



Language, identity, and internationalization: EMI faculty's meaning-making of multilingual and multicultural identities

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Reply to reviewers

We are grateful to all reviewers for their insightful comments and helpful suggestions, which we have incorporated into the revised version of our article. In addition, we would like to include our replies next to the reviewer comments, so as to facilitate the tracking of our changes.

Reviewer 1	Reply from the authors
<p>General comment:</p> <p>This manuscript offers a timely and well-conceptualized exploration of the multilingual and multicultural (MLMC) identities of EMI (English-Medium Instruction) faculty in Spain. It is well written, theoretically informed, and empirically grounded. The study contributes to ongoing discussions on Englishization, intercultural competence, and faculty development within internationalized higher education. I find the paper to be of publishable quality, though several refinements would strengthen its impact.</p>	<p>Thank you for your kind words.</p>
<p>1. Originality:</p> <p>The paper presents a novel exploration of EMI (English-Medium Instruction) faculty identities in a Spanish higher education context. While teacher identity research is well developed, this study extends the discussion by integrating multilingual and multicultural (MLMC) identity dimensions and focusing on the holistic lived experiences of EMI faculty rather than isolated aspects such as classroom practices. The originality also lies in its attempt to frame EMI faculty as agents of change within internationalization, which adds conceptual depth. However, as it is a single-institution case study, originality is somewhat tempered by limited scope and generalizability.</p>	<p>We thank the reviewer for acknowledging the originality of our study and for noting the limitations associated with a single-institution design. While we agree that the findings are not intended to be statistically generalizable, we would like to emphasize that in-depth qualitative case studies are particularly well suited to investigating identity construction, lived experience, and agency in intercultural education contexts. As argued by Flyvbjerg (2006) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016), such studies generate analytically transferable insights by providing rich, context-embedded understandings of complex social phenomena. Importantly, single-institution qualitative research is well established within the <i>Journal for Multicultural Education</i>. Numerous articles in the journal draw on localized qualitative data to explore identity negotiation, multilingualism, and intercultural learning (e.g., Ben Hammou et al., 2026; Wong, 2025; Zmire et al., 2025).</p> <p>Our study aligns with this tradition by offering a holistic account of EMI faculty members' multilingual and multicultural identity trajectories and by conceptualizing EMI faculty as agents of change within internationalization processes.</p>

	<p>We therefore see the depth afforded by our qualitative, single-institution approach not as a limitation to originality, but as a methodological strength that contributes nuanced insights and lays the groundwork for future comparative or multi-site research.</p> <p>References:</p> <p>Ben Hammou, S., Razkane, H., & Benzehaf, B. (2026). Exploring English-medium instruction (EMI) in health sciences: students' experiences and implications for broader implementation in Moroccan higher education. <i>Journal for Multicultural Education</i>, 20(1), 27–41. https://doi.org/10.1108/JME-03-2025-0057</p> <p>Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research. <i>Qualitative Inquiry</i>, 12(2), 219-245. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800405284363</p> <p>Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). <i>Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation</i> (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.</p> <p>Wong CE, P. A. (2025). Professional identity development patterns among beginning Tamil teachers: generating propositions for supporting minority language teachers. <i>Journal for Multicultural Education</i>, ahead-of-print. https://doi.org/10.1108/JME-09-2025-0206</p> <p>Zmire, Z., Chen, X., Guo, T., & Ryoo, J. (2025). Impact of geopolitical conflicts on education: challenges for mixed and immigrant families in East Asia. <i>Journal for Multicultural Education</i>, 19(2), 170–183. https://doi.org/10.1108/JME-01-2025-0003</p>
<p>2. Relationship to Literature:</p> <p>The manuscript demonstrates extensive engagement with current scholarship, citing both foundational works (e.g., Byram 2020; Deardorff 2006; Kim 2009) and recent studies (e.g., Wingrove et al., 2025; Hillman et al., 2023; Xiong et al., 2023). It engages with debates on Englishization, plurilingualism, intercultural competence, and teacher identity theory, and situates its findings within these frameworks.</p> <p>I suggest to review recent articles such as: https://doi.org/10.17533/udea.ikala.356438; https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2023.2298933; https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01434632.2024.2380389; https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01434632.2024.2373254</p>	<p>We thank the reviewer for this constructive feedback and for recommending additional recent studies to strengthen the manuscript's positioning within current debates. In response, we have expanded the literature review and discussion to better engage with recent work on EMI and teacher identity, as well as with decolonial and postcolonial perspectives on English dominance.</p> <p>The additional sources have been incorporated as follows:</p> <p>⇒ Lo (2024) and Corrales et al. (2024) were added to the “Conceptual Framework” section, enriching our discussion of identity negotiation and identity conflict.</p> <p>⇒ Rey-Paba et al. (2024) was included in the Discussion to support our interpretation of fluid identity and the creation of a “safe third space” in the classroom.</p>

