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Maintaining teaching and learning quality in higher education through support of EMI lecturers

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Nella discussione sulla qualità delle lezioni impartite in lingua inglese nel settore della Higher Education (HE), permangono diverse questioni da approfondire che vanno ben oltre la partenza di quell' "inarrestabile treno" (Macaro 2017) che è il fenomeno dell'English Medium Instruction come strumento di internazionalizzazione. La questione del raggiungimento e del mantenimento della qualità è stata al centro di un progetto sviluppato in una grande università del Nord-est dell'Italia per supportare i docenti che insegnano i loro corsi in lingua inglese e per indagare le percezioni degli studenti in un ambiente in cui insegnanti e studenti condividono per lo più la stessa L1, cioè l'italiano. Dopo aver delineato il progetto, che mirava a perfezionare le capacità didattiche e la consapevolezza interculturale dei docenti attraverso una varietà di percorsi di supporto linguistico e metodologico, il presente contributo riporta le difficoltà e preoccupazioni degli insegnanti riguardo all'insegnamento in inglese, così come da essi riportate nelle risposte ad un questionario. La discussione continua poi prendendo in considerazione le percezioni degli studenti circa la qualità delle lezioni EMI. Le implicazioni legate alle percezioni di docenti e studenti sono infine discusse in termini di gestione della qualità dell'istruzione in lingua veicolare inglese e degli aspetti dell'insegnamento e dell'apprendimento che ne sono interessati.

Parole chiave:

Qualità della didattica, Internazionalizzazione, lingua inglese.

Keywords:

English Medium Instruction, Internationalisation, Higher Education, quality assurance, teacher training.

1. Introduction

European Higher Education (HE) is witnessing a rapid growth in the number of degree programmes and course units taught through English, and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have sometimes launched into EMI as a need to remain abreast with the general trend of internationalisation in HE, and as a way to attract international students, funding and to improve rankings. As with all new movements, a picture of how it will develop over time is sometimes elusive, as is a clear idea of how the notion of quality can be instilled and maintained in teaching practice.

As Valcke and Wilkinson recall, English has become a "dominant 'partner' within all higher education learning approaches where an additional language medium is involved" (2017: 15). The reasons for this dominance lie within the economic and political arenas. As a number of scholars have observed (Shohamy 2013; Wilkinson 2013; Philippson 2006; Costa & Coleman 2013; van der Walt 2013), English-medium instruction in countries where English is not the main language of communication is often conceived as a synonym for internationalisation, where HEIs hope to "attract more national and international students and lecturers and gain visibility at the international level, thus emulating and even competing with the world's top universities located in Anglophone countries such as the USA and the UK" (Guarda & Helm 2016: 1). Although EMI may offer opportunities for both students and teachers, in terms of international mobility for study and employability, and in terms of furthering language and intercultural learning, several scholars in the field have warned against the risks of this trend. Some have highlighted a tendency towards commoditisation of education, linguistic dispossession and domain loss for local languages, as well as an imposition of a Western mindset as a new form of imperialism (Philippson 2006). Others have stressed how the shift towards EMI may become a discriminating factor, in that it marginalises students and teaching staff whose language competence is not felt to be adequate, or who are unwilling to study or teach through English (Coleman 2006).

In the debate regarding the empowering and marginalising nature of EMI, a key issue is the quality of educational provision. In programmes where English is the medium of instruction, constant monitoring should be assured (Valcke & Wilkinson 2017) so as to maintain the quality of teaching and learning so that EMI students do not risk falling behind those enrolled on programmes taught in their native languages.

