

EMI Professional Development in Italy: An Assessment Focus

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Abstract

This paper addresses the issue of assessment in English-Medium Instruction (EMI) and international teaching contexts in Italy. Its aims are twofold: to present the results of a survey of lecturers who teach in English-taught programmes (ETPs) in a northern Italian university regarding their experience of assessment in other cultures, their current assessment practices in ETPs and their attitudes towards assessment; and to report on a module developed as part of an EMI professional development programme that focuses specifically on assessment, feedback and learning outcomes. The lecturers completed the survey before taking part in the training module so educational developers would gain insight into their conceptions of assessment prior to the course. The training module was developed to support lecturers in developing assessment styles and practices that are appropriate for the international learning environment and ETPs.

1. Introduction

Assessment is a key aspect of teaching and learning and in EMI and international contexts, it requires careful consideration. Dunn and Wallace (2008, p. 249) identify “designing and delivering curriculum and assessment for ‘localized (yet) international’ content and teaching approaches” as one of the four main challenges in transnational education. This is largely because assessment styles and student approaches to assessment differ across cultures. Some countries tend to favour summative assessment, and others formative assessment; some countries traditionally use oral exams, while others rely largely on written modes of assessment such as assignments, papers and es-

says. There are also discipline-specific modes of assessment, such as laboratory exams in scientific disciplines. All students place importance on assessment, but some students may be more assessment-oriented than others; that is, placing greater importance on the attainment of high marks. Assessment is a “benchmark for the quality of the student, the instructor, the course, the programme and the institution” (Wilkinson et al., 2006, p. 38) and, as David Killick notes, is considered by many researchers to be “the most important driver of student engagement and learning” (2015, p. 168). This fundamental place of assessment is not usually reflected in research on EMI and English-taught programmes (ETPs), in which it has largely been a marginal issue (Kao & Tsou, p. 183). It is also sometimes overlooked in professional development courses for EMI lecturers, even though Fortanet-Gómez (2010) called for an assessment focus 10 years ago and Leask (2008, p. 121) has drawn attention to the need to focus staff attention on assessment practices in the transnational environment.

This chapter focuses specifically on assessment in EMI in the Italian context and on professional development for lecturers in ETPs. It draws on assessment concepts and definitions that are widely recognised and applied in both EMI and non-EMI contexts (Brown & Knight, 1998; Brown, 2005; cf. Earl & Katz, 2006). Summative assessment is usually equated with Assessment of Learning and involves assessment tools that sum up students’ progress, using instruments such as time-constrained tests and exams, or final papers and reports, which provide a measure of achievement. Such instruments are high stakes for students as the outcomes can have an effect on their future studies or careers. Formative assessment, on the other hand, is often used interchangeably with Assessment for Learning (AfL) and involves assessment tools that work on improving student performance, providing opportunities for them to receive feedback in time for remediation of errors. Examples of formative assessment tools may include groupwork assignments, reflective commentaries, presentations, portfolios or role-plays (Brown, 2005, p. 82). Particularly in an international context in which students have diverse backgrounds and may aspire to working in multicultural contexts, it is important to create authentic, valid assessment

practices that enable students to develop transferable competences and knowledge (Brown, 2005; EQUiP, 2019).

Academic staff who teach their subject through the medium of English as part of university internationalisation strategy sometimes have limited knowledge of how students are assessed elsewhere. As a result, they are often unaware of international students' expectations regarding assessment practices, or of the different "biographies, perspectives and emotional responses" (Killick, p. 157) that diverse students bring to learning and assessment. As Harju-Luukkainen et al. (2020, p.2) note:

We know often very little of other countries' assessment policies and practices outside our own. While remedial actions are made and taken with attention on the local context, sometimes an in-depth understanding of, for instance, the long-term consequences or larger global influences is missing. Therefore, a more complex understanding of different educational systems, assessment strategies, policies, practices and their connections is needed. Given that we live in a globalised world, it is important that we understand the context of others in order to reflect our own and also to justify possible actions.

