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El reconocimiento docente: innovar e investigar con criterios de calidad

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El reconeixement docent: innovar i investigar amb criteris de qualitat

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English as the medium of instruction: a response to internationalization.

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ABSTRACT

The status of English as a lingua franca has led European universities to implement the use of this language as a medium of instruction (EMI). This study presents an analysis of the status quo of EMI at the University of Alicante. It takes into account the institution's language policy and the programs which offer subjects in English, as well as the challenges, needs and benefits of the professors and students. Qualitative and quantitative data was collected by means of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The findings of this needs analysis will help us to create an action plan that will include teacher and student training schemes to foster internationalization.

Key words: Internationalization; English as the Medium of Instruction (EMI); Integrated Content and Language in Higher Education (ICLHE), English for Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), Integrating Content and Language (ICL), teaching.

1. INTRODUCTION

English as a Lingua Franca is becoming increasingly important in the Spanish university context (Hontoria et al., 2013). ‘Today, more and more universities in Spain are starting to design language policies, usually including Spanish and English. At the same time, Spain has a special socio-political context since part of its territory is already bilingual’ (Fortanet, 2012: 48). At the University of Alicante, one of the five public universities in the Valencian Community, we are immersed in a bilingual university with an increasing multilingual language policy and undertaking a process of internationalization. Both issues, linguistic policies and internationalization, go hand in hand in promoting mobility throughout the world, as well as facilitating the academic and research opportunities of university staff and students.

Although the use of English as a vehicular language is ever-increasing in tertiary education, the concept of teaching content in another language, other than that of the students, has existed since the latter part of the past century. Educational movements such as those of bilingualism and total immersion in the US and Canada, and the bilingual programmes of the Spanish autonomies with co-official languages, might be considered precursors of the present day Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) prevalent in many primary and secondary schools throughout Europe (Coyle et al, 2010; Dalton-Puffer, 2007; Lasagabaster & Ruiz de Zarobe, 2010). CLIL “refers to situations where subjects, or parts of subjects, are taught through a foreign language with dual-focused aims, namely the learning of content, and the simultaneous learning of a foreign language (Marsh, 1994; 2000)”. In the university context, according to Smit and Dafouz (2012), the term CLIL has been transformed to Integrating Content and Language in Higher Education (ICL or ICLHE) or English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI). Unlike CLIL in lower stages of education, where both the language and content is the focus of learning, ICHLE or EMI concentrate on the content with the use of the language as the medium of instruction. However, the greater use of the vehicular language can establish a context of, at least, partial immersion; thus it may indirectly enable the participants to progress in the language (Muñoz, 2012).

Until recently, most studies having to do with the implementation of CLIL have been carried out at primary and secondary schools. As could be deduced from the HEPCLIL (Higher Education Perspectives on Content and Language Integrated Learning <http://mon.uvic.cat/hepclil/>) international conference at the University of Vic on March 27-28, 2014, many Spanish universities are now immersed in studies to explore what is going on in so far as how our higher education institutions are adopting to the EHEA and, at the same time, establishing and implementing multilingual language policies. In addition, a number of studies have begun to explore the needs and benefits of ICLHE or EMI at the university level (Fortanet, 2012; 2013; Morell, 2008; 2010; Ruiz de Zarobe 2011; 2013). The AgroInglés (2013) project carried out in the ETSI of Agronomy (*Escuela Técnica Superior de Ingenieros Agrónomos*) at the UPM (*Universidad Politécnica de Madrid*) has not only attempted to find out the status of the use of English in all the Spanish Universities, but also surveyed teachers, students and administrative staff of the ETSI of Agronomy regarding their views on teaching in English.

In this paper, much like in the AgroInglés project (2013), we set out to explore the *status quo* at the University of Alicante(UA) with regard to the use of English as the medium of instruction (henceforth, EMI). We not only intended to find out about the UA policy, but also the willingness, attitudes and needs of the teachers (lecturers and professors) and the students. Thus, our study is guided by the following 3 broad research questions:

1. How does the UA deal with EMI and what is being implemented?
2. What are the teachers' linguistic competence levels? Are the UA teachers willing and motivated to teach in English? What are their needs?
3. What are the students' linguistic competence levels? Are the UA students willing and motivated to learn in English? What are their needs?

2. METHODOLOGY

This qualitative and quantitative study on the situation of EMI at the UA was carried out by a group of professors, lecturers (members of the AcqUA research group) and students of the English Department (and one professor from the Agrochemistry &

Biochemistry Department), who formed an ICE (*Instituto de Ciencias de la Educación*) network. At our first meeting, we decided to divide our project into the following three parts: 1. UA Policy and its implementation 2. Teachers: attitudes, challenges, and needs 3. Students: attitudes, challenges and needs.

Each member of the network was assigned to work on one of the three parts, and thus 3 groups were formed. In the case of the UA policy, members were to search the UA webpages, contact and interview personnel from the different areas, and write up their findings on the Google drive. Those of us working on the teachers and the students' perspectives elaborated two questionnaires to be distributed among the university personnel. We began with a rough draft, and then, through general discussion among all the members of the group, added, deleted and modified questions to make the survey as clear and concise as possible. The final questions were then entered in an online survey service (limesurvey.org) in the official languages, i.e., Spanish and Catalan (Valencian) and in English. Both surveys contained the same three, general categories. (1) The first collected data concerning the general demographics of each group surveyed, such as age, sex, type of degree, department, etc. This information allowed us to see if the results of the survey generally came from all segments of the group surveyed or if they were skewed in any noticeable way. (2) The second section of the survey covered the linguistic competence of students and teachers. Here they were asked concerning their certifiable level of English as well as their own self-evaluation of their level, broken down into the different linguistic skills. The purpose of this section was to identify the specific skills that teachers and students felt they needed more help to develop. (3) Finally, the last section of the survey included questions concerning specific experiences with the use of English in the classroom as well as expectations for how English should be used in the university context. This section of the survey allowed us to evaluate the perceived needs in general and determine what types of courses would help prepare faculty members to teach content courses in English.

The results section that follows begins with the UA policy and EMI within degrees and subjects, and continues with the findings from the two questionnaires administered to the lecturers and students of the UA.

3. RESULTS

3.1 UA policy and EMI courses

English has been used at the University of Alicante (UA), thus far, for academic and research purposes, mainly in those university centres where international research collaborations have been established. In addition, those departments that contribute to the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes of English Studies, Translation and Interpretation and others that have specific subjects in English for their degrees (e.g., Tourism, Economics, etc.) have also used English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI).

However, the new UA language policies designed during the last few years, have significantly contributed to increase the use of English in other degrees. In that sense, the last UA policy, which focuses on the use of English and other languages, (<http://web.ua.es/es/sep/documentos/pdf/ua/pivad-2013-2016.pdf>) has clearly promoted the implementation of EMI at the UA. According to this language policy, teachers can benefit from EMI specialists and English language support. They may also receive help for the correction of teaching guides, materials and exams in English. Furthermore, many of the faculties, such as the Polytechnic University College, have developed their own policies to support the use of English. Among the courses of action taken by this new UA language policy, in each of the university centres has been the creation of the figure of the linguistic coach (*dinamizador lingüístico*), who plays an important role in offering general information related to English use (on-line tools, translations, etc.).