In this paper, quality should be interpreted as the result of language mastery on the part of both lecturers and students alike, and competence in the use of effective methodological approaches that can enable students overcome the challenges which are naturally posed by the shift in the language of instruction and learning. As Klaassen and de Graaff suggest (2001: 282), EMI requires an additional effort on the part of teaching staff, who need to be made aware that students may need additional support in accessing content and negotiating meanings in a language that is not their own. Therefore, as Cots puts it (2013: 117), a shift in methodology is required, in other words a "process of decentering of the focus of pedagogic action from the instructor to the students". By giving students a more active role during classes, for instance through group work and discussion, role plays and other learner-centred tasks, lecturers can empower students to construct knowledge by themselves, thus moving away from the top-down approach of knowledge transmission that often characterises academia. According to Hahl, Jarvinen and Juuti (2014), students who feel empowered in the EMI classroom are not only able to enhance their own learning, but are also

able to generate a more positive atmosphere for both themselves and their lecturers.

In Italy, EMI in higher education is a relatively recent phenomenon (Costa & Coleman 2013) when compared with northern European countries. First introduced in the early 2000s, the implementation of study programmes taught in a foreign language was formally reinforced by a 2010 law regarding universities which advocated the promotion of education through a foreign vehicular language. Since then, Italian HEIs have been moving very quickly towards the implementation of EMI at the graduate and, more recently, undergraduate levels. Guarda and Helm observe (2016) in the academic year 2015/2016 a total of 245 English-taught programmes were offered by 55 universities across the country, 226 of which were at the Master's level and 19 at Bachelor's level, with a remarkable 72% rise compared with the previous year¹.

While EMI has gained momentum in Italian HE, it is important to note that the issue of language proficiency, on the part of lecturers and/or students, has not appeared to be a major source of concern until very recently, nor has the issue of methodology been discussed in depth. In a survey on EMI in Italy conducted in 2010, Costa and Coleman found that most lecturers – the vast majority of whom were Italian – were often "forced to teach through English regardless of their target language competence" (2013: 11). What is more, 77% of the 38 institutions that responded to the survey admitted that they did not provide their lecturers with any kind of training or support, be it linguistic or methodological. It may be this lack of training that led the two authors to conclude that the shift to EMI did not appear to lead changes in the way contents are delivered, as formal monologic lectures still constituted the most common teaching style in Italian HE.

In recent years, however, some changes have become evident: several institutions across Italy have started offering their lecturers courses, seminars and other forms of support and training related to EMI. In the sections that follow, we will first outline the LEAP (Learning English for Academic Purposes) support programme that was devised and run by the Language Centre of a large university in north-east Italy. We will then discuss the main findings of two research studies that aimed to collect EMI lecturers' evaluations of their own concerns about teaching in English and of the impact of this shift on their teaching practice, as well as students' evaluations of EMI and lecture quality.

2. EMI at the University of Padova and the LEAP project

The University of Padova, one of the oldest in the world, has a long tradition of welcoming international scholars and students since 1220. This has become a

¹ For an overview of EMI in Italy, see Helm and Guarda (2015) and Guarda and Helm (2016)

driving force recently as the university shares with other HEIs the need to catch up, and keep up with the swiftly moving concept of internationalisation, in particular, as concerns EMI.

In May 2013, all the University's lecturers were sent information about the support options offered by the LEAP² project, namely a 2-week summer school in Venice, an intensive course in Dublin, a blended course at the University Language Centre in Padova and an individualised language advising service³. They were also sent an application form which included a link to a survey aimed at collecting responses on what the lecturers perceived as their needs and concerns about teaching through English. The survey contained both closed-ended and open-ended questions, and sought to cover some of most relevant areas related to English use for communicative and professional purposes, including: background experience with the English language; previous experience with EMI, if any; perceived concerns about using English for communicative and didactic purposes; perceived strengths and weaknesses in English; expectations about the support programme and areas of language and didactics that the respondents wished to cover⁴. Of the 115 lecturers – all Italian – who completed the application survey, 86 were teaching at the graduate level, 19 in undergraduate degree programmes and 11 at PhD level. Nearly half the respondents (50) had no experience with EMI at all, while the remaining 65 lecturers had at least one year's experience of teaching in a foreign language. The responses were useful to the LEAP team to tune the support options to the lecturers' real needs and expectations, and to gain insights into their experiences and motivation. To meet these aims, a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was adopted to analyse the open-ended answers qualitatively. By adopting a constant process of comparison across chunks of text, it was possible to identify a series of recurring themes and patterns through the data.