<p>1</p> <p>2</p> <p>3</p> <p>4</p> <p>5</p> <p>6</p> <p>7</p> <p>8</p> <p>9</p> <p>10</p> <p>11 The critique of English dominance is noted, but participants' limited awareness of linguistic equity issues is not fully problematized in dialogue with existing decolonial or postcolonial scholarship.</p> <p>12</p> <p>13</p> <p>14</p> <p>15</p> <p>16</p> <p>17</p> <p>18</p> <p>19</p> <p>20</p> <p>21</p> <p>22</p> <p>23</p> <p>24</p> <p>25</p> <p>26</p> <p>27</p> <p>28 While recent references are included, there could be deeper comparative engagement with non-European EMI contexts (global-south contexts).</p> <p>29</p> <p>30</p> <p>31</p> <p>32</p> <p>33</p> <p>34</p> <p>35</p> <p>36</p> <p>37</p> <p>38</p> <p>39</p> <p>40</p> <p>41</p> <p>42</p> <p>43</p> <p>44</p> <p>45</p> <p>46</p> <p>47</p> <p>48</p> <p>49</p> <p>50</p> <p>51</p> <p>52</p> <p>53</p> <p>54</p> <p>55</p> <p>56</p> <p>57</p> <p>58</p> <p>59</p> <p>60</p>	<p>⇒ Aguilar & Arnó (2024) was also integrated into the Discussion to highlight differences in attitudes toward decolonization and linguistic equity between our European context and Global South settings.</p> <p>To address the reviewer's point regarding the limited problematization of participants' awareness of linguistic equity, we have strengthened the manuscript's theoretical framing highlighted in the following sentence to the Introduction: "From a decolonial perspective, the normalization of English as a neutral academic medium in EMI settings obscures its role in reproducing epistemic and linguistic inequalities (Canagarajah, 1999; Kubota, 2020; Pennycook, 2017)." We have also highlighted the issue of high-status languages and dominant-language capital in the discussion.</p> <p>We have also expanded the Discussion to engage more explicitly with decolonial and critical scholarship, while interpreting the absence of such concerns in participants' accounts as an analytically relevant finding: "While decolonial and critical scholarship shows that English-medium and additional-language teaching can reproduce Western privilege, native-speakerism, and marginalisation—especially in Global South contexts (Brown & Laihonon, 2022; Kramsch & Zhang, 2018; Tajik et al., 2023; Widodo et al., 2020)—these concerns did not emerge in our participants' accounts, who instead framed English in largely pragmatic, utilitarian terms, in line with Aguilar-Pérez and Arnó-Macià's (2024) findings. This absence is analytically significant, pointing to the normalization and depoliticization of English in European EMI contexts, where EMI correlates with university autonomy and neoliberal governance structures (Wingrove et al., 2024). This, in turn, highlights the need for professional development that foregrounds critical and decolonial perspectives on English in higher education."</p> <p>Finally, regarding the reviewer's suggestion to engage more deeply with non-European EMI contexts, we agree that comparative perspectives are valuable. However, our study is</p>
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	<p>intentionally situated within a specific European EMI context and is not designed as a comparative investigation. We therefore treat findings from Global South settings as only partially transferable due to differences in sociolinguistic, institutional, and policy conditions. At present, our study draws on EMI scholarship beyond Europe to situate the study within wider global debates by including work from the Arab world (Abdel Latif & Alhamad, 2023), African contexts (Anchimbe, 2007), Iran (Karimi & Mofidi, 2019), Nepal (Phyak et al., 2022), Turkey and the Mediterranean region (Eren, 2022), the United Arab Emirates (Hopkins & Gkonou, 2023), and diverse East and Southeast Asian contexts (Hu et al., 2014; Widodo et al., 2020; Xiong et al., 2023; Zeng et al., 2023), as well as transnational and diasporic professional contexts (Dai & Feng, 2024; Lee et al., 2024). We believe this engagement enables us to acknowledge the diversity of EMI experiences globally while maintaining the context-specific and exploratory focus of the present study.</p>
<p>3. Methodology:</p> <p>Clear participant inclusion criteria. Use of Saldaña’s coding method (iterative, conceptual, and descriptive coding). Strategies to ensure trustworthiness: member checks, reflexivity, anonymization, and verbatim quotes. Sample size (n=16) is small and limited to one private university in Spain, which restricts transferability. The decision to use self-assessed CEFR levels and subjective identity ratings (Table I) may introduce reliability and major concerns. Two aspects: 1) Review a broader sample size; 2) Uses additional research tools (e.g. surveys to collect a more objective identity classification)</p>	<p>We thank the reviewer for this comment. Representativity and generalizability are not aims of this qualitative study; rather, our goal is an in-depth exploration of EMI faculty’s meaning-making processes within a specific institutional context, as reflected in the article title. In qualitative interview-based research, a sample of 16 participants is considered appropriate and sufficient to achieve thematic saturation (Guest et al., 2006). Furthermore, an objective classification of identity is not the focus of this study. On the contrary, self-assessment and self-perception are central to our analytical framework, as we examine how EMI faculty understand, negotiate, and articulate their own identities. Accordingly, the use of self-assessed CEFR levels and subjective identity ratings is methodologically aligned with the study’s aims rather than a limitation.</p> <p><u>Reference:</u> Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How Many Interviews Are Enough?: An Experiment with Data Saturation and Variability: An Experiment with Data Saturation and Variability. <i>Field Methods</i>, 18(1), 59-82. https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903</p>

4. Results:	
<p>Results are richly illustrated with participant quotes, covering multiple identity dimensions (knowledge, skills, attitudes, awareness, emotions, and behaviors). They highlight: Faculty valuing subject expertise over linguistic authority. Ambivalence toward English dominance. Positive but sometimes fragile MLMC self-concepts. Institutional pressures versus personal agency. The framework in Figure 1 (p. 23) visually synthesizes findings, showing MLMC identity as an intersection of macro-, meso-, and micro-contexts.</p> <p>However:</p> <p>While the themes are well analyzed, there is some repetition across categories (e.g., awareness vs. beliefs).</p> <p>Results could more strongly contrast divergent voices rather than emphasizing commonalities.</p> <p>The reader suggests that results and discussion sections could be united to simplify and avoid redundancies.</p>	<p>We thank the reviewer for this comment.</p> <p>While closely related, <i>awareness</i> and <i>beliefs</i> are analytically distinct in our framework: “awareness” refers to participants’ explicit recognition of EMI-related issues, whereas “beliefs” capture underlying evaluative orientations and assumptions. Some overlap is therefore expected, for example between <i>recognising</i> the dominance of English (awareness) and <i>accepting</i> it as an unproblematic reality (belief).</p> <p>We have updated the Findings and Discussion where relevant to highlight divergent voices; however, our findings did show overarching commonalities among the participants’ experiences and perceptions that we felt we needed to represent.</p> <p>We recognize that some ideas from the Findings were restated in the Discussion, and we have updated the Discussion to address that repetition. However, we have kept the two sections separate as our goal was to present the participants’ voices in the Findings while we</p>

