Integrating Classroom-Based Negotiation Into a Syllabus

A Multicycle Action Research Study

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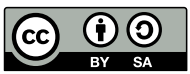
Bozen-Bolzano University Press, 2023
Free University of Bozen-Bolzano
www.unibz.it/universitypress

Cover design / layout: DOC.bz / bu,press
Printed by Fotolito Longo, Bozen-Bolzano

ISBN 978-88-6046-195-7
DOI 10.13124/9788860461957



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1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

The research that is the focus of this volume refers to an action research (AR) project regarding the English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) course that I had been teaching at the Faculty of Economics and Management at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano in South Tyrol, Italy, to undergraduate economics students on two undergraduate programmes, Economics and Management (E&M) and Politics, Philosophy and Economics (PPE), for several years prior to the study being undertaken. The research formed the basis for my doctoral studies, and some findings have already been published in abridged forms (Prior, 2018, 2020, 2021) as have some parts of the literature review (Prior, 2023). Although this volume contains some parts of these published articles with the editors' permission, it is significantly more comprehensive since it focuses on the entire project and as such describes in greater detail the research process undertaken and the findings generated through the AR cycles.

The ESAP course had been conceived in 2001 as an integrated credit-bearing mandatory language course for the students, whose degree programmes are characterised by the Faculty's very specific teaching model that uses three languages of instruction, German, Italian and English, which tend to be distributed equally over the subjects offered in each undergraduate degree programme. This study model makes the University one of the very few universities in Europe that require undergraduate students to follow programmes using three languages of instruction.[1]

Despite the University having a very specific language model, there is no formal university-wide policy as to how the three languages are distributed in degree programmes nor as to which subject a language is allotted. However, the Faculty of Economics and Management distributes the languages as equally as possible over the subjects offered in their degree programmes and

1 According to the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano's website, studying with the trilingual model of the university is "a unique opportunity in Europe". See https://www.unibz.it/en/services/language-centre/study-in-three-languages/

so, as an example, Economics is taught and examined in English, private law in Italian and Financial Risk Management in German. Since the programmes' subjects are only offered in one language and are not doubled up, this means that approximately two-thirds of the courses are taught in a student's second (L2) or third language (L3). English is therefore used as a medium of instruction, as is German and Italian, but the difference is that almost all students have either German or Italian as their first language (L1); in fact recent data show that of the total number of students enrolled in the E&M and PPE degree programmes at the Faculty, 37.06% have German as their L1, 59.1% have Italian and 2.8% have another L1 other than German and Italian. However, only a further 1% have English as their L1[2]. Therefore the vast majority of students following a course using English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) have English as their L2 or even their L3, with varying proficiency levels (Prior, 2021).

EMI has been defined as "the use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English" (Dearden, 2014, p.4). Although the English used in this context complies with this definition, as a medium of instruction, however, it differs from Italian and German given that South Tyrol is a German-Italian bilingual area of Italy. As a result of this, the EMI courses at the University are held almost exclusively by lecturers who are non-native speakers of English, a feature which has been shown to be typical of Italian university contexts (Costa, 2013), but which again differs from the courses where German or Italian are used as a medium of instruction. These are almost without exception held respectively by lecturers with German or Italian as their L1.

Given these specific considerations related to the Faculty's teaching model therefore, the ESAP course, which runs concurrently with other subjects taught in English, had been conceived to provide extra skills practice and language input in English to assist in the study of those other courses using EMI (Prior, 2021). ESAP is a branch of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which itself is a branch of English language teaching (ELT). ESP as a concept

2 Data provided by the Student Secretariat at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano on 3 August 2022.

first appeared in the 1960s when global developments in the scientific, economic, and technological fields created a huge demand for specific English rather than the general English for no particular purpose that had traditionally been the focus of much language teaching and learning. Much teaching of English therefore started to shift towards a more functional syllabus which would provide language and skills training for specific professional and academic needs in order "to help language learners cope with the features of language or to develop the competencies needed to function in a discipline, profession, or workplace" (Basturkmen, 2005, p. 6). ESP is therefore distinct from general English and is defined as "an approach to language learning, which is based on learner need" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 19). However, as far as the ESAP course of this study is concerned, no real needs analysis had ever been undertaken. This meant that the design of the syllabus had not taken into consideration the learners' language needs and thus did not comply with this fundamental principle of ESP.

An action research project was therefore initiated which used the Plan – Action – Observation – Reflection cycle (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988) in order to conduct an initial wide-ranging needs analysis to investigate these needs from the perspective of the main actors in the EMI courses, the students and the lecturers whose language of instruction was English. These findings were then employed to create a much more detailed revised syllabus for the course, which was then successively modified over two further AR cycles covering three academic years in total.

The desire to use two different sources for data collection was due to the pragmatist worldview that governed this study, which originates from my background as a teacher who has been designing and teaching ESP courses at university level for over twenty years. Further, my ontological perspective is that all relevant voices involved in a context have the right to be heard. Using the two different sources for the data would allow me to investigate the situation more comprehensively because I would have gathered views from both sides of the classroom. These findings could then be triangulated in order to "achieve fuller understanding of [the] target phenomenon" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 164), which would allow me to design a syllabus that could be as relevant as possible. Given the desire to include these two data sources, therefore, a

convergent parallel mixed methods research design was used in the quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis stages (see Section 4.3) and then the results were integrated and discussed to verify the findings from both datasets as well as to explore different types of questions from each dataset.

Before this research project had been initiated, the ESAP course had used a skills-based approach to designing its syllabus, and the course had been mostly teacher-fronted due to the large numbers of students attending the course (sometimes reaching 80 in a class), although attendance was not compulsory. Since the students had to use various English language skills in their EMI courses, and on the findings from the initial needs analysis, the skills approach to the syllabus was to be maintained. However, there was also the firm intention to provide each individual student with significantly more opportunities to engage in more relevant skills practice than had previously been the case in the teacher-fronted course. In order to combine these two aspects, elements of a product approach to syllabus design, the skills-based approach, were blended with a process approach to syllabus design where negotiation would be used in the classroom to provide more opportunities for that skills practice and would allow the students to engage more actively in the decision-making aspects of their course. My years of experience have led me to believe that my learners should be allowed to contribute to the organisation of their course, which is often not the prevailing orthodoxy in the traditional educational practices that characterise my work context.

1.2 The Significance of the Study and Contribution to Knowledge

Since Breen's seminal article on syllabus design in 1987, the idea of blending product and process approaches has been posited, referred to variously as "multi-dimensional" (Breen, 2001), "hybrid" (Long, 2005c) or "eclectic" (Clarke, 1991) syllabuses. However, even though "no one approach can be responsive to learners' needs" (Graves, 2008, p. 161), there are no accounts of intentionally blending these approaches to syllabus design in the literature. There are a few accounts of process syllabuses that have been adopted in classroom settings around the world, but these accounts tend to focus on using a process approach instead of using a product approach. Moreover, many of

these admittedly few accounts often refer to a myriad of problems in the implementation of the process syllabus. Therefore, an account of an intentionally blended syllabus that has positive outcomes does not seem to appear in the literature.

A further significant aspect of the study is the use of extra credit exercises (ECEs) that were used in AR Cycle 3 to incentivise attendance so that the classroom skills and language practice could be beneficial to as many students as possible. This use of ECEs in university language classrooms in Italy was the first account to be documented in the literature (Prior, 2018).

This research contributes to existing knowledge on syllabus design and eclectic approaches to syllabus design for ESP in tertiary settings, in particular in the Italian context where research in this field is still in its infancy (see also Costa & Mastellotto, 2022). It also makes a more recent contribution to the work of other researchers who have undertaken classroom-based research on practical implementations of negotiated syllabuses, such as Budd & Wright (1990) and Serrano-Sampedro (2000), and particularly in university settings such as some of the accounts in Breen & Littlejohn (2000a), including Martyn (2000), Newstetter (2000) and Sokolik (2000), as well as in Boon (2011) and Wette (2011), among others.

Further, this research contributes to the knowledge on how using a negotiated syllabus can be associated with providing learners with greater autonomy in their learning, as was reported by Bloor & Bloor (1988) and Cotterall (2000). It has also been suggested that using negotiation in the classroom provides more opportunities for skills practice (Serrano-Sampedro, 2000) and so this research aims to demonstrate that this can indeed be the case and that this practice is beneficial for improvement in the skills.

Finally, the research documented in this volume contributes to existing knowledge on using action research with multiple AR cycles in English-language classrooms by providing a detailed account and evaluation of this teacher research. Although there are accounts of AR studies by teacher practitioners working in classrooms, they tend to be limited in number (Burns, 2005b) and many date back to more than ten years ago (Burns & McPherson, 2017) so this study is a more recent addition to the literature. Moreover, it provides insight into the iterative nature of AR and how the multiple cycles

that characterised this study enabled "initial insights and findings to give way to deeper, new but related questions" (Burns, 2005b, p. 67), which led to greater rigour in the research. Using multiple cycles also allowed me to integrate the contributions received from the learners, who are normally excluded a voice in the decision-making process of their learning, so that the content and organisation of their courses in the successive cycles could be improved.

1.3 Research Questions

The research questions were developed to reflect both the AR tradition and the convergent parallel mixed methods research design. The first two research questions are presented as mixed methods questions whereas the subsequent three questions were designed to be investigated through taking practical measures in the AR cycles.

The first two questions concern the needs analysis that was required to be undertaken in order to redesign the ESAP syllabus:

1. What are the English-language skills needed by economics students at this trilingual university as perceived by the main "actors", i.e. students and lecturers?
2. What skills practice should be maintained or enhanced in the syllabus?

These are mixed methods questions, as they required access to two different data sources, the students and the EMI lecturers, and the answers had to be sought through the merging of the analysed data from the two datasets, which was done through a "side-by-side comparison" (Creswell, 2014, p. 222).

The other research questions regard the action that needed to be taken in the classroom once the needs analysis had been conducted, reflecting on the action undertaken and evaluating it:

3. How can a predominantly product syllabus that is skills based benefit from the integration of a process approach to syllabus design?
4. What elements of the syllabus can be negotiated with the learners considering the constraints of this particular context and experiences in other contexts?

5. What evaluation methods can be devised to ascertain the effectiveness of this proposed syllabus for each individual learner?

As the focus of AR is to "bring about changes and, even better, improvements in practice" (Burns, 2010, p. 2), these questions could only be investigated through at least two AR cycles, since they required reflection on the action undertaken both during and at the end of the course and adjustments made when necessary. Moreover, given the learner-centred focus of the syllabus and the desire to make it as flexible and as practical as possible so that it could be used with different groups of students, the use of multiple AR cycles would allow for a more rigorous approach to this evaluation through multiple data collection stages and methods.

2. Literature Review

2.1 An Overview of Syllabus Design in ELT

As summarised in Prior (2023), any literature review of syllabus design in ELT should begin with Breen's two-part state-of-the-art article (1987a; 1987b). His work can be considered a significant contribution to the paradigm shift in syllabus design that was occurring at the time as he examines not only the formal and functional syllabus types, which were undeniably the most popular types of syllabus at the time, but also the task-based and process syllabus. These had begun to emerge during the eighties and were influenced to a great degree by Krashen's (1985) observations that language acquisition came from the learner's ability to understand meaning from language input rather than from studying the grammar of a language. Breen argues that various developments in language research prior to his article being published also contributed to the paradigm shift. These developments concerned changes in the way assumptions were held about language, teaching methodology, learner contribution and how planning for teaching and learning was conducted (Breen, 1987b, p. 157).

It is evident that Breen was accurate in identifying a shift in syllabus design in the late eighties due to this belief being shared by others (e.g Graves, 2008), the number of other influential works about innovations in syllabus design around that time (Candlin, 1984; Yalden, 1987; Prabhu, 1987; Nunan, 1988a) and the development of ESP approaches to teaching which stressed the necessity to identify learners' needs in order to plan a language syllabus (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Master, 2005). It is beyond the scope of this literature review to summarise all the developments Breen refers to in his article, but the changes in syllabus design referring to product and process approaches will be referred to due to their significance for the research project in this volume.

2.2 Product Approaches to Syllabus Design

Up until the end of the seventies when communicative language teaching (CLT) started gaining acceptance, a syllabus had traditionally focused on the linguistic elements that were deemed necessary to be taught and learnt, which were the grammar and the skills of listening, reading, writing and speaking (Breen, 2001, p. 152). This type of syllabus was known as the formal syllabus, but it is also commonly referred to as the grammatical or structural syllabus, and it is a syllabus based on the assumption that language learning should be strictly sequenced based on moving from grammatical or linguistic simplicity to greater complexity. The main aim tends to focus on producing correct grammatical structures and that "the skills be worked upon in a sequence from the receptive to the productive" (Breen, 1987a, p. 85). However, Nunan asserts that "grammatical complexity does not necessarily equate with learning difficulty" (1988a, p. 28), and the sequencing of language into grammatical chunks implies that there is a finite amount to learn. Additional criticism directed at grammatical syllabus concerns the fact that language and skills learning does not naturally occur in such a structured, sequenced way and basing a syllabus purely on grammar and/or skills entirely misses all the other aspects that make language as complex as it is. However, this sequencing of language makes a grammatical syllabus simple to package and so it "has a strong theory of language, but not a strong theory of learning" (Graves, 2008, p. 160).

Perhaps the greatest criticism of the grammatical syllabus, however, was that it did not take into consideration the communicative purposes of language. The greatest reaction to the grammatical syllabus was the functional/notional syllabus (Wilkins, 1976) that developed in the seventies along with the publication of the Council of Europe's Threshold Level (van Ek, 1975), which was an attempt to standardise the learning and teaching of some of the main European languages. This type of syllabus bases its content on the functional skills and notions that the learners need to master, rather than just the grammatical elements of the language. Hutchinson & Waters state that "functions are concerned with social behaviour and represent the intentions of the speaker or writer, for example, advising, warning, threatening" and notions are the "categories into which the mind and thereby language divides reality, for example, time, frequency, duration" (1987, p. 31). However, if a syllabus is based on the functions and notions that learners need, this implies that a phase must be integrated into syllabus design where these needs are assessed. This shift towards a functional approach therefore made it necessary to incorporate needs analysis into syllabus design, which was clearly unnecessary in grammatical syllabus design as the starting point was the underlying structure of the language itself (Graves, 2008, p. 160). The functional approach to syllabus design, with this emphasis on needs analysis, was the catalyst that allowed ESP courses to evolve dramatically in the 1980s. It was assumed that ESP learners had already followed a grammatical syllabus, and so had a good understanding of the deep-rooted structure, but now they needed "to learn how to use the knowledge they already have" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 32). Master (2005, p. 101), in his survey of ESP topics reported in published papers, notes that the opinions of the learners "comprised an essential element of the needs analysis", but once the importance of needs analysis had been clearly established, further research into ESP syllabus design fell significantly in the 1990s.

The formal and functional types of syllabus detailed above were seen as similar approaches to syllabus design in that learners were expected to gather often de-contextualised and separate language items, whether they be forms or functions, before being able to apply the language in any real communicative context. These two types of syllabus were described by Breen as *propositional plans*, in which "language knowledge and capabilities regarded as the

appropriate outcomes will be organised and presented in the plan as things which are systematic; perhaps based on logical formulae, structures, networks, rules, or schemas" (1987a, p. 85). Nunan (1988a), however, when referring to these formal and functional syllabuses uses the term *product-oriented* syllabuses, which he describes "are those in which the focus is on the knowledge and skills which learners should gain as a result of instruction" (Nunan, 1988a, p. 27), in other words, "learning is supposed to result in a product – a set of knowledge and skills" (Graves, 2008, p. 160). The two definitions relating to propositional plans and product-oriented syllabuses are very similar to how *synthetic* syllabuses were described (Wilkins, 1976), where the language to be taught is broken down into its composite parts: lexis, syntax, morphology, pronunciation and is taught in ever-increasingly sophisticated stages until the language has been learned. Learners then have to "re-synthesize the language that has been broken down into a large number of small pieces" (Wilkins, 1976, p. 2) when they need or want to use the language for communicative purposes. Nunan, elaborating on his product-oriented syllabuses, makes the point that although synthetic syllabuses were initially equated just with the grammatical syllabus, all product-oriented approaches to syllabus design are generally regarded as synthetic (1988a, p. 28). For the purposes of this volume, any further reference to this type of syllabus will make use of the terminology *product approach* in order to avoid confusion.