One of the survey questions asked applicants to describe their previous experience (if any) with EMI. Interestingly, responses were varied: for 18% of the responding lecturers, teaching in English had been a very positive experience. For an equal number of respondents, previous experience had been mixed, with positive aspects including the greater degree of internationalisation promoted through EMI, while the drawbacks included a greater workload and different levels of students' linguistic competence. A totally negative picture, on the other hand, was provided by 5% of the responding lecturers, as exemplified

² The LEAP (Learning English for Academic Purposes) Project was funded by the International Relations Office of the University of Padova, and was based at the University Language Centre.

³ All support options had a dual focus on EMI methodology and on language. For more information, see Dalziel 2017.

⁴ For a more exhaustive overview of the methodology for data collection and analysis, as well as for a more extended discussion of lecturers' needs and concerns about teaching through English, please refer to Helm and Guarda (2015).

in the following comment: "The experience was not satisfying, both for the low approval from the student and for the self-evaluation of my english" (R27).

Besides asking the lecturers to describe their previous experience with EMI, the questionnaire also sought to explore what they perceived as their needs and concerns related to the use of English, both while lecturing and when interacting with students on a more informal level. Although 10% of respondents stated that they had no concerns at all, the other lecturers identified a variety of concerns and areas which they felt weak in. The most frequently mentioned concern relates to teaching methodology, where 28% of the respondents expressed their need to modify their teaching approach and to adapt it to the EMI context in which they were teaching. Some of this subgroup expressed a lack of spontaneity and inability to improvise in class in the same way they would do in their native language, for example "I have to prepare carefully my lessons. Improvisation is not allowed in a second language" (LA12). For others, the need to adapt their teaching style was linked to their willingness to give students a more central role in the classroom, something which resonates with the EMI research illustrated above. In this light, while applying for the support options offered by the Language Centre, they were expecting to "receive guidance on how to organise my lectures (...), on the way I can involve more the students in the course (I am trying to implement a more active and participating modality of teaching)" (D04). The awareness of the need to adopt a more learner-centred methodology seems to suggest that lecturers were, at least in part, aware of the difficulties that students face in the EMI classroom, and were willing to experiment new strategies to facilitate the learning process. In addition, responses to the questionnaire appear to contrast with Costa's (2012) observations, namely that Italian university professors are not interested in receiving any methodological training. It cannot be denied, however, that there was some resistance on the part of a few participants in the initial stages of the support courses offered by the Language Centre. This resistance seems to be due to the fact that while some lecturers had recognised the need to implement new teaching strategies, others may not have expected a focus on methodological issues as part of EMI training. It was interesting to note, however, that as the courses progressed, in most cases any initial resistance transformed into active involvement and even unexpected enthusiasm about pedagogical issues in some cases.

Besides methodology, questionnaire responses suggested that the use of English in informal communicative episodes, together with fluency, pronunciation and a perceived lack of vocabulary, were the major sources of concern for all lecturers - those with previous experience with EMI and those without. These concerns were the areas that the lecturers stated they needed more support in, and were expecting to tackle in the options provided by the Language Centre. The following comments exemplify the main concerns in relation to the respondents' language ability: "I have limited experience with

'social' English" (B14); "My English is still not fluid enough to allow me express a concept in different manners (D04)" ; "My pronunciation is horrible" (SS15); "I have a poor pronunciation and a limited vocabulary outside technical context" (SS01). Some of these findings appear to confirm previous research on EMI. Lehtonen *et al.* (2003) and Tange (2010), for instance, also found that informal conversational episodes with students were a source of concern for lecturers. Finally, the responses to the questionnaire also showed further areas of language use, such as limited knowledge of grammar rules as well as a certain lack of self-confidence, that were felt as problematic by some of the respondents.

