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Branka Drljača Margić
Sveučilište u Rijeci, Filozofski fakultet
HR–51000 Rijeka, Sveučilišna avenija 4
bdrljaca@ffri.uniri.hr
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7617-6606

STUDENTS' ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH-MEDIUM INSTRUCTION: TEACHERS' OPINIONS, PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES

Abstract

The growing internationalisation of higher education is closely intertwined with English-medium instruction (EMI), that is, non-philological study programmes conducted in English in non-English-speaking countries. Although EMI is attributed numerous strengths, such as advancement of English language skills, a matter of concern is the sufficiency of students' English language proficiency for fruitful engagement in EMI.

This paper aims to investigate teachers' opinions about the importance of student English language proficiency, language policy, and language support in EMI, their perceptions of the appropriacy of students' English language command for efficient participation in EMI, and their practices, such as translanguaging, used to address students' language-related challenges. The study was part of international research on EMI in which structured interviews were conducted with 30 teachers from five European universities – in Copenhagen, Turin, Maastricht, Lleida, and Rijeka.

The results reveal similar teachers' opinions, perceptions, and practices in different higher education contexts. The teachers note that around a third of students do not have English language proficiency that is sufficient for effective studying in English and achieving learning outcomes. What is most problematic for students is grasping the subtleties of the argument and writing in a clear and precise manner.

The findings point to the need for an explicit language policy that would stipulate the required language level for students and pre-empt inadequate language competence to stand in the way of quality learning and teaching in EMI. They also indicate that programmes of language preparation and language support should be provided to students.

Key words: English-medium instruction (EMI), students, English language proficiency, teachers, language policy, language support, translanguaging

1. Defining English-medium instruction

The process that is inextricably interwoven in modern European higher education is its integration achieved through the Bologna Process, the aim of which has been to ensure that higher education and higher-education qualifications are comparable between different European countries. In addition to the comparability of three-

cycle higher education, the use of the same language promotes the mobility of teachers and students. In that sense, English as the most widespread academic lingua franca paves the way for academic internationalisation and transferability. At the same time, these processes strengthen the status of English as a language in which teaching and learning in higher education take place. Consequently, English-medium instruction (EMI) has become one of the main strategic goals of universities across the continent and has been on the increase in the last 20 years. For example, the period from 2017 to 2021 witnessed a growth of 77% (British Council 2021).

EMI stands for the use of English "to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English" (Macaro et al. 2018: 37). In other words, study programmes in countries such as Croatia, Spain, and Denmark are also conducted in the English language, mostly in parallel with their counterparts in the national language of the host country. EMI is thus a form of the integrated learning of content and language where content-related outcomes are specified in the curriculum, while the acquisition of language is predominantly incidental, that is, a by-product of daily exposure to and the use of the English language for learning purposes. Specifically, English is a medium of instruction in which lecturing, discussing, presenting, and testing take place, but there is no explicit focus on it (Pecorari 2020).

The overwhelming majority of teachers and students in EMI are non-native speakers of the English language. Teachers teach in English because their courses are part of English-taught study programmes and because of the strengths of EMI, such as language development and increased international cooperation. Students opt to study in English because they believe that language immersion will advance their English language proficiency, they see EMI as a new and exciting challenge, and they believe that English-medium higher education will serve as a springboard for further education and career development abroad (Drljača Margić and Vodopija-Krstanović 2017; Richards and Pun 2023).

Although EMI is implemented due to its benefits, such as the greater visibility of the higher education institution, enhanced mobility of teachers and students, and improvement of English language proficiency, it faces several serious challenges. The main challenge of EMI is the inadequate language proficiency of teachers and students. Since the onus and the focus are usually placed on teachers' language proficiency (Doiz and Lasagabaster 2020), in this paper, we enquire into EMI students' language command, from the teachers' perspective.

After the introductory part, where EMI is defined, what follows is a theoretical background to the topic. Section 3 depicts the aims, participants, and methodological procedure of the study. The findings are analysed and discussed in section 4. Finally, the implications of the results are examined in the conclusion.

