The Influence of emi on Teacher Identity in a Colombian University

Influencia del inglés como medio de instrucción en la identidad de los docentes de una universidad en Colombia

L'influence de l'anglais comme moyen d'instruction sur l'identité des enseignants dans une université colombienne

A influência do inglês como meio de instrução na identidade dos docentes em uma universidade colombiana

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Abstract

English medium instruction (EMI) is a growing initiative in Latin American higher education that requires instructors to adopt various roles. To understand this aspect better, this qualitative study explored how teaching EMI classes affected the identity of a group of Colombian university instructors. Data gathered from semi-structured interviews and observations revealed that when teaching EMI, instructors experienced a conflict among their professional, personal, and institutional identities, causing them to renegotiate their teaching self. The interplay of factors such as their perception as content experts, the need to provide language support, their pedagogical competence, their personal interest and proficiency in English, and their willingness to teach EMI played a role in this conflict. These results highlight the need for instructors and institutions to face a possible identity reconfiguration to implement EMI successfully. This article contributes to the theoretical and empirical understanding of teacher identity in EMI in Latin America.

Keywords: English medium instruction (EMI), teacher identity, identity conflict, identity renegotiation, Latin America

Resumen

El uso del inglés como medio de instrucción (EMI) es una iniciativa en aumento en la educación superior de América Latina, la cual requiere que los profesores adopten diversos roles. Para entender mejor este aspecto, el presente estudio cualitativo exploró el impacto de la instrucción de clases en inglés como medio de instrucción en la identidad de un grupo de profesores universitarios en Colombia. Los datos recogidos de entrevistas semiestructuradas y observaciones de campo revelaron que al impartir sus cursos en inglés los docentes experimentaron un conflicto de identidad en los aspectos profesional, personal e institucional, lo que los llevó a renegociar su "yo" docente. La interacción de factores como su percepción como expertos disciplinares, la necesidad de brindar apoyo lingüístico, su competencia

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pedagógica, sus intereses personales y su dominio del inglés más su disposición a impartir sus cursos en inglés tuvieron mucha incidencia en ese conflicto. Los resultados ponen de relieve la necesidad de que profesores e instituciones hagan frente a una posible reconfiguración de la identidad para lograr implementar el sistema EMI con éxito. Este artículo contribuye a la comprensión teórica y empírica de la identidad docente en EMI en América Latina.

Palabras claves: inglés como medio de instrucción (EMI), identidad docente, conflicto de identidad, renegociación de la identidad, América Latina

Résumé

L'anglais comme moyen d'instruction (AMI) est une initiative prenant de l'ampleur dans l'enseignement supérieur latino-américain qui oblige les professeurs à adopter divers rôles. Pour mieux comprendre cet aspect, cette étude qualitative a exploré comment l'enseignement des cours AMI a affecté l'identité d'un groupe de professeurs colombiens d'université. Les données recueillies à partir d'entretiens et d'observations semi-structurés ont révélé que lorsqu'ils enseignaient l'AMI, les professeurs étaient confrontés à un conflit entre leurs identités professionnelle, personnelle et institutionnelle, les amenant à renégocier leur moi-enseignant. L'interaction de facteurs tels que leur perception d'experts en contenu, la nécessité de fournir un soutien dans la langue étrangère, leur compétence pédagogique, leur intérêts personnels, leur maîtrise de l'anglais et leur volonté d'enseigner l'AMI ont joué un rôle dans ce conflit. Ces résultats mettent en évidence la nécessité pour les professeurs et les institutions de faire face à une éventuelle reconfiguration de l'identité pour mettre en œuvre avec succès le processus de l'AMI. Cet article contribue à la compréhension théorique et empirique de l'identité des enseignants dans l'AMI en Amérique latine.

Mots clés : anglais comme moyen d'instruction (AMI), l'identité de l'enseignant, conflit identitaire, renégociation de l'identité, Amérique Latine

Resumo

O inglês como meio de instrução (EMI) é uma iniciativa crescente no ensino superior latino-americano que exige que os instrutores adotem várias funções. Para entender melhor esse aspecto, este estudo qualitativo explorou como o ensino de aulas com EMI afetou a identidade de um grupo de instrutores universitários colombianos. Os dados coletados por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas e observações revelaram que, ao lecionar no EMI, os instrutores vivenciaram um conflito entre suas identidades profissional, pessoal e institucional, o que os levou a renegociar sua identidade docente. A interação de fatores como a percepção deles como especialistas em conteúdo, a necessidade de oferecer suporte na língua estrangeira, a competência pedagógica, os interesses pessoais, a proficiência em inglês e a vontade de ensinar EMI tiveram um papel importante nesse conflito. Esses resultados destacam a necessidade de instrutores e instituições enfrentarem uma possível reconfiguração de identidade para implementar o EMI com sucesso. Este artigo contribui para a compreensão teórica e empírica da identidade do professor no EMI na América Latina.