Of the 115 lecturers who completed the application survey, 70 were selected to participate in the support options provided as part of the LEAP project. Given the limited availability of places, priority was given to lecturers who were already teaching through English, with the aim of supporting them to maintain or improve the quality of their academic activity (for further details, see Guarda & Helm 2016).

3. Impact of English and of LEAP on teaching practice

At the end of the three courses offered by the LEAP project (the Summer School in Venice, the intensive course in Dublin and the blended course), the 53 lecturers who had taken part in these support options were asked to complete a second, final survey⁵. The survey, which contained both open-ended and closed questions about the support option attended, was completed by 28 participants from across the three courses. In addition to the survey, the 27 lecturers from the blended course were also invited to write open feedback on the last day of their experience. A few months after the end of the courses, 17 participants from across the three support options also agreed to be interviewed by one of the researchers. All the interviews took place towards the end of the academic year after the EMI lecturers had been teaching again. The aim of data collection was to gather the participants' comments on whether the support they had received through LEAP and the use of English had had an impact on the way they conceived and implemented their teaching. Besides giving us access to the participants' perceptions and experiences, the data was also important for evaluating the quality of the LEAP support options and to plan further events and courses. The open-ended questions of the survey, the open written feedback and transcriptions of the interviews underwent a qualitative thematic analysis to reveal recurrent patterns and themes. The following section sums up some of the most relevant findings. However, for a more complete picture of the

⁵ The feedback from the 17 participants in the language advising service was not included in this analysis. As it is an individualised service, it was felt that this support option could not be compared with the three courses which, on the contrary, involved groups of lecturers and included group work and discussions.

themes that emerged during the analysis, we invite the reader to refer to Guarda and Helm (2016).

The findings of this research phase appear to be in line with the analysis of applicants' needs and concerns. The research showed that many lecturers, when teaching in a language that is different from their own and their students', feel that their teaching approach needs to become more student-centred. This emerged in particular in the responses of lecturers working in the humanities, while it was felt as less urgent by some professors in the hard sciences. Despite this difference across disciplinary areas, many participants reported discovering the potential of such a methodological shift, which can empower students to access contents and meanings despite the potential barriers posed by the vehicular language. This is exemplified, for instance, by the following extract: "I had to structure it [the course] in a more erm in a less less monologic way, and make sure that there were moments in which the students could think and do things themselves, some breaks, some moments in which they could rest because [attending such a course] is tiring" (Interview, D02). This sense of renewed awareness also emerged in the words of lecturers who initially seemed to be reluctant, or did not expect to engage in discussion about methodology: "Before starting the course, I thought it would have been a course of English: grammar, vocabulary, way of saying...but it was more, in particular because I have understood something new for me about teaching methodologies" (Survey, B02). It should not come as a surprise that lecturers used expressions such as 'unusual', 'discovered', 'surprise', 'motivated', 'impressed' to comment on the discussions of pedagogy that took place in class. As some respondents made clear, these discussions were an 'opportunity to reflect, for the first time, on training pedagogy' (Open feedback, SSU-08), something which, in a context like Italian HE, appears to be 'quite unusual in our professional activity' (Open feedback, B15): "I have been teaching in higher education for almost 30 years and I have never had the chance to reflect upon the pedagogical dimension of my activity, also because as you know the recruitment process that we have here does not include this aspect at all" (Interview, SS13).

During the analysis, a further interesting element emerged which seems to reveal the impact of the LEAP support courses and the shift to English as the vehicular language. For some lecturers, adapting their teaching to EMI also implied giving their courses a more "international flavour" (Open feedback, B04). As Guarda and Helm remark (2016: 11), "the use of another language called for a wider view on the issues dealt with in class, and thus broadened the spectrum of experiences and knowledge to which the students could have access". The respondents who pinpointed this shift commented that the use of English had stimulated them to introduce examples from different countries and to refer to a variety of cultural backgrounds, as well as to invite their international students to share knowledge and experiences as seen from their own perspectives. The following extract is an example of this: "this is something I learnt at S. Servolo,

that it's not just a matter of translating my Italian course (...) I had to change all my examples (...), using another language automatically puts you into a different wider context, you no longer speak only about Italy, you automatically think "but [what happens] in Germany, but in Sweden, but in Finland (...)" (Interview, SS07).