2. Considering students' language-related challenges, translanguaging, and language policy

In EMI, students' language proficiency has been one of the causes for concern (Drljača Margić and Vodopija-Krstanović 2017; Evans and Morrison 2011; Galloway and Rose 2021; Macaro et al. 2018; Ou, Hult and Gu 2022). According to Arnbjörnsdóttir

(2017), EMI students often overestimate their English competence, while in reality a third struggle with English. Similarly, Richards and Pun (2023) doubt students' linguistic ability to manage English-only EMI.

Previous studies (for example, Galloway and Ruegg 2020) show that EMI students with weaker language proficiency are reluctant to engage in classroom activities such as discussing and asking questions, which require impromptu reactions, and unlike, for example, presenting seminars, cannot be prepared in advance. Richards and Pun (2023) mention students' difficulties with communicating disciplinary content, that is, articulating their comprehension of content in English. Linguistically weaker students give simplistic answers to teachers' questions and shy away from further elaboration and illustration (Wilkinson and Gabriëls 2021). Mahboob (2014) and Pecorari (2020) notice that they face problems with content comprehension and cannot understand the subtleties of the topic, or even fail to understand an idea or a concept altogether, which has a damaging impact on their learning (Macaro et al. 2018). Ackerley (2017: 277) adds that some students consciously "sacrifice the learning of some content for the chance to study in English." Evans and Morrison (2011) also note that students have significant difficulties with written production in academic English, which comes to the fore when they write seminars and essays or take written exams. Consequently, EMI can have an adverse impact on students' academic achievement (Galloway and Rose 2021). Additionally, to accommodate students' needs and possibilities, teachers tend to simplify content and questions, tolerate less precise responses, and switch to the students' first language (Duong and Chua 2016; Pun, Fu and Ka Ching Cheung 2023). Finally, as Dalton-Puffer (2011) argues, students who enrol on EMI and do not have sufficient language competence miss out on the opportunity to reap the linguistic benefits of EMI. They do not develop their oral skills and disciplinary discourse to the same extent as students who have a solid basis in the English language already at the time of enrolment.

One of the strategies that teachers use to cope with students' weaker language proficiency is translanguaging (Mazak and Carroll 2017). García (2014: 112) defines translanguaging as "the ways in which bilingual students and teachers engage in complex and fluid discursive practices that include, at times, the home language practices of students in order to 'make sense' of teaching and learning, to communicate and appropriate subject knowledge, and to develop academic language practices." In EMI, translanguaging often serves as scaffolding to help insufficiently proficient students acquire knowledge and express themselves better (Adamson and Fujimoto-Adamson 2021). At the University of Copenhagen, in the Centre for Internationalisation and Parallel Language Use, for example, translanguaging is not only used and tolerated when the need arises; it is an integral part of their policy of linguistic parallelism and believed to enhance the teaching-learning process (Dimova, Hultgren and Kling 2021). However, as teachers' linguistic repertoire does not involve such a variety of languages to cater for the needs of a student body with different L1s, translanguaging in EMI is confined to code-switching between English and the national language of the host country, as the majority of teachers are native speakers of the latter (Drljača Margić and Molino 2022).

The problem of insufficient language proficiency in EMI stems from the absence

of an explicit language policy that would stipulate language requirements for EMI stakeholders. Spolsky (2017: 5) defines language policy through three components: a) practices, b) beliefs and ideologies related to what is thought to be appropriate language behaviour, and c) management or attempts to influence the practices and beliefs of a community. There is a distinction between explicit, overt, and planned policies and implicit, covert, and unplanned policies (Shohamy 2006). When it comes to EMI, language policy is largely implicit and unplanned (Doiz, Lasagabaster and Pavón 2019; O'Dowd 2018; Ou, Hult and Gu 2022; Wilkinson 2014), which suggests a lack of standardisation and benchmarks for quality assurance. Dafouz, Hüttner and Smit (2018: 541) characterise language policy in EMI as "surprisingly implicit or dangerously simplified in the political agendas of most tertiary institutions." It is believed that either English proficiency will take care of itself or that English is a no-brainer. A systematic approach to language, which is a medium, not the goal of instruction, would be too time-consuming and costly, and thus slow down the implementation of English-taught study programmes. As beliefs affect practices, an explicit language policy, which would guarantee consistency, quality, and accountability is very rarely pursued and remains a "pressing issue" (Wilkinson 2014). Consequently, in most EMI contexts there are no admission criteria – students are not tested or required to provide proof of language level prior to enrolment (Aizawa et al. 2023; Galloway and Rose 2021).