	have used the Discussion section to reengage with the literature based on our findings.
<p>5. Implications for research, practice and/or society:</p> <p>The paper explicitly addresses theoretical, practical, and policy implications:</p> <p>Theory: Conceptualizes MLMC identity as dynamic and multi-layered.</p> <p>Practice: Recommends institutional forums for reflection and targeted professional development in intercultural pedagogy.</p> <p>Policy/Society: Calls for universities to prioritize MLMC competence to prepare students for plural societies.</p> <p>Economic/commercial implications (e.g., for employability, institutional branding) are mentioned but not deeply explored.</p> <p>Societal-level impact (e.g., influencing public attitudes, language policies) is hinted at but underdeveloped.</p>	<p>We thank the reviewer for this positive assessment.</p> <p>The implications section has been expanded on p. 17 to address economic and societal implications.</p>
<p>6. Quality of Communication:</p> <p>The manuscript is well structured and readable, with clear progression from introduction to implications. It uses accessible academic English, balancing theory with illustrative data. The clarity of participant quotes is particularly effective.</p> <p>The reference list is robust but formatting consistency should be checked.</p>	<p>We thank the reader for this comment.</p> <p>The formatting of the reference section has been revised.</p>
Reviewer 2	
<p>General comments:</p> <p>This is a well-structured and clearly written article that explores the multilingual and multicultural identities of EMI lecturers in a Spanish university. The research question is clear, the argument is</p>	<p>We thank the reviewer for their time and feedback.</p>

coherent, and the methodology is appropriate.	
<p>Minor revisions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hellekjær reference: As mentioned in item 2, please check the discrepancy between the in-text citation and the reference list. 2. Page 10, line 3: Consider whether “humility” is the most appropriate word here, as it might unintentionally imply that participants who self-identified as MLMC lacked humility. 3. Page 12, line 39 (Discussion): The text states that the focus is on the “distinction between the professional identities of language teachers and EMI faculty.” However, the paper primarily explores the professional identities of EMI faculty. This could be rephrased for greater accuracy. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The reference has been removed altogether with the recent update and other references have been updated where needed. 2. The word “humility” has been substituted by “a stance of self-effacement”, to indicate that participants downplayed their skills. 3. The sentence has been rephrased as follows: The study addresses a gap in the literature by providing an in-depth exploration of EMI faculty’s professional identities, with reference to their differentiation from language teacher identities in existing scholarship.
Reviewer 3	
<p>1. Originality: Does the paper contain new and significant information adequate to justify publication? Yes - it highlights an angle previously unexplored in EMI lecturer research.</p>	Thank you.
<p>2. Relationship to Literature: The review of the literature is updated and comprehensive. The only aspect which needs further review and is not dealt with throughout is institutional culture, i.e., the culture of the university and its orientations towards multilingualism and multiculturalism. This point is especially pertinent since all the research participants come from the same institution, and its orientations in terms of the beliefs, norms, perceptions towards the topics researched may have a meaningful impact on the formation of the teacher identities.</p>	We have addressed this issue by adding information about the institutional culture in both the methods section and the discussion.

<p>3. Methodology:</p> <p>The research method employed- a semi-structured interview - is suitable and answer the research question.</p>	Thank you.
<p>4. Results:</p> <p>The results are displayed clearly.</p>	Thank you.
<p>5. Implications for research, practice and/or society:</p> <p>The study underscores the importance of the EMI lecturers' awareness of the need to adapt teaching to the EMI format. However, it also demonstrates the lack of a critical perspective towards the dominance of English and the justification for using it as a medium of instruction. These conclusions need further emphasizing - the extent to which linguistic imperialism in the form of English dominance is aligned with multilingual multicultural values and beliefs. Also as mentioned above - the contextual role of the institution and the messages it conveys to lecturers and students as to EMI prominence and its position in the set of values the institution upholds. These factors need to be considered also in future research in other contexts.</p>	References have been added in the discussion and in the implications.
<p>6. Quality of Communication:</p> <p>The paper is clearly delivered.</p>	Thank you.
<p>Final suggestions:</p> <p>As was mentioned above there are two issues that need further explaining and revising:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. reference to the institutional culture throughout, especially in the literature review and the discussion and implications. 2. The implications of the non-critical approach or awareness of English dominance in a multilingual 	Please see our comments above.

multicultural mindset.	
Guest editors' comments	
<p>Since the focus of the special issue is on the development and navigation of identity in intercultural education, please further expand on how your study engages with these central themes. In particular, please elaborate on how your study contributes to discussions about the development and negotiation of identity within intercultural or transnational educational contexts.</p>	<p>We have added references to transnational, transcultural education at the beginning of the introduction, and highlighted this further in the findings.</p>

Language, identity, and internationalization: EMI faculty's meaning-making of multilingual and multicultural identities

Abstract

Purpose: This original research article explores how English-medium instructors in internationalized higher education settings navigate challenges and affordances regarding internationalization, student expectations, and research demands, and how these dynamics shape their multilingual and multicultural (MLMC) identities.

Design/methodology/approach: This phenomenological study explores the MLMC identities of 16 EMI faculty members at a Spanish university, using semi-structured interviews and a conceptual framework examining knowledge, skills, and abilities; values, beliefs and attitudes; awareness; behaviors; and emotions.

Findings: Findings reveal a positive orientation toward MLMC identity and EMI, minimal monolingual bias, and a strong acknowledgement of the need to adapt teaching methods, despite an emphasis on content delivery. Awareness of the negative impacts of 'Englishization' on linguistic diversity and equity is limited. The study positions EMI faculty as potential agents of change but calls for stronger institutional support.

Originality: Teacher identity has been extensively researched, yet much of the focus has remained on language teacher identity or on isolated aspects of EMI faculty identity, such as classroom practices and teaching beliefs, rather than adopting a more holistic perspective. This study offers in-depth insights from a single institution, with implications that are relevant for broader EMI contexts.

Keywords: English medium instruction; EMI; higher education; Spain; multilingual; multicultural; identity; faculty training; Englishization; internationalization

Introduction

'I'm not an English teacher, but an accountant that can teach in English.' – Maria

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3 The internationalization of higher education is characterized by strategic cooperation
4 among institutions (Gaebel and Zhang, 2024), the pursuit of income through international student
5 recruitment (OECD, 2023; Thondhlana, *et al.*, 2023), and the goal of creating global learning
6 environments for domestic students (Rumbley and Hoekstra-Selten, 2024; Sercu, 2022). These
7 forces have increased international faculty mobility (ETER [Project](#), 2019), promoted English-
8 medium instruction or EMI (Wingrove *et al.*, 2025), fostered international alliances (Marinoni
9 and Pina Cardona, 2024), and raised the prominence of research in global rankings (Boussebaa
10 [and Tienari](#), 2021), driving the contested trend of '[Englishisation](#)' [Englishization](#)' in higher
11 education (Wilkinson and Gabriëls, 2021). However, the benefits of Englishization are
12 counterbalanced by challenges related to quality assurance, cultural and linguistic identity, [the](#)
13 [European plurilingualism agenda](#) (Beacco, 2005), and equity for non-English speakers (Ben
14 Hammou and Kesbi, 2023; Sah and Karki, 2023), [particularly](#). [From a decolonial perspective, the](#)
15 [normalization of English as a neutral academic medium has heightened its role in reproducing](#)
16 [epistemic and linguistic inequalities within a context that arguably supports diverse voices](#)
17 [\(Canagarajah, 1999; Kubota, 2020; Pennycook, 2017\), making it necessary to examine its role in](#)
18 [intercultural education contexts.](#)

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40 Europe, where they conflict with the plurilingualism agenda (Beacco, 2005).