A general analysis of the use of English at the UA (institutional web site, departments' web sites, interviews with teachers, etc.) reveals that English is used as the medium of instruction mainly in 3 different areas, as is summarized below:

i) English content courses: Most of the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes at the UA include, at least, one subject taught from 50 to 100% in English. The final list of

subjects offered in English each academic year is reviewed and approved by the Office of the Vice President for Culture, Sports and Language policies (<http://web.ua.es/es/vr-ric/cursos-en-ingles.html>). As an incentive, those teachers who offer their classes in English (apart from the English or Translation Departments) may receive 100€ (per credit) for new subjects and 50€ (per credit) for those subjects that have already been given before.

ii) ARA (*Alto Rendimiento Académico*) groups (<http://web.ua.es/en/vr-estudis/groups-ara/a-r-a-high-performance-2013-14-academic-groups.html>): The High Academic Performance groups (ARA), which were established by the Valencian government (Generalitat Valenciana) in the five public universities of the autonomy, aim to strengthen the potential of the most outstanding students from the beginning of their university studies by allowing them to take at least 50% of their basic credits in English. These students, who enter the UA with high grades and who must certify a B1 level of English, are also offered support to improve their linguistic competence. ARA groups have existed in the UA for the last four years and in the next academic year, the following degrees of the UA will have them: Biology, Law, Sound and Image Engineering and Computer Science Engineering. Those lecturers or professors who take part in ARA groups receive an annual certificate from the university and can either have recognition in terms of credits or financial compensation (i.e., each credit given in English counts for 1.5 credits).

iii) Other events or courses: Besides the official content and ARA group subjects delivered in English, the UA also has some summer courses (Rafael Altamira University), and the International Summer Program (ISP; <http://www.isp.ua.es/>) that include EMI courses. Furthermore, there are a number of research workshops and international meetings, which take place at the UA, that also use English as the vehicular language.

In so far as unofficial English language courses are concerned, the UA, through the Centre of Languages (*Centro Superior de Idiomas - CSI*), offers courses to the entire university community to help them improve their English language competence (A1 – C1, according to the Common European Framework Reference of Language). In the case

of ARA students, who need to acquire a B2 level, these courses are free. In addition, the Education Science Institute (*Instituto de las Ciencias de la Educación-ICE*) has offered lecturers and professors a few 20 hour workshops, such as “Academic English for Teaching and Presenting”, “English for Teaching Content Courses at University”, and “English as a Medium of Instruction”, to help train academics in the use of the *lingua franca* for teaching and research purposes.

3.2 Teachers and students’ surveys

Once each of the two questionnaires had been elaborated, translated and put into the Lime Survey programme, they were sent by email to 2,341 members of the teaching staff and to 27,341 students in 7 different areas of study. Students and teachers had a total of two weeks to answer the survey, and a reminder email was sent a week later. The results of the survey demonstrate a fairly broad sampling of the overall group. 35% of the teachers responded to all of the questions on the survey (828) and 8.25% of the students answered all of the questions (2,257). The general statistics of those who answered the questions corresponds generally to the overall population of the university community in sex. For the teacher survey there were more answers by men (63% vs. 37%), but this is because there are more male teachers than female (62% to 38%). Inversely, female students outnumbered male students in the student survey (60% vs. 40%), as was to be expected by the population (58% vs. 42%). In general, the number of people who answered all the questions provides a broad enough sampling of the university personnel and students to allow us to draw general conclusions about the status quo of teaching in English at the University of Alicante.

As stated above, the main objective of the present study is to explore both lecturer and student needs and motivations in the implementation and promotion of EMI courses at the University of Alicante. One of the primary concerns is to know the level of competence in English of all stakeholders and, thereby, determine their underlying linguistic needs. As regards lecturers and professors, there was no previous information available. Likewise, concerning students’ levels of competence, even though the new

study programmes require students to obtain the B1 level before they complete their undergraduate studies, no data of English competence before graduation had been previously gathered. Thus, the survey sought to find out about teachers and students' certified and perceived competence levels.

3.2.1 Levels of Competence

Figure 1: Diplomas and Certificates of Competence in English held by students and lecturers.

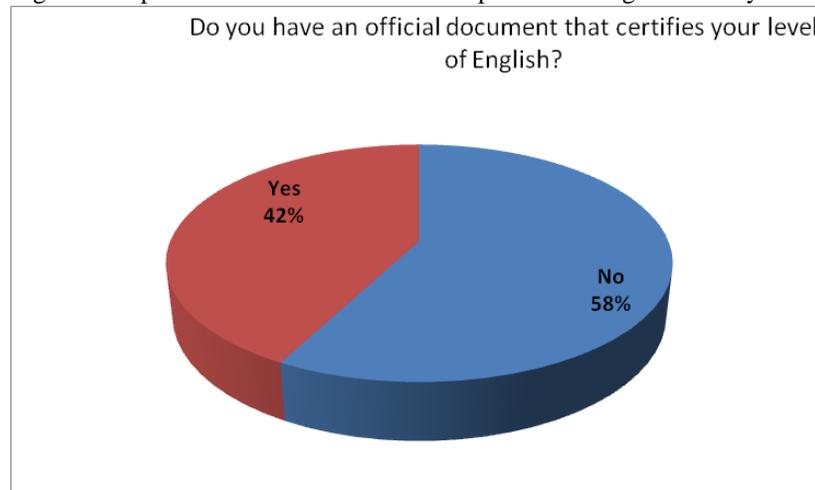
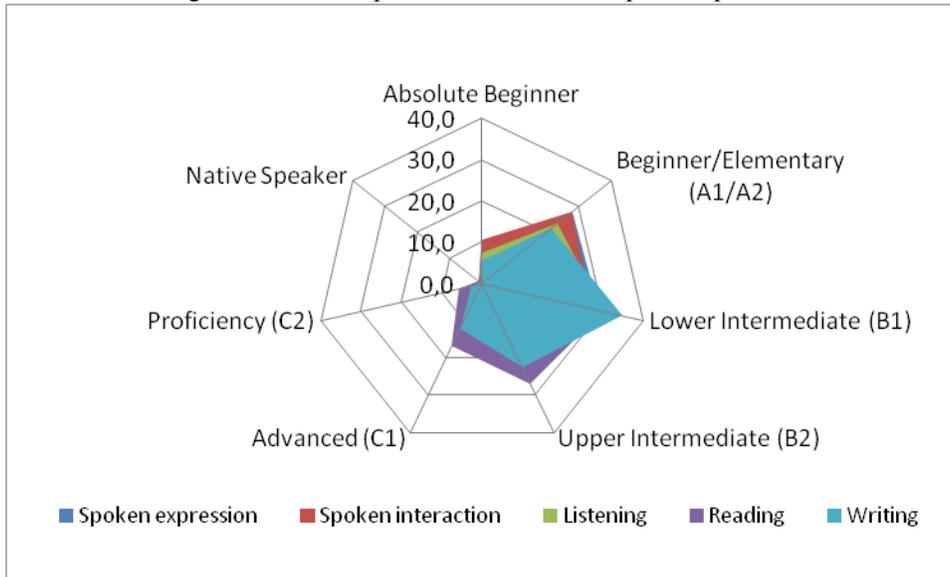