3. Determining the aims and describing the methodology

Students' English language proficiency is an aspect of EMI that has been insufficiently investigated and discussed, and teachers' views on students' language competence have been very rarely explored. The present study addresses this research gap by enquiring into teachers' opinions, perceptions, and practices associated with EMI students' proficiency in English as a medium of instruction. Moreover, the topic of students' language command is explored from a transinstitutional and transnational perspective.

The paper draws on the findings obtained from an international study conducted within the project "Transnational Alignment of English Competences for University Lecturers (TAEC)," which involved five European universities: the University of Copenhagen (Denmark), the University of Turin (Italy), the University of Lleida (Spain), the University of Rijeka (Croatia), and Maastricht University (the Netherlands). Through structured interviews, six teachers from each university were asked to reflect on issues concerning EMI students' English language proficiency. Some of the teachers' responses were presented in Drljača Margić and Vodopija-Krstanović (2022) to show what teachers say about their students' language command as part of the description of teachers' views on EMI. In the present study, however, we adopt a holistic approach and thoroughly analyse all the teachers' responses to gain a deeper insight into their opinions, perceptions, and practices related to EMI students' English language competence, or lack thereof.

Specifically, we use the teachers' responses to a set of open-ended questions – on the differences between EMI and L1MI, on EMI students' English language proficiency, on language policy in EMI, and on translanguaging in EMI – as a discourse we

analyse in order to extrapolate: (a) how important teachers see EMI students' English language proficiency for being able to effectively undertake EMI and how they think language policy should approach prospective EMI students' language command; (b) how teachers perceive their EMI students' language proficiency and its appropriacy for efficient studies in English; and (c) which practices teachers use to respond to their students' English proficiency-related challenges. In line with Spolsky's tripartite model, we analyse management, that is, the establishment of an explicit language policy attempting to influence the practices and opinions of an EMI community; teachers' opinions and perceptions related to students' language proficiency, language policy, and language support; and teachers' practices in response to students' insufficient language proficiency.

Each interview lasted from 30 to 60 minutes and was audio-recorded and transcribed. The results were analysed using a qualitative approach. The teachers' responses were read thoroughly and analytically several times, and the data were coded manually to identify themes (Saldaña 2015) that were classified as teachers' opinions, perceptions, and practices. Supporting response excerpts were selected, and they are integrated into section 4 to illustrate the teachers' views, observations, and behaviour. Each participating teacher was assigned the capital letter T and a number from 1 to 30 (1–6 for Dutch teachers, 7–12 for Danish, 13–18 for Spanish, 19–24 for Croatian, and 25–30 for Italian).

The 30 teachers constituting the sample came from four disciplines: medical sciences, physical sciences, humanities, and social sciences, predominantly economics. None of the teachers was a native speaker of English. The teachers had seven to 32 years (17 years on average) of teaching experience in higher education, and their engagement in EMI ranged from one to 32 years (eight years on average). Eighty-seven per cent of the teachers also taught in their L1.

Fifty-eight per cent of the teachers were also educated in English, predominantly at the master's and doctoral levels. In addition, 75% stayed abroad for at least one month for professional purposes and used English daily. Fifty-two per cent took a commercial English language proficiency test, mostly *Test of English as a Foreign Language* (TOEFL) and Cambridge tests, but most of them do not remember the level they achieved. Regarding their language proficiency self-assessment, the large majority believed that they were at the C1 level, and no one went for a level lower than B2 on the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) scale (Council of Europe 2001).