A further theme that emerged in the analysis was that a great number of lecturers who participated in the LEAP programme openly recognised the need for support. Given the challenges that EMI poses to the teaching staff, the participants reported that they had greatly appreciated the sense of community that arose during the courses. In their words, it was thanks to the "positive interactions among colleagues of the class and the exchange of experiences, opinions, problems and ideas during the numerous discussions stimulated by the teacher" (Survey, BU-05) that they could feel that 'my worries are those of other colleagues' (Survey, B11) and discover that "we could improve our teaching activity simply sharing our experiences" (ibid). The emergence of a Community of Practice (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder 2002) also had the potential to inspire its members' teaching practice: "After each our meeting (in which we discussed, presented and listened to talks, attended seminars, received advice,...), I remember that I continued for several days after, to reflect about the topics, to reformulate my considerations,...I fixed in my mind terms, phrases and strategies that I will try to apply in my courses" (Open feedback, B04). In addition, it also reinforced the participants' feeling that they need support and guidance in order to move into the new territory of EMI with increased confidence and awareness: "I agree that a good proposal would be to think about a permanent support organized by CLA [the University Language Centre] and structured in several activities scheduled and covering all the academic year, with teachers booking the ones they are interested to" (Open feedback, B04).

The research we conducted on the lecturers' needs and concerns prior to participating in the LEAP support options, and their perceptions of the impact of such courses and of English on their teaching practice, showed that introducing a foreign language for teaching and learning may open up opportunities to reflect on teaching, and the implementation of more student-centred approaches. This may have an important impact on the quality of education provided in contexts, such as EMI, in which students need more support and empowerment to learn through a language which is not their own, despite the potential limitations.

4. Students' needs and concerns about quality EMI

Clearly quality in EMI involves an adequate and appropriate preparation of students as well as their lecturers. We have found that lecturer support and methodological training leads to changes in the classroom environment and an

improvement in learning, and it is therefore opportune to evaluate the students' involvement in the process as part of the more complex picture of the multiple players communicating through the EMI interface, where both students and lecturers reach a beneficial and reciprocal level of interaction and negotiation in the learning process. Thus the students' needs and concerns must also be considered in order to satisfy quality parameters.

A different study that was undertaken as part of the LEAP project regarded students' views with the aim of understanding their perceptions of EMI, and their learning. The issue of quality in this context refers to the factors which affect the entire outcome of the learning process in the EMI classroom, rather than the provision of support where necessary. The success of internationalisation is regularly measured in terms of the capacity to attract international students (Grin 2010), with numerous comparative quantitative studies now available, however there is, as yet, little research to show how students cope with EMI.

While lecturers have had the opportunity to participate in the LEAP training, students enrolled in EMI courses at the University of Padova do not receive specific preparation for the English-taught programmes. In the past, students who had an EMI course in their study plan were offered the possibility of attending voluntarily a 50-hour general English course. However this project has now concluded with mixed and not very satisfying results. Although students must self-declare that they have at least a B1 level, there is no provision for refusing enrolment due to unsuitable language ability, and there is no obligatory language test after enrolment. The typical EMI scenario is a predominantly L1 Italian classroom with a varying, but limited proportion of international students, and an L1 Italian lecturer. The typical classroom also comprises a mixed capacity in English ranging from B1 to native-speaker.

Students enrolled in a Postgraduate ETP in the Social Sciences were invited to participate in the project by responding to a 38-item questionnaire which asked about their perceptions of EMI, their views on how their learning may, or may not have been affected by EMI, and whether the language competence of their lecturers and/or classmates is decisive in the learning process. The questionnaire asked students to rate on a 5-point Likert scale their answers to direct questions about their own language competence, how they perceived language as affecting lecture quality, their lecturers and perceived changes in language and teaching on the course, followed by 3 open questions (see Clark 2017). The aim was to see whether students' and their lecturers shared the same concerns, and also to discern which, if any, language issues are perceived as affecting the quality of EMI.

