of the course content ($M=4.53$). All in all, the informants reported that they learned the content of their respective academic subjects relatively well, while they perceived their language learning was limited.

These results mirror the unbalanced EMI learning scenario in terms of content and language-learning outcomes in higher education (HE) that Airey describes (2016: 73). He explains that, when enrolling in EMI courses, students are expected to have already acquired sufficient linguistic competence in pre-university education. Yet, as we shall see throughout this section, not only are the student informants affected by this imbalance in EMI programmes, but also by

insufficient linguistic preparation before starting them. Other research has also pinpointed the different issues that this imbalance may cause for students' learning (Arnó-Macià and Aguilar-Pérez 2021; Pun and Jin 2021; Zhang and Pladevall-Ballester 2021).

4.1.1.2. Variable 2: Language-Learning Experience (LLE)

This variable comprised three sub-variables: the number of languages that students knew other than their L1 —here called extra languages (ExL)—, the number of foreign languages they had learnt through formal instruction (LFI), and their SA experiences. The results for this variable, as shown in Table 3, confirm that those students who have learnt more languages and those with some SA experience hold different beliefs about EMI learning.

Sub-variable 1: Extra Languages (ExL)	ST37 My level of satisfaction...is...	ST38...my English skills develop...
1ExL (n=106)	(<i>M</i> =3.37)	(<i>M</i> =3.72)
2ExL (n=151)	(<i>M</i> =3.79)	(<i>M</i> =4.04)
3ExL (n=59)	(<i>M</i> =4.08)	(<i>M</i> =4.61)
Significant differences	3ExL and 1ExL ($p=.01$)	3ExL and 1ExL ($p<.001$) 3ExL and 2ExL ($p=.02$)
Significant correlations	-	-
Sub-variable 2: Languages learnt by FI (LFI)		
1LFI (n=171)	(<i>M</i> =3.50)	(<i>M</i> =3.91)
2LFI (n=150)	(<i>M</i> =3.89)	(<i>M</i> =4.15)
3LFI (n=14)	(<i>M</i> =4.36)	(<i>M</i> =4.64)
Significant differences	3LFI and 1LFI ($p=.02$)	-
Significant correlations	-	Positive [$r(338) = .13, p=.015$]
Sub variable 3: SA experience		
SA (n=93)	(<i>M</i> =3.89)	(<i>M</i> =4.30)
No SA (n=245)	(<i>M</i> =3.64)	(<i>M</i> =3.96)
Significant differences	-	$t(336) = -2.28, p=.02$
Significant correlations	-	Positive [$r(338) = .12, p=.023$]

Table 3. Significant differences and correlations for ST37 and ST38 based on LLE (n=338)

These results mirror past investigations that clarify the cognitive benefits of increasing the linguistic repertoire and spending time in environments where English is the native language (Kristiansen et al. 2008; Fox et al. 2019). In addition, SA experiences in combination with formal instruction increase students' instrumental and integrative motivation and trigger belief changes as

regards learning strategies and autonomous learning (Serrano et al. 2016; McManus 2023).

4.1.1.3. Variable 3: Sex

Female students reported more English linguistic growth ($M=4.16$) through EMI lessons than males ($M=3.79$, $p=.01$), and they also reported more effective learning of course content ($M=4.29$) than their male counterparts ($M=4.02$, $p=.01$). Possible explanations for these findings include higher motivation and a more effective use of learning strategies by females as identified in previous research. They have been found to use, for example, more strategies for general study, for practicing formal rules and for conversation than their male counterparts (Dörnyei and Ryan 2015; Montero-Saiz Aja 2021).

4.1.2. Quantitative Data from Instructors' Questionnaire Responses

Data related to the opinions of instructors about learning academic content in English was elicited through questionnaire statements 29 and 32 and explored in greater depth through the interviews. The wording for these items was as follows:

ST29. In Galicia students who start their university degree have a good level of English (a B1 at least). (*Strongly disagree...Strongly agree*)

ST32. I think they should include more subjects in English as part of the university curriculum/programmes. [*Yes, but only if they are optional subjects / Yes, either as optional, compulsory or core subjects / No (... please...comment...on the reasons.)*]

Concerning student English proficiency on enrolment in university studies, 80% of the teaching staff ($n=28$) concurred that this level is below the required standard for HE ($M=2.57$). As for ST32, more than half of the instructors (57%, $n=20$) supported the introduction of more EMI courses in the curriculum only if these were offered as elective courses. Based on the variables of sex and years of experience, no significant statistical differences were found. However, regarding the type of instruction (i.e. GE or EMI), it seems that the EMI instructors are more enthusiastic about the further implementation of EMI courses ($M=2.75$) than the GE instructors ($M=2.26$; $p=.02$). As language specialists, it seems more natural for the latter to identify implicit or secondary aspects, whether linguistic and/or pedagogical, that may impinge on students' learning and development. In contrast, EMI instructors seem to be more positive based on the utilitarian value of the language and the gratifying experience of teaching in a FL, as they attested in the interviews.