Regarding language support or development for EMI, a fifth took part in a pedagogic training programme that made reference to content and language integrated learning (CLIL) and/or EMI. A fifth participated in an EMI training programme, while 8% attended a course on academic English. Finally, 8% of the teachers received language assistance in the form of proofreading or translating their teaching materials.

4. The analysis and discussion of results

4.1. Investigating teachers' opinions

All the teachers regard students' adequate English language proficiency as the main

prerequisite for successful learning in EMI. Students need to understand the language well not only to be able to develop a general understanding of a concept but also to comprehend the nuances of meaning. Language should not be a stumbling block that prevents them from asking and answering questions, agreeing and disagreeing with something, arguing for and against certain phenomena, and expounding on a topic. They should feel confident and spontaneous using the language to readily engage in discussions in class. Their writing skills should be developed to enable them to demonstrate their knowledge, elaborate on a subject matter, and express their opinions in a written form. T29 notes that in order to prosper in EMI, "students need to understand the content, have decent fluency to explain a topic and discuss about it, as well as good writing skills to express themselves precisely when taking written exams." The teachers believe that students having good language skills already at the time of enrolment at university enables them to capitalise on EMI both in terms of achieving content-related outcomes and in terms of advancing their academic language skills and disciplinary discourse. T14 says that "students' inadequate language proficiency hinders them from fully participating in EMI, profiting from it content- and language-wise, and enjoying it."

The teachers also believe that an explicit language policy should be adopted and aim at screening students prior to their enrolment on EMI to check their linguistic aptness for content acquisition in English. However, an explicit language policy, which would determine the required language level for students, is rarely implemented in EMI (Aizawa et al. 2023; Wilkinson 2014). Consequently, "students are simply expected to know enough English when they enrol" (T6) or "it is hoped that they won't take the risk of studying in English unless they are capable of passing exams" (T12). To put it differently, students' language proficiency is not given much thought and it is almost taken for granted that they will manage EMI (see also Pecorari and Malmström 2018).

Several examples that prove the opposite are noted in Qatar (Al-Muftah 2017), Denmark (Dimova, Hultgren and Kling 2021), and Japan (Richards and Pun 2023), where prospective students have to take one of the two international standardised tests of English language proficiency for non-native speakers of English – TOEFL or *International English Language Testing System* (IELTS) – to confirm their linguistic readiness for EMI. Also, there are examples where content teachers take the assessment of student language proficiency into their own hands through interviews and/or motivation letters (Drljača Margić and Vodopija-Krstanović 2022), but it is questionable to what an extent these methods and the qualification of the examiner for language assessment are reliable and objective (see also Schmidt-Unterberger 2018). Two teachers in our study, however, do not consider testing students to be necessary. Rather, they believe that the decision to enrol on EMI and language proficiency assessment should be left to the discretion of each individual student. Students with weaker language proficiency would then "either make it due to their additional work on language or flunk out of EMI" (T22).

Regarding the appropriate language level for EMI, although it has been reiterated that students should be at least at the B2 level to be able to fulfil the requirements of their studies (Macaro et al. 2018; O'Dowd 2018), Aizawa et al. (2023) maintain

that it is difficult to set a threshold and that B2 might not be enough for students to succeed in EMI. Additionally, there is no consensus among universities on the level of English language proficiency that students should have to attain their educational goals (O'Dowd 2018). For example, at the University of Zurich, students need to provide evidence of the C1 level to be enrolled on an English-medium study programme (Studer and Siddiqa 2021), while at Complutense University of Madrid the required minimum is B2 (Sánchez-García 2020).