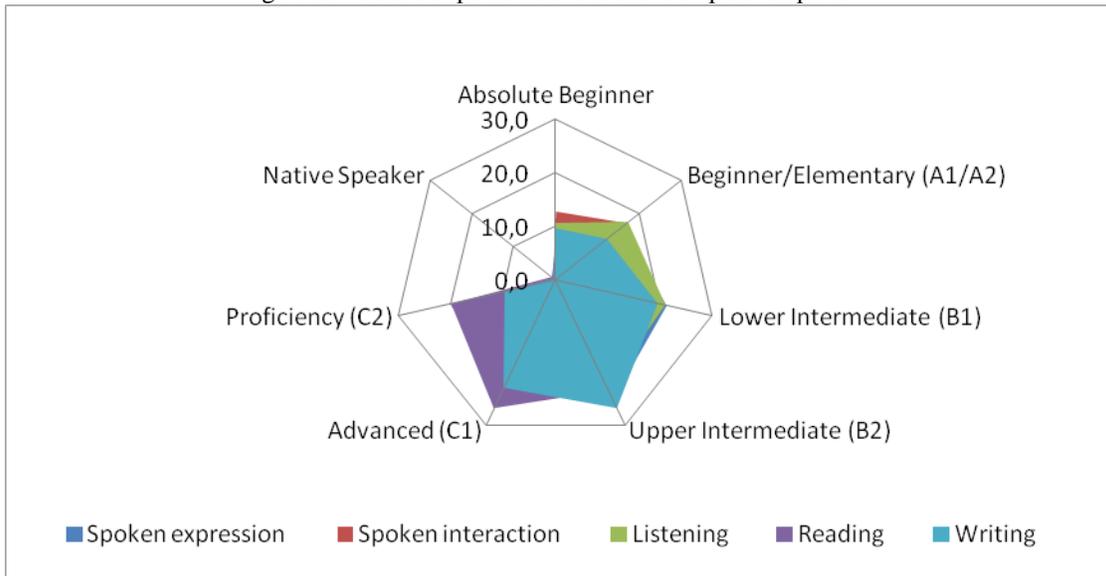
Figure 1 shows that 42% of the respondents have been awarded with a diploma that certifies a specific level of competence in English. The figure does not distinguish between teachers and students, as there is not a significant difference between the results; in both cases the percentage of respondents with a certificate was about 42%. (41% of lecturers and 42% of students).

Figure 2: Students' perceived levels of competence per skill



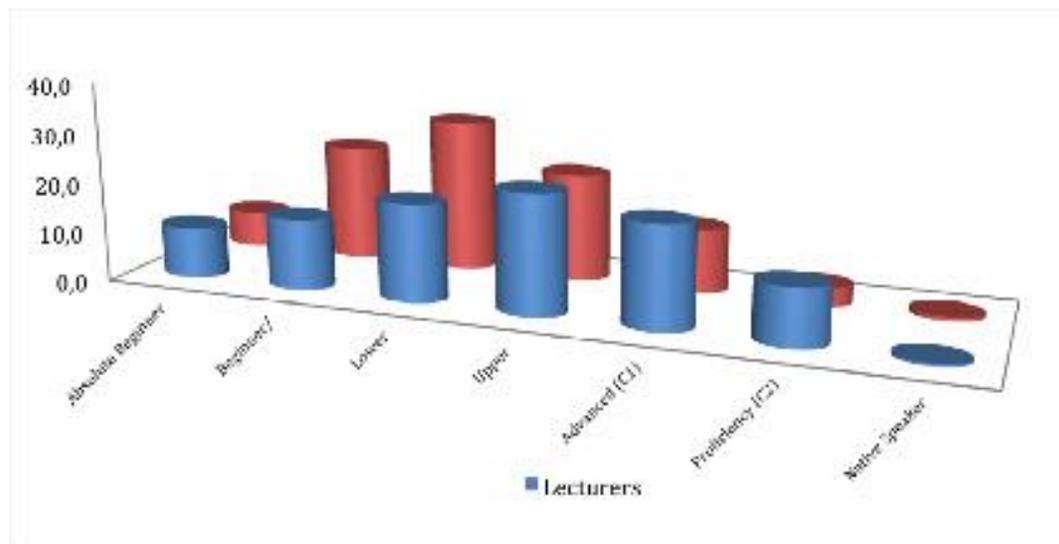
In general students feel they have a B1 level in most of the skills. However, they do not feel confident in spoken interaction, which scores around the A1/A2 levels. Nevertheless, reading surpasses the average score, and approaches a level of competence near B2 (see Figure 2).

Figure 3: Lecturers' perceived levels of competence per skill



In contrast, teachers' perceptions of their own level are overall higher than those of students. The average of the results is situated under the umbrella of the B2 level. In certain skills, reading, and to a certain extent, writing, teachers feel closer to a C1 (see Figure 3). This is consistent with the open responses of the lecturers about their experience with Academic English, where the majority stated that they usually read scientific articles and write research papers.

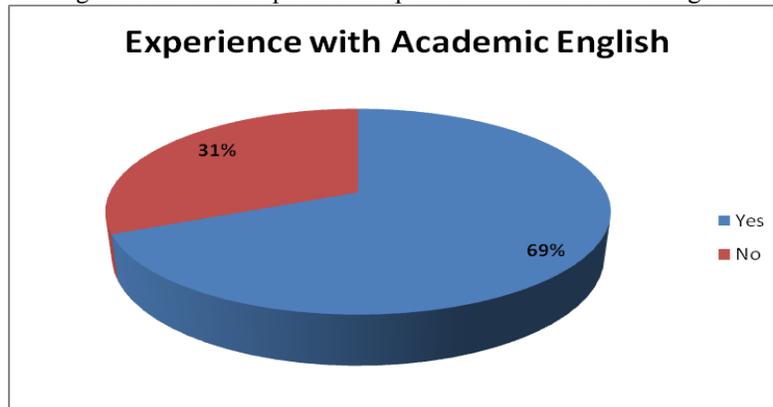
Figure 4: Comparison of Competence levels between lecturers and students.



Comparing students and lecturers' results, there is a highly significant difference¹ between the perceived levels of competence. Figure 4, which is based on the average level of the skills, illustrates that the majority of students perceive their level to be around the B1, whereas the curve of lecturers peaks at the B2-C1 cluster. These latter results, as stated before, may be related to the lecturers' necessity of using Academic English in their work as researchers, as English is the *lingua franca* of Academia. The majority of lecturers (69%; see Figure 5) use English for academic purposes (writing scientific articles, presenting papers at conferences, lectures, etc.).