Palavras chave: inglês como meio de instrução (EMI), identidade do docente, conflito identitário, renegociação da identidade, América Latina

Introduction

In Latin American universities, English medium instruction (EMI) is a growing initiative that aims to prepare graduates for the complexities of the interconnected world using English as a *lingua franca*. The literature on this topic has identified benefits of its implementation, including strengthening internationalization processes, raising institutional visibility, supporting English language development, and fostering intercultural competence and global citizenship (Galloway et al., 2017; Macaro et al., 2018). Despite these benefits, studies have also identified challenges, especially related to instructors as they are at the forefront of implementing EMI (Kling et al., 2022; Trent, 2017). For instance, EMI has often been implemented in a top-down fashion, which, at times, ignores the voice of instructors and neglects the needs of participants, i.e., teacher professional development and student support (Nieto Moreno de Diezmas & Fernández Barrera, 2021).

Another challenge has to do with the new roles expected from EMI instructors. These roles include assuming various identities such as being experts in their discipline, proficient users of English, and accomplished educators (Pappa & Moate, 2021). Furthermore, instructors should be familiar with students' culture and language (Inbar-Lourie & Donitsa-Schmidt, 2020). For those who are non-native English speakers (NNES) and who work in regions where this language is not commonly used as the language of instruction, adopting this triple role can be daunting and emotionally complex, and can profoundly affect their identity (Yuan, 2021).

Understanding teacher identity (TI) has become an essential topic in educational research (Jupp & Lensmire, 2016; Lopes & Pereira, 2012) as according to Karousiou et al. (2019), studies show its influence on classroom practices. Furthermore, TI plays a key role in teacher interpretation of educational policies in higher education such as EMI (Lin, 2023). When policies are imposed, instructors tend to resist them since they feel their identity is affected and that contextual and individual differences are ignored (Pappa & Moate, 2021). Additionally, studying identity provides valuable insight into the quality of classroom practice (Richards, 2021), their attitudes towards teaching, and their professional development. For this reason, TI has become an important topic in current EMI research.

Much of the research on EMI has been carried out in Europe and Asia, which have a more established trajectory of teaching content in English (Guo et al., 2022; Macaro et al., 2018). However, researchers in Latin America have also joined the EMI bandwagon, and research in this area has gradually emerged (Aliaga-Salas & Pérez-Andrade, 2023; Dafouz & Smit, 2020). Most EMI studies in Latin America focus on topics such as faculty and student perceptions on the implementation of EMI (Corrales et al., 2016; Tejada-Sanchez & Molina-Naar, 2020), teacher education (Escalona Sibaja, 2020; Gimenez & Marson, 2022), and the adoption of a bilingual approach to teaching in English-medium settings (Archila & Truscott de Mejía, 2020; Archila et al., 2022).

Several reasons prompted the focus of this study on the effect of EMI implementation on teacher identity. First, at the time of the literature review for this article, we found few studies carried out in Latin America on this topic, and only one in Colombia (see Molina-Naar & Tejada-Sánchez, 2025). Second, this is a critical aspect that can affect disciplinary teaching and learning in higher education (Karousiou et al., 2019), especially since EMI is relatively new in Latin America (Macaro et al., 2018). Therefore, this paper endeavors to fill this gap by exploring the influence of the implementation of EMI on the identity of a group of faculty members at a Colombian university.

Literature Review

To understand the connection between teacher identity and EMI, it is necessary to review the existing literature on these topics. Therefore, this

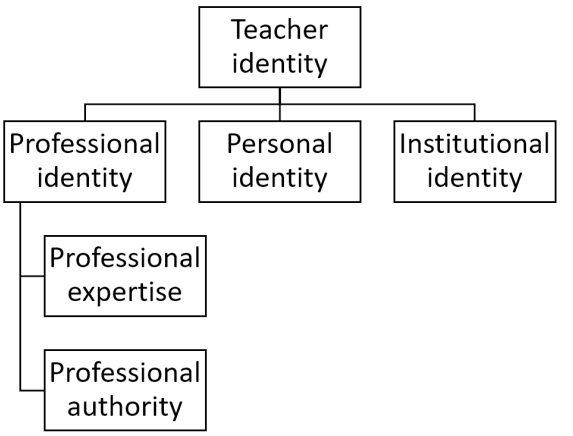
section will first discuss teacher identity, then move to EMI, and finally focus on studies that explore teacher identity and EMI together.

Teacher Identity

Because of its multifaceted nature, teacher identity has been defined in various disciplines, including philosophy, psychology, sociology, and education (Davey, 2013; Rodrigues & Mogarro, 2019). One prevalent feature is that it is not a static concept but rather a changing one in response to the experience gained along the course of teachers' personal and professional lives (Cordingley et al., 2019; Hanna et al., 2019; Karousiou et al., 2019). Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that teacher identity is affected by individual, social, and cultural characteristics, in that it involves interpreting and reinterpreting experiences (Davey, 2013). Furthermore, Richards (2021) suggests that it is embedded in the nature of teaching itself. Thus, it can be said that teacher identity results from the interaction of the contexts where the teaching takes place with the personal, social, and cultural dimensions of the teacher. This means that it is in constant transformation and renegotiation during a teacher's professional life.