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42 ~~Previous~~ [Prior](#) research ~~shows that~~ [characterizes](#) EMI ~~professors as~~ [faculty as](#) multilingual
43 and multicultural (MLMC) professionals ~~whose~~ [operating in transnational educational spaces,](#)
44 [engaging in context-dependent translanguaging \(e.g., publishing and teaching in English,](#)
45 [socializing in Spanish\), international mobility, and culturally sensitive interaction. Consequently,](#)
46 [their English-mediated](#) identities, ~~shaped by their use of English,~~ [are dynamic and](#) require
47 [continual](#) [ongoing](#) negotiation __ as they balance roles as instructors and researchers within
48 complex educational systems (Kim and Tatar, 2017; Stojanović *et al.*, 2025). While studies have
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3 examined EMI teachers' classroom practices and professional development needs (Dafouz and
4 Smit, 2020; Lasagabaster and Doiz, 2021; Macaro and Rose, 2023; Stojanović and Robinson,
5 2021), less attention has been given to their MLMC identities, particularly regarding
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7 transcultural and translanguaging practices, emotions, sense of community, and career development
8 (Lee [Martin et al.](#), 2024). Given teachers' critical role as role models, facilitators, and agents of
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10 change (Karimi and Mofidi, 2019), this study addresses this gap by drawing on teacher identity
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12 theory and intercultural competence frameworks to explore how EMI instructors construct and
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14 navigate their MLMC identities, and how these intersect with institutional internationalization,
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16 teaching, and research. In doing so, it aims to generate insights that can inform inclusive
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18 pedagogical approaches and targeted faculty development in increasingly diverse academic
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20 contexts.
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29 **Conceptual Framework**

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32 Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) emphasize the importance of teacher identity as 'a lens through
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34 which to examine aspects of teaching' and a resource for meaning-making (p. 175). Teacher
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36 identity is enacted within specific 'ideological, practical, personal, institutional, emotional and
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38 sociocultural dimensions' (Nazari and Costa, [2022](#), p. 367), as teachers continuously
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40 (re)negotiate their identities through interactions with colleagues, policymakers, and students
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42 (Fenton-Smith and Gurney, 2022; [Lo, 2024](#); Widodo *et al.*, 2020), ~~taking on diverse roles such as~~
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44 ~~teacher, researcher, advisor, administrator, or coach.)~~ —an ongoing process that can intensify in
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46 EMI settings and lead to identity conflict (Corrales *et al.*, 2025).
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51 Varghese *et al.* (2005) highlight the importance of teacher identity in the sociocultural
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53 dynamics of the classroom, particularly for language teachers, who act as linguistic and cultural
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55 mediators, creating a safe 'third space' for intercultural interaction and identity exploration in the
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3 classroom (Kramsch and Zhang, 2018). Hopkins and Gkonou (2023), in their study in the United
4 Arab Emirates, support this view, noting that EMI instructors, like language teachers, strive to
5 create such a space. However, the relationship between language and EMI instructor identities
6 cannot be taken for granted, as existing research on teachers' practices and beliefs remains
7 inconclusive: for instance, some studies report prevailing monolingual orientations among
8 policymakers and professors (Eren, 2022; Han, 2023; Serna-Bermejo and Lasagabaster, 2022),
9 whereas others point to instructors' agency in making language choices (Phyak *et al.*, 2022;
10 Xiong *et al.*, 2023). Given the unique position of English as both an enabler and an obstacle in
11 international education (Canagarajah, 1999; Kubota, 2020; Pennycook, 2017), the role of
12 language in EMI instructor identity requires further investigation.

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Following Alvesson *et al.* (2008) and Baker (2021), identity is understood as a multiple, fluid construct shaped through relational practices within diverse power structures. This aligns with Kim's (2009) notion of 'intercultural identity' as a continuum from monocultural to increasingly inclusive orientations. In this study, EMI professionals, as multilingual individuals, are viewed as developing dynamic, multifaceted identities, shaped by their language proficiency, cultural background, and the social contexts in which they operate (Atobatele and Mouboua, 2024).

Terminology in intercultural studies varies. Here, 'plurilingualism'/'multilingualism' denote individual or community language repertoires (Council of Europe, 2018), and 'pluriculturalism'/'multiculturalism' refer to cultural resources at individual and group levels (Beacco *et al.*, 2016). 'Intercultural' highlights empathy, openness, and awareness of cultural difference (Arasaratnam and Doerfel, 2005), while 'translingual' and 'transcultural' practices embrace diversity and challenge native-speaker norms (García, 2009; Kramsch and Zhang,

2018), particularly relevant in internationalized higher education (Baker, 2021). As such, the professional context for EMI instructors is inherently multilingual, intercultural, and often transnational, with English being used as a medium of communication with students who have different mother tongues and come from different backgrounds.

Social identity as competency (Stone and Hart, 2019) can be framed through intercultural competence models: Byram (2020) emphasizes communicative and intercultural dimensions; Deardorff (2006) the process dynamics; Fantini (2020) attributes, proficiency, abilities, dimensions, and process; Dai and Feng (2024) attitudes, knowledge, skills, awareness, and outcomes. From Second Language Acquisition (SLA), the Douglas Fir Group (2016) situates language learning within nested micro (interaction), meso (institutions), and macro (sociopolitical) contexts, linking individual encounters to broader structures.