4.1.3. Qualitative Data from the Interviews

In terms of motivation and attitudes towards EMI programmes, about 89% of the students (n=50) welcomed further implementation of these courses due to the instrumentality of English, in that it guarantees preparedness for future employment (8 ref),¹ a variety of social opportunities (6 ref), better access to post-graduate studies and research materials (7 ref) and enriched disciplinary and language learning (2 ref). For their part, the instructors acknowledged the usefulness of the language as a professional tool, not only for their students, but also for themselves (4 ref). In addition, EMI instructors acknowledged that their role grants them advantages regarding their teaching timetable and provides a good opportunity to practice the language (4 ref).

Some lecturers and professors considered the students' insufficient level of English a hindrance to the learning of specific academic subjects (4 ref), and that content learning is easier in a student's mother tongue (2 ref). In addition, some argued that EMI should not be imposed since there are other foreign languages to learn as well (2 ref). Other instructors expressed their disapproval of EMI, indicating that the challenge it poses for learners might lead to negative attitudes towards the language. Indeed, some comments by EMI students also show evidence of this issue:

In any case, to have to study a subject in a language that you cannot use proficiently is always a challenge. (QtSt252)²

I don't think I have upgraded my...language skills...in English at the USC. I think my skills have improved very little compared to the level I had when I finished high school, which is disappointing. (QtSt420)

The informants broadly agreed that learning English is different from learning other subjects. Based on this belief, it is understandable that acquiring and teaching content through EMI is very challenging, in that students and educators must learn and teach, respectively, while engaged in course content that requires different processes of learning. This issue has also been noted in previous studies (Cots 2013; Doiz et al. 2013b; Dafouz 2014; Pérez Vidal 2015; An and Thomas 2021).

4.2. Evaluation of EMI Programmes

In relation to the second research question regarding the implementation of these programmes, the interviews revealed diverse sets of concerns.

4.2.1. *Student and Instructor Proficiency*

The comments of some instructors made clear that low levels of English proficiency of beginning students at the USC were an issue:

Another problem is the uneven level of the students; for instance, some of them want an exam in English but some others don't. (EMI-IntT13)³

According to the official regulations, students are expected to have a B2 level... but it is unrealistic. So... this means I'm forced to build basic language skills while trying to force the programme as much as I can... The official regulations describe multilingual students, and they say their level is high when it is really low. (GE-IntT16)

For their part, the students also acknowledged that their levels of proficiency, as well as those of professors and lecturers, were not good enough for effective EMI learning (5 ref). Pre-service instructors noted having received very little training in English as future primary school teachers (2 ref), which echoes findings reported by Loredó Gutiérrez et al. (2007) about a group of teachers in training of whom less than 50% perceived their competence in English to be high. Apart from their previous language-learning experiences in secondary education, this also reflects the different levels of exposure to learning in English because of the uneven distribution of courses across USC faculties and schools. For example, at the beginning of the present study, only four subjects were taught in English in the Faculty of Education, whereas 13 subjects were taught in the language in the Faculty of Chemistry. An additional issue that underlies the negative opinions of pre-service teaching staff seems to be the quality of the teaching they experience. When asked if more courses in English should be included in the curriculum, they stated:

What should be established is that if we have a good foundation at the secondary and high school levels, we can have courses taught in English at the university. (IntSt18)

Yes, they [courses in English] should be included. We only had one subject over three months taught by three teachers, none of whom spoke in English. And they just focused on the basic grammar as usual. (IntSt21)

Furthermore, most of the participating instructors (95%, n=21) commented on the preparation and attitudes of students and staff on EMI programmes. As the following comments illustrate, the instructors themselves pointed out the need for better training:

As to the teacher... they should allow us to take some lessons in English, for example, for a better preparation. (EMI-IntT12)

I have a C1 level and would like to continue learning... I think all EMI teachers have language limitations... Some students are way better than me in English because they have lived abroad, or they are Erasmus students. (EMI-IntT13)

In the case of the other faculties, I see the advantages of EMI only if the teachers are well prepared to deliver the lessons in English. As to the students...the level is so unequal that perhaps it would be best to teach them English as a separate subject and not... through the degree subjects. So, I think there's more will to internationalize the degrees than to have the students learn. (GE-IntT22)