To conceptualize teacher identity, it is important to understand its links with aspects such as agency, beliefs, as well as personal characteristics such as race, class, and gender (Day et al., 2005; Galman, 2009; Zembylas & Chubbuck, 2018). Agency is a fundamental element as it deals with the direction teachers intentionally give to their professional development to meet their proposed goals—self-realization (Zembylas & Chubbuck, 2018)—and the role they expect to attain among their peers (community acknowledgement). Van Lier (2010, as cited in Volchenkova & Bryan, 2019) notes that agency encompasses initiative, intentionality, control, self-regulation, and self-efficacy. The interplay of these aspects together contributes to collectively shaping teacher identity. As can be seen, identity is based on the necessity of self-realization, and it focuses on the need to be acknowledged by a community of peers (Volchenkova & Bryan, 2019).

Figure 1 Model of Teacher Identity



Note: Adapted from Kling (2013).

This paper adopts the model proposed by Kling (2013) that describes teacher identity as a construct consisting of three components: professional, personal, and institutional identity (see Figure 1). According to Kling, professional identity encompasses professional expertise and professional authority. Professional expertise relates to the level of disciplinary knowledge teachers have, while professional authority refers to how peers and students see the teacher in terms of their knowledge and status. Personal identity addresses the individual characteristics of the teacher and how these are present in the teaching process, whereas institutional identity involves the sense of belonging to the institution and teachers' level of identification with institutional goals and plans.

In sum, TI is a shifting, non-static aspect that embraces personal, professional, and institutional dimensions and how these shape the teacher-self. In the words of Akkerman and Meijer (2011), TI can be summarized as the "ongoing process of negotiating multiple I-positions in such a way that a more or less coherent and consistent sense of self is maintained throughout various participations and self-investments in one's (working) life" (p. 315).

English Medium Instruction

As EMI has spread, it has been conceived in different ways. At its basic level, it is the instruction of academic subjects in English. While somewhat controversial, the context of these courses is usually higher education and "countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English," a definition used by both Dearden (2014, p. 2) and Macaro (2018, p. 19). Macaro et al. (2018) emphasize that its use should not have a detrimental effect on academic content learning. Dafouz (2021) adds that EMI usually does not focus on language learning or include language-learning objectives; however, Aguilar (2018) has found that incidental language development may occur, especially regarding technical language and oral skills. Dafouz and Gray (2022) note that many students enroll in these types of courses to have the opportunity to improve their English since in most EMI contexts English is not the native language of students and faculty (Hellekjaer, 2010; Pecorari & Malmström, 2018).

Several authors (Chen & Peng, 2019; Kim & Tatar, 2017) have emphasized that EMI does not equate to English as a foreign/second language (EFL/ESL); rather, in EMI contexts, English is conceived as a *lingua franca*. EFL and ESL presuppose standard forms of English (Baker, 2009) that become the focus for teachers and students. Therefore, understanding that in EMI English is a *lingua franca*—that does not belong to a specific community or culture nor does it require specific standards—can reduce teachers' apprehension about their own and students' English proficiency (Kim & Tatar, 2017).

Previous studies have highlighted both the opportunities and challenges of EMI (Corrales et al., 2016; Tejada-Sánchez & Molina-Naar, 2020). Some of its positive aspects relate to offering internationalization opportunities for both domestic and non-national students, strengthening institutional reputation, and preparing students for future jobs (Macaro et al., 2018). Others have suggested that EMI can contribute to intercultural awareness and understanding of the discipline at the global level (Earls, 2016; Hamid et al., 2013; Rey-Paba et al., 2024). Regarding the challenges, EMI has been reported as often being a top-down initiative without considering contextual and stakeholder needs (Corrales at el., 2016; Fang & Hu, 2022) and often without sufficient professional development for teachers (Escalona Sibaja, 2020).

A common area of discussion also relates to the interplay between the role of the instructor and role of language in EMI. First, studies have found that language proficiency can affect the effectiveness of EMI. For instance, both students' lack of language proficiency and instructors' limitations in English may affect content learning for students and add increased preparation time and cognitive load for instructors (Gimenez et al., 2024; Helm & Guarda, 2015; Henriksen et al., 2019; Tejada-Sánchez & Molina-Naar, 2020). Similarly, Qin (2021) noted that when faculty rate their own English proficiency as "insufficient," this may affect their delivery of content in a foreign language and leave them with feelings of "incompetence" in their role as "bilingual" instructors (p. 83). Related to this is the question of whether teachers should change their pedagogy when incorporating EMI. While Cots (2013) found that EMI faculty in Spain viewed implementing EMI as only changing the language of instruction and not adapting their pedagogical strategies, other authors have reported on faculty's experiences indicating that EMI requires aligning their teaching practice with more student-centered or "Western" classroom approaches (Chen & Peng, 2019; Perrin & Wang, 2022). Moreover, some instructors have expressed negative feelings towards EMI which affect their self-efficacy. They believe that EMI impacts the quality of their teaching, the capacity to use language spontaneously, and the level of complexity of the content delivered (Richards & Pun, 2022). Furthermore, in the Latin American context, several authors have argued for

a multilingual approach to EMI, suggesting that the first language serves as a resource to diminish insecurity, increase participation, and improve content learning (Archila et al., 2024; Calvo et al., 2022; Gimenez et al., 2024). In this region, other authors have explored teacher attitudes related to implementing EMI, highlighting the challenge it represents for teachers in terms of language and institutional policies (Corrales et al., 2016; Martinez, 2016).