When a degree programme is internationalised or taught through the medium of English, lecturers thus need to review the type of assessment they use, taking into account student diversity and the special features of the international teaching and learning environment. They may need support in the form of professional development to raise awareness of other teaching practices and assessment procedures.

The Italian university has typically tended to assess student performance using oral exams, a practice going back a century (Pastore & Pentassuglia, 2015, p. 409). While worldwide, there has been a trend in the last 20 years towards outcomes-based assessment that focuses on the attainment of competences and away from exclusively summative assessment and norm-referenced marking, a high percentage of Italian courses still assess students using a final oral exam (Pastore & Pentassuglia, 2015). In addition to this commonly used oral mode, assessment in Italian higher education involves practices relating to marking and the

administration of exams that are peculiar to Italian universities. As a result, Italian lecturers in ETPs and internationalised programmes may need support in rethinking and designing appropriate assessment tools and developing clear and transparent communication around them.

Professional development for Italian EMI lecturers is increasing. In a 2015 survey of Italian universities offering ETPs, 60% of respondents said that there was no training for staff teaching these programmes, while 10% said the university provided methodological training and 2% a language course (Broggini & Costa, 2017, p. 253). This represented an increase on figures from the previous survey in 2012, so in the absence of more recent data, it can be assumed that the trend is continuing and the provision of training courses is on the rise. Although several Italian universities, particularly in the north, have developed training courses for staff, assessment is not usually a main focus. This corresponds to data from a Europe-wide survey of lecturers in EMI which shows that most European teacher education programmes focus on language support, practical teaching sessions and academic language and that less than half of teacher education programmes (TEPs) include some methodological component (Dafouz, 2018; cf. O'Dowd, 2018). Assessment practices do not usually feature in courses that prepare lecturers for ETPs (Costa, 2015, p. 134).

This chapter focuses on the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, a private university in the north of Italy with several campuses, which offers EMI and internationalisation professional development workshops for university lecturers from its own university and outside. It has two aims: (1) to present results of a survey of lecturers in ETPs which provide insights into their experience of assessment in other countries, their attitudes towards assessment and their existing assessment practices and (2) to outline the content of an EMI professional development module that was designed to support lecturers in using assessment styles and practices that are appropriate to the international learning environment. The purpose of the survey was to enable educational developers to have a clearer understanding of the needs of lecturers when it comes to assessment. The survey results also establish a broader portrait of assessment practices in EMI programmes in one Italian university than that afforded by a previous survey of 150

lecturers in the same university (Costa & Murphy, 2018). Costa and Murphy asked whether lecturers in ETPs change their assessment practices with respect to Italian-taught programmes and whether language competence was assessed separately as part of a wider survey on teaching practices. Overall, the chapter argues for the importance of including assessment as an essential part of EMI professional development.

2. Context, Research Questions, Method and Participants

2.1 Context of the Study

The research and training centre referred to in this study began offering professional development modules for EMI lecturers in 2016. Participation in the training is free and on a voluntary basis. The first modules were designed to raise awareness of the special features of the international classroom, to provide strategy for the classroom, including language support, and to offer feedback on lecturers' existing EMI practices through micro-teaching sessions. The team of educational developers includes EMI specialists from within and without the university, both Italian and non-Italian. Apart from offering practical strategies for the international classroom (Ryan 2005; TAEC, 2019; EQUiP, 2019), the courses also provide a space for reflection on the opportunities and challenges of the EMI context and for lecturers to share personal experiences and needs. Through initial training modules, educational developers perceived that most lecturers had a limited experience of student assessment practices and marking schemes used in other countries, leading to the desire to investigate the issue further by means of a survey and to offer training in this area.