The teachers also think that for students with weaker language proficiency, "language preparation could be organised before they enrol on EMI" (T19) as well as "additional language support after their enrolment" (T11). In a similar vein, Macaro, Akincioglu and Dearden (2016) suggest that if student testing does not yield satisfactory results, their enrolment could be postponed. In the meantime, they could undertake a preparatory language training programme for studies in English (Galloway and Ruegg 2020), which higher education institutions should organise and after which student language proficiency would be retested. Richards and Pun (2023: 223) thus describe a bridging programme in Turkey and several countries in the Middle East held by language specialists who are "familiar with academic genres and with the language demands of content subjects." After student enrolment, additional language support could be offered through English for specific purposes (ESP) courses (Galloway and Ruegg 2020). Čakarun and Drljača Margić (2024) report that EMI students highly appreciate ESP courses because they serve as a valuable scaffolding for their content courses in terms of learning discipline-specific terminology and developing discipline-related literacy. Also, ESP courses include an explicit focus on language and language feedback from teachers, which are missing in content courses because content teachers lack the time and competence to deal with language-related issues and make subject-specific discourse more accessible to students (Doiz and Lasagabaster 2020; Drljača Margić and Vodopija-Krstanović 2017; O'Dowd 2018). Rose et al. (2019: 2155) depict ESP courses as well operationalised language support in the form of "special classes which target the vocabulary, language, and academic needs associated with the subject area," and thus consider students' performance in ESP classes to be the most significant predictor of their success in EMI. Along the same lines, Hillman and Ocampo Eibenschutz (2018) describe three-semester language support for students held in parallel with content courses, and Hu, Li and Lei (2014) write about additional reading, listening, and speaking classes organised for EMI students. Similarly, students can receive language support and feedback from language experts while they work on their essays and seminar papers. One such example involves process writing, in which students get feedback from a language teacher on different drafts of their written work. The feedback is provided in a manner that prompts students to think about the language, consult the relevant literature, and ultimately expand their metalinguistic knowledge. Following the feedback, students make necessary revisions and edits, and hand the final version in to the content teacher (Mahboob 2014). A similar practice is reported by Larsen and Jensen (2020), albeit complemented with an introductory lecture on academic English writing and a final session to recap and reflect on student work.

4.2. Exploring teachers' perceptions

The teachers perceive that the majority of their students have sufficient English language proficiency to understand content, present seminar papers in class, and take exams. Regarding students' capability to discuss in class, and ask and answer questions, teachers' perception is limited due to students' restricted engagement in classroom discussions. One of the teachers complains that "students do not participate and interact in class, which is rather frustrating and demotivating" (T17), and another observes that "there's a small group of students who sit in the front and talk a lot, and there's a silent majority who are difficult to motivate to speak" (T28).

The rarity of students' active participation can be attributed to their reluctance or inability to engage in activities that cannot be prepared in advance and thus require impromptu reactions. Specifically, students' shying away from such activities might be due to several reasons: lack of automaticity and spontaneity in the (discipline-related) language; insufficient knowledge of content; unwillingness to participate in class; fear of embarrassment when speaking in front of other students; and/or tendency to be overcautious when speaking English in an academic environment. T28 notices that EMI students are "more reluctant to participate in class than those who study in their mother tongue […] they always have to process what they want to say before saying it."

The small minority who report satisfactory student participation say that "students are able to argue with sufficient clarity, sure, some more, some less" (T2) and that "students contribute to good interaction and ask relevant questions" (T30).

However, the teachers also note that around a third of their students have weak language proficiency, some even "surprisingly weak" (T9), which has a negative impact on their content comprehension, as well as on their oral and written production. They face significant difficulties expressing themselves accurately and coherently, conveying an idea, and elaborating on a topic in the English language. One of the teachers is shocked by "how little they understand what they read in English […] and how they can't get an idea across" (T4), and another reveals that "it seems that international students come here to learn English, even if that means failing courses" (T14). Our findings concur with the findings of previous studies (Aizawa et al. 2023; Doiz and Lasagabaster 2020; Evans and Morrison 2011) which point to the importance of adequate language proficiency for students to understand the content and discuss it.

This imbalance in students' language proficiency, ranging from high proficiency to struggling with the language, further deepens differences between students and makes it harder for both teachers and students to teach/learn the same material at the same pace.

The teachers also note that students' language proficiency is not necessarily adjusted to the requirements of an academic milieu. T1 describes some students' English as "primitive, restricted and colloquial, sufficient for everyday communication." This observation substantiates the discrepancy between basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) (Cummins 1979). Although students can possess good BICS, their general academic and discipline-related language might not be at an appropriate level for

communication in an academic environment. Finally, students' varieties of English can be very accented, which makes them less understandable internationally. A teacher admits that "it's quite difficult to understand them, often it takes some time" (T6).