The aforementioned interplay between the role of the instructor and that of language in EMI can deeply affect instructors' self-conceptions since teaching in a foreign language, especially if teachers perceive their language proficiency as insufficient, can confuse, create a disequilibrium, or marginalize their identity (Karim et al., 2022; Pennington & Richards, 2016). Thus, this literature review turns to the connection between EMI and TI.

Teacher Identity and English Medium Instruction

As explained previously, EMI seems to affect TI because of the interaction of the different roles expected for instructors to take on when teaching their discipline in English. This interaction may cause the reconfiguration of instructors' professional and personal identities (Volchenkova et al., 2022) because teachers possibly change their already "established pedagogical repertoires" (Pappa & Moate, 2021, p. 4). When facing this type of change, teachers' existing identity clashes with the new emerging professional self, resulting in a reformation of perceptions (Vähäsantanen, 2015), teaching practices, and even the way they interact with students (Song, 2016).

In the case of EMI teachers, Volchenkova et al. (2022) found that this approach poses challenges to faculty's disciplinary expertise, threatens their authority, and undermines their self-confidence. This lack of confidence appears to be stronger in instructors who doubt their English language proficiency since teaching content through English is different from general university teaching and depends on teacher's self-perception (Wilkinson, 2018). For instance, Qin (2021) observed that although some teachers were confident in disciplinary terminology in English, they were less comfortable with oral communication. Therefore, one aspect that arises when instructors feel that students do not understand the content due to students' low language proficiency is the inclination to correct language, which Moncada-Comas and Block (2021, p. 688) refer to as "CLILised EMI." Because of the aforementioned, "EMI is somewhat threatening to their [instructors'] professional authority" (Volchenkova et al., 2022, p. 112).

Since EMI instructors are in essence disciplinary teachers, using English as the medium of instruction adds an extra layer of complexity to their identity which, in turn, influences their practice, their interaction with students, and their development as professionals (Song, 2016). This fact may hinder teachers' recognition of themselves as teachers of language, content, or both. Even more, in a study carried out by Yuan (2021), instructors using English in their content-based courses reported feelings of insecurity and inadequacy due to their accent and knowledge of grammar, while experiencing guilt or shame when students asked them to repeat themselves.

On another note, in a study from Brazil, Gimenez et al. (2024) showed that EMI has an impact on the academic identity of instructors and possibly on collegiality, creating a "we" versus "them" position. Gimenez et al. observed that those who taught EMI defined themselves as innovators while labeling those who did not as against innovation and set in their ways. Also, Dafouz (2018) found a positive impact of EMI on teachers' identity because, as she argues, they re-invent their identity, improve their English language proficiency, and acknowledge their already existing linguistic resources for the sake of student content understanding.

Conversely, other authors have demonstrated that teachers' language choice in the classroom affects their identity. Moncada-Comas (2022), for example, observed an EMI teacher who embraced multilingual practices by relying on translanguaging as a meaning-making tool. This author suggests that using the native language as an affordance in the teaching-learning process serves to "construct and strengthen her EMI lecturer identity" (p. 29). Furthermore, Tejada-Sanchez and Molina-Naar (2020) suggest that instructor self-perception in terms of their personal and professional identity is affected by their language history and use. This idea is supported in a more recent study by the same authors (Molina-Naar & Tejada-Sánchez, 2025), where they found that EMI instructors have a language-bound identity in which their critical thoughts on the role of English in the context causes many to implement multilingual strategies in classroom and assessment practices.

As identity is strongly connected to the teaching and learning context, the culture of the discipline and even the national identity seem to influence EMI teachers as well. Qin (2021) reported on an identity shift in a group of medicine faculty transitioning to EMI. For these instructors, since language proficiency was not the focus, they experienced an improved classroom atmosphere and relationship with their students. Kuteeva and Airey (2014) argue that knowledge structures may differ across disciplines and so might teaching practices and attitudes in general and particularly in EMI contexts. This can also be seen in Huang's (2019) study of EMI teachers in the humanities and law, which suggests that teachers' perception of national and/or ethnic identity is reflected in how they teach their discipline. In the case of some EMI experiences in Asia, Perrin and Wang (2022) mention that Western teaching methods have prevailed in educational models, forcing teachers to adapt their identities to other cultures.