Given the importance ~~as well as the~~and complexity of EMI faculty roles in internationalized and Englishized higher education institutions, this study ~~explores~~explored how ~~English-medium Instruction (EMI)~~ faculty at a private university in Spain conceptualize and navigate their multilingual and multicultural (MLMC) identities, ~~following the models proposed above~~. The focal question guiding this study is: *How do EMI faculty make meaning of their MLMC identity and what professional, linguistic, and intercultural experiences inform identity development in these contexts?*

Materials and Methods

This was a phenomenological study conducted at an institution that has a strong strategic orientation toward internationalization. This is evidenced by its extensive English-taught provision and QS placement within the top 10% for international student mobility (as indicated on the university's website), yet, the institution has no publicly available institutional policy on

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3 language use or internationalization. This fact is supported by the words of one participant, who
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5 shared: “I think the Institution considers itself an international university because of the
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7 programs they have and because of the mix of students, foreign and local students, they have. I'm
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9 not sure it is lived internally,” posing a key question about how institutional culture shapes their
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11 identity.

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14 Sixteen faculty were ~~purposively~~purposely selected, meeting inclusion criteria ~~and~~
15 ~~providing oral informed consent.~~ Semi-structured interviews ~~of about 60 minutes~~ enabled
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17 participants to share lived experiences, balancing structured inquiry with open exploration.
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19 Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and anonymized ~~and pseudonyms were assigned~~, to
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21 ensure confidentiality. Data were analyzed using Saldaña’s (2021) coding methodology:
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23 descriptive coding captured key elements, followed by iterative refinement into a structured
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25 codebook, and conceptual coding to identify broader themes. Trustworthiness was enhanced
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27 through member checks and reflexivity, acknowledging potential researcher bias, and by
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29 presenting participants’ quotes verbatim, including non-standard language, to authentically
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31 reflect their perspectives.

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34 ~~This rigorous approach revealed how EMI faculty construct and negotiate their MLMC~~
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36 ~~identities within a dynamic educational landscape, enriching understanding of identity formation~~
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38 ~~in multilingual EMI settings and informing policy, faculty development, and institutional~~
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40 ~~support.~~

41 42 43 44 45 46 47 **Findings**

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50 Our findings suggest that EMI faculty operate as intercultural mediators, navigating competing
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52 norms and expectations across institutional and transcultural academic spaces. Participants’
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54 backgrounds—shaped by time abroad, experience in English-speaking contexts, and professional
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3 use of English—strongly influenced how they shaped their perceived and negotiated their MLMC
4 identities. These profiles, ordered by self-assessed English proficiency on the Common European
5 Framework of Reference (CEFR) scale ([https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-](https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/level-descriptions)
6 [framework-reference-languages/level-descriptions](https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/level-descriptions)[https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-](https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/level-descriptions)
7 [european-framework-reference-languages/level-descriptions](https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/level-descriptions)), are summarized in Table I,
8 followed by the description of prominent themes identified through data analysis. Each theme
9 captures an element of the faculty's MLMC identity, which is discussed more broadly in the
10 Discussion section.

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22 **[Table I. Participant Profiles]**

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25 ***Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs)***

26 KSAs—knowledge, skills, and abilities—help explain how EMI faculty perceive their roles, the
27 crux of their identity in relation to linguistic vs. subject-matter expertise. Originating in Schultz's
28 (1961) human capital theory to describe qualities that enhance productivity and growth, the
29 concept remains central in HRD human resource development and organizational psychology for
30 job analysis, training, and performance assessment (Campion *et al.*, 2011).
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39 In this study, faculty generally rooted their authority in subject knowledge and expertise
40 rather than language knowledge and proficiency. As Emilia noted, English offered functional
41 clarity, highlighting language as a medium while content knowledge sustained authority: 'It's
42 very cultural, but the thing in fact is much better because English is more synthetic.' This
43 signaled to the opinion that the use of EMI even helps focus on the content being taught because
44 of the concise nature of English as a language.
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53 Sara articulated a dual sense of identity related to language KSAs, stating, 'I think I'm
54 both, actually. Um, obviously I'm not a native speaker in all the languages that I think that I have
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3 a high level.’ This reflects a common sentiment among EMI faculty, who often viewed
4 themselves as fully proficient professionals in multiple languages, demonstrating their self-
5 assurance in delivering high-quality EMI instruction.
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10 The use of translingual and transcultural skills and abilities, both in the workplace and in
11 private life, characterized the experience of several faculty. José mentioned his use of English
12 not only in professional settings but also in family life, which showcases how language use can
13 seamlessly bridge personal and professional realms. He shared, ‘Spanish is my first language, but
14 I consider English to be also... I’m not native speaker, but I’ve obviously used English for a very
15 long time, also, like familywise, with my wife, we speak in English as well.’ Carmen similarly
16 navigates between Catalan, Spanish, and English, creating an inclusive, multicultural
17 environment. She noted, ‘Catalan in fact, this is my mother tongue. Spanish and Catalan. Both of
18 them are my mother tongues and then English and a little bit of French,’ suggesting a flexible
19 identity that allows her to bring diverse linguistic resources into her teaching.
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34 Finally, Laura reflected on her cultural understanding through English, saying, ‘to some
35 extent I feel I understand better other ... or English culture as a result of using English.’ This
36 understanding deepened the idea of her MLMC identity being shaped by using EMI, making the
37 EMI classroom a shared space where culture and language intersect to enrich teaching and
38 learning experiences.
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45 46 *Awareness*