Despite the advent of CLT at the end of the seventies, which certainly heralded a backlash against grammatical syllabuses, product approaches are still prevalent in English-language teaching and many commercial coursebooks are still based on traditional formal syllabuses (Harmer, 2003; Wette, 2011). This is because "educational practice is concerned with the achievement of certain desired end states" (Eisner, 1992, p. 302) and so a product approach to syllabus design can be more easily evaluated and thus more attractively presented and sold. This view of syllabus types therefore regards what actually happens inside the classroom solely as a means to achieving the end product and what happens in the classroom, or the processes themselves, tend to be overlooked (Prior, 2023).

2.3 Process Approaches to Syllabus Design

In the second part of his article, Breen examines how the paradigms of syllabus design had been changing during the eighties. As mentioned at the beginning of this review, he identifies four frames of reference which affected how syllabus design had started to change at the time: language; teaching methodology; learner contributions; how we may plan for teaching and learning, and particularly how these aspects had started to merge (1987b, p. 160). These changing assumptions about language teaching and learning largely contributed to the development of alternative syllabuses, which he identifies as the task-based and process syllabuses.

Before discussing these two types of syllabus in more detail, it is important to understand how these syllabuses compare to formal and functional syllabus, which we have seen are product approaches to syllabus. Breen describes task-based and process syllabuses as *process plans* as opposed to *propositional plans* and states that they

> represent *how* something is done. They will seek to represent knowledge of *how* correctness, appropriacy, and meaningfulness can be simultaneously achieved during communication within events and situations (Breen 1987b, p. 160 – original italics.)

This idea of focussing on the process, rather than the product in the formal or functional syllabus, was also highlighted by Wilkins (1976), who used the term "analytic" syllabus to describe a more holistic syllabus where learners are given samples of the target language in an ungraded state and they analyse it to gain meaning. Wilkins states that analytic syllabuses "are organized in terms of the purposes for which people are learning language and the kinds of language performance that are necessary to meet these purposes" (1976, p. 13), which was echoed more than twenty years later by Markee who states: "learning is organized in terms of the social purposes that learners have for learning the target language" (1997, p. 16). Wilkins had initially envisaged that the functional syllabus would be an analytic syllabus but as the focus of the functional syllabus is the product, i.e. the skills and functions needed by the learner, it has been generally accepted that it is a synthetic syllabus (*cf*. Nunan

1988a). As a further exemplification of the confusion that can arise when discussing the terminology relating to approaches to syllabus design, Nunan (1988a) uses a different term when referring to task-based and process syllabuses and calls them "process-oriented syllabuses". Despite using this term, he agrees with the broadly accepted view that these types of syllabuses focus on the "processes through which knowledge and skills might be gained" (Nunan, 1988a, p. 41).

An advantage of taking a process view of syllabus design is that it takes content (the syllabus) and merges it with methodology (how it should be learnt). In synthetic syllabuses, which are product-oriented, there tends to be a separation of the syllabus and methodology (Nunan, 1988a; Breen, 2001; Littlewood, 2009). However, in analytic syllabuses the fact that the *what* (content) and the *how* (methodology) are inevitably interconnected is explicitly recognised. Further, these types of syllabuses do not regard classroom activities as a mere means to achieve a linguistic goal, but rather the language is the means to undertake activities in the classroom. This assumption is represented in what Breen refers to as process plans, the task-based syllabus and the process syllabus being the two types he discusses (1987b), otherwise known as the process-oriented syllabus (Nunan, 1988a; Graves, 2008).

2.3.1 The task-based syllabus

The task-based syllabus can be regarded as the most well-known (Graves, 2008) of the two types of process plans that Breen (1987b) identifies and has a dual-focus: to enable learners to develop communicative competence and share meanings but also to achieve something tangible while the language is being used (Breen, 1987b, p. 162). The tasks used in the classroom aim to "engage the *same* abilities which underlie communication itself" (Breen, 1987b, p. 162 – original italics) and because the learning process itself is seen as the content, this type of syllabus neatly blends content and methodology. Long & Crookes state that the selection of tasks to be used within this syllabus must be undertaken once a needs analysis has been conducted so that the "real-world *target tasks* learners are preparing to undertake" can be replicated (1992, p. 44 – original italics). Over the years, however, the definition of task has changed somewhat (Nunan, 1989, p. 5). The definition has ranged from

Breen's suggestion that tasks used in the learning process should exemplify target language communication in the target situation (1987b, p. 162), to Willis's much broader approach where "tasks are always activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome" (1996, p. 23). Given the popularity of certain task-based coursebooks that have come onto the market over the past decade or so, it seems that this broader definition of what a task is has taken hold.

Despite the popularity of the task-based syllabus over the years, however, it has remained controversial, mainly because there has been little research that substantiates many of the claims of its advocates (see for example Seedhouse, 1999, p. 149; Willis & Willis, 2001, p. 176; Harmer, 2003, p. 173). Further, as seen above, the definition of task is "fraught with problems" (Littlewood, 2004, p. 325) and can range from a simple classroom activity to something "so broad as to include almost anything that involves learners doing something" (J. Richards, 2001, p. 162). The other main criticism of task-based learning is that it can favour fluency over accuracy (J. Richards, 2001, p. 162) and even if a task has been designed with a focus on meaning, for example, it is usually down to the individual learner as to how to interpret the task, and so s/he may focus entirely or mainly on form (Littlewood, 2004, p. 324). Moreover, teachers have expressed concern about using task-based learning in their classrooms. In their more recent study, Zheng & Borg (2014, p. 208) report some of the challenges task-based learning poses to teachers, including it being more time-consuming, it can be problematic to implement in large classes and it often does not reflect how English is assessed in examinations.

2.3.2 The negotiated (process) syllabus

The other "process plan" that Breen identifies is the process syllabus, which, like the task-based syllabus, is an analytic syllabus that focuses on the ***how*** rather than on the ***what***. However, a process syllabus is more than a task-based syllabus as it provides "a bridge between content and methodology and [offers] a means whereby the actual syllabus of a classroom group may be made more accessible to each of its members" (Breen, 1987b, p. 166). He sees the process syllabus as a means to transfer the creation of a syllabus from the designer to the teacher and crucially also to the learners so that they "create

their own syllabus in the classroom in an on–going and adaptive way" (Breen, 1987b, p. 166). An underlying assumption is that because teachers who have to work with a syllabus necessarily have to interpret it and adapt it to each specific group of learners, which makes a prepared syllabus redundant as soon as it has been produced, a type of syllabus should be designed which explicitly takes this into account and can (or should) be reinterpreted (Breen, 1987b, p. 166). Other research has confirmed that teachers will often deviate from a prescribed syllabus or negotiate aspects of the learning process with learners to cater better to learners' needs despite having to adhere to imposed curriculums (Linder, 2000; Serrano-Sampedro, 2000; Wette, 2011). Therefore the process syllabus

> provides the framework within which either a predesigned content syllabus would be publicly analysed and evaluated by the classroom group, or an emerging content syllabus would be designed (and similarly evaluated) in an ongoing way. (Breen, 1984, p. 55)

Breen & Littlejohn state more simply that a process syllabus provides a framework for decision-making in the classroom (2000c, p. 29), which is undertaken by both the teacher and the learners through negotiation. Negotiation, according to Breen & Littlejohn, is "discussion between all members of the classroom to decide how learning and teaching are to be organised" (2000b, p. 1). This emphasis on making decisions in a collaborative way between the teacher and the learners in order to organise the course was referred to as an essential component of learner-centred approaches to syllabus design as presented by Nunan:

> While a learner-centred curriculum will contain similar elements and processes to traditional curricula, a key difference will be that information by and from learners will be built into every phase of the curriculum process. Curriculum development becomes a collaborative effort between teachers and learners, since learners will be involved in decisions on content selection, methodology and evaluation. (Nunan, 1989, p. 19)

The term learner-centredness has been used to refer to various views on language teaching, ranging from humanistic perspectives that regard learners as complex beings rather than "just" language learners, to teaching methods designed to foster learner autonomy (Tudor, 1993). However, Nunan's view that learner-centredness can be understood as the involvement of learners in the design of their own learning, often through negotiation, has often been the accepted definition adopted in studies of learner-centred approaches to teaching (Davies, 2006; Zhang & Head, 2010).

One of the first times the term *negotiated syllabus* was used was by Clarke (1991) who investigated using negotiation with learners to design their learning programmes. He used it as a synonym for Breen's process syllabus, and so it would be useful to clarify terminology at this stage. Breen (1987b) uses process plan as a superordinate category that covers both the task-based and process syllabus. However, Breen & Littlejohn (2000a; 2000b) in their later volume tend to use the term negotiated syllabus as a synonym for process syllabus and use both terms interchangeably to refer to the same type of syllabus. Therefore, from hereon in, to avoid confusion and whenever necessary, when referring to process approaches to syllabus design, in the sense of process plans as Breen (1987a; 1987b) names them as discussed above, the term process approach will be used. When referring to the negotiated (or process) syllabus, the terms process syllabus and negotiated syllabus will continue to be used interchangeably to refer to the same type of syllabus that "allows full learner participation in selection of content, mode of working, route of working, assessment and so on" (Clarke, 1991, p. 13).

As summarised by Prior (2020), negotiation that takes place in the classroom can relate to the content, the language learning procedures, the goals and even how these or other aspects are assessed. Breen & Littlejohn see this process as a cycle where decisions are negotiated initially about one or more aspects relating to the classroom work in the initial stage, actions are taken to implement those decisions in the next stage and then there is an evaluation phase where both the learning outcomes and the process that led to those outcomes are evaluated. This negotiation cycle is reproduced in Figure 2.1:

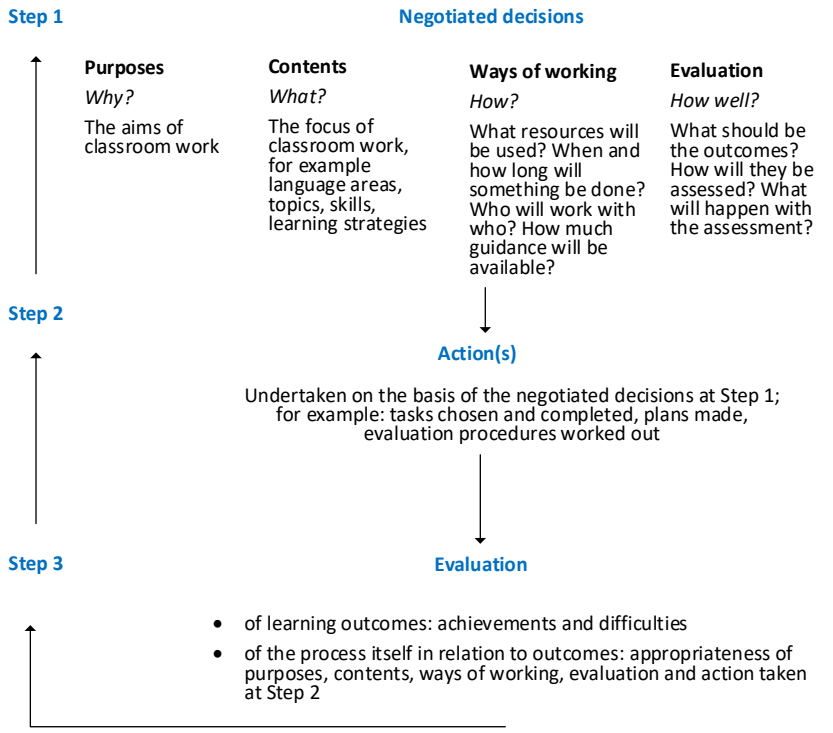

Fig. 2.1 – The negotiation cycle. From *Classroom Decision-Making: Negotiation and Process Syllabuses in Practice (*p. 32), by M. P. Breen and A. Littlejohn. Copyright 2000 by Cambridge University Press.

An aspect of negotiated syllabuses that is of prime importance is step 3 in the cycle; the role of evaluation and how this can inform and improve the learning process. Breen & Littlejohn believe that evaluating the actions proposed through negotiation is the most important feature of these types of syllabus (2000c, p. 33). Evaluation occurs through the group reflecting on the outcomes and the appropriateness of the decisions that were taken and the actions that occurred from these decisions. What is important about this evaluation phase is that "it generates essential information for teacher and students for the next cycle of decision-making" (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000c, p. 33). This closely reflects Breen's previous argument that process syllabuses are retrospective in that during the evaluation phase(s) the group can reflect on the decisions that

led to achievements and difficulties and in this way adapt the decisions for further phases in the learning process or for the next course (Breen, 1987b, p. 167).

Consequently, a syllabus based on negotiation between the teacher and the learners involves those learners in the decision-making processes of a syllabus and as such "gives voice to students in the management of their learning" (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000b, p. 1). Slembrouck claims that "educational practices are responsible for gradually silencing youngsters" (2000, p. 148), so using a negotiated syllabus that allows learners to actively contribute to the decision-making processes that are involved in the design of their syllabus provides a more democratic approach to teaching and learning. Graves (2008) also refers to involving teachers and learners in the design of a syllabus instead of allowing specialists, who tend to be external to the classroom context, to undertake this task as they often work sequentially; first the curriculum is planned, then needs are analysed, then materials are written and then implementation takes place. She objects to this system and states that "by putting the classroom at the end of the chain of decisions, it positions teachers – and learners – as recipients and implementers of received wisdom, rather than decision-makers in their own right" (Graves 2008, p. 151). As such, she sees the teacher as "a catalyst for curriculum change" (Graves 2008, p. 171), but also acknowledges the important role of the learners in the decision-making process so that what they themselves want to do and achieve is clearly reflected in the syllabus design.

A process syllabus that promotes negotiation also enables each individual to bring to the learning process their own distinctive previous knowledge and experience and, with the support and feedback from the rest of the group, including the teacher, allows the learner to become "an active agent" in the learning process (Breen & Littlejohn 2000c, p. 24). If learners are active agents, they can "exercise autonomy on an equal footing with others in the group", which "promotes a learner's power of learning and interdependency in learning when appropriate" (Breen & Littlejohn 2000c, p. 22). Consequently, given the fact that all learners are individuals with specific needs, with their own particular knowledge and proficiency in the language, a process syllabus can allow each learner to focus on what s/he feels is beneficial and appropriate for

his/her needs and interests during the learning process, yet with the support and input from the entire group and the teacher (Prior, 2023)

Clarke refers to the pedagogical value of designing a negotiated syllabus, since the design of the syllabus is "no longer external to, or prior to, the implementation of the syllabus" (1991, p. 14). As learners are involved in the decision-making about the course, the design of the syllabus becomes the "most essential pedagogical component" and "a process concept, a dynamic and flexible dimension of the learning experience" (Clarke, 1991, p. 14). The pedagogical value of using negotiation in the classroom means that learners are provided with opportunities to engage in authentic communication. Despite the pervasive presence of the internet nowadays, often many language learners only have contact with the target language in a classroom environment, and in particular, they may only have opportunities to *produce* the target language in the classroom. Therefore, if they are given opportunities to negotiate over the syllabus and the learning process, this will allow them to engage in authentic communication with both the teacher and the other learners. By doing this, they are provided with opportunities to acquire some of the fundamental skills and language that will be needed in other situations outside the classroom environment where negotiation is required. It has been argued, therefore, that through this negotiation, language learning can occur because negotiation is itself a communicative activity (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000a; Serrano-Sampedro, 2000; Waters, 2012).

Although the idea of process syllabuses is appealing due to the learner-centeredness of the approach, this type of syllabus has not been adopted by mainstream ELT coursebooks, which, as mentioned previously, tend to promote a product approach, in which language is sequenced within a syllabus and tends to be dealt with separately, and which is more easily packaged than a process approach. Wette (2011, p. 137) observes that process approaches tend to be found in what she terms "low-constraint" contexts, where teachers have greater autonomy in decisions related to syllabus design and content. To a certain extent this observation contradicts Breen's idea that the process syllabus offers a way to work around and within an existing syllabus (1987b, p. 166), an idea which is reiterated by Breen & Littlejohn (2000c, p. 34) who state that this type of syllabus is often used in conjunction with another, pre-designed syllabus or ready-made

materials. Although it can be safely assumed that many, perhaps even most, teachers are not in low constraint contexts and as such do not have a great degree of freedom to decide on classroom content, Breen's contention that teachers and their learners interpret pre-existing or pre-designed syllabuses in any case makes the adoption of a process syllabus seem reasonable and even relatively workable. Wette (2011, p. 137) does make a valuable point, however, in that "pure" versions of a process syllabus are virtually non-existent, which is echoed by Breen & Littlejohn (2000c, p. 30) who state that "it would be highly unusual and inefficient for a classroom group to seek negotiated agreement on all of the major questions in every lesson, even if this was feasible". Clarke (1991, p. 16) goes further and claims that it is "the radical nature of the Negotiated syllabus … which is likely to confine the application of its full-blown or pure version to rather rarely obtained circumstances". Markee (1997, p. 22) also refers to "the strong form" of a process syllabus, as he defines it, and suggests this type of process syllabus has probably never been implemented and that most practical applications are of a weaker form. In fact, there are very few documented examples of pure or almost pure forms of a process syllabus. One example that was documented was implemented in a Belgian university for an undergraduate English-language course, but this experience was characterised by a series of problems including erratic attendance, rejections of the tutor's suggestions and fundamental disagreement amongst the students as to the contents and ways of working (Slembrouck, 2000). The problems were so multifaceted that the course was eventually discussed at the faculty board level due to student complaints and was abandoned after one semester. Another almost pure form is documented in the same volume but for a course for ELT professionals, and this experience also led to a series of tensions and difficulties due to the participants not being particularly proficient at negotiating and their expressing dissatisfaction at their apparent lack of progress through the course (Ivanič, 2000).