This is complemented by Richards and Pun (2022), who emphasize the need for EMI teachers to reflect on their cultural philosophies, principles, and theories to embrace their multifaceted identity. In areas with histories of colonization, as in the case of Brazil, tension around the use of English as the main language in the classroom—connected to neo-liberal politics and oppression—has caused mixed feelings of desire and resistance and, therefore, affects instructors' academic identities (Jordão, 2019, as cited in Gimenez et al., 2024). Additionally, Karim et al. (2022) highlight that these situations foster a negotiation of "selves" that instructors can experience when faced with EMI.

A final aspect related to TI in EMI has to do with faculty's perceptions about institutional policy and how this relates to a number of roles (instructor, researcher, curriculum designer, etc.) they must fulfil in their professional lives. For instance, Kim and Tatar (2017) found evidence that teachers' identity is affected when they become EMI teachers since preparing for these courses increases workload; therefore, they dedicate less time to research and other roles. After this review of the literature on EMI and TI, this research seeks to delve into what happens to teachers' identity in a Latin American context when implementing EMI.

Method

The research question guiding this qualitative exploratory study was: How has teaching EMI classes affected the identity of a group of Colombian university instructors? To answer this question, semi-structured interviews and classroom observations were carried out over a period of two semesters and ethical standards were followed, as described in the next section.

Context and Participants

The study was carried out at a private, non-profit university in Colombia. Since 1995, the university implemented a foreign language requirement for students to graduate in order to prepare them for the globalized world. Besides foreign language education, other initiatives such as student

mobility, dual degrees, and EMI have been put in place to internationalize the institution. Some programs are particularly strong in their EMI implementation, such as the Schools of Business and Engineering, while others are in the initial stages of development. Faculty leading these types of courses are selected in two ways: either the instructors volunteer or they are assigned according to institutional needs. Often those that are assigned have completed their graduate studies in English-speaking countries.

Participants in this study were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that the data collected came from "a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). In this case, we invited ten of the most experienced EMI instructors of which eight (six male and two female) accepted to take part in the project. Seven of the instructors were Colombian and one was French; therefore, they were all NNES though highly proficient in the English language. As mentioned above, they all had completed their graduate studies abroad and had been teaching at the university level between five and 15 years with a minimum of two years EMI experience. They belong to four different academic departments: three from the International Business and Marketing program, two from Computer Science, two from Mechanical Engineering, and one from Law. Of these participants, six were tenure-track full-time and two were adjunct faculty. The participants of the study authorized the use of their data by signing an informed consent form, and the institutional ethics committee also approved the project.

Data Collection and Analysis

At the end of the semester, each of the eight participants took part in an individual semi-structured interview about their EMI experience since this type of data collection technique seems to be well suited to explore topics related to "identity development in EMI because it affords more spontaneous and detailed data" (Pappa & Moate, 2021, p. 29). The interviews were part of a larger project that sought to explore faculty perception on EMI and how it affected instructors' relationship with content, communication skills, and teaching practice. It is important to note that the topic of identity was not explicitly asked in the interviews, but rather it emerged as a recurrent theme within the responses from the participants. Each interview was recorded and transcribed, and both instructors and their responses were assigned a code by numbering each instructor and turn (e.g., I1:2).

Additionally, the instructors were under observation when teaching their regularly scheduled EMI courses for one week, each for a total of 180 minutes. Observations took place in the middle of the term once teachers were familiar with their students and before the end-of-semester assessments. The researchers took field notes using a form adapted from Garza et al. (2017), originally designed for bilingual classrooms (see Lara-Alecio et al., 2013). This form included aspects related to both teacher and student behavior as well as pedagogical strategies (e.g., language of instruction, communication mode, activity structures, and language and content teaching strategies). The data from the observations was used to confirm the codes and themes from the interviews by allowing the researchers to see the role that faculty adopted and the pedagogical strategies they used when teaching their classes.

All data were analyzed following the procedures of thematic analysis (Nowell et al., 2017). In the first phase, each researcher became familiar with the data by individually reviewing the transcripts and field notes several times to identify themes. Initial codes were generated from the identification of "interesting aspects in the data items that may form the basis of themes across the data set" (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 6). In the third phase, codes were discussed among the researchers to reach a consensus about the final categories, using ATLAS.ti (22 version, 2022). Afterwards, the codes were related to the major categories of Kling's (2013) model (see Table 1).

Table 1 Themes and Codes

Theme	Codes	Definition
Professional identity	Content expertise	Knowledge of discipline
	Language support	Scaffolding of language and teaching jargon
	Pedagogical expertise	Ability to teach disciplinary content
	Experience	Time teaching EMI
Personal identity	Language interest	Personal interest in English
	English proficiency	Self-perceived language proficiency
	Personal growth	Acknowledgement of benefit of EMI
	Hulk effect	Change of character
Institutional identity	Value of EMI	Recognition of EMI's worth
	Resistance towards EMI	Negative feeling towards EMI
	Choice of EMI	Compulsory vs voluntary participation in EMI

Results

The following section presents how instructors perceived the influence of teaching EMI courses on their identity. As described in the method section, clear examples of professional, personal, and institutional identity were identified in the interviews with the instructors. However, because of the nature of the data, most of the examples seen in the observations related to professional identity while personal and institutional identity were more difficult to find.