¹The results show a highly significant difference in the scores of all the skills ($p=0.000$; 2-tal Sig in Levene's Test).

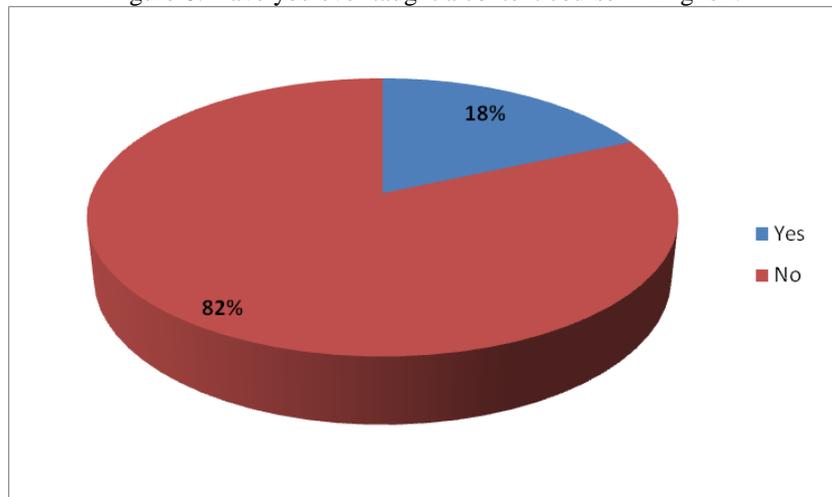
Figure 5: Lecturer's previous experience with Academic English



3.2.2 Lecturers' further results

Despite some experience with Academic English, the majority of the lecturers surveyed have not taught a content course in English (82%; see Figure 6). As the sample surveyed is a good representation of the actual distribution of lecturers (sex, centres, etc.) at the UA, we may assume that there is still only a small percentage who have been involved with EMI courses.

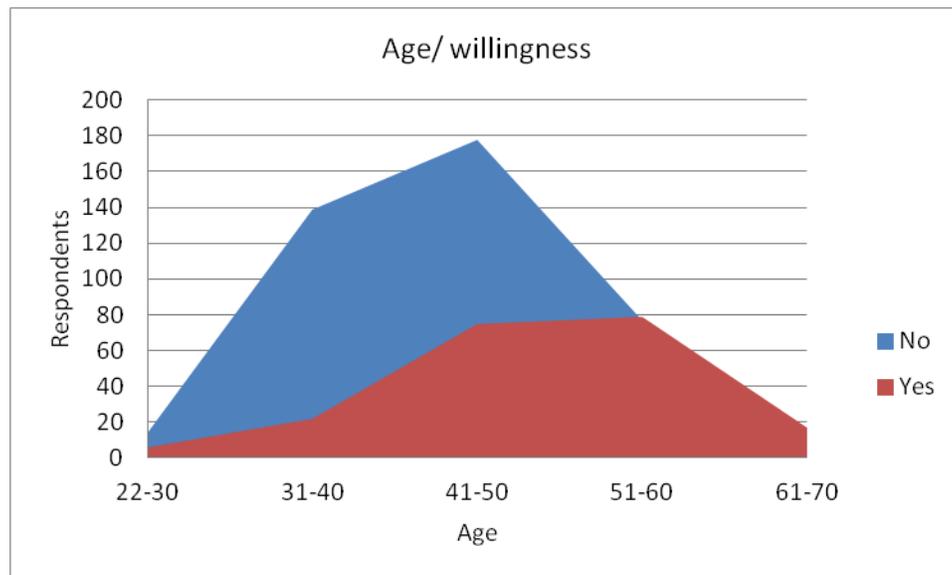
Figure 6: Have you ever taught a content course in English?



Furthermore, those lecturers that have never taught an EMI course do not seem to be so willing to participate in this kind of programme. These results may challenge the

spirit of the PIVALD² at the UA, since it is not feasible to foster this kind of programme without the support of the academic personnel. Interestingly enough, and unlike what we had previously expected, the lecturers who were more willing to take part in such courses are those aged between 51-60 (see Figure 7)³.

Figure 7: Lecturers' willingness and Age.

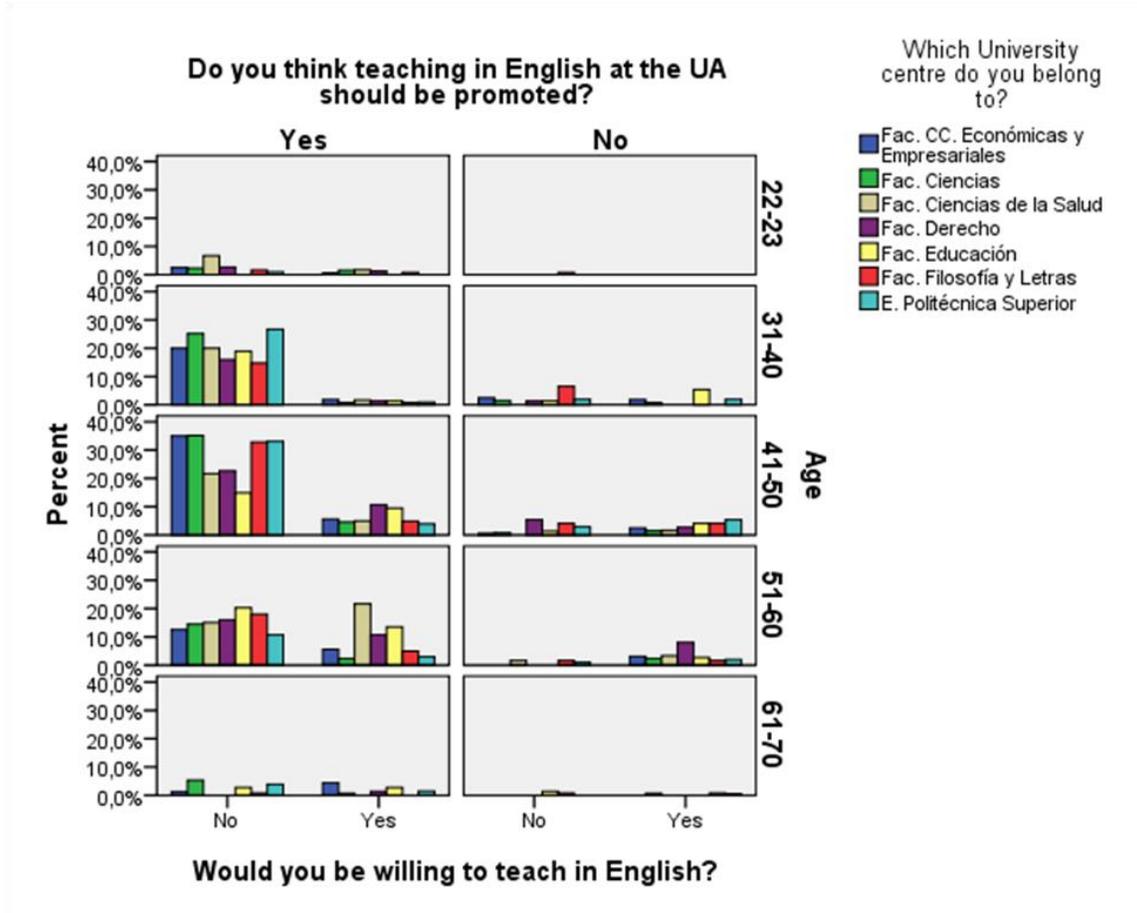


These results highlight the fact that there is a significant relation between age and motivation. Figure 8 illustrates that although the majority of lecturers, especially those aged between 41-50, considered that EMI courses should be promoted, they are not willing to do it themselves (76% answered negatively). Therefore, the main issue in the implementation of EMI courses is to know the reasons for which teachers are reluctant to join the programme, and the possible motivating schemes that could be implemented.

