

## Introduction: Focusing on classroom interaction in EMI contexts

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English-medium instruction (EMI) is mushrooming in higher education institutions all over the world, as it is considered to be a pillar of the internationalization process in which universities are deeply immersed. A recent study by the British Council (2021) points out that English-taught programs increased by an astonishing 77 per cent in the period 2017–21, despite the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors of the study relied on more than 200,000 English-taught programs delivered in over 3750 HEIs from all continents and observed that 63 per cent of the total number were offered in the European higher education area region, followed by the Chinese region at a considerable distance (12.2 per cent). In any case, the increase was found in all the regions under scrutiny, namely Sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, South Asia and the Americas. This confirms that the spread of EMI is a global tendency.

But this overwhelming trend should not lead us to overlook the fact that the implementation of EMI programs involves the change of the language of instruction from the students' and teachers' first language (L1) to English as a foreign language, which directly impinges on classroom interaction. In fact, studies (e.g. Doiz and Lasagabaster, 2021; Macaro, 2018) reveal that in many contexts classroom exchanges are limited to a few words or short sentences, and dialogic lectures are conspicuously unusual. Language proficiency tends to be the main stumbling block that hampers classroom interaction (Konakahara et al., 2019), as students are reluctant to participate in class mainly due to their lack of confidence in their English, which results in a feeling of discomfort at speaking before their classmates (Evans

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and Morrison, 2011). Similarly, English proficiency becomes a major concern for EMI lecturers – especially spoken fluency and informal interaction skills (Helm and Guarda, 2015; Lasagabaster, 2022).

According to Gass and Mackey (2007), the close relationship between interaction and learning is beyond doubt, as there is ample empirical evidence to support this statement. Interaction has been described both as central to the educational experience, and as a key instrument for learning to take place (An and Thomas, 2021), since it represents an opportunity for teachers to scaffold the transmission of knowledge and to provide feedback both on language and content, and for students to ask questions that will help them to understand and process the new knowledge, while at the same time developing and improving their second-language (L2) competence. Teacher–student interaction therefore contributes substantially towards the successful realization of the learning outcomes, which is why there is a growing interest in the role of dialogue and interaction in education. The benefits of a dialogic approach to education have been nicely summarized by Wegerif et al. (2019:1):

For example, links have been made between a dialogic approach to education and the development of learners’ critical and higher-level thinking, the enabling of more productive learning interactions, the promotion of creative problem-solving and the acquisition of ‘21st-century’ skills in working collaboratively. Dialogic education has also been seen as a means for making connections between subject disciplines, encouraging active and democratic citizenship and enabling people to live together more peacefully.

With this evidence in mind, it stands to reason that the limitation of student–teacher interaction entails considerable risks because it may affect both content and language learning. If the stakeholders are unable to express their ideas in English and EMI courses become less interactive, the development of the students’ general and subject-related competences and the construction of students’ knowledge abilities may be negatively affected. Similarly, if teacher–student interaction is limited to low-order cognitive exchanges that simply require one-word or a few-word answers, students may find classroom interaction unchallenging, and this may negatively affect their participation in class. Conversely, if the questions posed by the teacher are more challenging and demand greater cognitive effort, students’ participation may be encouraged and facilitated (Lasagabaster and Doiz, 2022; Mercer and Howe, 2012). This is why it is so important to analyse and reflect on how EMI teachers endeavour to make the transmission of knowledge accessible to their students while using English as a foreign language (Doiz and Lasagabaster, 2022), and the role of classroom interaction in this process.

Interestingly, whereas classroom interaction has been researched widely in secondary education, there is limited data at the tertiary level (Macaro, 2018). In an attempt to fill this gap and shed some light on classroom talk, the articles gathered in this special issue aim to analyse interaction from different perspectives, including the role of translanguaging or the teaching mode (face-to-face versus online teaching) in such interactions, as well as how different variables such as motivation, anxiety and beliefs about pronunciation influence this process. The role to be played by team-teaching and teacher training in improving classroom interaction will also be examined and, finally, the multifaceted nature of interaction through a genre-based approach will be considered. In short, our intention is to provide the reader with a broad thematic take on interaction, which also affords a reasonably wide and varied geographical scope as the volume encompasses three European countries (Spain, Austria and Italy), a country in Asia (China) and another that lies partly in Asia and partly in Europe (Turkey). The pedagogical implications of the studies are also reported.