Professional Identity

The most recurring theme found in the data relates to that of professional identity, which is consistent with the fact that teaching in English is part of faculty's professional duties. Within this theme, data were grouped into four codes: content expertise, pedagogical expertise, language support, and experience. Related to the first, all instructors consider teaching content as their main responsibility, showing a strong identity as content experts. For instance, one instructor reported that on the first day of class, he tells students: "I don't come to teach you English. I come to teach you a class that is taught in English" (I8:8). This is confirmed by Instructor 2 who reported "the main objective of the class is the content of engineering" (I2:6). Consistent with this, several instructors confessed to codeswitching into Spanish when necessary for students to understand. As Instructor 4 succinctly said, "when the student prefers to speak in Spanish..., I switch to Spanish, so they understand the content" (I4:4). This was seen in the statements by Instructors 4 and 6, who answered in the language the students used to ask questions. Additionally, most faculty declared they did not focus on teaching or correcting language issues because that is the work of language instructors. As Instructor 4 remarked: "I believe the people who can correct grammar, pronunciation, and all that, and who are really prepared and trained for it are the English language teachers" (I4:7). Again, the observations evidenced this as only one out of the eight corrected language errors.

Interestingly, some of the instructors acknowledged they do some minor language teaching, consciously showing some identity as language supporters, even if it is at a small level. They recognized students should know and use field-specific language in English, and, therefore, they may need to teach this jargon and provide glossaries. Instructor 1 reported that he assigns the "topics and the readings in English, so they become familiar with the language they use in the business world (...) when they talk about currency fluctuations, the stock market (...) All those terms are

used in the field" (I1:2). They also realized they may need to teach this jargon, as Instructor 3 mentioned: she "doesn't have to focus on words which are everyday language but on particular technical jargon...a lot of words are going to be brand new" (I3:14). For instance, Instructors 1 and 3 briefly taught technical words, as seen in the observations.

Another part of professional identity found in the data is classroom pedagogy. Two types of practices were seen in the participants. Some teachers made no changes to the course or how they teach because they felt teaching in English was the same as teaching in their native language. This was confirmed in several observations. Instructor 4, for example, continued to use team-based learning and others continued to use teacher-fronted lectures (I6, I7, and I8, for example) interspersed with exercises commonly found in engineering and physics classes.

In contrast, other participants used more precise language, provided language support, and/or reduced course topics because they felt teaching in English required these modifications. For instance, some instructors suggested they scaffolded the language in their classroom. As one mentioned: "If I suddenly explain something or ask a question and the students don't follow me, then I go back and explain it in a different way" (I6:4). This was confirmed by another participant who stated that he "tries to find a simple way, which may be difficult, to explain content to a student in English, in very simple words really... Finding the vocabulary sometimes takes a while" (I7:11). Another instructor admitted he had to "modify and delete content to be at the same point as if I had delivered the course in Spanish." (I8:3).

This ability to teach disciplinary content in English could also be seen in the observations. For instance, since the topic in Instructor 3's class related to law, she used precise language and tools such as slides and cases—while Instructor 1 and 4, from business, used videos with subtitles, Google Maps, and podcasts to support content learning in the classroom. Instructors emphasized that they believe that making these changes helped them to ensure students learned the most essential content of the course.

The data showed instructors' experience teaching content in English as another aspect to highlight professional identity. Novice EMI teachers seemed to feel less confident of their own proficiency and pedagogy; therefore, they required more time for class preparation. For instance, Instructor 5 revealed that she rehearses and memorizes what she is going to say in class, as reported in the following excerpt: "When I started teaching this class, I practiced it... what I was going to say, how I was going to say it... all my speech... I needed at least a couple of hours to practice the whole class" (I5:4-5). Conversely, more experienced EMI faculty admitted that the more they teach in English, the more confident they become, as Instructor 1 said: "at first, obviously, there were obstacles and things that made me nervous... but over the years my confidence with EMI increased significantly. Now I feel very comfortable" (I1:4). This was confirmed by the observers, who noticed that experienced teachers showed more confidence in the classroom.

Personal Identity

The data also evidenced aspects of personal identity such as language interest, English proficiency, personal growth, and a change of personal character (which we have termed *Hulk effect)*. First, faculty who are enthusiastic about language learning, even though they have a clear conviction about their identity as content teachers, tended to address language aspects in class, too. Instructor 1 explained, "correcting language is not my responsibility, but I do it because I am passionate about it. In other words, when I hear a student say something that is not appropriate, I say 'look, say it this way'" (I1:6), which was also evidenced when we observed him. Other instructors only

correct pronunciation and use of key words or jargon of the field (I3, I6, and I8).