Therefore, the practical applications of process syllabuses that have been documented tend to have been weaker forms (Budd & Wright, 1990; Breen & Littlejohn, 2000a) due to the impracticable nature of "pure" forms. However, Breen & Littlejohn (2000c) suggest that a "pure" process syllabus should not necessarily be the goal and that a process syllabus should rather be interpreted as a framework for decision-making. This would imply that the number and

type of decisions open to negotiation can and will differ greatly from context to context (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000c, p. 29). To illustrate this framework approach, and to show how a process syllabus can be applied practically, they propose a "curriculum pyramid", which depicts how decisions can range from the widest context possible, the entire curriculum, to the narrowest at the single task level (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000c, p. 35).

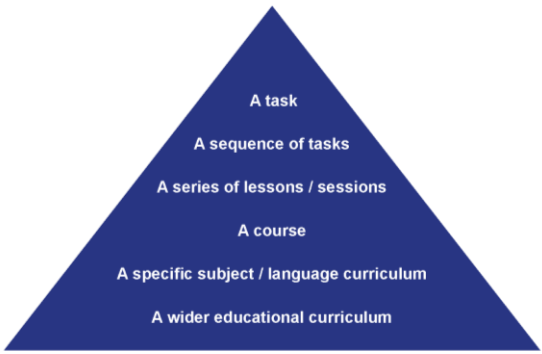

Fig. 2.2 – The curriculum pyramid: levels of focus for the negotiation cycle. From *Classroom Decision-Making: Negotiation and Process Syllabuses in Practice (*p. 35), by M. P. Breen and A. Littlejohn. Copyright 2000 by Cambridge University Press.

If a process syllabus is regarded as a framework, such as the one illustrated here, this type of syllabus therefore becomes much simpler to enact in a practical context and, of course, can be easily adapted from one context to the next.

However, there are certain weaknesses of process syllabus that have been noted over time. Breen (2001, p. 156) himself questions the feasibility of using process syllabuses in certain contexts and highlights various factors that may negatively affect the adoption of a process syllabus, including student expectations and the conventions and expectations of the teaching context and the institution itself. The main perceived drawback of a process syllabus and the use of negotiation in the classroom is that it subverts the traditional institutional teacher-student role, which requires the teacher to make all the decisions concerning the teaching and learning process. Bloor & Bloor (1988, p. 65) refer to this attitude of learners who often "see themselves as operating in a passive role, just 'being taught'", and see the teacher as the active member of the partnership. Budd & Wright (1990, p. 225) highlight this difficulty during their experience of

implementing a process syllabus and state "the apparent reluctance of the learners to become involved is almost certainly an outcome of the conflict that a shift in role relationships brings about". Slembrouck (2000), in his account of a process syllabus not going to plan, also identifies this shift in roles as a reason for the failure of his course, as does Newstetter in the same volume, who found many of her students had an "inability to comprehend this system" (2000, p. 182). Learners' ambivalence about their role and that of the teacher in the negotiated classroom was also reported by Boon (2011). Therefore, although a process syllabus strives to attain learners' greater involvement in the learning process through the negotiation of decision-making, it is actually this very aspect that alienates many learners due to the overriding influence of the traditional model of learning where the teacher is expected to have all the answers and make all the decisions. Similar to these accounts in the literature, the problem of learner resistance to the redesigned ESAP syllabus was experienced in the study that is the focus of this volume. When the negotiated syllabus was introduced to the students in AR Cycle 2, only two students selected to adopt the redesigned syllabus, and this low take-up rate led to its unsuccessful implementation and its subsequent modification for the third and final action research cycle (details can be found in Chapters 6 and 7).

The traditional model of learning can act as a barrier to the successful implementation of a negotiated syllabus, but Clarke (1991, p. 20) identifies the resistance emanating not from the learners but from the teachers themselves, since "the very idea of negotiation is likely to lead to that of anarchy and, in a sense, a dereliction of duty". White (1988, p. 102) also has similar concerns and comments on what he believes would be the practical problems that some teachers would face if they had to use a process syllabus as this, in his view, would imply abandoning the coursebook, "the mainstay in many courses in which the textbook equals the curriculum". It would be difficult, therefore, to imagine how a process syllabus could be implemented since the support of a coursebook "is a tradition that dies hard … in many situations the coursebook is all the hard-pressed or underskilled teacher has to rely on" (White, 1988, p. 102). These concerns about teachers' resistance to models of a negotiated syllabus are certainly valid as "teachers' beliefs influence their instructional choices" (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012, p. 283), but they relate to strong or pure

forms of negotiated syllabuses that, as discussed, would most likely be unworkable in almost all educational contexts. Indeed, in their study on teachers' attitudes to providing learners with more autonomy, one of Borg & Al-Busaidi's key findings was that although teachers were generally positive about the desirability of learner involvement in decision-making processes about their courses, they were sometimes significantly less positive about how feasible this would be (2012, p. 286). Stevick also refers to the problems inherent with providing too much freedom for learners in the classroom and highlights the role of the teacher as someone who "controls" what is happening in the classroom:

> If we, in our zeal to be "humanistic", become too "learner-centered" with regard to "control", we undermine the learner's most basic need, which is for security. We may find that we have imposed our own half-baked anarchy on the class. Absence of structure, or of focus on the teacher, may well be all right in certain kinds of psychological training, but not in our classrooms". (Stevick, 1980, p. 33)

Barriers to the negotiated syllabus can also originate from the institutions themselves. Slembrouck states clearly that "classroom negotiation entails that one seeks to restore the speech of the students by reintroducing their right to plan and assess the educational process" (2000, p. 148), but it has also been claimed that "the student as an active learner is not very welcome in most sectors of universities" (Levin & Greenwood, 2001, p. 104). Consequently, the fact of giving the learners a voice in the decision-making processes of their courses can disturb the institutional status-quo. This aspect was not a feature of my study as, being in a "low-constraint" context (Wette, 2011, p. 137), I have ample freedom to design the course, especially regarding methodology and course contents.

Because a negotiated syllabus can be regarded as "deviant" (Clarke, 1991, p. 20) from the established models of traditional educational contexts, its main weakness seems to be the resistance shown towards it by the two main actors involved in its design and implementation, the teacher and the learners, as well as from the institution itself. Consequently, in view of this resistance, an alternative approach would need to be considered where the benefits of using

negotiation in the classroom could be exploited, but the more radical and unworkable aspects that have created such an opposition to process syllabuses would be avoided. This alternative approach would imply using a blend of elements that characterise a process syllabus with other aspects from a more product-based syllabus to mitigate the perceived radical nature of the process syllabus.

2.4 The Blended Syllabus as the Next Stage in Syllabus Design

A syllabus represents the "assumptions about the nature of language and language learning" (Nunan, 1988a, p. 29), and because of the changing attitudes and approaches to language learning, the area of syllabus design in ELT has experienced an abundance of developments and disagreements over the years. Particularly, syllabus design has tended to base itself on dichotomies, to which this literature review has alluded. Breen (1987a; 1987b) had already acknowledged a clear difference in paradigms used in syllabus design in his two articles on syllabus design, which this literature review used as its starting point, and which he referred to as "propositional plans" and "process plans" (1987a). This identical dichotomy was highlighted by Waters (2012) over two decades later, but he defined them as the "learning to communicate" and "communicating to learn" approaches. Although most ELT publishers have focussed on a learning to communicate approach in their coursebooks, in other words a product approach, developments in ELT methodology have also promoted a communicating to learn approach, in which the "product", or the linguistic outcomes, are not pre-specified and instead develop more spontaneously due to the involvement of learners in classroom processes and activities. Examples of this approach include stronger forms of task-based language teaching, as well as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) instruction, and Dogme ELT (Waters, 2012, p. 443).

Therefore, given the research over the years and these differing assumptions held about language learning, it seems short-sighted to base a syllabus exclusively on either one type or another given the relative weaknesses of each. Breen, already in his article in 1987, postulates that process plans might be synthesised with propositional plans (1987b, p. 172). Clarke (1991, p. 25),

recognising the difficulties that a pure negotiated syllabus would create both for the teacher and the learners, makes reference to a "mixed" or "eclectic" syllabus where negotiation is used to adapt an existing product syllabus. Breen revisits this theme in his chapter published in 2001. Although he highlights the diversity of syllabus types at the time, including the emergence of syllabuses based on lexical approaches including corpora studies, synthesised approaches to syllabus design that he had suggested in 1987 were not apparent. However, he predicts that because of the complexity of language learning, which involves not only knowledge about language but also communicative competence and many other broader aspects, the future of syllabus design would focus on what he describes as "multi-dimensional" syllabuses where elements from various syllabuses would be merged (2001, pp. 156-157). Long also refers to the "miscellany of syllabus types" that have emerged, amongst which are "hybrids" (Long, 2005b, p. 3).

More recently, Wette (2011, p. 143) notes that Breen's prediction has been correct and that blends of product and process-oriented syllabuses can now be found. Graves (2008, p. 161) also refers to other types of syllabuses, including the text-based syllabus, genre approaches to syllabus design and content-based syllabuses, and claims that we are now in a post-syllabus phase where "no one approach can be responsive to learners' needs". Instead of imposing an innovative approach to syllabus design, however, she states that the current models being used should be developed still further and this should be done by the individual classroom teachers, who in any case are the people best placed to be able to respond to the differing needs, expectations and desires of different groups of learners (Graves, 2008, p. 77). Littlewood (2009, p. 252) focuses on the "process-as-outcome" approach where the results of processes can be more easily observed and verified due to the important role issues concerning accountability and perceived value for money play in modern education.

As far as the literature on syllabus design is concerned, therefore, the focus on blends as an emerging approach has been highlighted by several researchers (Breen, 2001; Graves, 2008; Littlewood, 2009; Wette, 2011) because of the great complexity of the language learning process and the huge variety

of contexts in which it occurs. However, there seems to be no literature documenting classroom-based applications of an intentionally blended process-product approach to syllabus design, where elements of a negotiated syllabus (process approach) are deliberately introduced into a predominantly skills-based syllabus (product approach) to enhance the learning of those skills through opportunities for more practice. Consequently, the time seems ripe to implement such an approach in order to ascertain whether a blended approach can really overcome many of the weaknesses that a purely product or process approach demonstrates.

2.5 The Role of Practice in Language Skills Learning

The ESAP syllabus that is the focus of this study already contained an emphasis on practising and improving the skills when it was decided to redesign it following the findings from the data collection. From these findings, it became clear that a focus on the skills was still appropriate for the context. Although "there is no fully-fledged 'skills-based approach' to language teaching" (Johnson, 2002, p. 190), a focus on skills has generally been classed as a product syllabus due to the inclusion of skills learning in both formal and functional syllabus types. It has been suggested that this has been particularly apparent in the area of ESP: "product-oriented approaches … form the foundation of most courses based on commercial textbooks as well those that aim to develop skills and knowledge in English for academic or specific purposes" (Wette, 2011, p. 137).

The focus on language as a skill has an extremely wide literature, and it is beyond the scope of this section of the literature review to investigate the multiple aspects covered over the years, which range from general learning theories on skill acquisition without necessarily referring to language (Holding, 1965) to detailed accounts of skill theory and language teaching (Johnson, 1996). However, one aspect that has gained ground in cognitive approaches to skill acquisition in general is how practice can contribute to the automatisation of skills, based on Anderson's three-stage skill acquisition model of declarative knowledge leading to procedural knowledge to automatic output (2000). In most forms of skill acquisition, whether that be speaking an L2 or driving a car, learners are first presented with information about that skill,

and they then have to encode the skill to be able to perform the skill. This encoding, where all the actions and structures are examined step by step, is often demanding and error-strewn due to the cognitive load that remembering and sequencing the skill requires and as such is regarded as the declarative phase. The second phase of skill learning is when there is a shift from arduously following this declarative information to incorporating it into procedural knowledge through practising the skill. In this proceduralisation stage, "the learner develops efficient procedures of performing the skill, often by skipping or compounding steps that were presented in the first stage" (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 154). The advantage of reaching this procedural knowledge stage is that the learner can quickly use the rules learnt with a low error rate, but there is an inability to generalise that knowledge (DeKeyser, 2007b, p. 3). The third stage, known as automatisation, in its widest sense refers to the whole process from the initial engagement with the skill and its rule in its declarative state to "the final stage of fully spontaneous, effortless, fast and errorless use of that rule, often without being aware of it anymore" (DeKeyser, 2007b, p. 3). In order to achieve automatisation in a skill, the skill requires practice, which has been noted by many over time (e.g. Ausubel et al., 1978; Johnson, 2002; DeKeyser, 2007b). Practice can be defined in many ways and in a very broad sense it may "simply involve using the skills that have been acquired, sometimes imperfectly" (Legge, 1986, p. 22). However, as far as practice in the language classroom is concerned, DeKeyser (2007b, p. 8) maintains that practice refers to "specific activities in the second language engaged in systematically, deliberately, with the goal of developing knowledge of and skills in the second language". Lightbown also provides a definition of practice "as opportunities for meaningful language use (both receptive and productive) and for thoughtful, effortful practice of difficult linguistic features" (2000, p. 443). Moreover, Newell & Rosenbloom state: "Practice makes perfect: Correcting the over statement of a maxim: Almost always practice brings improvement and more practice brings more improvement" (1981, p. 1). What can be seen from these three definitions is that if practice of a language skill is to have beneficial results, it needs to be undertaken purposefully and as regularly as possible.

There has been much debate in the literature about how practice can be incorporated into classroom work in order to contribute to language learning, and reviewing this extensive debate is again too vast for the scope of this section. However, Ortega, based on the interaction hypothesis literature (e.g. Long, 1996; Swain, 2000) contends that "meaningful use of the L2, and particularly the meaningful productive use afforded during communicative interactional practice, drives acquisition" (2007, p. 180). She argues that to achieve this, practice in the classroom should follow three principles: it should be interactive, it should be meaningful and there should be a focus on task-essential forms (Ortega 2007, p. 180). She states that interactive practice between peers rather than with the teacher has been shown to provide more opportunities to talk for longer and "learner-learner interaction affords better opportunities for the expression of a wider variety of meanings and functions than is typically possible in teacher-fronted classrooms" (Ortega, 2007, p. 182). Her second principle of practice is that it should be meaningful, which she defines as being the "cognitive engagement or involvement with the task, a quality that arises from the learners being personally committed to the practice event" (Ortega, 2007, p. 183). This cognitive aspect of meaningfulness has been linked to motivation theories in L2 learning (Dörnyei, 1994). The third principle she advocates is that the tasks learners are required to undertake in class are designed so that they "practice form-function connections in the L2 that the task makes particularly salient" (Ortega, 2007, p. 185). With this, she claims that often task-based practice can occur without a specific focus on form and so the tasks designed should exemplify language and communication in the target situation, which, as mentioned earlier in this literature review, has been advocated by others (Breen, 1987b; Long & Crookes, 1992). Consequently, to summarise, if practice of language skills in the classroom is to be beneficial in skills acquisition, learners need to be provided with opportunities to engage predominantly in learner-learner interaction and the tasks in which they engage should provide target language practice and are meaningful to them. These last aspects would therefore imply their communicative and language needs would have to have been assessed and analysed for the tasks to be meaningful and relevant.

A final consideration about skills practice in the language classroom concerns the third stage of Anderson's acquisition model; automatisation. In general skills acquisition theory, automatisation of a skill can take many thousands of hours but there will never be enough time in the L2 classroom to provide learners with the amount of practice that is needed to automatise a skill (DeKeyser, 2007c). However, DeKeyser argues that L2 skills practice in the classroom should not strive to achieve automatisation but rather should be seen "as a necessary but far from sufficient condition for the development of second language skills" (DeKeyser, 2007c, p. 292). Since "educators and educational psychologists do not doubt the importance of practice" (DeKeyser, 2007b, p. 5), and considering the evidence that has shown that meaningful, regular practice can lead to improvement in language skills proficiency, a syllabus that has a focus on providing opportunities for target language skills practice would be beneficial especially in contexts where opportunities for practice are otherwise lacking, such as in situations where the language is used as a foreign language or in traditional educational contexts where using particularly the productive skills occurs infrequently.