With this background in mind, the two opening articles focus on teacher interactional practices. The first article addresses teacher translanguaging practices in EMI in Turkey and, more specifically, examines their functions. In line with other studies (e.g. Sahan and Rose, 2021; Söderlundh, 2013; Tarnopolsky and Goodman, 2014), the authors of the chapter, Genc, Yuksel and Curle, found that lecturers used translanguaging primarily for content transmission purposes, and to a lesser degree for social and affective functions, such as establishing rapport. However, the authors of the study noted that not all the lecturers in their study adopted translanguaging practices in their L1, presumably due to the effects of the institution's strict English-only policy. Costa and Mariotti's article also considers teacher interactional practices, but in this case the authors focus on the kinds of questions asked by EMI teachers to their students in Italy. The interactional practices are analysed in the light of the variable of mode of teaching – that is, in a face-to-face context and in an online teaching context – in four different disciplines. This is a topical issue, as the COVID-19 pandemic forced many universities and colleges to organize online teacher–student interactions, and the consequences of this major shift have so far received little attention in the EMI context. Some differences in the use of questions posed by the teachers, depending on the media, were observed. In particular, a higher number of questions were asked when the lessons were conducted face to face as opposed to online.

The next two articles approach student–teacher interaction from the students' perspective. Kopinska and Fernández-Costales examine the interplay between classroom interaction, motivation and anxiety through a qualitative approach. The authors seek to understand students' driving forces to participate

in EMI programs and whether the use of a language that is neither the students' nor the teachers' mother tongue conditions their interactions. The results of the study revealed a general anxiety-free atmosphere in the classrooms, which fostered student motivation and their engagement in classroom interaction. The students' vision as speakers of English interacting fluently in all spheres of their future lives is underscored in this study. Along these lines, the students in Gómez-Lacabex and Roothooff's study were reported to perceive English as a tool to communicate in a globalized world rather than a target in itself. Under this vision, students shy away from the native norm of English as a necessary aim to be achieved. As the authors show, this is especially true of the students' conceptualization of English pronunciation, in which intelligibility and fluency were favoured over accurate (and therefore more native-like) pronunciation. In addition, they explore the students' attitudes towards EMI teachers' pronunciation and their pronunciation anxiety in the interaction with different interlocutors, such as teachers, local peers, L1-English international peers and L2-English international peers.

The next two articles deal with teacher development in an EMI context. Rui and Lo focus on the impact of teacher collaboration on teachers' practices and classroom interaction. Collaboration between a language teacher and a content teacher is approached by these two scholars as a means to better integrate content and language teaching, as a result of which the language challenges faced by the students studying in English may be overcome more easily. Rui and Lo conclude that content teachers became more language aware and worked on vocabulary and text structure when they worked in collaboration with a language specialist, and that this collaboration positively affected students' progress and class interactions. Differences in the classroom interaction patterns between a class in which collaboration was provided and another class without it were reported. In the next article, Studer and Kelly report on an intervention program in which teachers were trained and encouraged to establish dialogic or authentic interactions with their students in EMI. In order to do this, they first carried out observation, (self-)assessments and surveys with the teachers in which they showed that teachers tended to adopt monologic teacher-centred interactions. Once the diagnosis was carried out, they set out to raise the teachers' awareness of the benefits of dialogic interaction in the EMI classroom through the illustration of several descriptors taken from Studer's (2018) framework. Together with the teachers who participated in the interventions, they noted that the shift from the monologic to the dialogic interactions translated in an improved classroom experience for the students, although the teachers' shift from one kind of interaction to the other was not always an easy task.

The closing article of this special issue presents a theoretical approach to interaction in the EMI context. Carmen Sancho Guinda reflects on the multifaceted nature of interaction in higher education from a genre-based approach. Her article has two main goals. The first is to make the concept of communicative interaction in higher education more inclusive by expanding it beyond the teacher-centred classroom events. Under her approach, interaction covers the areas of research, instruction, promotion, and administration and management, all of which are part of the university undertaking. The second objective is to propose a genre-based proposal for the understanding of communicative interaction at university and to show that her proposal may pave the way not only for research, but also for policy-making and policy implementation in EMI university settings.

In short, this volume dwells on interaction from different perspectives. It draws from the classroom-based experiences of teachers and students and takes into account the consideration of individual variables such as pronunciation, motivation and anxiety. It also establishes connections between different teaching modes and interaction, and reports on the impact of teacher training and teacher intervention on interaction. Finally, it includes a theoretical proposal in which the readers are invited to take a more inclusive understanding of the concept of interaction in EMI. We believe that this special issue will be of interest to pre-service and in-service teaching staff who have to teach their courses in English (or any other foreign languages), as well as to students and researchers involved in EMI programs and for whom the promotion of successful and fruitful interaction between teachers and students should be a sign of quality teaching.

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