² PIVALD: UA plan for the fostering of Valencian and other languages in teaching.

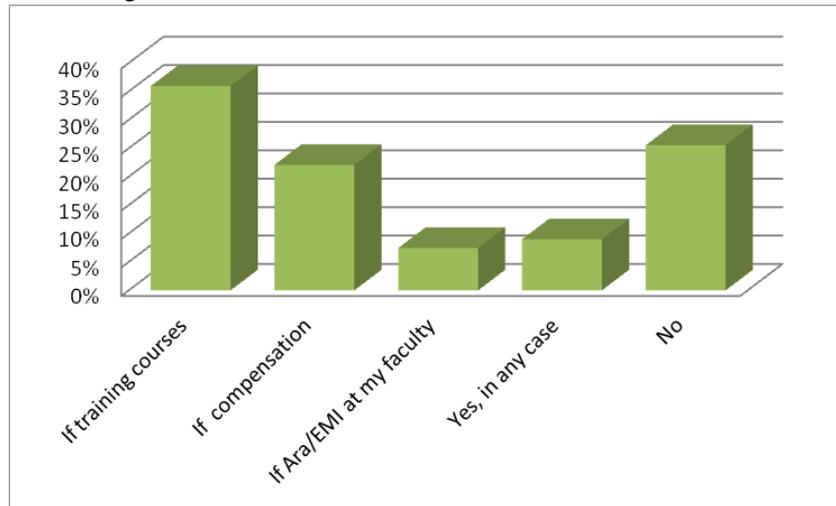
³ Statistically, the relation between age and willingness is highly significant ($p= 0.000$; t-test).

Figure 8: Age, Faculty, Need to Promote and Willingness.



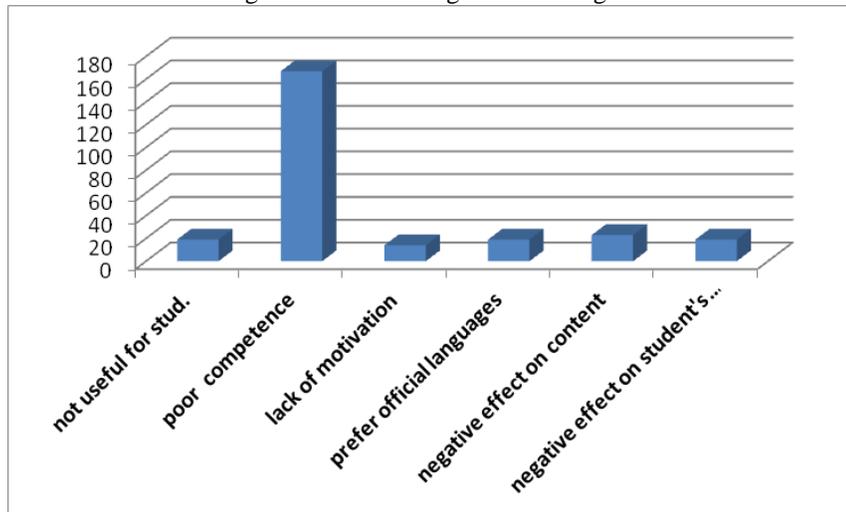
In fact, looking deeper into the data, some lecturers would be willing to teach EMI courses, especially if training courses were available (see Figure 9); academic and economic compensation was also considered, albeit to a lesser extent.

Figure 9: Incentives and motivations for Lecturers



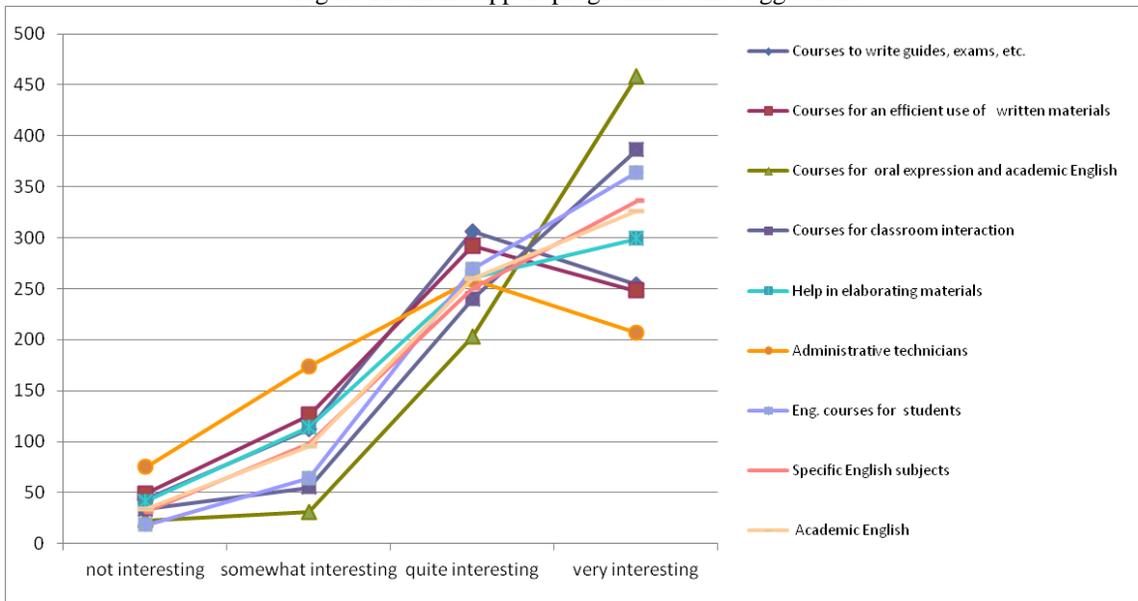
Notwithstanding the fact that some lecturers would teach EMI courses if some support programmes and incentives were implemented, there was still an important percentage of respondents that were not willing to do so (32%). However, when they had to state the reasons for that decision, the majority concluded that they did not feel confident with their level of English (see Figure 10). Thus, for both, teachers who are willing and teachers who are not, the level of English and the linguistic training seem to be the key factors to foster the implementation of EMI courses