While assessment practices are specific to disciplinary areas, some generalisations can be made about assessment in different cultures: Anglophone countries, for example, tend to use continuous assessment, written assignments and exam papers, while in countries such as Italy, oral exams at the end of a course prevail in many disciplines. To give one example, the Italian approach to assessment and marking is vastly different from British-American-Australian models, where the essay is "one of the

most common measures of academic success and is emphasised in undergraduate education” (Rosin O’Hagan & Wigglesworth, 2015, p. 1729). In many Italian degree courses, the first written assessment that students undertake is the graduation thesis at the end of a three-year degree, although they may have completed short-answer style written exams. The Italian style of assessment bears comparison with some other European countries, but the marking system is different. Traditionally, summative assessment has been the main form of assessment. A final exam, sometimes oral, sometimes written and oral, has played a significant role in Italian assessment, making it a high-stakes occasion. A recent study of Italian students in three degree courses, Pedagogy, Psychology and Communication showed that an oral exam was taken by 73.1% of students, a written exam by 15.9% and a mixed form of oral and written exam by 11% (Pastore & Pentassuglia, 2015, p. 409). Students typically prepare for the exams by studying textbooks and lecture notes. A final oral exam may be the first and only occasion on which students receive feedback from the examiner.

The marking system in Italian higher education is unique to Italy. For each exam students receive a mark out of 30, while their final mark on graduation is out of 110. This system derives from an era in which the total mark came from the sum of marks assigned by each member of an examination committee: until the 1970s there were three members for a normal exam and 11 for a final exam, each of whom assigned a mark out of 10. In Italy a pass mark starts from 18 and a student who obtains 30 may be awarded *Lode* (distinction) if outstanding. Non-Italian lecturers in the Italian university system who have come from an Anglophone university, where percentage-based marks that correspond to grades are used, and in which 100 per cent is rarely awarded, are likely to need time to adapt to assessing students orally and assigning marks out of 30. It can only be assumed that for most international students, the Italian marking system is equally – if not even more – bewildering. As Dunn and Wallace (2008, p. 255) have noted “assessment is hard enough when students are accustomed to the same educational system as their teachers; when assessment tasks are clear and inclusively designed; when students are not over-assessed; when assessment tasks are pitched at the appropriate level; when requirements are explicit

[...]. How much more difficult is it when teachers and students are separated by diverse prior experiences of all these things?”. Furthermore, at most Italian universities a student may refuse to accept the mark proposed by the lecturer and choose to take the exam again, more than once, to improve the mark. A fail is not recorded in the academic record and the student sits for the exam until passing. A good example of information about the Italian exam and marking system is set out on the website of the Guidance and Counselling Unit of Ca’ Foscari University of Venice: https://www.unive.it/pag/fileadmin/user_upload/inglese/study/how_to/counseling/EXAMS_instructions.pdf. Such information is not necessarily as well explained or displayed by other Italian universities. This is significant because assessment modes, marking schemes and exam conditions differ greatly in other countries and the prior experiences of international students may not equip them to cope with assessment in the Italian system. On the other hand, Italian students who enrol in an English-taught programme may need extra support in understanding assessment practices adopted in an internationalised course.

2.2 Survey of Italian Lecturers in ETPs

The purpose of the survey was to gain insight into the experience and knowledge of assessment practices outside Italy and conceptions of assessment held by Italian lecturers in EMI. Conceptions of assessment are defined as “one’s beliefs, meanings and understandings of assessment” (Fletcher et al., 2012, p. 120). In an international context in which student expectations and backgrounds may differ greatly from those of Italian students, it is particularly important to investigate the latter because, as Meyer et al. (2010) note, there is “evidence that attitudes held by staff about assessment and whether staff have assessment expertise have an impact on their use of assessments and feedback provided to students” (p. 332). The two key research questions that the survey was thus intended to investigate were: (1) How much experience do Italian lecturers in ETPs have of assessment outside Italy? and (2) What conceptions do Italian lecturers in ETPs have of modes of assessment, exam practices and marking schemes in the international teaching context? The survey bears some similarity with surveys of lecturers in

EMI in other contexts, such as Taiwan (Kao & Tsou, 2017) and Spain (Fortanet-Gómez, 2020).