In another area, faculty's self-perceived language proficiency was also highlighted in the data. Since none of them were native English speakers, several described themselves as "not perfect models" (I7) of the language. This was a limitation for some since they did not want to make mistakes in front of their students or lose their authority because of their command of English. For others, the fact of being a NNES was liberating. One participant felt that the EMI classroom became a safe space where the focus was on communicating ideas and not on language accuracy. The following quote exemplifies this feeling: "This is a safe space. English is not our language, so we're always going to be learning vocabulary, we're always going to be perfecting it (...) including me." (I5:9). This quote is also an example of another code: personal growth.

While the instructors recognized the difficulties of teaching EMI courses, most embraced the challenge and saw it as a way to strengthen themselves. One instructor stated that the EMI classroom was "the only space where I can practice English. Fortunately, I feel that I do it well, not perfect, but I feel that I have no problem" (I6:10). Another participant mentioned: "I even see EMI as a benefit for me. I see it as a personal challenge" (I1:4).

Furthermore, some faculty reported transforming into a different person when delivering EMI courses. In this so-called *Hulk effect*, instructors associated these changes with feeling more inhibited in the class (e.g., telling fewer jokes) and feeling unable to establish strong rapport with students. These aspects can be seen in the following excerpts:

> What I have noticed over time is that in different languages, one has different personalities...So I change a lot. My way of acting in English is very different from my way of acting in Spanish. (I4:17)

> I'm probably a different teacher. I feel like earning the trust of students takes a lot more. I have a much harder time in English, possibly because of that. (I5:10)

Institutional Identity

The final theme found in the data relates to institutional identity and includes three codes: value of EMI, resistance towards EMI, and choice of EMI. Offering the courses in English was a top-down decision and generated mixed emotions among faculty interviewed for this study. When faced with this imposition, all participants highlighted the value of students taking classes in English in their field, seeing it as a benefit for their future professional career. For example, one participant stated that the courses were "an opportunity for them outside of English classes to practice the language in a field or in a space that is very similar to their work... and we always emphasize the fact that companies are looking for graduates who speak English" (I6:1). Another instructor believes that the university wanted to "allow students to have an international experience without leaving the country" (I2:1). However, some of the participants resist the policy because of the role that they must take on and the lack of appropriate conditions to perform it successfully, generating feelings of frustration.

> I think that the policy of implementing classes in English is not going to work. We're not going to have either English speakers or engineers...It's not only the effort for us, but one is left like: what else do I do? (I8:4–5)

From the data, it can be inferred that this dichotomy may be associated with the type of contract the instructor has, which relates indirectly to their choice of teaching EMI. In this study, the tenure-track faculty held some negative feelings towards teaching EMI because they were not consulted about their assignment, as can be seen in the following quote: "Basically I teach the class in English because I have to. In this sense, it's an obligation in my department" (I4:1). In contrast, the two adjunct instructors were more positive because they had the opportunity to accept/reject the course. One adjunct instructor even said that teaching EMI was "like a vacation... it was amazing" (I3:12).

Discussion

The results demonstrate that when teaching EMI, faculty experience a conflict among Kling's (2013) three levels of identities—professional, personal, and institutional—which implies the creation of a new EMI teaching self that Akkerman and Meijer (2011, p. 315) termed the "unity of self." This renegotiation often generates a conflict between what the EMI teacher should be and who they actually are.

In this study, all eight instructors unequivocally aligned themselves as experts of their discipline who, due to various reasons, teach in English, following Airey's idea that in EMI "content is king" (2020, p. 343). Therefore, the discipline-expert identity prevails as Baker and Hüttner (2019) and Block (2021) also found. However, further analysis indicated that instructors acknowledged that they perform other roles, leading to identity transformation. This is in line with Kling's (2013) work, where instructors wonder about the different roles and responsibilities EMI brings about. Research (Aliaga Salas & Pérez Andrade, 2023; Corrales et al., 2016) has shown the biggest identity shift EMI faculty experience is that of becoming language supporters. This means that, as most participants recognized, they assumed the role of facilitating content comprehension and communication. Airey (2020) states that all content teachers are, to some extent, communication instructors since each discipline has its own specialist language, and their job, in whatever language they use for instruction, is to prepare "disciplinary literate graduates" (p. 344). Therefore, he asserts that EMI teachers should embrace this role, as several instructors in this study have done. In fact, our findings showed that faculty reported addressing language issues, especially those related to disciplinary discourse and technical jargon. They supplied specific field-related terms, glossaries, and supported students' communication, even translanguaging from English into Spanish—which echoes what Kling et al. (2022) and Karim et al. (2022) have found and other authors suggest should be common practice in Latin-American EMI (Gimenez et al., 2024; Molina-Naar & Tejada-Sánchez, 2025; Tejada-Sanchez & Molina-Naar, 2020). Others cut course content to facilitate learning in English, similar to what Hu et al. (2014) found. As seen in the results, the language factor plays a pivotal role in EMI as instructors have to reconcile "their pedagogical being, doing and relating in EMI contexts" (Pappa & Moate, 2021, p. 26). Although participants were from varied disciplines, there were no significant differences in their perceptions of their professional identity.