Figure 10: Reasons against teaching EMI courses



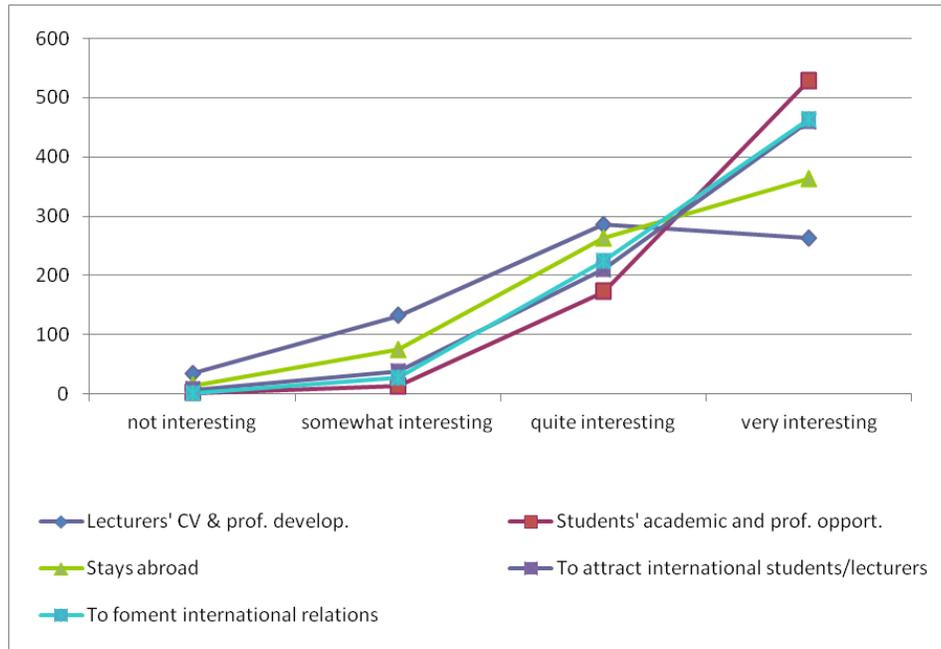
All these questions about needs, motivations and constraints yield a significant result, as most lecturers see that they need further linguistic training and enough competence to feel sufficiently prepared to teach EMI courses with the required quality. This result is also supported by their views on possible schemes that could be fostered to implement EMI courses. The majority of the polled lecturers consider that training is necessary. In particular, they mainly suggest offering courses to improve the lecturers’ oral expression and classroom interaction techniques; closely followed by English Language courses and Specific English subjects (e.g., English for Business or English for Computer Science) for students in the official curriculum.

Figure 11: EMI support programmes and suggestions



Finally, the survey focused on the benefits of this kind of programmes. The majority of lecturers affirmed that it was important for the academic and professional opportunities it created for students, followed by the fostering of international relations, especially for student and lecturer exchange programmes.

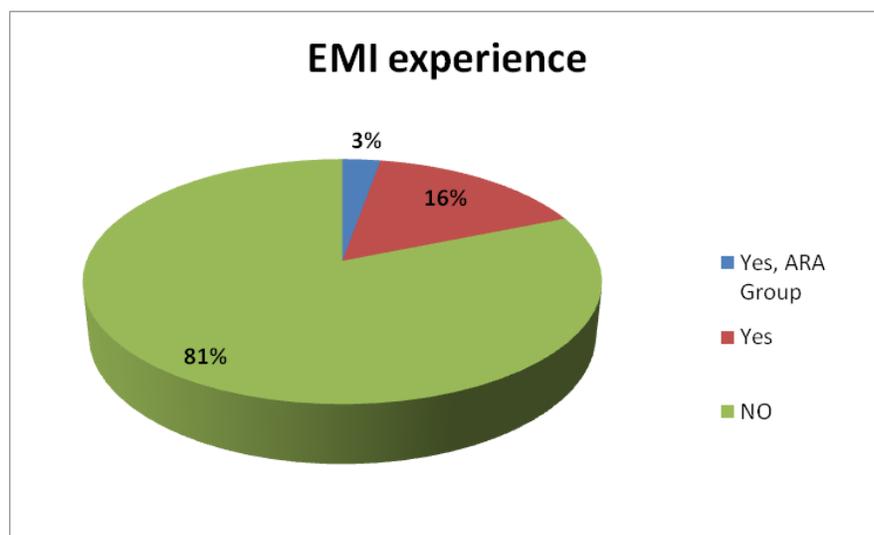
Figure 12: Benefits of EMI programmes.



3.2.3 Students' further results

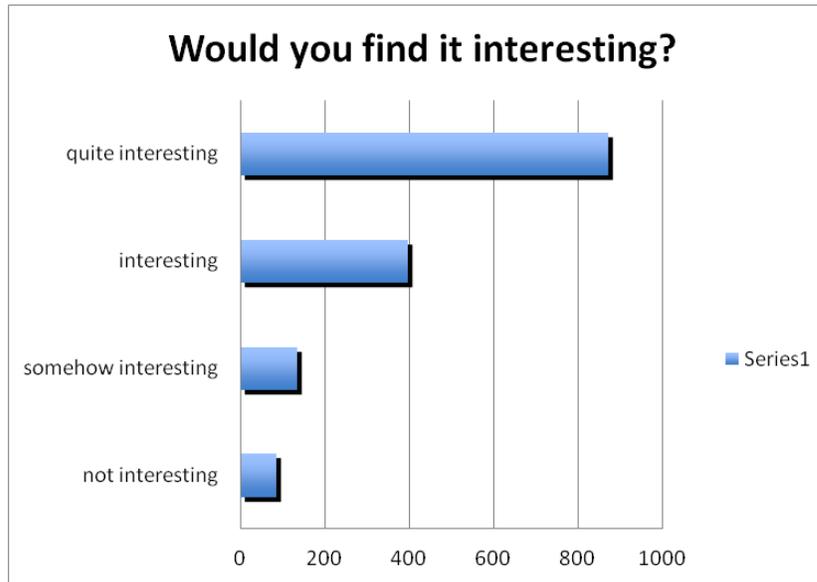
Most of the students surveyed were registered in an undergraduate degree (91%) and had not had previous experience in an EMI course (only 19% did; 3% were in an ARA group and 16% had previously registered in an English-taught subject).

Figure 13: Have you ever registered in an EMI course?



From the students that had not signed up for an EMI course, only 19% had been offered the possibility and 81% had never had the chance; albeit the majority considered it very interesting (see Figure 14).

Figure 14: Interest shown by the students that had not had the possibility of registering in an EMI course.



It was relevant to know the reasons some students did not take an EMI course in spite of being offered the possibility. Those students had declined it basically due to two main reasons: (1) they were worried about their level of academic performance that could be hindered by the use of a foreign language; and secondly, (2) they considered that they did not have the required competence in English (see Figure 14).

Figure 15: Reasons for not registering in an EMI course



In order to have better insight into the use of English in EMI courses, students were surveyed about how much English was used in their subjects. Although in general English is mainly used, it was surprising to discover that English is not always used in some situations.