The survey took the form of a questionnaire with 12 closed questions and two open-ended questions. The first two questions concerned the lecturers' experience of assessment outside Italy. Subsequent questions concerned lecturers' conceptions regarding student assessment and marking. Descriptors such as "assessment for learning", "assessment of learning", "peer assessment", "self-assessment", "summative assessment" and "formative assessment" were not used in order to avoid confusion if respondents were not already familiar with these terms. The two open-ended questions (1) asked lecturers to complete the statement "I chose to take part in this module because... and (2) gave lecturers the opportunity to express specific "thoughts or questions" as far as assessment is concerned. This section was added to give educational developers at the centre the opportunity to respond to specific needs in the training module and, if necessary, to integrate new material or activities.

The survey had 27 respondents, 26 of whom were Italian. There were no English native language users among the respondents. Respondents taught in a range of disciplines including Medicine, Science, Management, Economics, Agriculture, Philosophy and Psychology and all taught in ETPs at the time of filling in the survey, with varying degrees of experience. The majority of the respondents had completed the first EMI professional development module offered by the centre, which focuses on features of the international classroom, classroom strategy and scaffolding, and includes a practical micro-teaching session, so they had received some input from educational developers. They were invited to complete the survey when they enrolled for the second module. After filling in the survey, lecturers completed the module on learning outcomes, assessment and feedback.

For the analysis of the survey, quantitative analysis was applied to the closed-ended questions and qualitative analysis to the open-ended questions. The data from the survey was cross-referenced with data recorded during module discussion time, such as written notes made by the educational developers of participants' comments. The sample analysed in this paper is to be considered the first stage of investigation as it is anticipated

that there will be a second stage of research in which interviews with a sample of the lecturers will be undertaken. This will enable a greater insight into teacher cognition; that is, Italian lecturers' beliefs, awareness about teaching and thought processes with regard to assessment. Teacher cognition in EMI research is a growing area of interest (Henriksen et al., 2019) and more data is required to be able to gain a better understanding of EMI in Italy and how lecturers need to be supported.

2.3 EMI Professional Development: A Focus on Assessment

The second aim of this paper is to present the content of the EMI training module on assessment and to propose a focus on assessment in professional development elsewhere. The EMI assessment module lasts three hours and covers learning outcomes, assessment and feedback in the EMI and international context. The module needs to be short and concentrated because of the non-compulsory nature of EMI professional development at the university in question and because lecturers have little time for training. Although brief, it introduces the main assessment concepts known both in EMI and other contexts: assessment of learning; assessment for learning; continuous assessment, peer assessment and self-assessment. With reference to these concepts, the module also presents a range of different approaches and attitudes to assessment around the world. It engages participants in exercises on communication for assessment processes, the provision of timely feedback and the notion of feedforward (Leask, 2008, p. 127), and the expression of learning outcomes appropriate to an international context (EQUiP, 2019). As far as learning outcomes are concerned, the course content was influenced by the work of Killick (2015) and Deardorff and Jones (2012) and introduces Biggs' (1996) concept of constructive alignment, in which assessment tasks must be aligned with intended learning outcomes and teaching practices as part of a holistic planning process. Overall, the module encourages lecturers to establish guidelines and adopt a framework and clear communication around assessment.

3. Survey Results and Discussion

3.1 Lecturers' Experience of Assessment Outside Italy

The first two questions asked about lecturers' experience of assessment practices outside Italy as a student (Q1) and as a teacher (Q2). Responses revealed that most lecturers had little experience of university assessment outside Italy in a teaching capacity, although some had had direct experience as students. 41 per cent had no experience of assessment in a teaching capacity of assessment outside Italy, 22 per cent had only indirect experience of assessment, meaning that they had not directly assessed students, but become aware of other assessment practices during periods abroad. A further 22 per cent had a little direct experience and 15 per cent had a lot of direct experience. This suggests that lecturers' experience and knowledge of assessment styles and approaches in other countries and of international student expectations and attitudes to assessment is, on the whole, fairly limited. A recent survey of staff in EMI in a Spanish university asked lecturers about the possibility of a short period teaching abroad and found 80 per cent would welcome the possibility (Fortanet-Gómez, 2020, p. 12). As offering teaching abroad for all EMI lecturers is probably difficult to administer, it is important to provide them with an international perspective through training.