4.3. Getting acquainted with teachers' practices

In order to address students' inadequate language proficiency, the teachers primarily resort to translanguaging, that is, code-switching between English and the first language of home students. T9 remarks that "around 60% of students are native Danish speakers, so teachers switch to Danish when necessary." The teachers translanguage when they notice that students face difficulties understanding the content. T14 says that they "use Catalan to help students get the message," especially "when the topic is complicated" (T13). Sometimes they translanguage out of precaution, when they presume something might be problematic for students to understand. As T7 puts it, they "translate some expressions anyway, just to be on the safe side."

The teachers also allow students to translanguage to compensate for their insufficient language proficiency. Through their first language, students ask for clarification or seek to express themselves more precisely. T14 notes that "students use Catalan or Spanish when they can't express an idea in English," or "they switch to Croatian when asking questions" (T21). Also, T15 reports "encounter[ing] whole paragraphs in Catalan/Spanish in exams, which [they] tolerate because the focus is on the message." The teachers sometimes even encourage students to translanguage "because their level of English is too low" (T13). T28, for example, says that when they notice that students have difficulties with writing, they "ask them to explain orally in Italian what they have written in English."

Other practices used to support primarily weaker students in content acquisition are speaking at a slower rate, making use of repetitions, additional elaboration on complex topics, providing more examples, simplifying the content, and using visual aids. T24 notes that they "always try to keep in mind that some students contend with inadequate English proficiency, so [they] ask simpler questions and provide more explanation." Also, the teachers check student understanding more frequently, through comprehension questions in class or, as T17 reveals, through "weekly quizzes. I mark them and give feedback to students, which assists their learning, while at the same time enables me to monitor their comprehension." Furthermore, extra care is taken that students are attentive in class. T15 explains: "I try really hard to draw students' attention. Then they follow attentively and understand better what I'm saying." A teacher in our study also reports expressing themselves concisely to make it easier for students to follow and absorb. In T3's words, "I stick to the point, while in my mother tongue I tend to talk too much." It has to be mentioned, however, that slower talk, repetitions, and conciseness sometimes result from teachers' inadequate language proficiency, meaning that although sometimes these strategies are not used purposefully to support student learning, they still serve the purpose. T1 states that their "weaker English language skills have a positive effect on student learning [...] slower speaking rate and repeating render my teaching

in English more effective." Finally, as the teachers notice a shorter attention span among EMI students, they tend to take more breaks than with students who study in their first language. T16 warns that "it is better not to skip the break because students' attention span is shorter when classes are in English."
Other useful techniques of scaffolding in EMI, which were not explicitly mentioned by our participants, are supplying students with a glossary or lecture notes in advance, using coursebooks, providing more opportunities for clarification questions, signalling importance, and utilising signposting phrases (Airey 2015; Drljača Margić and Vodopija-Krstanović 2022).

5. Pondering on the implications and giving final remarks

Although studies on students' language progress in EMI show that students' language proficiency in both general and discipline-specific English increases due to studying in English (for example, Cosgun and Hasirci 2017; Čakarun and Drljača Margić 2024; Vidal and Jarvis 2018), we maintain that their language command should be at an adequate level already at the beginning of their studies. The minimum level most frequently mentioned in the literature is B2, which according to the CEFR indicates the ability to "understand the main ideas of complex text […] including technical discussions […] interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity […] without strain […] produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint […]" (Council of Europe 2001: 24). However, we second Aizawa et al.'s (2023) view that C1 as the minimum level is preferable because it provides greater security that students will grasp the subtleties of the content, be able to analytically discuss the relevant topics, and ultimately apply knowledge. According to the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001: 23), C1 refers to *effective operational proficiency* and "represents an advanced level of competence suitable for more complex work and study tasks." Besides, establishing the required language level not only largely contributes to students' effective engagement in EMI but also provides a sound basis for the further development of students' receptive and productive skills as well as their disciplinary literacy (Dalton-Puffer 2011).
The present study corroborates that not all students have adequate language competence for education in English. Looking through the teachers' lenses in all five contexts under study, it can be said that English is an obstacle impeding some students' acquisition and demonstration of knowledge in the language. Higher education institutions would thus thrive from adopting an explicit language policy by means of which students' language preparedness for EMI would be assessed and through which standards and benchmarks would be set and quality assurance ensured. Hopefully, such a policy would align language requirements and quality thresholds across study programmes and institutions. Firstly, elective preparatory language training programmes should be organised for prospective EMI students. Secondly, students should take one of the standardised English proficiency tests, TOEFL or IELTS, or their adapted versions, such as the IELTS Academic test, which could be additionally tailored for the purposes of EMI. As Yen and Kuzma (2009) indicate, the scores obtained on these tests are positively correlated with students' academic performance. Regarding the specialised discourse and terminology of