Responses from 74 students⁶ enrolled in the 1st and 2nd years of the course were studied and it was found that international students (IS) were more critical

⁶ Of these, 60 were domestic students with L1 Italian, while 14 were international students (including L1 English, Russian, Rumanian, Spanish, Portuguese and Vietnamese).

in their self-evaluations of language competence. Their rating of their own language skills was lower than the domestic students' (DS) ratings in all skills. Further, 1st year DS considered their language skills to be higher than 2nd year DS.⁷ Saarinen and Nikula point out (2013) that a B2 level is generally required for successful participation in EMI, yet many of our sample were a B1 level and had difficulty reaching B2. On the other hand, most respondents said that they had met absolutely no language difficulties in the course so far, but those who did express difficulty in following the course all rated their own levels as *high* or *very high* which implies that they may consider their own competences to be adequate and that the source of difficulty may lie elsewhere.

The relationship between language capacity affecting the success of lectures and the students' perception of what may be considered a 'good' lesson (see for example, Gundermann 2014; Clark 2017) was a concern of many lecturers. In this regard, all respondents claimed that there was definitely a difference in level across the class - as one student noted: "an important part of the students have problems with the language as well" (IN2-02). It is possible that the calibration of the levels (as outlined by the CEFR⁸) may not be sensitive enough, or that intercultural competence may play a part, or, as Dafouz and Smit point out, the "language code which functions as a tool for [...] teaching and learning" may not "encapsulate discursive and other social practices" (2016: 4). Language level (B1, B2, C1 etc.) was not a useful predictor of student satisfaction with courses or perceived quality of EMI.

Although all students were aware of a difference in language level, they also indicated that the discrepancy in level did not affect the success of lectures, a result which does not coincide with the literature. It is interesting to note that lecturers generally expected language competence to be closely correlated to lecture success. DS in their 2nd year were most aware of the negative effects of the different language levels, while IS and 1st year DS did not find that differences in level affected the success of lectures. Nonetheless, students (including those who had not yet reached a B2 level) generally agreed that entry requirements to the course should include a minimum language level of B2 to avoid the mixed levels and possible negative impact on the class. It was also suggested by several participants, that lecturers should be asked to pass the same tests.

It has been argued in the literature that the quality of education diminishes in the EMI classroom (Troudi & Jendilhi 2011; Al-Bakri 2013), with the suggestions that learning must in some way be hindered if the subject is taught in a language different from the students' own L1. In this study, it was found that only 13% of students (all 1st year DS who rated their own competence as *high*) agreed that

⁷ See Clark (2017) for further details

⁸ Common European Framework of Reference

their learning was probably slower. This disadvantage could manifest itself in taking longer to learn, slowing down knowledge acquisition, not receiving an optimum level of knowledge acquisition in their lectures, or over-taxing the working memory having to work in two languages. On the other hand, 32% of respondents (all 2nd year DS) indicated that they had not felt any hindrance to their learning by following EMI courses.

As mentioned above, most EMI lecturers interviewed were concerned with their language (in particular, pronunciation and accent) and/or methodological skills (Helm & Guarda 2017).

Students' perceptions of quality clearly involve their lecturers' language competence, and students were keenly aware, and at times critical, of their lecturers' language skills: "Unfortunately, not all the lecturers have a very good level of English" (IT2-03), "Some lecturers have very good English, most are average and their lessons are clear and understandable. However, some are a disaster" (IT2-11). Similar results were found in a Swiss study (Studer 2015: 226) which also noted that language competence was mentioned by students when discussing poor teacher preparation and methodology. While lecturers were more concerned, or sensitive about, pronunciation and/or accent (see Helm and Guarda, 2014), Gundermann (2014: 124) suggests that pronunciation and accent are key to comprehension and thus it was expected that students might share this concern, as comments made in class suggested. It was interesting to note that half the respondents indicated that lecturers' pronunciation posed no problems to understanding, with IS being the most critical. Lecturers' clarity and fluency (intended as speaking smoothly with complete information units, few false starts, etc) was not generally a problem, although about 13% of students (all 2nd year) - said that lecturer clarity and fluency was *not good at all*.