3.2 Lecturers' Conceptions of Assessment in EMI

Question 3 asked whether lecturers change their assessment practices in English-taught courses. Nearly all respondents agreed (59%), strongly agreed (15%) or slightly agreed (15%) with the statement "I assess students differently in English-taught courses". This result is significantly different from Kao and Tsou's survey in Taiwan (2017, p. 189), which found 90% respondents reported no significant differences in assessment between EMI and non-EMI, and from a large survey administered to staff at the same Italian university in 2016 (Costa & Murphy, 2018), in which only 50% of lecturers said that they had made changes to assessment practices in their international courses (p. 609). The result in the present survey may reflect an existing awareness of some of the issues at stake as nearly all lecturers who signed up for the assessment module had already completed prior EMI

training with the centre, whose courses tend to attract lecturers who recognise a need for improvement and better understanding of and support for EMI and internationalisation. It may also be interpreted as a sign that the international teaching context is changing fast and with more and more ETPs in Italian universities, there is wider discussion about and interest in teaching and learning issues and internationalising the curriculum.

In question 4 in the survey lecturers responded to a statement: "International students find the Italian assessment system clear". The statement refers to lecturers' perceptions of international students' experience of assessment in Italy. No-one strongly agreed with the statement and 33% disagreed with it. However, 19% agreed and 48% slightly agreed with the statement, making a total of 67% who think that the assessment system is more or less clear. Lecturers' perceptions that international students find the Italian assessment system clear may not match those of the students, although no data regarding international student perceptions at the same university is available to confirm this. Perhaps significantly, the only survey respondent who had a lot of direct experience of university assessment outside Italy both as a teacher and as a student disagreed with the statement. This suggests that personal experience outside the Italian system may lead to a higher degree of understanding of the differences between Italian and other assessment processes and thus increase empathy with regard to international students' experience of these processes.

Question 5 concerned the marking system: "International students ask me to explain the Italian marking system". Only 7 per cent of respondents said that international students always ask for explanation; 26 per cent said that they usually do and 41 said they occasionally do, while 26 per cent said that students never asked for explanation. Given the idiosyncratic nature of the Italian marking system and the lack of readily available information in some departments and universities, it is perhaps surprising that more students do not ask for information. It is not my intention to explore the many possible reasons for which students do not ask for explanation, but rather to highlight the need for the provision of explicit information about exam rules, marking schemes and assessment criteria at an institutional, departmental and course level. For the nearly three quarters of students who

ask for explanation of marking even if only occasionally, it is important that lecturers are able to offer clear information and breakdowns regarding marking criteria, how learning outcomes are reflected in assessment and students' rights to accept or refuse a mark. As noted in the EQUiiP Internationalising Course Design Thematic Text, assessment "should be made transparent to the students" (2019, p. 8).

3.3 Existing Assessment Practices Used by Lecturers

Questions 6–10 were aimed at gaining insight into the existing styles of assessment used by lecturers in English-taught programmes. In particular in Q6 respondents were asked if they use a final exam as the only form of assessment in their international courses and Q7 asked if the mode of assessment in these courses is oral. A final exam (either written or oral) as the exclusive form of assessment is still reasonably common: 11% said that they always use a final exam, 15% that they usually use a final exam and a further 22% that they occasionally use it as an assessment tool in their international courses. This points to the need to raise greater awareness of assessment concepts and approaches to ensure that EMI lecturers use a range of different tools and reflect carefully on the purpose of the assessment they are using. Using summative assessment as the only form of assessment is probably not appropriate in EMI courses because it does not foster in students "an evolving level of competence" (EQUiiP, 2019, p. 7) or provide lecturers with "a multidimensional view" of a student's performance (Kao & Tsou, 2017, p. 199).