Given these considerations about the importance of practice in order to improve language skills, and the context in which the ESAP course is located, the intention to integrate as much skill practice as possible in the syllabus was clear. Furthermore, the use of a negotiated syllabus would allow for increased language practice as "it functions as a catalyst for the development of the learners' communicative ability since, from the beginning, the negotiation is attempted in the target language" (Serrano-Sampedro, 2000, p. 109).

2.6 Learner Autonomy

The concept of learner autonomy, as has been discussed elsewhere (Prior 2020), has been widespread in language education since the early 1980s. However, there has been less focus on how a negotiated syllabus can contribute to learners achieving greater autonomy in their language learning.

Briefly, learner autonomy has been described as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" and "to have, and to hold, the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning" (Holec 1981, p. 3). This idea of autonomy originated from the practice of self-directed learning, often in

self-access centres, which is "learning in which the objectives, progress and evaluation of learning are determined by the learners themselves" (Benson, 2001, p. 8). Despite the popularity of self-access centres with their materials and resources, there has not been any convincing evidence that self-directed learning alone can develop into learner autonomy and so the pursuit of learner autonomy moved away from the unrealistic assumption that it would develop spontaneously from self-directed learning and concentrated more on learner training (Holec, 1980). Holec focused on learners training themselves, but the practice of learner training has developed over the years and is no longer confined to self-directed learning and now tends to be incorporated into classroom learning (Benson, 2001). Learner training can take various forms, including language awareness training, which focuses on improving the learners' knowledge about the nature of language and acquiring effective learning strategies (Dickinson, 1988). Learner training is important for all learners but "it is essential for those aiming at some level of autonomy" (Dickinson, 1988, p. 46).

The fact, therefore, that autonomy requires learners to take charge of their learning and take responsibility for it has been broadly accepted (Little, 1995; Cotterall, 2000; Benson, 2001), but this view can tend to focus on learners' concurrent language learning. Littlewood (1999) recognises that learner autonomy is a goal that should be reached in order to benefit learners not only during their educational experiences learning languages but subsequent to that. Little also recognises how acquiring a degree of autonomy benefits learners both during and after their language educational experiences, as they can attain a degree of "pedagogical autonomy" that will be of an advantage in any learning context. However, he also states that "the whole point of developing learner autonomy is to enable learners to become autonomous users of their target language" and therefore exercise "communicative autonomy" (1995, p. 176). If pedagogical autonomy is encouraged, learners will be able to practise it and make use of it directly during any classroom activities as well as outside the classroom while engaged in their language learning, even if they are unable to exercise communicative autonomy because their language proficiency level is too low. However, as learners increase their language proficiency, pedagogical autonomy and communicative autonomy will then begin to interact

and learners will be more confident when using the target language in contexts away from the classroom than learners who have not practised learner autonomy. Little (1995) makes it clear that confidence in using the language is crucial for successful language learning.

Moreover, fostering learner autonomy can be seen as being even more desirable now than in the past, given how English has become so pervasive in so many contexts, whether they be cultural, social, educational or technological. The use and learning of English in the globalised world are ever-changing due to the rapid growth of communication technologies and the omnipresence of the internet, which has provided language learners with an infinite supply of input, stimulus and communicative opportunities. Waters, in his review of ELT methodology, states that "the increasing ubiquity of web-based language teaching and learning resources has the potential to redistribute the balance between teacher-led and learner-based instruction" (2012, p. 448). As a consequence, learners have more opportunities than ever to work more independently, whether that be explicitly in language learning environments, or in their every-day lives. Moreover, the assumption that the English we use today can be represented by a homogenous and monolingual culture is clearly irrational given the global status that English now enjoys. Illés (2012) refers specifically to the established but unrepresentative native-speaker models that have traditionally been used, and to a certain extent are still used, in ELT but which can no longer be considered appropriate for 21st century English-language learners who have to operate in a globalised world where English is used so prevalently. She therefore believes that "the task of language education is … to help learners develop self-reliance and autonomy, which will enable them to communicate successfully in international settings" (Illés, 2012, p. 506). These developments make it fundamental that there is a focus on ways to foster learner autonomy in any context where a syllabus, especially a learner-centred syllabus, is being designed and implemented in English-language courses.

Cotterall agrees that learner autonomy should be integrated into classroom practice and she focuses particularly on how teachers can help foster learner autonomy in their courses. She states that

> Language courses which aim to promote learner autonomy will incorporate means of transferring responsibility for aspects of the language learning process (such as setting goals, selecting learning strategies, and evaluating progress) from the teacher to the learner. (Cotterall, 2000, pp. 109-110)

This approach, therefore, regards the learner as a decision-maker who has a certain amount of control over aspects of the learning process, and Benson states this explicitly: "the key factor in the development of autonomy is the opportunity for students to make decisions regarding their learning within a collaborative and supportive environment" (2001, p. 151). Typically these decisions concern the planning of classroom activities and the evaluation of their outcomes but Cotterall asserts the real challenge for course designers is "to find ways of supporting the transfer of responsibility for decision-making about learning from teacher to learner" (2000, p. 110). This approach implies that the teacher and the learners should engage in activities that will allow the learners to express their needs and interests and provide opportunities for reflective feedback, both from the teacher and the learners. In her discussion of the context in which her study occurred, this is effectively what happened as her learners, all low-level adult learners, were initially asked to set goals for the course, were encouraged to keep learner journals, had regular interviews with the teachers and engaged in ongoing reflection both with their teachers and their peers (Cotterall, 2000). Moreover, many tasks in class were developed based on the individual learner's goals and future communication situations so that "rather than having to create links between pedagogic tasks and their own needs, learners instead practised tasks associated with their target situations, and received feedback on their performance" (Cotterall, 2000, p. 114). In the evaluation of this course, the inclusion of tasks related to learners' goals, resulted in "an unprecedented level of motivation" (Cotterall, 2000, p. 115). This increase in motivation has also been observed by Little, who argues that learners who take responsibility for their own learning not only have a greater likelihood of reaching their learning goals, but they also tend to "maintain a positive attitude to learning in the future" (1995, p. 176).

In Cotterall's study, although not once does she refer to a negotiated or process syllabus, the approach she describes is almost identical to the models

of the negotiated syllabus that were presented in Section 2.5.2. However, she does refer to the process that was undertaken and states that it

> presented the learners with a means of meeting their own needs. By making the language learning process salient, the course helped learners understand and manage their learning in a way which contributed to their performance in specific language tasks. (Cotterall, 2000, p. 115)

Other studies have also implemented approaches where learners have taken responsibility for decision-making regarding their learning (Hall & Kenny, 1988; Karlsson et al., 1997; Dam, 1995) and the syllabus models used are very similar to the negotiated syllabus. However, also in these cases the terms "negotiated" or "process" syllabus are never used and so a clear link between promoting learner autonomy within a negotiated syllabus was not made in these accounts. A clear link is established by Bloor & Bloor, however, in their paper "Syllabus Negotiation: the basis of learner autonomy". They describe syllabus negotiation as an "approach to helping students arrive at the position of being able to understand and articulate their language learning objectives" (1988, p. 62) and they regard syllabus negotiation as a crucial way to encourage learners to take responsibility for their own learning, the fundamental premise of learner autonomy:

> Whether it be with an individual in a self access programme or with a group of students in a conventionally taught course, negotiating the syllabus is the first step towards full responsibility. (Bloor & Bloor, 1988, p. 65)

In their account of a negotiated syllabus for an academic writing course at the University of Warwick, they identify the limits that the context presented, compared to the self-access courses to which they also refer. In the case of the self-access courses, they were able to negotiate the "broad objectives" of the course due to the individual nature of the courses, whereas with the taught courses they identify that it is the "details" that can be negotiated (Bloor & Bloor, 1988, p. 70). This account and its approach follows a similar approach to that presented by Breen & Littlejohn (2000c) in their negotiation cycle and

the curriculum pyramid as discussed in Section 2.5.2, and demonstrates that promoting learner autonomy often follows a very similar framework to that of the negotiated syllabus.

Promoting learner autonomy, therefore, is a central tenet in the study that is the focus of this volume and as such, plays a significant role in the syllabus that has been designed and implemented for the ESAP course that is the subject of this research. Providing the students with a degree of autonomy in their language learning is crucial because, as noted before, they will not have a teacher to accompany them throughout their English-learning experiences. Further, a constraint of my particular context is that the ESAP course in question only includes 30 contact hours in the classroom. Because there is such a short time available for this course, providing the students with opportunities to exercise a certain degree of autonomy in their learning English is a means to optimise the time that is available. Cotterall identifies this aspect as a reason for promoting learner autonomy because this approach "freed [her] from the unrealistic challenge of attempting to meet 20 different learners' needs within a 10-hour course" (2000, p. 115). Moreover, by promoting learner autonomy, the students will not only be able to take responsibility for some of the decisions linked to their language learning, but they will also be engaging in communicative activities that should benefit their language learning not only when following this course but also in any future language learning opportunities that they encounter. Therefore, due to these reasons, and the pragmatic underpinnings of this study, promoting learner autonomy is considered key in the design of this syllabus.

3. Action Research

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, action research (AR), the research tradition used in the study, is presented. A chapter solely devoted to action research was deemed necessary because this study not only used AR as its research framework, but it was the use of multiple AR cycles that informed many of the actions and directions

taken in the study. Therefore, this study developed in the way it did precisely because it was an action research study.

3.2 Historical Overview and Use in Education

Action research emerged as a research tradition in the second half of the twentieth century "as a reaction to scientific, experimental and quantitative paradigms" (Burns, 2005b, p. 57) and as such is grounded in constructivism. It is an approach used to explore aspects in a social context and improve the practices within those contexts and is characterised by its dual focus on action and research. The *action* element comprises participants in a process of deliberate intervention within a social context where there are problems or aspects have been problematised in order to bring about changes and improvements. The *research* element involves the systematic observation and analysis of these interventions and the changes that result, and reflection on the implications that these results create.

Action research is prevalent in a large variety of disciplinary fields, from health care to business and management (Burns, 2005b). It has also now become a much more common research tradition in applied linguistics and education due to educational research having become methodologically diverse over the past few decades (Burns, 2010).

The developments in the use of AR in educational contexts have led to a variety of definitions of AR. One of the simplest is possibly from Elliott who describes it as "the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it" (1991, p. 69, as cited in Altrichter et al, 1993, p. 4). Carr & Kemmis take a more comprehensive view, taking into consideration the critical aspect of AR linked to practice when they describe it as:

> self-reflective inquiry, undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which these practices are carried out. (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 220)

The idea that AR is a form of reflective practice that focuses specifically on solving problems in the context has been suggested by various researchers (Burns, 1999,

p. 30; Levin & Greenwood, 2001, p. 105; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p. 4; Burgess et al., 2006, p. 60; Costello, 2011, p. 7; Bradbury et al., 2019, p. 7). However, Burns (2010, p. 2) in her later book, when referring specifically to AR that is used in ELT, defines AR as "a self-reflective, critical, and systematic approach to exploring your own teaching context" where teachers problematise a situation and then attempt to find approaches to improve that situation. Action research conducted in educational contexts therefore, does not have to originate necessarily from problems within those contexts, but it always aims to effect change that will lead to improvement.

Kemmis further underlines the focus on the teacher's own context in his definition, but goes further, stating that the principal characteristic of AR is that "it always is a *practice-changing practice*" (2009, p. 464 original italics), emphasising how the engagement with AR itself brings about change within teachers' practice. In fact the constructivist influence on AR has led it to be described as "a response to conventional teaching" (Kayaoglu, 2014, p. 145), given constructivism's focus on the individual and learner activity in the classroom (Biesta, 2013). Consequently AR, because of its focus on reflective and self-reflective practice, can lead to modifications in classroom practice that might even oppose the prevailing orthodoxy.

Another central aspect of action research is its focus on the researcher(s) being integrated into the study rather than viewing it from outside. It was particularly this factor that made it a participative, exploratory research tradition, and made it part of the constructivist movement that developed over the twentieth century (Burns, 2005a). Moreover, the focus on the researcher him or herself being involved in a "systematic process of enquiry arising from their own practical concerns" (Burns, 2005a, p. 241), distinguishes AR from other forms of applied research, which tend to concentrate on the application of general theoretical issues to a context that is not related to the researcher's practice. This focus on the researcher's own practice has created a branch of AR known as insider action research, where the researcher is a permanent member of the professional or educational context which s/he is studying. Coghlan (2007) states that the main characteristics of insider AR are that it is interventionist, so it always aims to change aspects of the researcher's own context, and that it generates "actionable knowledge, which can be defined as

knowledge that is useful to both the academic and the practitioner communities" (Coghlan, 2007, p. 296). Kemmis (2009, p. 468) expands this view still further, stating that AR not only allows practitioners to be researchers but it also gives "practitioners intellectual and moral control over their practice". As such, it is a process that invites reflection about the practice, which clearly affects how teachers work and relate to what they are doing, but it can also be self-transformative, where teachers actually change the way they approach their lives (Kemmis, 2009; Herr & Anderson, 2015).

To a certain extent, action research has been considered to be a collaborative endeavour undertaken with other teacher-researchers rather than an individual pursuit (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p. 6; Burns, 1999, p. 1) although Nunan disagrees, stating that collaboration cannot "be seen as a defining characteristic of action research" (1992b, p. 18). Consequently, action research is undoubtedly practice-based, but can be undertaken both in collaboration with other teacher-researchers or alone. In this study, I worked alone.

Action research as we mainly understand it today began its development in the 1980s, again in Australia by Kemmis and colleagues, who reintroduced Lewin's cyclical form and need for self-reflection and proposed a new model with four clear "moments", being Plan – Action – Observation – Reflection (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988) as illustrated in Figure 3.1.

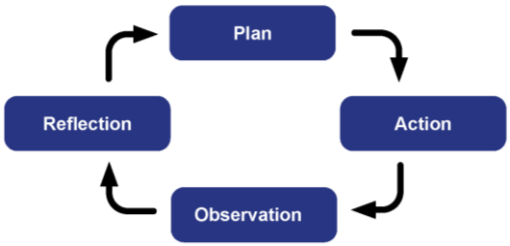

Fig. 3.1 – The action research cycle(s)

This focus on practice and improvement should have made AR appealing for ELT practitioners, yet it was only in the late 1980s that teachers really started to engage in action research projects in ELT (van Lier, 1988). In fact, many AR studies in ELT around that time were focused on curriculum evaluation due to the considerable influence of communicative language teaching on the

changing role of the teacher and how this role could become more interventionist (Burns, 2005a). At the end of the 1980s, Nunan (1988b) had advanced the idea of the "learner-centred curriculum" which tended to "place the onus for course design and curriculum development on classroom teachers" (Burns & McPherson, 2017, p. 107) and thus created a need for more opportunities for professional development. AR studies in ELT also focused on enhancing professional development in teacher education as well as on other aspects, such as finding solutions to particular problems in specific teaching situations. As a consequence, AR became "a byword for integrating a research orientation into the work of practitioners" (Burns, 2005a, p. 245). However, Borg (2010) contends that it is still relatively unusual for English-language teachers to engage in any research, not just action research, often because these teachers either lack research knowledge and skills or they tend to regard research as being detached from their classroom practice. Therefore, the study that is the focus of this volume is, to a certain extent, a model of how ELT research is described by various researchers. Not only does it focus on research conducted in a real-life context but it also aims to redesign a syllabus to improve classroom practice, aspects that are all seemingly unusual.

In education in general, and also in ELT, therefore, the essential element of AR is that it aims to improve the quality of the practice in the classroom, thus benefitting both the learners and the teachers involved in the process as well as colleagues and other practitioners in analogous contexts through dissemination of the results of AR projects. AR brings theory and practice together both to raise awareness of a (pedagogical) situation and its limitations and/or problems and to improve that situation through implementation of an action. This process is often undertaken by the teacher involved in the situation and accordingly introduces the figure of the teacher-researcher who is best placed to act as "an active catalyst for change in teaching practices, course design and problem solving" (Fareh & Saeed, 2011, p. 155).