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48 The awareness, or explicit recognition, of linguistic and cultural elements significantly shaped
49 the MLMC identities of EMI faculty, influencing reflecting on classroom dynamics, student
50 engagement, and the bridging of cultural divides. Language Awareness of language
51 characteristics and resulting impact on communication played a key role in how faculty adapted
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3 their teaching and communication strategies. For example, Juan noted, ‘when I speak in Spanish,
4 I feel... I communicate a lot through body language,’ but in English, he felt he was ‘missing
5 some part of that communication,’ highlighting how language affects expressiveness and
6 connection with students. This recognition of linguistic limitations often prompted faculty to use
7 alternative methods, like enhanced body language, to bridge gaps.
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11 Further, faculty’s awareness of the dominant role of English as the language of research
12 and academia subtly shapes their professional identities. Matilde discussed her comfort with and
13 awareness of her English and French knowledge, despite not being a native speaker. She
14 reflected, ‘I know that I’m not as fluent as mother tongue in English, but yes... I can perfectly run
15 a conversation or a professional negotiation in English or French.’ This awareness empowers
16 EMI faculty to access global research, engage in professional dialogues, and contribute
17 meaningfully to their fields.
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21 Cultural awareness is especially crucial in international classrooms. Manuel shared an
22 example of a U.S. student’s critical reaction to Spain’s legal stance ~~on polygamy, recalling a~~
23 ~~student commenting ‘Why is this? It’s horrible... why you should [sic. wouldn’t you] prosecute~~
24 ~~that?’ against polygamy.~~ Manuel used this as a teaching moment, showing how cultural
25 differences can enrich classroom discussions. His approach exemplifies how faculty can use
26 cultural awareness to foster a safe, respectful space for diverse perspectives, enabling students to
27 understand various viewpoints without judgment.
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31 In another example, José emphasized that language alone cannot convey cultural
32 nuances. He told his students, ‘Living abroad is very important... it’s not just about languages,
33 it’s about having an experience elsewhere as well.’ His viewpoint underscores the idea that
34 cultural awareness extends beyond language proficiency to include immersion and socialization
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3 in diverse environments. ~~Faculty like José encourage students to seek international experiences,~~
4 ~~fostering a deeper appreciation of cultural diversity and a broader worldview., promoting the~~
5 ~~value of transnational education.~~ Francisco echoed this, encouraging his children to live abroad
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8 and ‘try to understand the values, the culture, the habits, the procedures’ of other people. This
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10 perspective highlights how EMI faculty often bring a global outlook to their teaching,
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13 ~~encouraging students to embrace multicultural understanding and respect for~~
14 ~~differencesthemselves creating an international environment in their classrooms.~~
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21 *Emotions*

22 Faculty members expressed a range of emotions about teaching in EMI environments, reflecting
23
24 both the challenges and rewards. While some felt an increased sense of pride and confidence,
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26 others faced feelings of discomfort or frustration. Laura, for instance, described her journey of
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28 overcoming self-doubt: ‘I thought I was never being able to do it because I’m not bilingual...
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30 finally, I did it and it makes me feel really proud.’ Her experience highlights a common sense of
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32 accomplishment among EMI faculty who view their English proficiency as an achievement,
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34 contributing positively to their self-esteem and professional growth.
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39 Others voiced comfort in navigating multicultural environments, which they felt aligned
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41 with their personal and professional lives. Pilar shared, ‘I feel comfortable because it also
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43 matches the life experience or professional experience that I’ve had,’ underscoring that EMI
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45 teaching aligns with her broader career identity and experiences. Similarly, Manuel expressed
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47 ease in multicultural interactions, even if he identified as predominantly Spanish: ‘I’ve been so
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49 comfortable with people from other places, with different culture, religion, way of thinking.’
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53 Despite some frustrations, including feelings of inadequacy or limitations in fully
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55 expressing their personalities, EMI teaching often inspires a broader sense of open-mindedness.
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3 Laura acknowledged that teaching in English encouraged her to expand her perspectives, saying
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5 it made her ‘more open-minded... in general in cultural terms.’ This combination of emotions—
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7 from pride and confidence to frustration and openness—illustrates how EMI teaching is both a
8
9 challenge and a path for growth for many educators.
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12 13 14 *Values, Beliefs, and Attitudes*

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16 Frameworks of culture consistently link values, beliefs, and attitudes as interdependent elements
17
18 that shape shared meaning systems and inform behaviors (Rings and Rasinger, 2023). Our
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20 findings reveal a wide range of beliefs and attitudes, reflecting underlying evaluative orientations
21
22 and assumptions, among faculty, centered on their self-concept as MLMC individuals and the
23
24 perceived value of their English proficiency in teaching, research, and social contexts. When
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26 asked if they identified as MLMC individuals, several participants expressed strong agreement
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28 (e.g., Pilar, Clara, Marina, José). In contrast, others demonstrated humilitya stance of self-
29
30 effacement regarding their linguistic and cultural skills. Emilia described herself as an MLMC
31
32 ‘amateur’, and Isabel, despite self-reporting a C2 level in English and 3 additional languages,
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34 described herself as only ‘probably’ multilingual.
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39 The participants also noted differing beliefs about the role of English in personal and
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41 professional identity. For example, Pilar stated, ‘I consider [English] part of my expression and
42
43 being a professional,’ while Teresa admitted that teaching in English makes her feel ‘not as good
44
45 a professional as [she] should be.’ These self-perceptions are closely linked to participants’
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47 MLMC experiences in formal education, as well as study and work abroad (see Table 1), while
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49 English proficiency level appears to be less influential.
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53 Concerning language ideology, English dominance was accepted unconditionally by most
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55 participants- as a neutral reality. As Francisco indicated:
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3 I think nowadays [it] is not only mandatory, but is a good example of..., to improve your
4 professional career at the INSTITUTION, absolutely. If you, if you want to have a good, not
5 only performance, but a good career, professional career in the INSTITUTION, you have to
6 teach, to be able to teach in English and to investigate, to research also in English, and to
7 write in English, to write your paper to publish in a journal of course.
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12 Few participants reflected on the relative importancevalue of English compared to
13 Spanish and other languages they speak. Emilia reported shifting her language of publication
14 from Catalan and Spanish to English. Manuel, despite his bilingual upbringing in Valencian and
15 Spanish, does not consider himself MLMC unless he uses English. Only José reflected critically
16 that ‘sometimes there’s too much emphasis on English and too little on sort of perfection in the
17 other language as well.’
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26 In this sense, there is a clear utilitarian attitude towards English as a commodity enabling
27 career development, research impact, international networking for professors and opening doors
28 for students in the context of future employment. As José mentions This attitude is likely shaped
29 by the fact that most participants speak Spanish as their first language, which Emilija confidently
30 shared is “an advantage” because it is another major world language. Further, José mentioned:
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39 We see languages as a massive asset in the sense for the future as well. ... languages are
40 gonna open a lot of doors for those students, and you know I do internship coordination, and
41 a lot of the companies tell us that one of the things that they value the most about our
42 students is their language skills.
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47 Participants In the absence of a publicly available language policy, participants believe
48 that the Institution expects English proficiency to enhance the university's international
49 reputation and meet the needs of an increasingly MLMC student body. Francisco described this
50 expectation as ‘mandatory,’ José as ‘a plus,’ and Marina as ‘essential.’ Despite this pressure,
51 participants maintain a positive attitude toward English, seeing it as beneficial not only for their
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3 careers but also for fostering open-mindedness as part of the MLMC identity. As Laura noted, it
4 encourages cultural openness, while Manuel added that it prompts greater international
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6 engagement, such as research stays and travel.
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10 11 12 13 **Behaviors**