Figure 16: Percentage of the use of English in EMI courses

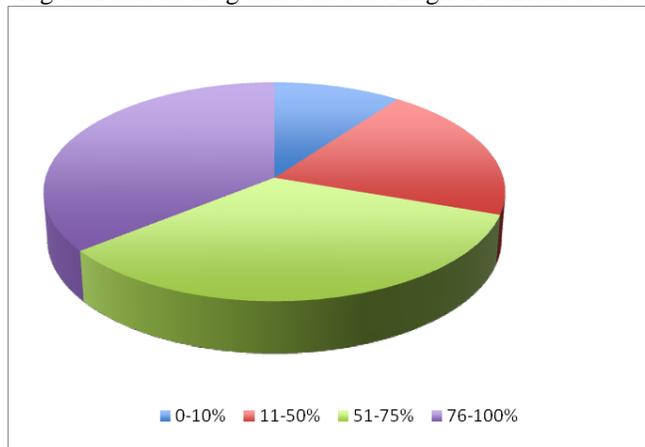
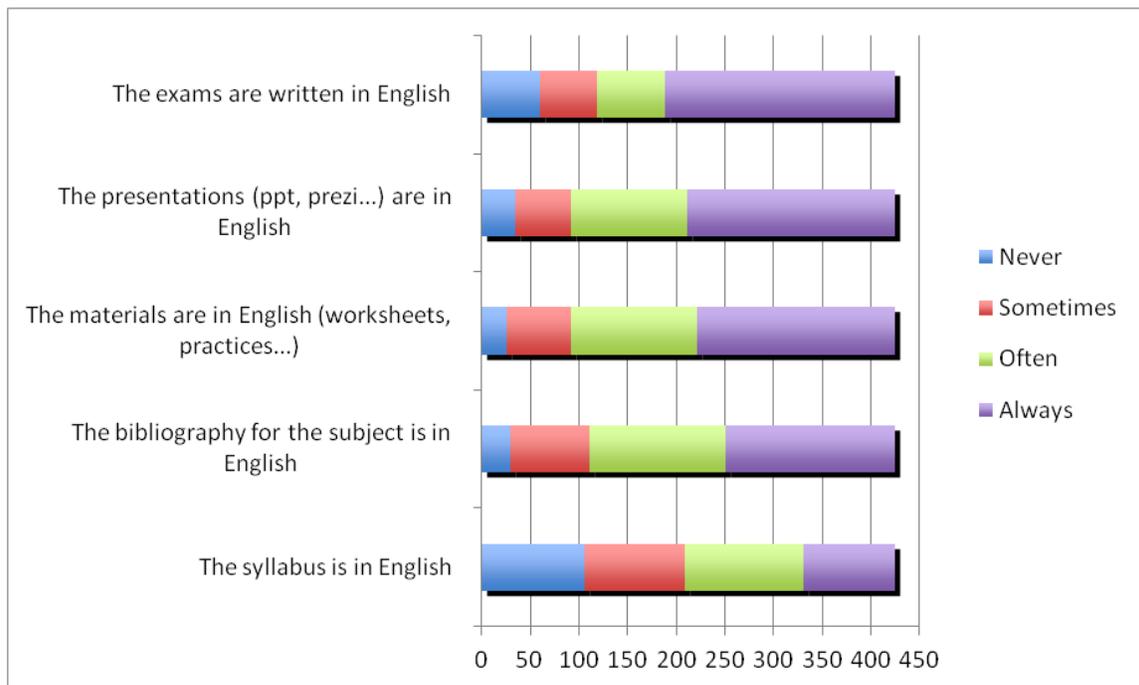


Figure 17: Use of English in lessons.



In general English is principally used to present the contents of the subjects, to offer additional information and assess the students; however, syllabi are sometimes neglected, maybe due to the extra work of publishing those on the Virtual Campus in various languages (see Figure 17). As regards the skills, speaking is perceived as the most challenging; whereas reading and listening are the easiest. This is logical, as passive receptive skills are less demanding from a cognitive point of view (see Figure 18).

Figure 18: Perceived difficulty per skill.