Lecturers participating in the LEAP project had commented on the level of students' English and whether classroom problems might arise from mixed and lower levels, which, in turn, would affect the perceived quality of the teaching. Over half the participants in the survey thought that their own level of English was better than their lecturers'. Regarding this point, some scholars (for example Maiworm & Wächter 2002) have suggested that only lecturers with a valid certificate, including language skills, should hold EMI courses, a proposal that student participants agreed with. However, careful evaluation must be made of what types of certification should be required, since the CEFR levels and structure may not be appropriate for the EMI context, as mentioned above (Pilkinton-Pihko 2013).

Regarding teaching methodologies, students were aware that methodology was an element discriminating between successful and less successful lessons. They recognized the benefits of participation, the merit of practices which included presentations, seminars and discussion, and expressed their

disappointment in some lecturers who they perceived as being unable to interact effectively with the class. An International student pointed out: "Professors should be encouraging discussion more. This could be done in the form of seminars [...] which could also be aided by an interactive activity" (IN2-16). Students were also appreciative of lecturers' ability to stimulate participation and discussion and an exchange of ideas in a positive classroom atmosphere with nearly 20% of respondents saying that lecturers were *always* able to manage the classroom in such a way as to encourage participation and discussion.

Lecturers participating in the LEAP project have been keen to discuss whether EMI students should be offered a choice of language for assessment purposes (Helm 2017). Students, on the other hand, feel very strongly that no choice of language be offered, and over 70% of respondents were totally satisfied with written and oral exams being held in English. Similarly for their thesis (an obligatory part of the coursework in degree programs at Italian universities) more than half the respondents stated that they felt *ready* to write, present and defend their thesis in English and no students reported being *definitely not ready*. This finding is surprising since although students rated their writing as better than their speaking skills with 74% indicating that their writing skills were *high* or *very high*, this is not supported by the results of the rigorous B2 tests offered by the University Language Centre where students struggle to reach a B2 level in writing. Further research will be carried out on this area since it is crucial to the discussion of quality in EMI.

5. Conclusions

As the process of Internationalization in HE gains momentum, it inevitably brings with it a move towards EMI, which has become a fixed factor in HE prospectuses in a short time. In this changing scenario, the role of the various stakeholders – not least lecturers and students – needs to be defined, especially in terms of assuring quality.

The LEAP project and the various sub-areas of study described above have the single aim of arriving at an understanding of the concerns of both students and their lecturers which have a bearing on the success of the EMI classroom. Within this picture, the University of Padova has been at the forefront in offering lecturers a wide range of support options with the aim of refining methodological skills, raising intercultural awareness and, to a lesser extent, improving the strictly linguistic levels of lecturers involved in EMI, in keeping with Valcke and Wilkinson's observation that "quality can be assured through practices of continuous professional development" (2017: 17).

However, support for lecturers is only one aspect of quality assurance, as the further findings with students have shown. Students have an important role in quality assurance in EMI, and as some of their responses has shown, their concerns do not always coincide with their lecturers' (a further study is currently

underway at the University of Padova investigating EMI from the students' point of view). Further, students were very perceptive of the role of language, although their responses regarding their own levels in terms of the CEFR and their language competence were not always reflected in language testing carried out at the University Language Centre

Nonetheless, a further important aspect of EMI has not been discussed in this paper, that is, the quality of EMI programmes also derives from the quality of HE administration and support services, which includes the English language skills and intercultural awareness, as well as the sensitivity of support services for international students. This area of EMI requires further attention.

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