They [instructors] need to prepare themselves to teach specific language, for instance, in a subject like English for law, the new ESP teacher needs to become familiar with areas such as civil law and criminal law...general English teachers do not normally learn terms related to law, business or science... thus, it's necessary to spend extra-time preparing lessons. (GE-IntT2)

These findings suggest a positive predisposition of EMI instructors to improve their language competence in English, which aligns with the results reported by Cal Varela and Fernández Polo (2007) about the motivations and beliefs of the USC staff. In addition, an imbalance was found in the skill levels of the teaching staff. On the one hand, while GE instructors have high linguistic proficiency, they lack solid preparation to teach in ESP areas. On the other hand, pre-service teaching staff are given good pedagogical training, but linguistic training in their degree programmes is lacking. As regards the EMI instructors, although they are specialists in their respective content areas, they also seem to require more solid professional development, both pedagogically and linguistically. In this regard, different initiatives have been set in motion in Spain and beyond, such as EMI professional development and training programmes (Arnó-Macià and Aguilar-Pérez 2021; Dafouz 2021; Webster and Herington 2021; Morell et al. 2022; Gil and Mur-Dueñas 2023) which could serve as a blueprint to design solutions customised to the needs of students and faculty at the USC.

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4.2.2. *Instructors' Attitudes and Pedagogical Practice*

Some comments by the EMI teaching staff illustrated that their teaching practice was rather intuitive and based on their beliefs about teaching in English, thus revealing a lack of pedagogical cohesion across the faculties and schools:

In terms of materials, I give my master students everything in English just as it is stipulated in the programme. We are not allowed to give them any materials in Spanish or Galician... It is also true that sometimes if they come across a word they don't know, I translate it for them. (EMI-IntT12)

So, I make clear from day one that I don't teach English, but I won't assess their English either... In the case of the materials I give them out in English. (EMI-IntT15)

We should always be clear about the content, for instance, in the use of PowerPoint slides I include illustrations to accompany the meaning of new words, we use a combination of materials in English and Spanish... I don't assess their language skills but... What I don't do is to give them the translated word or to accept questions in Spanish or Galician. I [try] to force them to repeat [the question] in English. So, it's a mutual understanding that it is not an English class, but we try to understand each other in English. (EMI-IntT18)

In terms of methodological approaches when teaching classes through EMI, the instructors also attempt to use translanguaging,⁴ albeit inconsistently, as can be gathered by some of their comments:

In chemical engineering... students can take the same subject in Spanish/Galician or in English... In the case of the materials, I give them out in English... but via the forums they have access to the materials in Spanish... They could do without the English materials and use the Spanish ones, but I don't think they do because reading is one of their best skills. (EMI-IntT15)

Because the level of my students is not homogenous, I would usually use my presentation slides in Spanish for those low-level students so that they may have a better chance to follow the content but in fact there are more materials and bibliography in English... so I give them terminology translated into Spanish (practically a literal translation). In a one-to-one interaction, I usually use Spanish if I see they don't understand the explanation in English or if they can't formulate questions clearly. But to address the whole class I usually use English. (EMI-IntT19)

These inconsistent pedagogical practices and assessment criteria are detrimental to the effectiveness of EMI programmes. The fact that students receive little or no feedback about their linguistic performance runs contrary to the aims of EMI to develop or reinforce their language skills. This means that some learners must assimilate course content in English despite poor linguistic competence attained in pre-university years. Along these same lines, the issue of the development of academic English skills for their future professions should also be addressed. As regards pedagogy, the compartmentalisation of languages, i.e. the use of English or Spanish rather than the full available language repertoire, creates what Doiz et al. refer to as “the hegemony of the monolingual mindset” (2013b: 215). In the case of the current study, based in the region of Galicia, such a monolingual approach is also detrimental to the use of the Galician language since it serves to foster the use of the more dominant L1 (Spanish) as a counterpart to English. Moreover, whereas team-teaching might not be feasible at the present time at the USC due to a shortage of teaching staff, it is an alternative worth exploring in the future.

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4.2.3. Curricular Organisation of EMI Programmes

Other EMI implementation-related issues voiced by the faculty members involved the placing of EMI subjects in the most appropriate academic years or levels throughout the curriculum, which increases the difficulty of teaching these programmes (4 ref), as stated by one interviewee.