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15 The findings revealed several distinct behaviors among EMI faculty ~~members~~ as they navigated
16 the MLMC landscape of their classrooms. Faculty frequently adjusted their communication
17 styles by speaking more slowly and clearly, using body language, and incorporating visual aids
18 to bridge language gaps. Javier explained: ‘I try, not always successfully, to speak much more
19 slowly than I would normally do... not to speak as if my audience were native speakers.’ To
20 further enhance clarity, faculty often avoided using idiomatic expressions and wordplay,
21 acknowledging the inherent challenges for non-native speakers. Javier mentioned, ‘I’ve stopped
22 doing that... it serves no purpose other than boosting my own ego,’ highlighting an intentional
23 move toward more accessible communication. Some faculty also reported cognitive shifts when
24 teaching in English, with Juan reflecting, ‘Because I’m not speaking my native language, usually
25 I have to use a ... logical brain,’ which can result in less spontaneity and humor compared to his
26 native Spanish classes.
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43 José and Manuel noted that their Spanish and English classes are largely similar, though
44 Manuel explained that teaching international students sometimes requires extra context, such as
45 briefly clarifying concepts like ~~an~~ EU ~~directive~~ directives. Likewise, Francisco incorporated
46 Spanish cultural references through familiar brands, allowing students to engage with the culture
47 they were experiencing and enriching the educational exchange.
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3 Institutional actions supported inclusivity, fostering ana MLMC environment responsive
4 to students' cultural needs. For example, Carmen described how a student was given space to
5 pray during Ramadan after faculty raised the issue, illustrating efforts to create a culturally
6 inclusive atmosphere.
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12 Discussion

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16 ~~Our~~The study addresses a gap in the literature by ~~highlighting the distinction between~~
17 ~~the providing an in-depth exploration of EMI faculty's~~ professional identities ~~of~~, with reference
18 ~~to their differentiation from~~ language ~~teacher identities in existing scholarship.~~ ~~teachers and EMI~~
19 ~~faculty.~~ While ~~both professions act as linguistic and cultural mediators,~~ the study also
20 ~~underscores the significant differences between these roles.~~ ~~The~~ literature (Kunschak and
21 Strotmann, 2023; Serna-Bermejo and Lasagabaster, 2022) ~~indicates~~ indicated a strong
22 monolingual bias among EMI faculty, ~~which~~ this was not observed in the attitudes or behaviors
23 of the study's participants. In fact, our findings show positive regard toward EMI as a way of
24 increasing interculturalism in transnational educational contexts and a neutral attitude toward
25 English dominance in academia. Additionally, while professional marginalization often compels
26 language teachers to reflect on their roles and fosters a mission as intercultural and interlinguistic
27 mediators (Kramsch and Zhang, 2018), EMI faculty, by contrast, do not perceive themselves as
28 part of a marginalized community (cf. Stojanović *et al.*, 2025). Instead, they exhibit a strong
29 sense of achievement and professional recognition based on additional language skills (Hopkins
30 and Gkonou, 2023; Xiong *et al.*, 2023).
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51 Our analysis ~~of KSAs reveals that authority primarily derives from subject-matter rather~~
52 ~~than language expertise.~~ Confidence revealed overall confidence in translingual and transcultural
53 interactions is linked to a fluid MLMC identity and the ability to create a safe 'third space' in the
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3 classroom (Kramsch and Zhang, 2018; [Rey-Paba et al., 2024](#)). While challenges identified in the
4 literature—such as increased preparation time, unmet training needs, and insufficient
5 incentives—are acknowledged, they are offset by the benefits of EMI, including enhanced
6 recognition, access, and self-efficacy.
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12 ~~Hellekjær (2017) highlights challenges in vocabulary and note-taking for EMI students.~~

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14 Faculty participating in this study show ongoing awareness of EMI's impact on language,
15 teaching, and interaction, adapting communication to student needs. However, focus remains on
16 teacher input rather than fostering rich student output, as noted by An *et al.* (2021). Consistent
17 with Hillman *et al.* (2023), institutional and cultural tensions in EMI evoke emotions ranging
18 from discomfort and frustration to a sense of achievement, pride and confidence.
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21 All participants valued English proficiency for career, teaching, and research, though
22 some identified as MLMC individuals while others viewed their competence as inadequate.
23 Unlike negative societal attitudes reported elsewhere (Schiffman, 1996; Stojanović, 2021), all
24 valued ~~an~~ MLMC identity, perhaps reflecting the more positive European context of this study,
25 ~~where multilingualism is promoted and considered common, rather than an exception. Further,~~
26 ~~the overwhelming positive regard toward English may be unique based on the participants'~~
27 ~~background, as most also speak Spanish—another high-status world language—making them~~
28 ~~multilingual with dominant-language capital (Bourdieu, 1977).~~
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31 With one exception, participants uncritically accepted the global dominance of English as
32 a lingua franca, viewing it as a commodity facilitating success for both students and faculty.
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35 While ~~decolonization~~ decolonial and critical ~~approaches have critiqued additional language and~~
36 ~~scholarship shows that~~ English-medium and additional-language teaching ~~for perpetuating can~~
37 ~~reproduce~~ Western privilege (~~Tajik et al., 2023; Widodo et al., 2020~~), native-speakerism
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(Widodo *et al.*, 2020), and marginalization—especially in Global South contexts (Brown and Laihonen, 2022; Kramsch and Zhang, 2018; Tajik *et al.*, 2023; Widodo *et al.*, 2020)—these issues was noted among concerns did not emerge in our participants' accounts, who instead framed English in largely pragmatic, utilitarian terms, in line with Aguilar-Pérez and Arnó-Macià's (2024) findings. This absence is analytically significant, pointing to the normalization and depoliticization of English in European EMI contexts, where EMI correlates with university autonomy and neoliberal governance structures (Wingrove *et al.*, 2024). This, in turn, highlights the need for professional development that foregrounds critical and decolonial perspectives on English in higher education, especially in internationalized context where students may not share the same attitudes toward language. participants in this study.