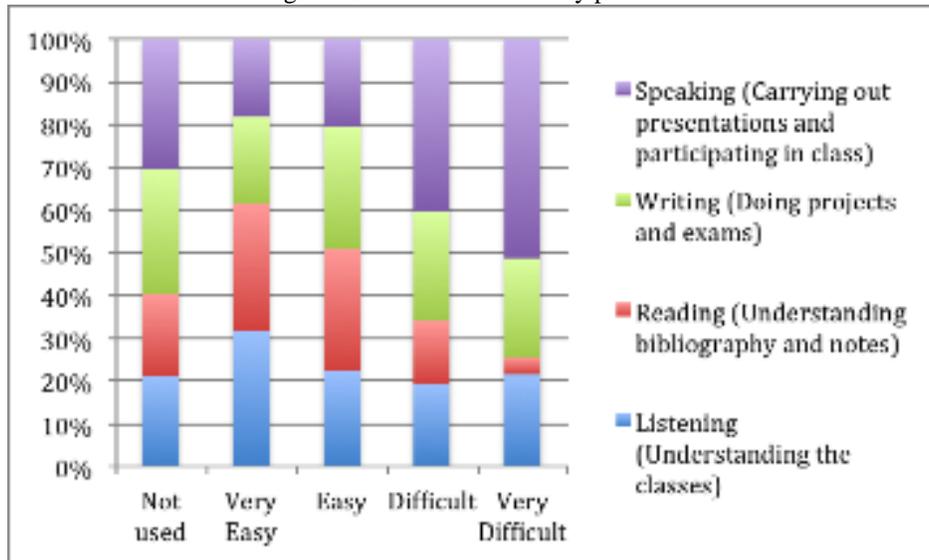
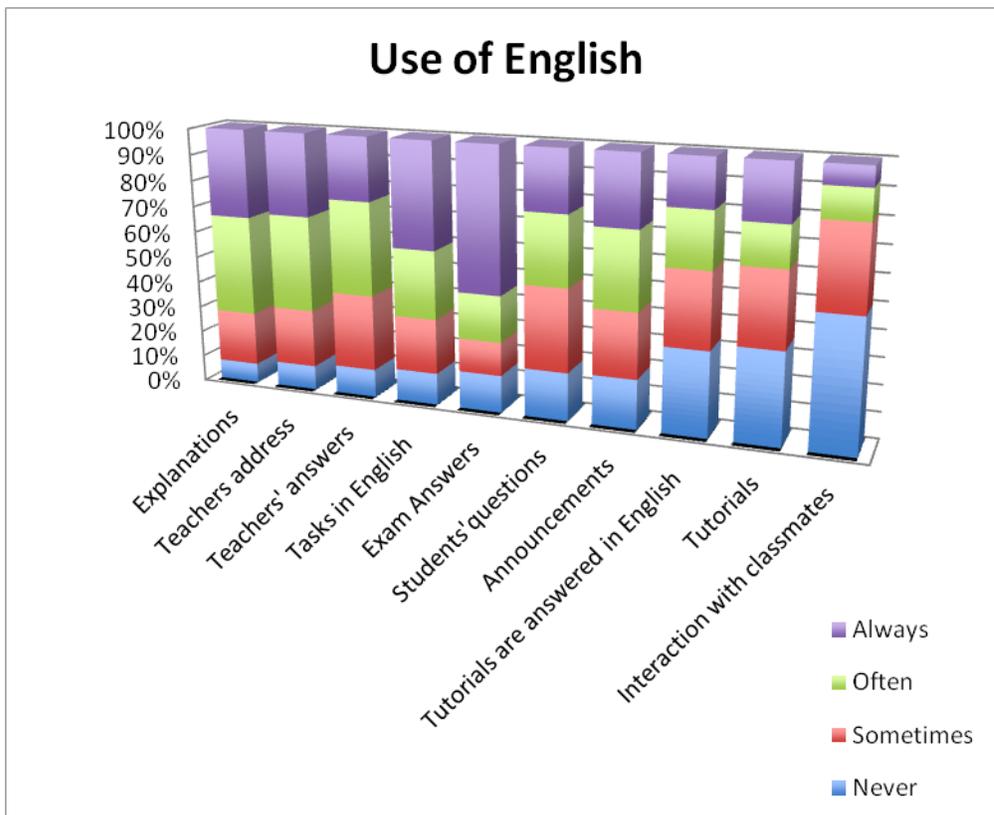
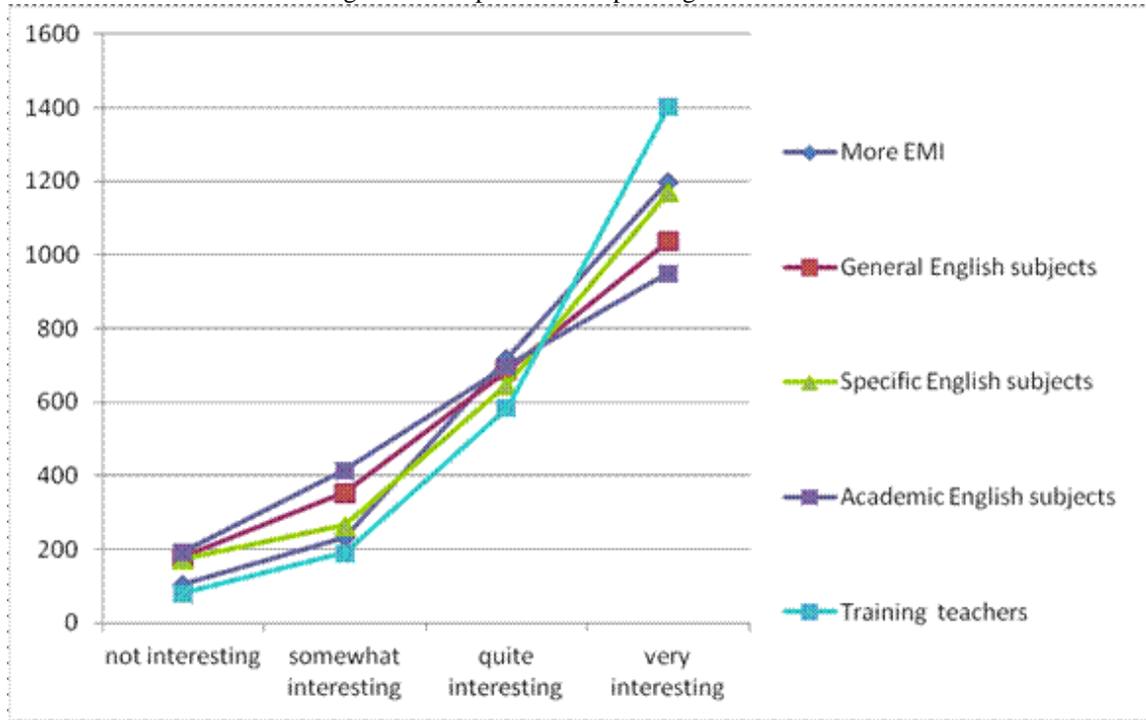


Figure 19: Use of English and Interaction



In addition, the survey pointed out that interaction should be enhanced, especially in tutorials and classwork. Although expository discourse (teachers' explanations and general questions) and exams are normally carried out in English, it is quite clear that most interaction, especially bilateral communication with and between students, is not in English.

Figure 20: Proposals for improving EMI courses



Finally, the students agree that there should be a better offer of EMI subjects. Moreover, they feel that this programme must be supported by ESP (English for Specific Purposes) courses, included in their official curriculum. And, above all, they also considered it to be fundamental that teachers are trained. The results from both the student and teacher surveys coincide with the belief that there should be more courses and a greater support system for EMI at the UA.

4. CONCLUSIONS

To summarize and highlight the most important findings of this study, which aimed to explore the *status quo* of English at the UA, we will respond to each of the broad research questions.

- 1) How does the UA deal with EMI and what is being implemented?

The UA's new language policy has promoted the use of English as the medium of instruction in three different contexts: i. content courses of the different degrees ii. ARA groups (high academic performance groups) in Biology, Law, Telecommunications engineering and Computer Science engineering, and iii. Other courses and events, such as the Rafael Altamira summer courses and the International Summer Program.

- 2) What are the teachers' linguistic competence levels? Are the UA teachers willing and motivated to teach in English? What are their needs?

Although the English competence levels of the teaching staff ranges from absolute beginners (A1) to highly proficient (C2), the largest number claims to be at an upper intermediate (B2) level. Most lecturers believe that EMI courses should be promoted in the UA to create more academic and professional opportunities for the students and to foster international relations. However, many of them are not willing to carry them out themselves and the main reasons given are their need for further linguistic and pedagogic training. The majority of the polled lecturers considers that training is necessary. In particular, they mainly suggest offering courses to improve the lecturers' oral expression and classroom interaction techniques; closely followed by English Language courses and Specific English subjects (e.g., English for Business or English for Computer Science) for students in the official curriculum.

- 3) What are the students' linguistic competence levels? Are the UA students willing and motivated to learn in English? What are their needs?

Much like the teaching staff, the students of the UA vary in their competence levels, but the median level they believed to have in most skills is lower intermediate (B1). Only 19% (3% ARA and 16% other courses) of the polled students had ever taken an EMI course, yet the majority, who had not taken any, thought it would be very interesting to be

able to take part in them. Those who had taken EMI courses claimed that there was a need for more spoken interaction in classes. To implement more and better EMI courses, the students believed, similar to the teachers, that there should be more training courses for instructors and more English for Specific and Academic Purposes courses for students within the official degrees.

Through this study we have collected data on the actual situation of the UA in terms of EMI courses and the process of internationalization. The findings we have presented here lend support to the need to support and train instructors and students better so that more EMI courses may be implemented. Our data, together with the recommendations of recent publications on ensuring quality education in EMI (see Bertaux, et.al, 2010 & Marsh, et.al., 2013) will hopefully allow us to design a programme to better prepare university lectures and professors confronted with EMI courses.

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