3.3 Cycles and Types of Action Research

Another essential feature of AR, as briefly mentioned in the previous section, is that it is not a linear process but cyclical, which Edge refers to as a "spiral

of increasingly aware experience" (2001, p. 3). Typically in AR studies, a sequence of stages occurs, which Edge characterises as:

> *Action* in the sense that one is in the middle of action
> *Observation* of what is happening, leading to a more specific focus of interest
> *Reflection* on the focus which has been identified, leading to
> *Planning* that forms the basis for future
> *Action* to improve the situation, supported by
> *Observation* in order to evaluate the changes made (Edge, 2001, p. 3, original italics)

These sequences that typify AR are very similar to the widely accepted model of "plan-act-observe-reflect" as presented by Kemmis & McTaggart (1988, p. 10, see Figure 3.1) and which they describe as:

> develop a plan of critically informed action to improve what is already happening;
> act to implement the plan;
> observe the effects of the critically informed action in the context in which it occurs;
> reflect on these effects as the basis for further planning, subsequent critically action and so on, through a succession of stages.

Both these models focus on AR's objective to change and improve the situation under study and this emphasis on change is also highlighted by Denscombe, who suggests that AR only has four characteristics: its practical nature, its focus on change, the involvement of a cyclical process, and its concern with participation (2007, p. 123).

In the case of the study of this volume, all the main characteristics identified by Denscombe are present: it is a practice-oriented study where a new syllabus is implemented in order to change and improve the existing syllabus, and within the cyclical process, evaluation stages are implemented to ascertain to what extent the new syllabus is benefitting the participants concerned. Consequently, the participants in this study – the students – have been able to participate actively in the evaluation of the effectiveness of the new syllabus, as well as being able to participate actively in the shaping of aspects of the

syllabus itself, due to the syllabus's focus on negotiation with those involved in the learning process.

The kind of action research described above and used in this study is one of the three distinct types of AR identified by Carr & Kemmis (1986), who split AR projects into technical AR, practical AR and critical AR. Technical AR focuses on the outcomes of the teacher or researcher's practice and is a one-way relationship with the other participants. Practical AR, on the other hand, although directed by the practitioner, involves the other participants who have a voice in the process. In this type of AR, not only does the practitioner listen to these voices, but s/he also "remains open to … the consequences that these others experience as a result of the practice" (Kemmis, 2009, p. 470). Critical AR is generally even more participatory, where everyone contributes to the research collectively (Kemmis, 2009).

Consequently, given these distinctions, as well as the fact that the worldview informing this study is pragmatism, as will be discussed in the following chapter, my study can be seen as a practical action research project, which is directed by me as the teacher-researcher. However, the other participants – the students and to a lesser extent the lecturers using EMI – have a voice due to the AR cycles which include regular data collection stages in order to provide evaluation throughout the entire project.

3.4 Effect on the Researcher/Teacher

So far this chapter has only concentrated on the history and theory of AR in educational contexts and particularly in ELT, and the purposes and goals of implementing an action AR study. However, studies have suggested that there are many benefits to implementing AR in educational contexts (Burns, 2009; Burns, 2013; Edwards & Burns, 2016), and that engaging in AR studies also has many positive outcomes on the main actor(s) of the study, in other words the teacher. These positive outcomes range from feeling "able to make confident, evidence-based decisions about their teaching" (Edwards & Burns, 2016, p. 10) to it being generally "transformative" (Borg, 2010) and even "self-transformative" (Kemmis, 2009) for the teachers involved. Zeichner (2003), however, cautions that many reports are anecdotal and the contexts are so diverse that many of these accounts are unreliable.

Despite these concerns, there is evidence that AR's focus on self-reflective and critical practices has led many teachers to feel empowered from participation in AR studies. Zeichner (2003) reports that under certain conditions, AR can provide teachers with more self-confidence in their ability to promote student learning and to become more proactive when dealing with difficult issues that arise in their teaching. Burns (1999) also referred to this feeling of empowerment and presented many positive comments from teachers who were engaged in a large AR study. These ranged from being able to engage more fully with their classroom practice to increased self-awareness and personal insight. One even highlighted how they had experienced both professional and personal growth:

> I felt a degree of personal satisfaction once I had collected the data and completed the write-up – a feeling that I had challenged myself and was able to meet the challenge to a certain extent. (Burns, 1999, p. 14)

Empowerment can also originate from AR's democratic principles, since "it invests the ownership for changes in curriculum practice in the teachers and learners who conduct the research" (Burns, 2010, p. 10).

The results of these democratic principles have been shown elsewhere. Zeichner (2003) presents evidence that teachers who have had positive experiences conducting AR studies have attained successful outcomes, such as moving gradually towards more learner-centred instruction, predominantly through engaging with the learners more frequently and eliciting feedback from them. A similar finding was evident in a study by Edwards & Burns (2016, p. 11), who found that teachers were able "to establish more open, collaborative approaches to teaching" due to becoming more reflective in their teaching after having engaged in AR. Zeichner (2003, p. 309) also found in his study that "many of the teachers reported improvements in pupil attitudes, involvement, behavior, and/or learning as a direct result of specific actions taken in their research". Improvements in students' attitudes, in particular referring to attendance, were also observed in my study, and further details and discussion concerning this aspect can be found in Chapter 7 in the discussion of the implementation of the blended syllabus.

3.5 Criticism of Action Research

Despite the reported benefits of AR, there has also been much debate about and criticism of AR mainly because it combines practice and theory and, as such, is seen by some to be too "subjective" (Burns, 2010, p. 95) or lack rigour (Bradbury & Reason, 2001; Burns, 2005b). K. Richards (2003, p. 26) notes that particularly due to its recent popularity, many projects have been classed as AR although they have not stood up to the rigour qualitative research requires. However, Block (2000, p. 138) takes an opposite view and criticises AR because "the entire enterprise is strong in theory but very difficult to carry out in practice". Action research, and particularly Kemmis & McTaggart's plan-act-observe-reflect sequence, has also been criticised for being overly prescriptive as the spiralling stages might be considered too inflexible a framework, which could limit the freedom of teachers engaged in action research (Burns, 2010, p. 8). However, Burns (2005a, p. 250) also argues that "one of the strongest features of action research that can contribute to enhancing rigor is its iterative, or cyclical, nature" because the cycles provide opportunities for data collection, observation and reflection so that findings can be tested and then developed, enhanced or even modified.

AR also tends to be criticised because it is often implemented by – or at least involves – the practitioner, i.e. the teacher, who can be regarded as being inexpert in research. Burns (2005a) refers to criticism as far back as the early 1980s where doubts were expressed about the ability of teachers to engage in research. Johnston (1994) claimed that the action research process is unnatural to teachers, and if it occurs it tends not to be initiated by the teachers themselves but by an external source. Borg (2010, p. 404) makes reference to the fact that teacher research in general can often seem to focus on descriptive accounts rather than analysis. Much of this criticism concerning the allegedly poor quality of AR undertaken by teachers often stems from conventional scientific concepts of research, such as studies should be large-scale, replicable and quantitative. This view demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of one of AR's central goals, which is to provide understanding about a local context, which is often extremely specific and small. However, in order to support teachers who might be less familiar with research, Burns (2005b) suggests

teachers work collaboratively with a researcher to improve the reliability of their findings. This might not always be feasible, so she also suggests that teachers should work within a clear methodological framework that defines the procedures undertaken explicitly in order to strengthen the study.

Further criticism, again mainly originating from conventional interpretations of how research should be undertaken, refers to the small-scale nature or the specific contexts that tend to typify action research studies. Zeichner refers to criticism directed at the usefulness of knowledge generated by teachers due to their specific teaching and learning contexts (2001) and Burns (2005b, p. 67) refers to how AR can lack "external validity" due to the small-scale nature of many studies and the impossibility for them to be generalisable. However, she also recognises that because action research studies are concerned with practical solutions, they "might have resonance for other practitioners in comparable situations" (Burns, 2005b, p. 67) and as such, external validity is not necessarily a goal for AR.

Although AR has been criticised for involving teachers, the relative rarity of teachers engaging in action research has also been noted. Rainey (2000) in her study found that over 75% of the 228 teachers she surveyed said they had never even heard of action research and Dörnyei (2007, p. 191) states "there is one big problem with action research: there is too little of it". There are predominantly three factors that contribute to this: the first is a lack of encouragement from the teacher's institution or superior(s) and a resultant lack of motivation to do research (Burns, 2005b; Borg, 2010), the second, and most commonly cited reason, is a lack of time (Rainey, 2000; Borg, 2010) and the third is, as discussed, teachers' general lack of research expertise (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 192).

3.6 Rationale for Using Action Research in This Study

As it has been stated in this chapter, AR aims to improve the quality of the practice in the classroom, thus benefitting both the learners and the teachers involved in the process. AR is therefore an appropriate tradition to use for this study because its objective is coherent with the aim of this study, which is to improve the quality of the teaching and learning practices in the ESAP courses I teach for economics students at the Faculty. Further, given the emphasis on practice that this study has, and the general set of beliefs and principles that I

hold as a teacher and a pragmatist, the use of AR with its focus on improving the quality of practice through practical action is consistent with this general worldview. Moreover, the AR process is often undertaken by the teacher involved in the situation and therefore s/he is best placed to enact change in his/her teaching practices. As I am the teacher of the ESP course in question, I am therefore the person who is best placed to undertake the process to provide the students with a course that is as relevant and useful as possible.

3.7 Measures to Counter Criticism of Action Research

In view of the criticism directed at AR, I will address the various issues and describe the action taken for each one.

Regarding the concerns about rigour, the research methodology used in this study was carefully chosen and implemented taking into consideration the context, the timespan and the participants involved. The data collection and analysis followed a convergent parallel mixed methods design, and applied a clear framework for data collection and analysis. This framework, using two recognised models from quantitative and qualitative research that were adapted for the specific context of the study, was flexible enough to accommodate the multiple AR cycles but was designed to guarantee a precise structure for the quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis also given the numerous phases that characterised the study.

Despite Block's assertion (2000, p. 138) that AR projects are difficult to conduct from a practical perspective, this problem was never experienced in this study. Because the context was the ESAP course I was teaching, because I had learned the skills needed to conduct the research through the resources provided through the PhD programme I had completed, and through the resources available to me in my work context, and because of my twenty-plus years of experience teaching and researching ESP at the tertiary level, the practical issues that did arise were able to be resolved. In fact the two main practical problems that affected the implementation of the redesigned syllabus – the lack of interest of the students in the negotiated syllabus in AR Cycle 2 and their infrequent and poor attendance in the PPE course in AR Cycle 3 – were able to be resolved also because this was an AR project with multiple cycles.

With respect to the criticism about AR precisely due to the use of cycles as mentioned in Burns (2010), the cycles themselves accommodated the iterative nature that evolved with the data collection, observation and reflection. Without the flexibility within these cycles, the coding of the interviews would not have been as comprehensive as they became, and the opportunities to revisit the data (both quantitative and qualitative) in the light of the various versions of the syllabus used would not have been possible.

Although it is understandable why criticism about AR projects is often directed at the lack of expertise shown by the teacher(s) who may be involved, the AR study which is the focus of this volume was a study conducted for a PhD programme and as mentioned, the programme provided an ample amount of training in research methodology. Further, my considerable experience as a classroom practitioner and researcher working as an ESAP lecturer at a university allowed me to use the skills I already possessed and this study afforded me with the opportunities to develop them still further.

It is also true that often AR studies are concerned with small-scale contexts, which was most definitely the case in my study. However, Burns (2010) acknowledges that many action research studies are concerned with practical solutions, which was the case in my context, and so I am convinced that although my context is specific, the situation is familiar to many ESP lecturers working in higher education institutions in Europe and elsewhere. Moreover, in order to provide as much resonance as possible, this study was conceived as a practical AR project where the data collection and analysis phases have been described in as much detail and as clearly as possible so that they can be easily replicated in analogous situations.

3.8 Practical Application of the AR Cycles in the Study

The AR cycles were organised and implemented in this study following the plan-act-observe-reflect sequence that was devised by Kemmis & McTaggart's (1988) and illustrated in Figure 3.1. There were three cycles in total spanning three academic years (from May 2014 to July 2016). Figure 3.2 below illustrates the three cycles and their timeframe and to ensure clarity at this stage and for ease of reference hereafter, the cycles are referred to as AR Cycle 1, AR Cycle 2 and AR Cycle 3. Each stage of each cycle will therefore be referred to with

these same numbers, so Action 1 refers to the action stage in AR Cycle 1 and Observe 3 refers to the observation stage in AR Cycle 3 and so on.

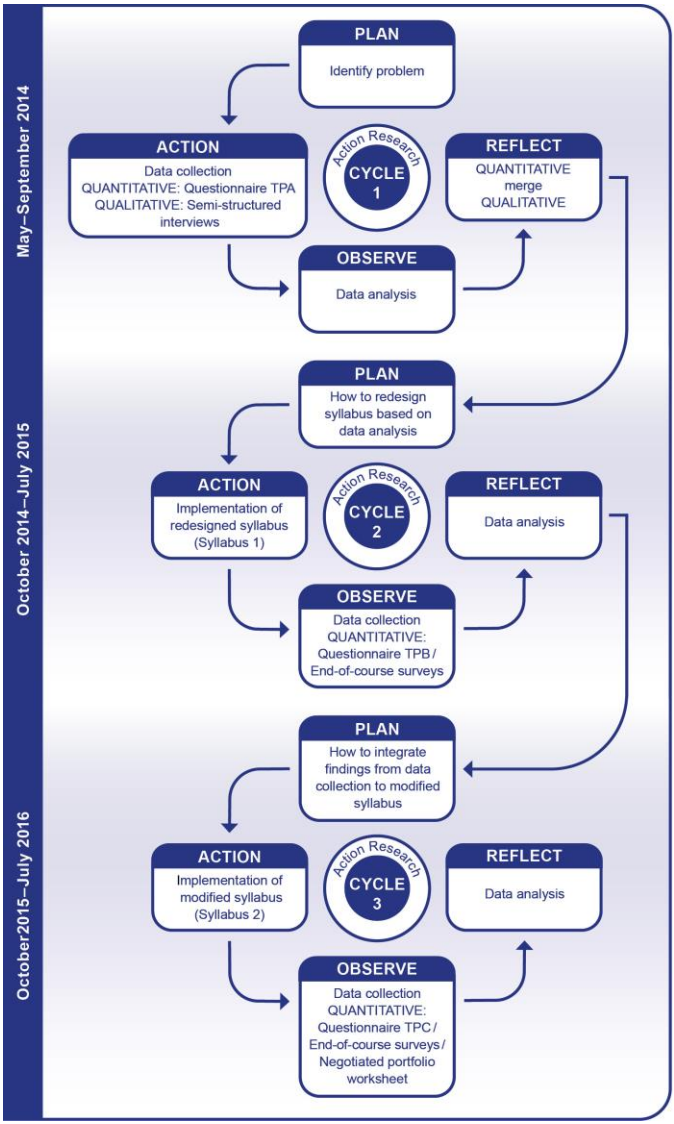

Fig. 3.2 – Action research cycles during the study. Note: TPA = student target population A; TPB = student target population B; TPC = student target population C.

3.8.1 Cycle 1

The first cycle, which took place over a four-month period (May-September 2014), comprised data collection where data were collected using a mixed methods approach. In Plan 1, the context was reflected upon and problematised. This resulted in the conclusion that the current syllabus for the ESAP courses I was teaching was not as learner-centred as I felt it could be and so there was the question as to whether it was adequately addressing the needs of the students. In this planning stage, the first two research questions of the study were formulated, which concerned which language skills the students needed to study at the Faculty of Economics and therefore how these would be reflected in the ESAP syllabus. Although these two questions were formally verbalised in AR Cycle 1, they had been in gestation for some time before the study had begun. It has been suggested that in insider action research studies, where the researcher investigates their own context, as is the case in this study, "there is not a clear beginning, or, for that matter, ending of the research" (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 92). In these cases, AR research questions are often formalised even some time after the situation under investigation has been identified. Therefore, for the purposes of this volume, the first two research questions of this study have been placed in Plan 1 of AR Cycle 1, and in fact were formalised in their current state at that time. However, in reality, the general questions had been conceived some time before the AR study was formally initiated.

Once these questions had been formulated, the data collection methods and the respondents were identified. In Action 1, the data collection occurred, and the different sources used to collect data were approached. Qualitative data were collected from the lectures who use English as a medium of instruction in the form of semi-structured interviews, and a questionnaire was administered to the economics students. In Observe 1, the data were analysed and in Reflect 1, the quantitative and qualitative data were merged, following the clear process of a mixed methods approach and as discussed further in Chapter 4. All further discussion about data collection and analysis is contained in Chapters 4 and 5.

