Chapter 9
From EMI to ICLHE: Teacher Development for L2-Medium Instruction in a Teacher Education Institution

Cristina Escobar Urmeneta
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4894-6260
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain

ABSTRACT

Sensitive to the demands expressed by society concerning the need to boost foreign language competences in schools, The Faculty of Education of a university based in Catalonia, Spain, set up an English-Medium Teacher Education Bachelor’s Degree (EMI-TED) based on the “Internationalisation at Home” model formulated by Nilsson. Basing itself on ethnographic and documentary data collected in the course of years 1 to 4 of the pilot project, this chapter reports on the process followed by the team of EMI instructors in their attempts to plan and deliver their subjects while remaining responsive to the unique challenges posed by the use of an additional language as the vehicle for learning. More specifically, it reports on their attempts to collaboratively design a planning tool that would help them to organise their teaching and cater for the simultaneous development of both the students’ professional competences and their language and discourse competences in English. The chapter ends with a set of recommendations for L2-medium teachers and teacher educators.

INTRODUCTION

Teacher education is necessarily influenced by issues related to the social, cultural and political dimensions that delineate the profile of the primary teachers required in each country. Primary schooling is expected to contribute to the development of primary students’ sense of cultural identity as well as to the cultivation of their enjoyment of a shared language and culture. However, the extraordinarily varied composition of current Western societies, the relocation of families in search of better living conditions, the interconnection between countries and cultures, communication technologies, and internationalised
science and economy also demand an education with a global perspective that teaches learners to understand the multiple links between their own lives and those of people around the world (Hicks, 2008). As a result, schooling in the 21st century takes place in a globalisation context that forces a reconsideration of the enculturation paradigm and gives rise to the question of how to overcome the apparent contradiction between the need to re-assert (and re-define) local identities while at the same time developing emerging transcultural identities.

Catalonia, Spain, is an interesting case in this respect as it faces tensions due to its political determination to preserve its distinctive language and culture, whilst it also takes an active part in the symbolic and economic construction of Europe, which includes its role as a region which attracts migrant populations in search of opportunities. In the domain of languages and language learning, this involves the coexistence of language policies with (apparently) opposing goals. Thus, in 1983 the Autonomous Government embarked on a language policy inspired by Canadian immersion programmes which has been the basis for the consolidation of a unique network of schools, from the linguistic point of view, which adopted Catalan, the minority language, as their default working language. On the other hand, since the 1990s, aware of the limited outcomes of traditional foreign language teaching, Catalan primary schools have been making efforts to promote and consolidate Content and Language Integrated Learning (henceforth, CLIL) programmes, in which English is used as a working language in some blocks of content or projects. This approach is strongly supported by the Catalan administration.

The triple challenge of welcoming, integrating and providing students from different origins cultural tools that will help them face a complex and changing reality requires primary teachers to be solidly qualified to help their students be in control of their lives, taking their immediate social context as the starting point and transcending it to encompass the whole world. Communicative competence in different languages, and more specifically in English, is one of the different factors constitutive of the required profile.

Sensitive to the demands expressed by society concerning the need to boost foreign language competences in Catalan schools, in 2012 the Faculty of Education of a university based in Catalonia, Spain, carried out a needs analysis on the basis of which it was concluded that (a) Catalan schools required a force of primary teachers who would not necessarily become English teachers, but who could take part in and promote national and international educational programmes where English was bound to become the default communication tool; and (b) English Medium Instruction (EMI) was a suitable strategy to boost the language competencies of the student-teachers, very particularly if an integrated approach to academic content and language was to be adopted.

On the basis of this analysis, the Faculty of Education in question set up an English-medium track of its Teacher Education Bachelor’s Degree (henceforth EMI-TED) based on Nilsson’s (2003) “Internationalisation at home” model. In this track, it was decided that the vehicular language of approximately between 65% and 80% of the credits would be English.

Taking as its starting point anecdotal records and documentary data, this chapter aims to report on the collective attempt of a team of instructors, with no previous pedagogical training in L2-medium instruction to recognise and respond to the needs their students experienced when confronted with the extra-ordinary challenges which would be a consequence of the language-switch. It is relevant to say that however inexperienced the instructors might be, they were experts in different fields related to the world of education and experienced teacher-educators themselves. In other words, this chapter reports not so much on the methodology adopted by this EMI teacher-training course, as on the process of teacher-development experienced by a number of pedagogues working together who were able to evolve
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