As far as using oral assessment is concerned, only 3.7% said it was the only form of assessment they used, while 37% said they partly used oral assessment and a further 3.7% mostly used it. The results differ significantly from data reported by Pastore and Pentassuglia, which showed a high number of Italian students being assessed in an oral exam, suggesting that EMI lecturers are sensitive to the need to use a mix of assessment. The figure that stood out was the number of lecturers who use no oral assessment in their ETPs: 52%. There is no need for Italian lecturers to completely abandon the oral exam, as it could be considered a local "vernacular" mode of learning and teaching (Dafouz, 2018, p. 550), but students must be supported in pre-

paring for it and provided with opportunities to practise before a final exam is undertaken. As noted above, it is important to offer students a range of assessment opportunities.

Questions 8, 9 and 10 asked for further details about assessment, such as whether continuous assessment is used, whether students are required to present portfolios and make presentations and whether Blackboard or other digital platforms are used for assessment purposes. While responses suggest that lecturers' assessment modes are shifting to accommodate the needs of diverse student cohorts, they also suggest that there is space for innovation as far as using technology and continuous assessment tools are concerned. Such practices would be worthy of investigation at a future stage of research. These issues are addressed as part of the EMI assessment module, as will be outlined in the next section.

3.4 Assessment of English Language Competence in EMI Courses?

Question 11 addressed an important issue in ETPs: whether students' English language competence affects their marks. This issue has been investigated by other researchers (Kao & Tsou, 2017; Strotmann et al., 2014; Costa & Murphy, 2018). In this survey 67% of lecturers agreed or slightly agreed that they take language into account when marking. A more in-depth understanding of what language aspects lecturers assess and how explicit the marking criteria are is urgently required. Comments from lecturers in the open-ended questions also pointed to a degree of confusion about the role that language should have in assessment, as will be discussed in the next section.

There is also the issue of whether content lecturers should be taking language skills into consideration at all and if linguistic discrimination is taking place. Kao and Tsou (2017, p. 191), whose study was focused mainly on the role of English in assessment in EMI programmes, found that although survey respondents "understood the importance of improving students' English proficiency through assessments, none of them applied assessment tools to evaluate students' English performance or indicated the English component in their criteria." Strotmann et al. (2014, p. 96) found lec-

turers did not “feel confident” assessing language as well as content. As Henriksen et al. note (2019, p. 10), many university teachers do not want the responsibility of providing language support and feedback to students, yet if language competence is going to affect grades, it needs to be supported.

An integrated approach to assessment may be appropriate in which the lecturer sets out content and language learning objectives in the course outline, supports the achievement of such objectives through teaching, and finally assesses them according to explicit criteria. Advocating the adoption of a CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) framework for assessment in ETPs has indeed become reasonably common (Wilkinson & Yasuda, 2013; Kao & Tsou, 2017). Given the worldwide interest in this matter, the role of English language in EMI assessment would be worthy of further investigation in future research.

3.5 Lecturers’ Concerns and Queries

The final part of the survey consisted of two open-ended questions, which gave respondents the opportunity to express particular interests and concerns related to assessment. Lecturers’ comments in the table below have not been categorised, but a few clear themes emerge: lecturers want an opportunity for “overall improvement”, they are concerned about the relationship between learning outcomes and assessment, they want to know more about different assessment practices and troubleshoot specific problems, and they need guidance about the role of students’ language in assessment:

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- I want to improve my assessment procedure.
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- I want to know more about alternative assessment procedures.
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- I’d like to receive support in approaching international courses in a more holistic way.
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- I’m interested in improving my professional skills.
-
- I need to refresh and check my teaching methods and also to share experiences with experts and colleagues.
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- I need some training in teaching/assessment (no opportunity before) and to obtain tips about improving my impact on students' learning outcomes.
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- My concern regards the definition of intended learning outcomes, because I think assessment depends on them.
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- I think learning outcomes and assessment strategies should be defined according to the specificities of international classrooms and I would like to learn how.
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- I want to know how to balance assessment of participation and creativity with "traditional" assessment based on having acquired knowledge of contents.
-
- I find it difficult to assess students' progress with a written exam.
-
- The problem is harmonizing oral and written assessment.
-
- How to handle: different language levels; links with learning outcomes; reasoning abilities
-
- My main difficulty is that I should not grade the language knowledge/competence, but in some cases, especially in open questions, language is functional to understand, and hence grade, the contents of the answer.
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- It is a bit difficult to assess involvement of students (some are rather passive).
-
- I would like to know more about assessment methods in international classes.
-
- I'm taking part to improve my way of teaching in an international course.
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Overall, the responses suggest a high degree of willingness on the part of lecturers to increase intercultural awareness of assessment practices and expectations, and to try to improve their own practices. They also demonstrate the desire or need for support in this area. Most revealing, perhaps, is the comment: "I need some training in teaching/assessment (no opportunity before)": Italian lecturers usually have no specific pedagogical training. As in Kao and Tsou (2017, p. 191), some comments indicate uncertainty about how to evaluate the language component. Although the sample of 27 respondents is quite small, survey results suggest a clear need to focus on assessment in EMI training for lecturers. The results of the survey also provide an initial

snapshot of existing attitudes to assessment and practices and open up the possibility of further investigation of teacher cognition and identity when it comes to teaching in the international and EMI contexts.

4. Discussion of EMI Assessment Module and Recommendations

The content of the module was outlined above, so this section discusses a role-play exercise and lecturers' comments in discussion time as well as providing recommendations for professional development with an assessment focus.

4.1 Role Play

Participants in the module take part in a role-play exercise, whose objective is to sensitise lecturers to the needs of both international and domestic students when it comes to assessment in an EMI course. As is clear from the role-play cards (Appendix 2), the scenarios are based on an Italian context. Lecturers are given a role-play card describing a scenario. These are based on case studies and research on student experience in the international context conducted by Marginson & Sawir (2011) and Handa (2005) and are designed to raise awareness of the challenges that international students face when changing academic cultures and that domestic students may face when enrolling in an ETP. Participants work in pairs, with one member of each pair playing the part of a student, and the other a lecturer. The student needs to ask for specific information regarding assessment and marking, or request feedback on progress. The teacher needs to provide clear answers and explanations.

The activities in the assessment module have so far not been video-recorded, but were observed by educational developers. Some participants in the teacher role struggled to offer clear explanations, highlighting the need for lecturers to prepare explicit instructions and guidelines for assessment and have a grasp of appropriate, concise language to provide further

details. Lecturers in the international context require extra empathy and patience when communicating with students. Leask (2008, p. 127) has drawn attention to the importance of effective communication around assessment processes:

The ability to explicitly and succinctly communicate roles and expectations around assessment requirements and provide high quality and effective feedback to students on their progress towards achievement of course goals were highly valued by students. This included being able to explain to students where they went wrong and what they needed to do to improve their performance.

4.2 Lecturers' Concerns in Discussion Time

During discussion time in the EMI module, further questions and comments from lecturers emerged:

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- Will students gain insight into the local educational culture if I change assessment to match international models?
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- I have really big class sizes, so continuous assessment is difficult because I don't have time to mark so many assignments.
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- I end up using multiple choice exams a lot as it's the easiest way to get round the different language levels of the students.
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- I started using groupwork for assessment, but I had problems with group dynamics. Should I form the groups or allow students to form their own groups without my intervention?
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These queries and comments are fairly consistent with the types of comments that have emerged in other studies (Fortanet-Gómez, 2020; Kao & Tsou, 2017) on transnational and international educational contexts.