a particular discipline, they are usually acquired and developed during studies, although they may be integrated into the preparatory programme (Aizawa et al. 2023). It is also highly valuable to offer supplementary ESP courses embedded in EMI degrees alongside content courses to support student content comprehension, as well as academic and discipline-specific language development (Čakarun and Drljača Margić 2024; Schmidt-Unterberger 2018). Such a systematic approach to language policy and language support, however, has long been overdue in many higher education contexts for the sake of enrolment numbers and speed. As a result, what suffers is the quality of the teaching-learning process, students' fulfilment of learning goals, their motivation, and self-confidence. Even though students who enrol on English-taught study programmes tend to be more proficient in English than those who enrol on L1-medium study programmes (Drljača Margić and Vodopija-Krstanović 2017; Kim and Yoon 2018), the absence of language policy within which a proof of language proficiency would be required hampers the exclusive enrolment of students whose proficiency in English is sufficient to efficiently tackle EMI. Consequently, EMI students can lack the necessary fluency, accuracy, and precision in the language to effectively undertake EMI (see also Galloway and Rose 2021).

Student language self-assessment cannot be a sufficient indicator because, due to no prior experience in EMI, students may overestimate their English language skills, especially those necessary for an academic milieu. Furthermore, even those who are aware that their language competence might not be up to the task, enrol on English-taught study programmes. They do it because they see EMI as an arena for language improvement, because EMI is regarded to be a jumping-off point for educational and professional mobility and a better job, and because studying in a foreign language appears appealing and opens opportunities for being part of an international classroom at home or abroad (compare Drljača Margić and Vodopija-Krstanović 2022; Macaro et al. 2018). Conversely, students may decide not to apply for EMI because they underestimate their language skills or because they perceive EMI requirements to be more demanding than they actually are. Drljača Margić and Vodopija-Krstanović (2017: 93) observe that "attending classes in English can appear daunting to those with no first-hand experience."

As a response to student inadequate language proficiency in EMI, teachers employ translanguaging to repair misunderstanding or lack of understanding and facilitate student learning by explaining complex content in the students' first language and allowing them to express themselves in a language they feel more comfortable with (see also Guarda and Helm 2017). They also do it as a precaution, when they think that something might be too demanding for students to fully understand when presented in English. In addition, translanguaging sometimes serves those students whose language command cannot be regarded as insufficient, but who could benefit from a bilingual approach being conducive to the reinforcement of one's knowledge. As Canagarajah (2011) says, translanguaging is utilised to facilitate access to disciplinary knowledge as well as its construction.

However, translanguaging can be favourable only to home students because the language used in parallel with English is the L1 of domestic teachers and home students. International students (with weaker language proficiency), on the other

hand, cannot get additional explanation in their first language or ask and answer questions in a language that is not English. Although, for example, at the University of Copenhagen, where a policy of parallel language use is pursued, the plan is to involve other languages in addition to Danish and English (Dimova, Hultgren and Kling 2021), this practice does not seem to be feasible because the chance that the teacher is able to equitably address the linguistic pluralism of an international classroom is extremely slim. Translanguaging can thus exacerbate international students' inclusion (see also Kuteeva, Kaufhold and Hynninen 2020). Hence, the absence of a language policy through which prospective students' language level would be tested for EMI leads to inequalities among students not only in terms of their language proficiency and ability to fully engage in EMI but also in terms of opportunities and provisions. Moreover, translanguaging falls short of the expectations of the students who regard an English-only policy in EMI as the best way to advance their language proficiency (see also Doiz and Lasagabaster 2017).