3.8.2 Cycle 2

AR Cycle 2 took place over the following academic year and the ESAP course in question was that of the Economics and Management (E&M) students (February 2015–July 2015), and the results from the data collection and analysis Action 1 and Observe 1 were used to plan an alternative approach to the syllabus. It was at this point that the third and fourth research questions were formulated, which considered how the product aspects of the ESAP syllabus could benefit from being integrated by a process approach and which elements of the syllabus could therefore be negotiated with the students. In Plan 2, an approach using a blend of a product and process approach to syllabus design was devised to provide the students with more choice in the planning of their course and in Action 2, the new approach to the syllabus was implemented. Given the importance of evaluation in AR studies, the fifth research question was also formulated at this time, which focussed on the evaluation methods that could be devised to ascertain the effectiveness of this proposed syllabus for each individual learner.

Once the syllabus had been implemented, Observe 2 was used to collect further data from the students, by conducting the same questionnaire that had been sent in AR cycle 1 in order to start collecting longitudinal results, as well as an end-of-course survey to measure students' attitudes towards the new syllabus that had been implemented in AR Cycle 2, thus providing a means to conduct an evaluation and provide answers to research question 5. This stage was particularly important due to the fact that very few students had engaged with the new syllabus and it was important to understand why this had been the case and what could be done to enhance future applications of the syllabus. Burns, when discussing the AR cycles states that "often, the results of changes are unpredictable and reveal new or unexpected avenues for further action, which is then observed and documented further" (2009, p. 290). In fact, without the AR cycles, although the unexpected lack of interest from the students would have been observed and then reflected upon, there would have been no scope for intervention. However, with the multiple cycles of this study, action was able to be taken and in fact Action 3 was subsequently characterised by "critically informed action" (Kemmis & McTaggart ,1988, p. 10).

3.8.3 Cycle 3

AR Cycle 3, which lasted the entire 2015/2016 academic year comprised the two ESAP courses: the one for the Politics, Philosophy and Economics (PPE) students in the first semester between October 2015 and January 2016 and the one for the E&M students in the second semester between February and June 2016. A slight change was made in the implementation of the syllabus in the second semester with the E&M students to correct a problem regarding attendance that had been identified in the first semester. Therefore, as this problem concerned a practical obstacle to the implementation of the syllabus, yet the syllabus itself remained unchanged, these two implementations are regarded as one AR cycle in this study.

Plan 3 consisted in redesigning the syllabus to mitigate the students' lack of uptake of the first syllabus and was enacted in Action 3 over the first semester and then again in the second semester. During Observe 3, further data were collected from the students: the third online questionnaire was conducted to provide further longitudinal results in May 2016, and end-of-course surveys were completed by the PPE students in January 2016 and E&M students in June 2016 to provide information about the revised version of the syllabus. Data were also collected in class as field notes and from the worksheets that students had used in class.

In the first Observe 3 phase, as mentioned above, a problem concerning attendance was noted. The fact that the course did not require compulsory attendance was already a given in the context, but the irregular attendance that was the norm for the course had not been considered when the revised syllabus was introduced. Therefore, action was taken in the second semester course with the E&M students to resolve this unexpected problem, which will be discussed more in depth in Chapter 7. This problem, as already mentioned, was able to be identified and solved not only because action research was used as the research tradition in this study but also because multiple cycles were enacted. Consequently, this particular phase of the study exemplified the "driving purpose" of AR, which is "to bridge the gap between the ideal (the most effective ways of doing things) and the real (the actual ways of doing things)" (Burns, 2009, p. 291).

The final phase of this cycle, Reflect 3, was used to analyse the data from the students collected during the Observe 3 phase. The findings from this phase contributed to the most recent version of the syllabus. This syllabus has an almost identical form to the modified syllabus that was used in AR Cycle 3 in the second semester of 2015/2016, in that the blended approach used is the same, the main source materials remain largely unchanged and the constraints that are discussed in Section 7.3.1 are still valid. However, the contents based on those materials, the distribution of language work and some of the specific topics have changed since the study was undertaken. These changes are due to the focus on negotiation and the changing needs and interests of the students in each course each year, as well as the move to online teaching in March 2020 due to the lockdown imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of writing (the 2022/2023 academic year), the course has now resumed face-to-face, but the content will still be negotiated with the students and thus the course will again undergo changes compared to previous years.

4. Research Methodology

In this chapter the research methodology that was used in this project will be presented and will mainly focus on the approach to research used for the study, and then the research design and tradition used. The data collection methods that were used during the needs assessment stage of the study and during the AR cycles will be presented, as well as my approach to data analysis.

4.1 Philosophical Framework

Philosophical frameworks are key concepts in social science research methodology as they refer to the system of beliefs researchers possess and which, inevitably, play a central role in governing how a study is undertaken. These frameworks are often referred to as paradigms, a term that was made popular by Kuhn (1962). However, this term can lead to confusion due to the multiple ways it has been used over the years (Morgan, 2007, p. 48). Given this confusion, whenever this study's philosophical framework is referred to in this volume, the term worldview, which is commonly used in social sciences and in

the mixed methods literature, will be used. Worldview has been used as a synonym for a paradigm (Creswell, 2014, 2015; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009) and although worldview can be considered a broader term than paradigm, as it refers to "all encompassing ways of experiencing and thinking about the world, including beliefs about morals, values, and aesthetics" (Morgan, 2007, p. 50), its usage is less open to interpretation than paradigm.

This study was set in a real educational context with real actors involved and the aim of the study was to create a blended skills-based process syllabus. Since the syllabus was and still is based on negotiation, its contents and language focus inevitably change from year to year depending on the input from each group of learners. Each individual learner is therefore able to contribute to the design of the English-language course so that it can become as relevant and useful for those learners as possible within the 30 hours that have been programmed for the course by the Faculty. Because of this real-world, practical focus, the worldview that informed the conceptual framework of the study was pragmatism. Pragmatism has been described as "the search for practical answers to questions that intrigue the researcher" (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 86) and has often been used in mixed methods research as its underlying framework because pragmatism focuses on what works in practice. Pragmatism tends to concern itself with the "conceivable practical consequences" (Peirce, 1905/1984, p. 494) of the research, which differs from many other worldviews such as positivism or constructivism that "insist upon antecedent phenomena" in "reporting and registering past experiences" (Dewey, 1931, p. 32 quoted in Cherryholmes, 1992, p. 13). In other words, in order to approach a context or study, a focus on practical consequences is favoured over a concern with preconceived ideas. The focus on practical consequences means that pragmatic research is characterised by choices made by the researcher in order to create those consequences, which means the specific human values and needs that characterise the context are also considered and in fact precede the search for theories or descriptions. These choices often relate to how and what to research and what to do, but there are many ways to approach a research question, many of which might not be suitable for those involved in the research or for the context itself. Therefore a pragmatist "simply eliminates them as possibilities for his or her classroom" because "not

everything that works is desirable, not every belief that is "true" is to be acted upon" (Cherryholmes, 1992, p. 13). In other words, pragmatists focus on what works in the context and the choices they make aim to be fit for the purpose(s) at hand.

Pragmatism was also a suitable worldview for this study as after having worked so many years as an English-language teacher, from an ontological perspective I have learnt to adopt a pragmatic approach in the ESAP classroom. Although I can use many approaches to teaching, I have to focus on what works in practice due to the constraints of the context I am working in, particularly with regard to the curriculum demands imposed on me by the university system I am working in, the number of students I have and the time allotted to the courses I teach. As far as the curriculum demands are concerned, and with regard to the study in question, the ESAP course I was and still am teaching must have a final examination that comprises a written and an oral component. This implies that the course should incorporate a focus on improving the specific speaking and writing skills and the specific language aspects that are to be assessed in the final exam. As far as the students are concerned, they are allocated into relatively large groups (on average between 30 and 70 students in one class), which means that speaking activities that are designed to encourage most or all of the students to participate tend to have to be paired activities or small group activities rather than large group or whole-class speaking activities, thus optimising each individual student's opportunities for language practice. Further, the course lasts 30 hours in total, and coupled with the varied language proficiency levels of the students, these also provide clear limitations as to what and how much language content is included in the course. Consequently, a pragmatic approach to my teaching context is the one that works best in practice.

4.2 Approach to Research – Mixed Methods

Pragmatism, the worldview governing this study, is described by Creswell as an "underlying philosophy that informs both quantitative and qualitative data collection" (2015, p. 16). Because this study was set in a real educational context and concerned the design of a negotiated syllabus for my advanced

English course for undergraduate Economics students, the conceptual framework of this study involved gathering data from different sources and at different times. Therefore initial data were obtained from both qualitative research and quantitative research. The main data sources for the needs assessment and analysis stages of the study had to be first and foremost the students at the Faculty of Economics, of whom on average there were 600 per year over the three years this study covers. Needs assessment requires information not only *about* learners but also *from* learners and indeed Carkin states clearly that "needs assessment of the diverse learners in EAP underlies syllabus design" (2005, p. 87). In order to obtain as representative a depiction of the English-language needs of the population under study, i.e. the students at the Faculty, a sample from that population would have to be selected. As far as how large the sample had to be, Dörnyei states that "the often quoted 'the larger the better' principle is singularly unhelpful" (2007, p. 99) although Creswell disagrees and emphasises that "with a large sample there is less room for error in how well the sample reflects the characteristics of the population" (2015, p. 76). My aim was to obtain as many responses as possible in order to provide as representative a view as possible from the students that were following the degree programmes at the time and to draw tentative conclusions from the findings for current and subsequent students. Consequently, I decided to use a quantitative approach to collecting data from the students as using a qualitative approach would have been impractical given the large number of students involved.

However, the study's aim was to gain as much of an insight as possible into the English being used at the Faculty and any problems students may have been encountering while studying in English, especially given the use of English as a medium of instruction to students who do not have English as their L1 and by lecturers who do not have English as their L1. Therefore, from a pragmatic and an ontological perspective, just approaching the students to provide data would have excluded an important target population: those lecturers who use English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI). This group of people that interacts in and uses English with the students would be able to provide their own in-depth, individual perspectives concerning the use of the English in their respective classrooms and so their voices were essential. This

target population only numbered 10 individuals in the year that the interviews took place: they were all teaching completely different subjects from Accounting to Information Technology and so would have completely different experiences of how English was being used by their students. Moreover they all had differing academic, professional and even linguistic backgrounds and although some had been teaching in English at the Faculty for more than ten years, others had only been using EMI for a year or two. Thus it became clear that a more "person-centred enterprise" (K. Richards, 2003, p. 9), where these individual experiences and stories could be explored in depth through a more direct personal approach, would be beneficial. Therefore a qualitative approach, which is "directed at describing the aspects that make up an idiosyncratic experience" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 126), was deemed more useful to collect data from the EMI lecturers, as this would provide "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1973) and would allow me to understand more fully the contexts of each individual's classroom and the resulting characteristics.

The students and EMI lecturers were identified as the only target populations from whom to gather data for this study as there were no other individuals who were involved with the use of English for academic or teaching purposes at the Faculty, apart from me as the only ESP instructor.

Given the specific nature of the context, therefore, the approach used in this study was a mixed methods approach. Put simply, mixed methods research (MMR) "involves different combinations of qualitative and quantitative research either at the data collection or at the analysis levels" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 24) while Johnson et al. go further and state that MMR "combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches… for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration" (2007, p. 123). By combining qualitative and quantitative research approaches, researchers endeavour to obtain a fuller understanding of the context under study, which has also been noted by Bryman as one of the main rationales for integrating qualitative and quantitative research (2006, p. 106). This desire to have as full an understanding of my context as possible is the overriding reason why I used a mixed methods approach.

Further it has been suggested that pragmatically-inclined researchers use their initial research questions as a way to select the research approach and methods that would be most suitable, "enabling the investigation of important questions through mixing methods in ways that cannot be adequately addressed with a single approach" (Riazi & Candlin, 2014, p. 142). Others (Tashokkori & Teddlie, 1998; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009) also concur that pragmatism is "the underlying and the informing paradigm for MMR" (Riazi & Candlin, 2014, p. 142).

Although a mixed methods approach combines features from quantitative and qualitative research, the mere combining of data from the two approaches is not enough to label a study mixed methods. Mixed methods is used in an attempt to understand the subject under study more deeply and Creswell (2015, p. 2) states clearly that a mixed methods approach integrates aspects of the quantitative and qualitative approaches "and then draws interpretations based on the combined strengths of both sets of data to understand research problems". This combined strength therefore provides a greater understanding of the context under study than from just one or other approach. Given the complexity of my study: the different target populations, the individual perspectives within the samples taken from those populations, the number of samples, the different subjects taught in English as well as the lengthy timespan of the data collection, amongst other aspects, from a methodological perspective a mixed methods approach was thus deemed the most appropriate for this study.

4.3 Research Design – Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods

Within the mixed methods approach to research, Creswell (2015, p. 6) identifies three basic mixed methods designs: explanatory sequential design, where qualitative methods are used to help explain data from previously used quantitative methods, and exploratory sequential design, where qualitative methods are used initially to explore the context, perhaps because the questions to be asked are not known, and then these qualitative findings are used as a basis to create a second quantitative phase of the study. The third mixed method design is convergent design. In this type of mixed methods design both quantitative and qualitative data are collected at the same time, analysed separately

and then merged "with the purpose of comparing the results (some say validating one set of results with the other)" (Creswell, 2015, p. 6). Comparing the findings will then provide the researcher with a broader view of the topic and will indicate how far they confirm each other. Often convergent mixed methods design is also known as convergent parallel mixed methods design (Creswell, 2014, p. 219), to emphasise that the collection of data occurs at the same time as opposed to sequentially as in the other two mixed methods designs. This design can be illustrated thus:

Fig. 4.1 – Convergent parallel mixed methods design

For this study, in the initial data collection stage, which corresponded with the first AR cycle (see Section 3.8.1 for details), the questionnaire to students and the semi-structured interviews with the lecturers who use English as a medium of instruction were conducted in parallel in the same period. However, there were two further data collection stages, when the same questionnaire was administered to the students. These stages occurred at the same time of year in the second and third year of the study in order to obtain a longitudinal view of students' views. In order to avoid confusion when referring to the three different groups of students and thus the corresponding questionnaire, they will be referred to as target population A, B and C (TPA/B/C) from now on in this volume (see also Figure 3.2 in Section 3.8). Consequently, although the first data collection stage can be considered a convergent parallel mixed methods design, the data collection stages of the project concerning TPB and TPC can be viewed as multiphase mixed methods design. This is often used "in the evaluation or program implementation fields in which multiple phases of the project stretch over time" (Creswell, 2014, p. 228), which was certainly the case in this study. Further data collection stages were intro-

duced throughout the three years to evaluate the implementation of the aspects of the syllabus, and this will be discussed in more detail in the data collection section in this chapter.

In this study, therefore, I have predominantly used the convergent parallel mixed methods design as a methodological principle. As I aimed to achieve a thorough analysis of not only what students have to study in English, but also the skills and language proficiency needed to study successfully in English, and as we saw above, the respondents were both the students and their EMI lecturers, this convergent design, which occurred mainly in parallel, allowed for the merging of the data to achieve a certain degree of triangulation. Triangulation has been defined as

> intentionally using more than one method of data collection and analysis when studying a social phenomenon so as to seek convergence and corroboration between the results obtained from different methods, thereby eliminating the bias inherent in the use of a single method. (Riazi & Candlin, 2014, p. 144)

The use of triangulation thus aims to lead to a fuller understanding of the subject under investigation, particularly when there is a variety of data sources and data collection methods, as was the case in this study. These sources and methods are explained further in Section 4.7.

4.4 Research Tradition – Action Research

Although the approach I used for this study is mixed methods, this approach was predominantly used for the initial and subsequent needs assessment and needs analysis stages. The chosen research tradition or design for this study, however, due to its aim to improve the existing course syllabus by adapting it through negotiation with the students, was action research. The two terms, tradition and design, are used throughout the literature to refer to similar concepts. K. Richards (2003, p. 13) lists seven core traditions in qualitative research: ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, case study, life history, conversation analysis and action research. Creswell (2014, p. 13) also identifies grounded theory and ethnography in qualitative research but refers to them as research designs. In order to avoid confusion, in this volume I have

used “design” whenever I refer to the convergent design of the mixed methods approach I used, and “tradition” to refer to action research.

4.5 Approach to Data Collection

The research approach for this study was mixed methods and the research design was convergent parallel mixed methods in the initial needs assessment phase in the first AR cycle. Therefore, the conceptual framework of this study involved data obtained from both qualitative and quantitative research. In order to conduct this initial needs assessment of the students at the Faculty, data were obtained qualitatively from the lecturers who use EMI in semi-structured interviews and quantitative data were obtained from student target population A from an online questionnaire using the Opinio questionnaire software. The questionnaire was administered three times over a total of three years, corresponding to the three AR cycles as described in the previous chapter, so quantitative data were collected from three different student target populations (TPA, TPB and TPC).