Implications

This qualitative study explored EMI faculty's MLMC identity in depth, offering rich insights as a socially-constructed phenomenon within the context of international education.

Conducted at a single institution with sixteen participants, the findings are not generalizable but reveal the uniqueness of the selected context and can be transferred to similar contexts/settings.

Further quantitative studies involving larger, more diverse samples from private and public institutions in Spain and other locations could offer an additional dimension to this research topic.

The findings have several implications. In terms of theory, this paper offers a framework that supports the notion of complex, fluid, dynamic professional identities in EMI contexts, reinforcing the relevance of understanding MLMC identity. We conceptualize MLMC identity as the self's integration within diverse cultural and linguistic communities, with the capacity to mediate between them (Figure 1).

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3 [Figure 1. **Multicultural multilingual MLMC** identity framework. Source: Authors' own
4 work.]
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8 The MLMC self exists at the intersection of cultural and linguistic spheres shaped by
9 macrocontexts (historical, political, educational), mesocontexts (local and regional
10 communities), and microcontexts (everyday interactions). Within these layers, languages and
11 cultures intersect, and a competent MLMC individual demonstrates critical reflection, emotional
12 regulation, and effective interaction across intercultural and interlinguistic settings.
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20 Regarding practice, there is a need for forums that foster exchange, reflection, and
21 dialogue among EMI faculty, who—by leveraging their MLMC competence—can act as agents
22 of change (cf. Collins *et al.*, 2016). ~~This potential merits further exploration across individual,~~
23 ~~institutional, and policy levels.;~~ Rey-Paba *et al.*, 2024). From the economic perspective, this
24 study suggests that MLMC identity supports employability, especially in international and
25 intercultural contexts. Ultimately, if universities aim to prepare students for diverse societies,
26 they must prioritize MLMC competence, with EMI faculty serving as key role models within and
27 beyond the classroom.
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38 ~~Gaps in understanding persist, yet key implications remain. Institutions~~ To that effect,
39 institutions should prioritize professional development on MLMC awareness, intercultural
40 communication, and pedagogical adaptation for EMI. Extending this to faculty, administrators,
41 and students fosters a culture that values MLMC identities and strengthens both teaching and
42 learning in EMI contexts. Formalizing an institutional language and/or internationalization
43 policy would strengthen guidance and transparency, while enabling alignment with Spain's
44 plurilingual language framework and the European Union's multilingualism policy.
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Future research could further explore MLMC identity by studying the longitudinal impact of EMI faculty's evolving MLMC identities on their pedagogical strategies and professional development. This could include investigating [the impact of institutional culture on EMI faculty identity](#), or how sustained engagement with EMI influences faculty confidence, teaching methodologies, and career trajectories, as well as how organizations can help in supporting MLMC faculty's identity development. Lastly, because this study focused on the Spanish context, future research in other geographical areas would provide additional information that could help understand the MLMC identity formation of EMI faculty globally.

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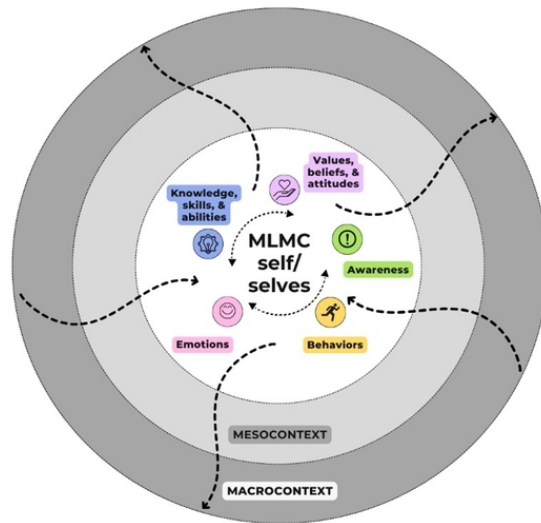


Figure 1. Multicultural multilingual identity framework. Source: Authors' own work.

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Table I. Participant Profiles

Pseudo-nym	English level	ML/MC identity	Time abroad	Time in EN-speaking country	Language of formal education*	Work experience in EN pre/outside university
Francisco	B2-C1	no	0 years	0 years	ES	n/a
Laura	C1	no	a few months	0 years	ES 80%, EN 20%	no
Teresa	B2-C1	no	a few months	a few months in the summer	ES (but PhD in EN)	no
Emilia	B2-C1	Yes/"amateur"	3 months	3 months	ES and CAT	no
Maria	C1	MC: 8/10**; ML: 6/10	several short stays (1 month or less)	several short stays (1 month or less)	ES	yes (short but frequent)
Carmen	C1	yes (7 on a scale of 10)	0 years	0 years	ES	yes (4 years international environment but in Spain)
Manuel	C1	ML: yes; MC: no	several short stays (3 months or less)	several short stays, 6 months Erasmus	ES	yes (but inside university sector)
Javier	C1-C2	ML: yes; MC: kind of	5 years UK, 8 years US	13 years	ES, EN	yes (UK, US)
José	C1	"cosmopolitan"	16 years (ages 16-32)	11-12 years	EN	yes (Brussels, EN & FR)
Pilar	C1	"a very definite yes"	2-3 years	1 year	mostly ES, some DE and EN	yes (US companies in Spain)
Isabel	C2	yes (10 on a scale of 10)	10 years		ROM, EN	yes (10 years, Madrid, Brussels, Tokyo, London)
Clara	C1-C2	yes	over 8 years	6 years	ES (EN for Master/PhD)	yes (work & study UK, US & Italy)
Juan	C1-C2	yes	several stays of 6 months and above	several stays, one of 3 years for PhD	ES (school, undergrad), EN (MBA, PhD)	yes (Brazil, Mexico)
Sara	C1-C2	yes	various years	over 10 years	DE (school), ES, EN	yes (UK & elsewhere)
Marina	C2	yes	2 years in UK, several stays of up to 2 months		ES, EN	yes (1 year London)
Matilde	C1	yes	several summers, weekly work stays	several summers, weekly work stays	ES	yes (short business trips)

*Note 1: CAT=Catalan; DE=German; ES=Spanish; EN=English; FR=French; ROM=Romanian

**Note 2: When asked whether they would identify as multilingual/multicultural, some participants chose to express that by providing a rating; however, no scale was offered to the participants during the interview process