4.3 Recommendations for Training

The EMI assessment module is still being developed and modified to take into account lecturers' needs and feedback from course participants. During

the module, recommendations regarding best practice in assessment and feedback are offered to the lecturers:

- Overall, assessment must be designed to reflect the intended learning outcomes (Killick, p. 168).
- Adopting formative assessment avoids having a high stakes final exam as the only form of assessment (Wilkinson et al., 2006). At the same time, it opens up opportunities for lecturers to provide “feedforward” on coursework or simulations.
- It is best to use a range of assessments in a course to obtain a multidimensional view of student performance (Kao & Tsou, 2017; EQUiP, 2019).
- When designing in-class tasks, it is imperative to make their purpose clear, aligning them with learning outcomes (Biggs, 1996; EQUiP, 2019) and providing rubrics.
- Explicit communication needs to be provided for all aspects of assessment, including breakdown of marks, marking criteria and whether English language ability is being taken into account. However, as Brown (2005) and Carroll (2015, p. 167) note, explicit information is not enough. Assessment practices need to be transparent so that students understand the assessment process and trust it.
- If written assignments are used, examples need to be made available when it comes to correct referencing and citing secondary sources. It is also useful to offer students samples of past marked assignments with written feedback and marks as a way of providing insight into marking criteria.
- Lecturers must make their expectations clear regarding both content and language and should consider adopting a CLIL framework for assessment in which separate content and language objectives are built into the course aims and intended learning outcomes and are evaluated according to clear criteria.
- Students undertaking an oral exam must be given the opportunity to practise during exam simulations.

- Interactive software such as mentimeter can be used for quizzes, and to stimulate wider class participation, which can then be turned into an opportunity for the provision of feedback and collaborative learning.
- Learning platforms such as Blackboard offer many possible tools for assessment and enable lecturers to provide feedback through audio files.

Assessment has an important role to play in teaching at all levels and preparing staff to adopt effective assessment practices is particularly important in EMI courses with international student cohorts. Meyer et al. (2010, p. 340) found that academic staff who had undertaken more professional development in assessment were more likely to agree that assessment improves teaching. According to Kao and Tsou, training in assessment concepts and tools enables lecturers “to better identify students’ learning difficulties, provide more effective feedback, and thus enhance students’ learning process” (2017, p. 203). Flexibility has been noted as an essential characteristic of the transnational learning environment (Leask, 2008; Hicks et al., 2005; Dunn & Wallace, 2008, p. 126) and lecturers need to be aware of other ways of assessing, offering feedback and expressing learning outcomes. Lecturers do not need to abandon local practices (Rizvi, 2017, p. 25), but to communicate these practices effectively, make them meaningful for all students and potentially integrating them with other practices that take into account the diversity of student profiles and backgrounds.

5. Conclusion and Future Directions

This paper has presented the results of a survey of 27 EMI lecturers in the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, a northern Italian university with several campuses, regarding their experience of assessment in other countries and their conceptions of assessment practices. The lecturers came from a range of faculties and had varying degrees of teaching experience in English-taught programmes. After filling in the questionnaire, they completed a training module that focuses specifically on assessment. The paper also outlined the content of the assessment module, arguing that such

training can play an important role in supporting EMI lecturers to adjust their assessment practices to reflect the diverse backgrounds of students and to align them with learning outcomes and teaching. Survey results highlighted the need for specific training that raises awareness of a range of assessment concepts and that helps lecturers develop assessment practices that are appropriate in the international and EMI context. It also pointed to the need for EMI lecturers to communicate all details of assessment explicitly and in timely fashion and for ETPs to have clear guidelines for both staff and students regarding assessment tasks and marking. The importance of offering training in these areas cannot be underestimated given the importance that students place on assessment. Offering professional development on assessment in EMI and other topics also encourages reflective practice and facilitates the development of a community of practice around ETPs and internationalisation. Dafouz (2018, p. 549) recommends that teacher education programmes should be “sites of reflection where teachers tell and share their experiences”. Although ETPs are found in most faculties of the university, there is often limited understanding among faculties of what happens in other programmes and of the existing practices used by other lecturers. A research agenda that gathers this kind of data and further analyses the practices lecturers use, as well as their conceptions of assessment, is being developed. It would also be useful to survey students in EMI programmes in Italy to gain an understanding of their expectations and preferences regarding assessment.

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