They [students] may find these subjects difficult because they are normally placed in the last years of their degrees and some years have gone past since students last studied English. Hence, on the one hand, it would seem feasible for this type of English subject to be present at the beginning of their degree; however, on the other hand, at the beginning stages of a degree students are not familiar with some important concepts for their degrees and thus, it may seem useless to teach them some terms in English before they even know what they are in their native language(s) (GE-IntT2).

Additional suggestions regarding the implementation of this methodology included consistent need analysis and monitoring (1 ref), effective decision-making and support by stakeholders and local authorities, and sufficient academic, human and economic resources (7 ref). All these aspects impinge on the quality of EMI programmes, that is, on “the level of excellence at which the institutional EMI policy is reflected in instructional practices..., learning outcomes and alumni performance” (Akincioglu 2024: 146).

4.2.4 Linguistic Friction of EFL and L1s

Finally, the data also showed the linguistic friction that can arise from the process of internationalisation in multilingual contexts (Doiz et al. 2011, 2014; Cots 2013). This is reflected in the ideological approach of two interviewees, the first of whom wondered, “Why do we have to give up Spanish as a LF and surrender to English?” (GE-IntT3). In a similar vein, a second instructor explained that EMI subjects widen the gap between those students with high and lower levels of proficiency. “It harms, consequently, those students whose skills are not linguistic” (GE-IntT5). Other participants also consider English as a form of imperialism, as these comments show:

Although foreign languages are very important, I think it is more important to know your mother tongue very well. In the case of Galician people, it is sad when I hear them speak proficiently in English, Spanish, or other foreign languages but they can't produce a full correct sentence in Galician, the language of our land. (QtSt238)

Forced linguistic colonialism has a negative impact on the recipient cultures. The educational, personal, and developmental benefits deriving from the learning of a foreign language are present regardless of the language learned. The impossibility of choosing beyond the English language is inadequate, and it leads students to think they are not good at languages since they cannot achieve a high level of competence in English in particular. (GE-QtT4)

This linguistic tension cannot be overlooked when implementing EMI programmes in multilingual regions since monolingual practices in English undermine the multilingual identities of the learners and teachers. Thus, EMI pedagogies should favor more inclusive, multilingual practices (Doiz et al. 2019; Akincioglu 2024).

5. Concluding Remarks

In this study I have addressed two main research questions about EMI programs at the USC. The first one aimed to identify the beliefs of the participants about content learning in English in the different academic areas. The data reported here indicate that they share positive views about the implementation of EMI

courses, mostly due to the utilitarian use of English. A key finding in this study, however, is that the academic field of the students, as well as their linguistic experience, had a bearing on responses, as did the type of English instruction the teachers delivered. The primary implication of these findings is the need for customised pedagogies in EMI programmes at the USC.

As regards the second question, the perceptions of students and teaching staff about the EMI experience revealed various issues regarding the implementation of this methodology, such as inadequate linguistic preparation, inconsistent pedagogical practices and organisational difficulties. These data mirror the results of previous studies conducted both in Spain and abroad (Dafouz et al. 2016; Kirkgöz and Dikilitaş 2018; Pérez-Llantada 2018; Doiz et al. 2019; Arnó-Macià and Aguilar-Pérez 2021; Akincioğlu 2024). Thus, further evaluation and adjustment of the implementation policies of these programmes at the USC is required to tackle these issues.

The findings of this study not only contribute to the existing body of knowledge about learning through EMI but also carry significant implications since they could inform the process of curricular adaptation or design of EMI programmes to better align them with the learners' and educators' needs. In addition, these results could also provide insights for teacher-training initiatives and for more effective policy implementation including, for example, more resource allocation and better instruction and assessment practices. Within the classroom context, these findings could also be used by instructors to implement interventions to foster motivation, to use more effective pedagogies and to design materials that are better adapted to the students' learning needs.

While this project provides valuable insights regarding EMI programmes at the USC, it also has some limitations such as its exploratory character and the lack of participation of actors other than students and teachers. To overcome these limitations, future research should comprise a more in-depth analysis of the impact this methodology has on students' learning, and further examination of the implementation policies involving other stakeholders such as administrators and university councils. Finally, this study could be replicated in other institutions, thereby permitting the emergence of evolving solutions and fostering increased cohesion and functionality in EMI programmes across the Galician region and more broadly in Spain.

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Notes

1. In NVivo, a reference (ref) is the number of times an answer or argument was repeated.

2. Questionnaire-Student# (QtSt252).

3. GE or EMI Interview-Instructor # (GEIntT12 or EMI-IntT12).

4. Translanguaging: the use of the full linguistic repertoire of communicative strategies that speakers possess from the various languages that they know (Taken and adapted from www.dicenlen.eu).

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