Another consequence of the identity conflict, associated with personal identity but affecting the professional self significantly, relates to the fact that all the faculty in this study were NNES. They seemed to compare their English proficiency with that of the native speaker, as Hahl et al. (2016) and Jordão (2019, as cited in Gimenez et al., 2024) also reported. Despite instructors' expertise in the discipline and as educators, their being NNES affected their identity and, hence, their practice. Similar to Pappa and Moate's (2021) findings, in this study, the non-native element caused instructors to feel a range of emotions, varying from excitement and enjoyment to frustration and discomfort, which is also perceived in the Latin American context (Inter-American Dialogue report, 2019). Those confident with their language proficiency tended to feel comfortable with the EMI challenge, even taking advantage of this security to correct learners' language errors (Airey, 2020), exhibiting the dual role as content experts and language supporters. The less confident instructors seemed to feel their authority as discipline experts threatened. They likely believed that their mistakes in the language could be reflected upon students' perception of their expertise in the discipline, which is supported by Park et al.'s (2022) findings. The negative consequence of this self-image conflict could be reduced if faculty and students truly understood that language in EMI should be viewed as a means for global communication (i.e., *lingua franca;* Baker, 2009) and that

"perfect" standard English if not required (Kim & Tatar, 2017).

In contrast to Kling's (2013) findings where participants understood that their language limitations do not inhibit their classroom performance, instructors in this study felt that their language confidence affected their classroom practices. For instance, some restricted telling jokes or using sarcasm in a way that would not happen when teaching in their native language (Pappa & Moate, 2021). For some faculty, these changes were to such an extent that they considered their teaching persona to have transformed in the EMI classroom (e.g., *Hulk effect*), as if they had become a different person. This identity conflict can yield either "constraining or enabling effects," as suggested by Huang (2019, p. 1191). In this study, this transformation was sometimes positive since instructors adapted their teaching practice to students' needs, as Kling et al. (2022) also observed. Conversely, the *Hulk effect* negatively impacted some instructors who felt that their relationship and interaction with their students was jeopardized.

Another aspect of institutional identity relates to teacher choice. Accepting the EMI challenge seems to be less traumatic when instructors can decide if they want to teach these courses, as was also reported by Molina-Naar and Tejada-Sanchez (2025). In this sense, the adjunct faculty in this study were very positive about the whole EMI experience, as corroborated by Dafouz (2018). As Wilkinson (2018) also noticed, the tenure-track faculty assigned to the courses were more critical towards EMI and the extra workload this entailed. Nieto Moreno de Diezmas and Fernández Barrera (2021) argue that the drawbacks of the integration of teachers into EMI can be solved by implementing prescribed protocols for teacher recruitment, planning, and engagement. The aforementioned illustrate how instructors reconcile their shifting identities as a result of the implementation of EMI. This has proven to raise a series of implications for faculty who may need to redefine their identities to cope with the challenge, as Cots (2013) also suggests.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore how teaching EMI classes has affected the identity of a group of Colombian university instructors, which is a gap in the literature on EMI in Latin America. Findings from the semi-structured interviews and classroom observation showed that using EMI to teach academic subjects has an impact on faculty members, redefining their different identities (professional, personal, and institutional).

In terms of professional identity, we argue that EMI instructors are mainly content experts who know how to teach their discipline. Teaching a discipline in EMI includes supporting students in English if necessary. This does not mean that they should be language teachers but rather become language supporters who facilitate disciplinary understanding. Therefore, it is essential that instructors be aware that teaching EMI most likely will cause identity conflicts and require their willingness to reconfigure their identity to favor student learning.

Some characteristics of instructors' personal identity, such as liking the English language, feeling proficient enough, understanding English in EMI as a *lingua franca*, and recognizing EMI's benefits for students seem to favor success in EMI. Higher education institutions that offer subject courses in English, then, must provide the necessary conditions for teachers to successfully cope with this challenge and endeavor to create a supportive environment. These conditions not only include the practical aspects, such as professional development in EMI pedagogies and even English language development when needed, but also offering faculty a role in the planning and implementation of EMI to help them deal with the possible identity reconfiguration that can result from the experience.

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Despite the small sample size of this study, we consider that it has contributed to expanding the theoretical and empirical understanding of the role of TI in EMI in Colombia and its particular characteristics, such as the fact that most instructors are NNES, they are assigned to EMI courses without their consent, and they are disciplinary and not language experts. Since this study focused on one institution, to better understand the renegotiation of TI in these contexts, we suggest replicating this study in more institutions in Colombia and Latin America to enrich the worldwide conversation on the topic.

This study has demonstrated that teacher performance in EMI contexts is affected by the interplay of professional, personal, and institutional identities, which could have significant effects on student learning. Therefore, to ensure success for all stakeholders, it is essential to recognize that instructor identity renegotiation can happen and should be addressed directly.

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