Apart from the data from the questionnaires, other data were collected in the second and third AR cycles from the students as a means to evaluate the implementation of aspects of the syllabus. Further discussion about these data collection methods can be found in Section 4.7 The Data Collection.

4.5.1 Quantitative data collection − Sampling

The convergent parallel mixed methods design, as discussed in Section 4.3, involves the collection of quantitative and qualitative data in parallel and is then merged in order to achieve triangulation. Often in this design “the quantitative sample proceeds from a random or non-random sampling procedure, while the qualitative sample proceeds from purposeful sampling” (Creswell, 2015, p. 78), which was reflected to a degree in this study. The quantitative data were collected from a questionnaire, a link to which was sent by email to a target population that comprised all undergraduate Economics students enrolled in the two E&M and PPE degree programmes. These students were chosen because they were the students who had the ESAP course which is the focus of this study in their study plan as part of their undergraduate degrees. The ESAP course takes place annually in the first semester (October-January)

for the PPE students and in the second semester (February-June) for the E&M students during their second year of the degree programme. Although the target population was the students who had the ESAP course in their study plan, the sampling was random as the questionnaire was to be filled in voluntarily.

Consequently, the methodology used to collect data from the students was combining random sampling with a rational means of selection, in other words the deliberately chosen target population. This is stated as being "a particularly effective method for surveys with a specific focus" (Dörnyei, 2003a, p. 73).

However, when sampling is based on self-selection, which was the case in this study as the students who completed the questionnaires were all volunteers, problems can arise (Dörnyei, 2003a; Lowie & Seton, 2013). If a questionnaire is completed based on self-selection, "the sample may lose its representative character" (Dörnyei, 2003a, p. 75) as the respondents who do complete the questionnaire will not necessarily be representative of the entire target population. In the case of this study, it is possible that students with less motivation or those who had a lower language proficiency might have chosen not to undertake the questionnaire. Indeed Brown (2001, p. 85) points out that often the respondents who complete a questionnaire voluntarily may be generalised as "eager-beaver" or "gung-ho" respondents and as such do not represent the target population but just the "eager-beaver" or "gung-ho" part of that population. As can be seen from Table 4.1, which summarises the questionnaires' response rates, there was in fact a degree of dropout, where some students did access the questionnaire but abandoned it before completing it. Dörnyei (2003a, p. 76) suggests that to achieve sample representativeness in a survey that is based on self-selection, a response rate of 80% would be needed to guarantee a lack of bias. However, as the target population for this questionnaire was limited to the Economics undergraduates and the findings are not being used to generalise beyond the specific context of this study, these samples can be seen as generally representative (Lowie & Seton, 2013, p. 53). Moreover, in Table 4.1, the response rate refers to the number of completed questionnaires as a percentage of the number of questionnaires accessed rather than the number of emails sent. When the emails were sent to the students

inviting them to complete the questionnaires, the individual addresses retrieved were not able to be identified as they were within group blocks divided by degree programme and year. As such, it was not possible for me to identify either the number of total emails that were sent, nor to whom they were sent and in fact it is likely that many of the email addresses were no longer valid or many of the emails were never even read by the addressee. Thus the reasons for the response rate being calculated based on the number of questionnaires accessed rather than the number of emails sent. Further aspects concerning the questionnaires will be analysed in the discussion concerning the findings from the questionnaire data in Chapter 6.

Table 4.1 – Questionnaire responses

	AR Cycle 1	AR Cycle 2	AR Cycle 3
Timeline	6 – 31 May 2014	27 May – 15 June 2015	9 May – 9 June 2016
Data collection method	QUANTITATIVE: Online questionnaire to target population A	QUANTITATIVE: Online questionnaire to target population B	QUANTITATIVE: Online questionnaire to target population C
No. accessed	218	141	147
No. completed	151	99	115
Response rate %	69.2%	70.2%	78.2%

4.5.2 Qualitative data collection – Sampling

Although convergent parallel mixed methods design is characterised by its use of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, typically the same participants for this data collection are used (Creswell, 2014, p. 222; Creswell, 2015, p. 78). However, due to the pragmatic underpinnings of this study, there were two distinct target populations chosen for data collection, the students and the EMI lecturers. Indeed, using different participants "works well when the intent of the convergent design is to compare different perspectives" (Creswell, 2015, p. 78), which was the intention of this study. Because these two target populations were entirely different from the perspectives of quantity, accessibility and ability to provide information, a quantitative

approach to data collection was used with the students, using a random sampling method, although the target population was very clearly defined.

However, a qualitative approach was used to obtain data from the second, and much smaller, target population, the EMI lecturers. Creswell (2015, pp. 78–79) presents various methods for qualitative sampling in convergent parallel mixed methods design, including having both the quantitative and qualitative target populations of the same size, with the inherent problems that would cause in terms of resources and time for large qualitative samples and lack of representativeness for smaller quantitative samples. In the case of this study, however, the sampling for the qualitative data collection was relatively straightforward: the target population was clearly defined as it comprised the members of staff who used English as a medium of instruction. Given the teaching model of the Faculty, where the three official teaching languages of the University – German, Italian and English – are used approximately equally throughout the degree programme, all the other lecturers would not have been able to provide any perspective on the English-language usage in their classrooms since they were teaching in either Italian or German. Therefore purposeful sampling was used to select the sample for the qualitative data, which amounted to ten participants. Below is a diagram to summarise the approach to data collection used in this study:

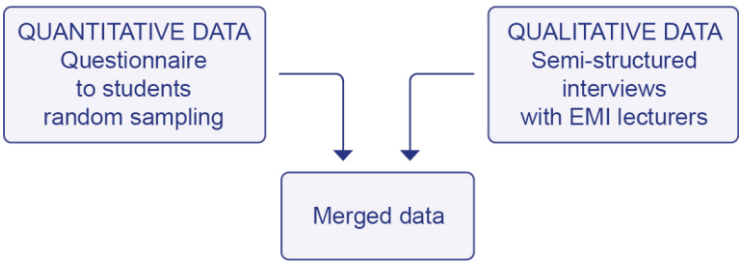

Fig. 4.2 – Sampling used in this convergent parallel mixed methods design

The aim of approaching the EMI lecturers was to gain a deeper insight into the English-language use and problems in the individual classrooms, and as the purposeful sampling only identified ten participants, conducting interviews with all of them seemed to be the most appropriate method. One-to-one

interviews would help to "establish a relationship with people that enables us to share in their perception of the world" (K. Richards, 2003, p. 50). Further, the interview has been described as a "professional conversation" (Kvale, 1996, p. 5) with the clear purpose "to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena" (Kvale, 1996, pp. 5–6). Consequently, selecting the EMI lecturers as participants in this study would allow for their perspectives to be shared, given that they are extremely important participants in the language-learning processes of the students in question.

A further consideration regarding the gathering of the qualitative data, and to a certain extent also the quantitative data, was the issue of my role as the researcher in this study, given my multiple roles as teacher, colleague and researcher. How these roles were considered when creating a framework for the data collection and during the data collection itself will now be discussed in the next section.

4.6 Researcher Roles

A qualitative approach to research "is fundamentally interpretative, which means that the research outcome is ultimately the product of the researcher's subjective interpretation of the data" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 38). This means that the researcher should reflect on their role in the study and on how the data are collected and interpreted. Being reflexive means exercising self-awareness and "reminds the qualitative inquirer to be attentive to and conscious of the cultural, political, social, linguistic and ideological origins of one's own perspective and voice as well as the perspective and voices of those one interviews" (Patton, 2002, p. 65). Given my role as the researcher for this study but also the teacher of the students (either concurrently or in the future) and the colleague of the lecturers who used English as a medium of instruction, I was fully aware of my multiple roles and potential problems that being an insider could generate. Therefore, as far as the quantitative data collected from the students were concerned, the questionnaire administered to the students was an online survey that guaranteed anonymity and students were under no obligation to complete it. This anonymity sought to address some of the disadvantages of questionnaires that have been highlighted by Dörnyei

(2003a, p. 13) including "acquiescence bias", where respondents agree with statements that they actually might not really agree with and the "halo effect", which is a tendency to overgeneralise. An example of the latter is where students who have a positive opinion of a teacher will state that everything about that teacher and class is positive, even if perhaps that is not the case. Certainly the opposite can also be true: if students do not like a teacher, they will probably give a generally negative assessment of that teacher and his/her class. He also refers to "self-deception", where people tend to deceive themselves as to their strengths and weaknesses (Dörnyei, 2003a, p. 13). Given the fact that the questionnaire used in this study sought data about students' proficiency levels through self-reporting, this aspect might have had an effect on the responses provided. A further weakness of questionnaires is "social desirability bias" where respondents "try to meet social expectations and over-report desirable attitudes and behaviours while underrepresenting those that are socially not respected" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 54). Given that the students completing the questionnaires had been, were at the time or were going to be students of mine, they may have provided information that was not wholly accurate knowing that I would be reading the responses. However, the sampling of the data to generalise the results and ensuring anonymity were ways to address these issues.

The follow-up surveys to students that are referred to further in this chapter were conducted on paper at the beginning of their written exam, but again students were under no obligation to complete them and they were also anonymous. It was impossible for me to identify individual responses due to the large numbers of students in the exam room (up to 90 in one exam).

As far as the interviews with the lecturers were concerned, all the respondents were approached initially via email with an overview of the study and a request to meet for an interview. As one of the characteristics of an interview is for the researcher to create a relationship with the interviewee, interviews can be regarded as being "active" as they "are unavoidably meaning-making ventures" (Mann, 2011, p. 8). Garton & Copland (2010, p. 533) also focus on the fact that interviews "should be viewed as an interactional event in which the interviewer and the interviewee jointly construct meaning" but focus specifically on "acquaintance interviews" which are typically semi-

structured interviews "in which interviewer and interviewee have a prior relationship" (2010, p. 535). This prior relationship could be due to the research itself if it was a long-term project but Garton & Copland (2010, p. 536) state that acquaintance interviews can also comprise relationships between researcher and participant that include friends, colleagues and family members. In the case of this study, I had a variety of relationships with the interviewees: some were known to me purely because we were colleagues whereas others were colleagues and friends. Therefore, the typical asymmetry that there exists between an interviewer and an interviewee, where the interviewer typically asks the questions and the interviewee answers, is often not so prevalent in acquaintance interviews. Further, if the researcher knows the interviewee, "empathetic neutrality" (Patton, 2002, p. 49) could be compromised, which refers to the researcher's stance as "middle ground between coming too involved, which can cloud judgment, and remaining too distant, which can reduce understanding" (Patton, 2002, p. 50). Clearly knowing the interviewees could have led to my becoming too involved or jumping to conclusions from what the interviewees mentioned.

4.7 The Data Collection

As a mixed methods study with a convergent design, quantitative and qualitative data were collected both in parallel and over time. Initial data were collected from two data sources: the students and the lecturers who use EMI for the needs assessment stage of the study, which have been used to inform the design of the syllabus. Further data collection stages occurred in the subsequent AR cycles of the study in the evaluation stages as well as repeating the data collection from students for a further two academic years to provide both cross-sectional and longitudinal comparisons.

As far as collecting data from the students was concerned, and as discussed previously, I used a predominantly quantitative approach by sending an online questionnaire with closed questions to all enrolled economics students of that academic year (2013/2014). This questionnaire was used in the first AR cycle during the initial needs assessment stage, which coincided with the first year of the study and it was sent out at the same time of year (middle

of May for 4 weeks) for the subsequent two AR cycles in the following academic years to gather data from three years' worth of undergraduate students.

Once the adapted syllabus was implemented in the second AR cycle of the study (2014/2015 academic year), evaluation was undertaken within the AR cycles to ascertain the students' attitudes about the implementation of the new syllabus since there had been an extremely limited uptake. This was undertaken as a short end-of-course, paper-and-pen survey administered to the students at the beginning of their written exam at the end of the course. The feedback from this survey was analysed and further action was taken in AR Cycle 3 (2015/2016 academic year) of the study to address the points raised. A further, more detailed survey to the one in AR Cycle 2 was distributed to the students at the end of the PPE and E&M courses of the third year to evaluate their perceptions of the changes implemented and this one used a variety of open and closed questions a space for suggestions and comments at the end was also provided. This time, a mainly qualitative approach was employed through the use of the open questions in this course evaluation survey because this kind of approach "tell[s] the *program's story* by capturing and communicating the *participants' stories*" (Patton, 2002, p. 10, original italics).

A further data collection stage occurred during the classes where negotiation of the syllabus actually took place. This comprised a worksheet that the students used during the negotiation class and which they submitted to me at the end of the class on a voluntary basis. The aim of this worksheet was manifold: it acted as a guide for the students' interactions during the discussion phase of the negotiated class but for the purposes of the study and the syllabus, it provided evidence of what had been discussed and negotiated in class. Clarke states that "detailed written records would have to be kept during the creation and implementation of a Negotiated model" (1991, p. 22) and Hedge concurs, stating that when implementing a negotiated process syllabus, written records are essential for accountability issues: "when decisions about content and procedure are taken throughout the course … record-keeping becomes crucial" (2000, p. 366). Further and most simply, if I had missed any of the input from the students, these worksheets would act as a reminder of what had been discussed. Moreover, given that the this study's research design used a mixed methods approach to data collection, during these Negotiated

Portfolio classes, I observed the interactions in those classes and took field notes to document what occurred as "the act of writing itself imposes shape and substance" (K. Richards, 2003, p. 136) and, in the case of the notes taken in the class in October 2015, were then subsequently written up. These field notes were taken to provide as much documentation as possible about the interactions in the class and also the decisions taken together with the students during the negotiation phase.

The Table 4.2 below summarises the data collection methods and data sources used. Further details about these data collection stages can be found in the following sections.

Table 4.2 – Data collection methods and sources over the three AR cycles

			Data collection methods	Data sources
AR Cycle 1	2014	May	QUAN: Online questionnaire (STP A)	Students
		May-August	QUAL: Semi-structured interviews	EMI lecturers
AR Cycle 2	2015	May	QUAN: Online questionnaire (STP B)	Students
		June	QUAN: End-of-course survey	
AR Cycle 3	2015 – 2016	October	QUAL: Worksheet in negotiated syllabus class QUAL: Field notes	Students
		January	QUAN + QUAL: End-of-course survey	
		April	QUAL: Worksheet in negotiated syllabus class QUAL: Field notes	
		May	QUAN: Online questionnaire (STP C)	
		July	QUAN + QUAL: End-of-course survey	

4.7.1 Qualitative data collection

For the initial needs assessment phase, and as far as the collection of qualitative data was concerned, the primary means of data collection in action research comprise the use of journals, interviews, documents and recording (K. Richards, 2003, p. 13). For this study, I used semi-structured interviews to collect data from the lecturers who use EMI that were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. I did not use journals as although they would have helped validate my results and be useful for further triangulation, I felt it would be impossible to persuade students or staff to keep a journal documenting their experiences for this project.

4.7.1.1 Semi-structured interviews

Interviews are a typical means of data collection in qualitative approaches to research (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 24) and the qualitative interview is ever-present in applied linguistics (Mann, 2011, p. 6; K. Richards, 2003, p. 47). Given that mixed methods approaches to research combine both quantitative and qualitative approaches to research, the interview is also a common means of data collection in mixed methods. Indeed Bryman noted as long ago as 2006 in his investigation of articles combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to research that "survey methods and qualitative interviews account for the vast majority of methods employed in the articles" (2006, p. 102) and he found that semi-structured interviews were the research method that was employed the most frequently.

The semi-structured interview is one of various types of interviews used in applied linguistics qualitative research. The three main types of interviews where one interviewee is present are commonly referred to as unstructured or open interviews, semi-structured or semi-open interviews and structured interviews. An unstructured interview is often a relatively informal talk where the responses from the interviewee tend to dictate the direction and content of the interview. As such they are often used to gain deeper insights into the interviewees' opinions, thoughts or experiences since an unstructured interview "allows maximum flexibility to follow the interviewee in unpredictable directions with only minimal interference from the research agenda" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 135). However, one of the main disadvantages of unstructured

interviews is that it is difficult to make useful comparisons between the answers provided by interviewees (Johnson & Weller, 2002, p. 499; K. Richards, 2003, p. 184). A structured interview, on the other hand, whose "agenda is totally predetermined by the researcher, who works through a list of set questions in a predetermined order" (Nunan, 1992b, p. 149), although much easier to compare across interviewees, tends to be very inflexible. Moreover, as K. Richards asserts, the qualitative interview ought "not merely to accumulate information but to deepen understanding and in order to do this the interviewer must be responsive to nuance and opportunity as the interview progresses" (2003, p. 64).