It has to be said, however, that translanguaging is a practice that goes beyond compensation for inadequate language command, as it fulfils certain social and psychological goals, such as identification with a group (for more see Drljača Margić and Molino 2022). Therefore, it is important to critically reflect on translanguaging in EMI to make sure that it represents the positive aspect of EMI, and is not a source of exclusion and discomfort for some students.

Finally, it seems fair to say that both teachers and students would benefit from a more language-conscious approach to EMI and from setting a language level prerequisite for students. In this way, students would be informed about the level of their language proficiency and its sufficiency for the academic requirements of EMI. Consequently, weaker students would familiarise themselves with the options they have and the steps they should take to be ready to enrol on EMI. Teachers, on the other hand, would not need to worry about language being a barrier to students' learning and about finding ways to grapple with the problem. This is in line with Ricento (2006: 21), who says that language in education is taken for granted and that "it is usually when we discover that […] we don't speak/understand a language or language variety, or use it inappropriately or ineffectively in a particular context, that we begin to pay attention to language." Hence, it is important to make a deliberate effort to ensure standardisation and transparency in EMI, and thus lay the groundwork for a more fruitful and rewarding education in English.

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ENGLESKO JEZIČNO UMIJEĆE STUDENATA U ENGLESKOME KAO JEZIKU VISOKOŠKOLSKE NASTAVE: STAVOVI, PERCEPCIJE I PRAKSE NASTAVNIKA

Sažetak

Sve veća internacionalizacija visokoga obrazovanja usko je povezana s engleskim kao jezikom visokoškolske nastave (EJVIN), odnosno nefilološkim studijskim programima koji se izvode na engleskome jeziku u zemljama neengleskoga govornog područja. Iako se EJVIN-u pripisuju brojne prednosti, kao što je razvoj engleskih jezičnih vještina, postoji briga oko dostatnosti engleskoga jezičnog umijeća studenata za uspješnu uključenost u EJVIN.
Cilj je ovoga rada istražiti stavove nastavnika prema važnosti engleskoga jezičnog umijeća studenata, jezičnoj politici i jezičnoj potpori u EJVIN-u, njihove percepcije primjerenosti engleskih jezičnih vještina studenata za učinkovito sudjelovanje u EJVIN-u te njihove prakse, kao što je prebacivanje kodova, kojima pribjegavaju da bi odgovorili na jezične izazove studenata. Studija je bila dijelom međunarodnoga istraživanja o EJVIN-u, u okviru kojega su provedeni strukturirani intervjui s trideset nastavnika s pet europskih sveučilišta – u Kopenhagenu, Torinu, Maastrichtu, Lleidi i Rijeci.
Podatci prikupljeni istraživanjem otkrivaju slične stavove, percepcije i prakse nastavnika u različitim visokoškolskim kontekstima. Nastavnici uočavaju da oko trećine studenata nema potrebne engleske jezične vještine da bi uspješno studirali na engleskome jeziku i zadovoljili ishode učenja. Studentima su pritom najproblematičniji shvaćanje nijansi značenja pojedine teme te jasno i precizno pisano izražavanje.
Rezultati upućuju na potrebu za eksplicitnom jezičnom politikom kojom bi se odredila minimalna potrebna jezična razina studenata te spriječilo da neadekvatno jezično umijeće stoji na putu kvalitetnomu učenju i poučavanju u EJVIN-u. Iz rezultata također proizlazi da bi programi jezične pripreme i potpore trebali biti dostupni studentima.

Ključne riječi: engleski kao jezik visokoškolske nastave (EJVIN), studenti, englesko jezično umijeće, nastavnici, jezična politika, jezična potpora, prebacivanje kodova