Therefore, a "compromise" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 136) between these two types seems the most useful for this research and so semi-structured interviews were used with the EMI lecturers as a means to administer a needs analysis. The semi-structured format allowed for a great degree of flexibility, but still allowed me to ask the lecturers specific questions, the answers to which have been more easily comparable. Further, as all the interviewees are busy researchers and teaching staff, it was important to limit the amount of time being taken from their working day, especially as they certainly had little incentive to provide time for this study as no immediate benefit would have been gained for them personally. Unstructured interviews can become very long whereas the semi-structured format allowed me to follow the research agenda, but provided sufficient flexibility for me "to follow up interesting developments and to let the interviewee elaborate on certain issues" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 136).

As these interviews were designed to be part of the broader analysis of students' English-language needs, an interview guide was used. This kind of a guide is what K. Richards describes as "a resource that be drawn on in whatever way and to whatever extent is appropriate" (2003, p. 69) and "helps make interviewing a number of different people more systematic and comprehensive by delimiting in advance the issues to be explored" (Patton 2002, p. 343). The interviewees were all domain experts but were not linguists so although they could provide information on the tasks undertaken in English in their classrooms and exams, they could not necessarily identify the linguistic re-

sources being used and would probably only be able to identify students' language problems in a general way. Therefore, Hutchinson & Waters's (1987, p. 59) target-situation analysis was adapted in order to function as a framework to collect information about the target needs of the students. Target needs, according to Hutchinson & Waters are "what the learner needs to do in the target situation", which differ from learning needs which are "what the learner needs to do in order to learn" (p. 54). Consequently the "big questions" (K. Richards, 2003, p. 69) used in the interview guide were based predominantly around the students' target needs, which were designed to be more straightforward for the subject lecturers to articulate and describe since there was also the consideration that all of them do not have English as their first language.

The interview guide was designed to follow a clear thematic structure to facilitate data collection and so the first section, entitled *Your use of English* sought to gather information about how each individual lecturer used English in the classroom given they all taught very different subjects with different year groups and class sizes. This question therefore aimed to elicit some of the students' target needs in each course that used English as a medium of instruction by analysing the descriptions of classroom interaction given by each lecturer. The interviewees therefore provided information concerning what teaching methodology they used, whether they used a traditional lecturing style or a more seminar-led approach, for example, as well as what teaching resources they used. In this section, the interview guide also provided the self-reflective question *What problems do you have when you use English in your class?* The phrasing of the question may appear insensitive since it assumes that the lecturers were having problems, but it was designed to encourage the lecturers to reflect on their classroom practice within the specific multilingual context in which they were working. The question aimed to identify whether any problems that did arise due to using EMI originated from difficulties the students experienced or from difficulties the lecturers themselves experienced as non-native English speakers lecturing to classes of non-native English speakers who may not even share their L1. Consequently although all the lecturers were non-native speakers of English, the question was not focusing on the fact

that they were non-native speakers, but more on the specific teaching context in which they were operating.

The second section of the interview guide sought to focus more on the students' use of English in each individual course and so the questions were designed to elicit further information about how English was used, how the subject's exam was structured and most importantly the language problems that students encountered during classroom interaction, completing exercises and the exam. As such this part of the interview guide acted as a framework to conduct a present-situation analysis, which has the aim to "[estimate] strengths and weaknesses in language, skills, learning experiences" (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998, p. 125). The final section asked for reflection on the success of each course from a linguistic perspective and lecturers were asked to identify whether they would modify their courses in the future to take into account any problems they encountered with using English as a medium of instruction. This final part was designed to be a reflective element in the interview so that the lecturers could consider what actions could be taken in the future (either by them or even by me as the ESAP course tutor) to improve their course from a language perspective.

Although as we have seen, an interview guide is often used to make the interviewing process of multiple respondents more systematic, the extent to how closely it is followed can vary from respondent to respondent. Often in semi-structured interviews "the interviewer remains free to build a conversation within a particular subject area, to word questions spontaneously" (Patton, 2002, p. 343), which is exactly what happened in this study. Therefore, although each interview was planned to last approximately 10 minutes and followed the same interview guide, they all had different running lengths and a variety of different information was provided, precisely because the answers that were provided then allowed me to probe further into the interviewee's specific context.

A further consideration regarding the interview guide was the fact that English is not the first language of any of the interviewees. Conducting interviews in a participant's first language can be advantageous as it has been perceived to "lead to more open, easier, more expressive communication and to

elicit more or more accurate information" (Cortazzi et al., 2011, p. 510). Therefore, I had also designed the questions based on the target situation and the target needs of the students in the event that I would have to conduct the interview in Italian. Although my Italian is quite advanced conversationally, if I had had to conduct the interview in Italian, it would have been easier for me to ask concrete questions regarding when English is used, how it is used, what aspects are dealt with in English, how often it is used and so on rather than attempting to extrapolate more complex linguistic information, which I would not have been able to do effectively in Italian. In the end, though, all the interviews were conducted in English despite all interviewees being given the option of speaking in Italian before we commenced the interviews. The choice to use English arose because even though seven of the ten people interviewed have Italian as their first language (the others having French, Russian and Russian/Bielorussian), they all use English professionally both as a medium of instruction and in their other academic and research duties. Moreover, given that I had a prior relationship with all of them, they were all used to interacting with me in English and so it seemed natural to use English in this context. However, there can be problems when an interviewee is interacting in his/her second or third language, such as feeling less at ease or not necessarily having the language skills to express complex thoughts or recount experiences (Cortazzi et al., 2011, p. 509) and reference will be made to these issues when they arise in the Data Analysis chapter.

The interview guide was also designed in this way so that this framework could facilitate the subsequent coding and categorising of the data, since the interviewees were all lecturers of completely different subjects. Asking situation-based questions rather than more linguistic-based questions allowed me to obtain a more easily comparable picture of the tasks undertaken in English in the various classrooms and the problems the students face when carrying out these tasks.

A final consideration about the semi-structured interviews was that as "there is almost universal agreement" (K. Richards, 2003, p. 67) that interviews should be recorded, this is what occurred. When the EMI lecturers were approached initially, it was made clear to them that if they agreed to be interviewed, they would be audio recorded. Further discussion about the ethical

considerations of this aspect appears in Section 4.9. Therefore, each interview was recorded in its entirety on a digital recorder (iPhone) and the audio files were then saved for the following analysis stages. Another method of collecting data from interviews is to take notes, a method which is recommended especially if recording equipment malfunctions (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004; Patton, 2002). However, K. Richards states that taking notes during an interview is an "unnecessary formality … which might inhibit the informant and distract the interviewer" (2003, p. 67) and it can be "a laborious task" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 200) particularly in longer interviews. Moreover, since the "raw data of interviews are the actual quotations spoken by interviewees" (Patton, 2002, p. 380), this would imply that the notes taken would have to accurately record what the interviewee says, which would have a negative impact on the interactive nature of a semi-structured interview. As conducting interviews was a procedure with which I was relatively unfamiliar, and I would have the audio file afterwards to code and categorise and so could revisit the interviews, I therefore felt taking notes could be an unwelcome distraction. Consequently although I had the interview guide in front of me during the interviews, I did not take any notes at all.

4.7.1.2 End-of-course surveys

Another data collection method that was mainly qualitative, as summarised in Table 4.2, was the two end-of-course surveys, which were conducted during the written exams at the end of the courses in AR Cycle 2 and AR Cycle 3. The first survey was conducted due to the fact that only two students had opted to follow the newly designed syllabus that was used in AR Cycle 2, and all the other students chose to follow the existing syllabus. Therefore, it was crucial to understand why there had been such a low take-up of the new syllabus in order to make adjustments for the following academic year as the aim was for the students to use the new syllabus. The survey consequently gave a list of possible reasons why the students had not chosen the modified syllabus and an "other" at the end for any reasons that had not been covered, and the students were requested to tick the reason that best covered why they had not chosen to follow the new syllabus. There was also a space for students to write a follow-up comment.

The second end-of-course survey, which was conducted at the end of the PPE course and the end of the E&M course at the end of AR Cycle 3, was more detailed in its design as it aimed to gather data in order to evaluate the modified syllabus that was used in this AR cycle. This survey used a mixture of closed yes/no questions about the course and then asked follow-up open questions to explain why the respondents had chosen yes or no. Due to the pragmatic underpinnings of this study, the purpose of using a more qualitative approach to data collection in this particular evaluation stage was to generate findings that would be useful for the subsequent course the following year. Patton states that in programme evaluation, "understanding the program's and participants' stories is useful to the extent that they illuminate the processes and outcomes of the program for those who must make decisions about the program" (2002, p. 10), and it is a qualitative approach to data collection that can better achieve this aim.

4.7.1.3 In-class worksheet

A further data collection method used in this study was the use of an in-class worksheet for the students during the Negotiated Portfolio classes with both groups of students in AR Cycle 3. As already mentioned, the worksheet had multiple aims; first it aimed to act as a framework for the students' interactions during the discussion phase of the negotiated class because "for the learners to be able to plan their own learning they require not only the opportunity to do it, but also information on how to design their plans" (Serrano-Sampedro, 2000, p. 113). For the purposes of the study and the syllabus itself, the worksheet was also designed to provide evidence of what had been discussed and negotiated in class since in a negotiated syllabus, "record-keeping becomes crucial" (Hedge, 2000, p. 366). This worksheet was adapted from an example provided by Hedge, which was used in a writing course to modify the contents of a coursebook that was being considered for adoption in order to better meet the students' needs (Hedge, 2000, p. 365). Although I was not using a coursebook for this course, I was using a book, *Freakonomics* by Levitt & Dubner (2005) so Hedge's worksheet was adapted to focus on this book.

The questions on the worksheet were divided into three sections entitled "Yourself", "Freakonomics" and "The Portfolio", the latter being the name of the coursework that the students had to complete. The "Yourself" section required the students to initially reflect on their strengths and weaknesses in English in an endeavor to raise their awareness of what individual language learning objectives they could address through the use of the Portfolio. In a learner-centred approach to syllabus design, learners need to be able to contribute actively to the planning of the syllabus but in order to do this, "the teacher has to encourage students to think critically about their learning experiences and about themselves as learners" (Tudor, 1993, p. 27). This initial reflective phase that was integrated into the worksheet thus provided an opportunity for the students to consider the purposes of the work to be done for the Portfolio, which is also the first element in Step 1 of Breen & Littlejohn's negotiation cycle (2000c, p. 32) as illustrated in Figure 2.1. As the negotiated syllabuses aimed to address the needs of the individual students involved, reflection and self-evaluation were considered crucial at this stage of the process. The students were requested to complete this section individually.

The second section entitled "Freakonomics" was completed in small groups and students were required to discuss the contents of the book and select which chapters would be useful or interesting for them to study together in class and which parts could be read without the support given in class. These two questions aimed to provide an initial focus for negotiation and for identifying the students' needs, but also what Hutchinson & Waters refer to as their "wants", i.e. what the learners feel they need or want from a course rather than the more objective necessities that are determined by the target situation (1987, pp. 55–56). This section also focused on aspects in the "contents" element of Step 1 of the negotiation cycle concerning the actual topics to be studied. Section three of the worksheet also focused on the content of the Portfolio, such as the type of texts to be written, as well as other elements that comprise the negotiation cycle, particularly concerning the ways of working such as how many writing tasks there would be and the amount to be written. Consequently, although students were unable to choose the source material, *Freakonomics*, and the negotiated element of the course was the Portfolio, all other aspects were open for negotiation.

Once students had had time to discuss these questions together in groups, we came together as the whole class and we negotiated the elements to be included in the Portfolio. This also allowed for negotiation of content, procedures and evaluation means so that by the end of the class, we had decided how much writing would be undertaken, what type of writing would be undertaken and which chapters of the book would be read.

At the end of the class, students were asked to submit their worksheets on a voluntary basis so that I could cross-reference what they had written with the notes I had taken during the negotiation stage and in total I received eleven worksheets. As mentioned previously, these worksheets were collected so that I had a record of what had been discussed and decided. During this class, I had also taken field notes while the students were working on the worksheet so that I had a further data collection method to cross-reference with the worksheets completed by the students and the notes I had taken based on the negotiation process.

4.7.1.4 Field notes

Field notes are a method of data collection in qualitative research which are "mainly written in the heat of the moment as events unfold before the researcher's eyes" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 229) and are the main data collection tool when observation is being undertaken. Field notes can either be taken at the time to be consulted during the analysis stage afterwards or they can be written up on detail after the observation period (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 229), which can aid in the analysis stage as typed up field notes tend to be easier to work with subsequently. For this study, field notes were taken twice, once in the Negotiated Portfolio class in AR Cycle 2 and again in the Negotiated Portfolio class in AR Cycle 3. The field notes in AR Cycle 2 were typed up after the class but the second set of field notes were not typed up afterwards.

Field notes function as a means to describe what is being observed and as such should avoid any judgmental language. They should describe the behaviour being observed rather than falling "into the bad habit of primarily recording interpretations" (Patton, 2002, p. 303). This is because field notes should act as evidence of what was observed. In order to avoid assigning meaning to

what is observed, verbs should be favoured over adjectives when writing field notes (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 231; Patton, 2002, p. 303) so that the specific actions observed are recorded rather than the researcher's interpretation of those actions. Direct quotations of what is said are also recommended as they provide an "emic perspective" (Patton, 2002, p. 303) – an insider's perspective – to what was being observed. Field notes can also contain the observer's own feelings and opinions since in qualitative research "the observer's own experiences are part of the data" (Patton, 2002, p. 304). K. Richards (2003, p. 137) also recommends that analytical and relational aspects are also recorded. Analytical aspects would relate to insights and connections with theory whereas relational issues concern how the researcher connects with what is being observed and the participants being observed, as well as any personal reflections on the observation. Given that I was observing my own students in this case, the field notes I took contained much of what is recommended. Analysis of these field notes can be found in Section 5.6.2.2.

4.7.2 Quantitative data collection

There are different means to collect quantitative data in applied linguistics, including language tests and objective measurements of a specific phenomenon, but due to the nature of this study, another very common method was used: the questionnaire. In the literature, there is an array of terms often used interchangeably for this means of data collection, including questionnaire, questionnaire survey or survey (Dörnyei, 2003a, p. 5), but for this volume I shall use the term "questionnaire".

Questionnaires can take on many guises: they can be seen as interview plans where the questions are read out to the interviewee, which would typically take place in a structured interview, or they can be "self-administered pencil-and-paper questionnaires" (Dörnyei, 2003a, p. 6) although nowadays, with the almost universal use of email and the internet, many tend to be administered online. Moreover, depending on the type of information sought, Lankshear & Knobel (2004, p. 164) identify purely descriptive questionnaires, cross–sectional questionnaires or longitudinal questionnaires. Descriptive questionnaires simply describe the current situation of the sample, a cross-sectional questionnaire takes a targeted sample and infers from the responses

the typical situation for the broader group or population, whereas a longitudinal questionnaire focuses on one specific group over time. For this study, a cross-sectional questionnaire was used which was sent to a target population that comprised all undergraduate Economics students enrolled for the degree programmes in Economics and Management and in Politics, Philosophy and Economics. As discussed, the questionnaire was then administered in the two following academic years, 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 to obtain a longitudinal view of the students' English language proficiency and any problems they may be experiencing studying in English at the Faculty, with a view to also use the data as an evaluation tool for the adopted syllabus.

4.7.2.1 Strengths and weaknesses of use

Questionnaires are commonly used as there are many benefits to their use, although undoubtedly there are also many drawbacks. Advantages of using questionnaires are that they can be sent to a large number of respondents and are versatile, especially now that many can be administered online and can potentially reach an extremely large number of respondents thanks to email and social media. For this study, an online questionnaire was used in order to reach as many students as possible, and also because it allowed for completion whenever and wherever was convenient for the respondent. Using an online questionnaire also facilitated the processing of the collected data afterwards. However, one problem that can be experienced with online questionnaires is that response rates can often be very low (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 101; Brown, 2009, p. 214). Therefore, in order to mitigate this problem, several emails were sent as periodic reminders, which seemed to contribute to the relatively high response rate in the three years surveyed, which ranged from 69.2% to 78.2%, as was shown in Table 4.1.

Another disadvantage of questionnaires is that often their reliability cannot be guaranteed, either due to ambiguous question wording, or to unreliable or inconsistent answers from respondents. In order to avoid ambiguous, loaded or simply unclearly worded questions because "in questionnaires so much depends on the actual wording of the items" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 112), the questionnaire was piloted, a stage that is regarded as being fundamental (Nunan, 1992b, p. 145; Dörnyei, 2003a, p. 63). An initial piloting phase was

used involving eight Economics students, and therefore potential respondents, who had volunteered for the task after I had appealed for help during my classes. These students were given the pilot questionnaire on paper and were asked to give their responses as real respondents, but also to focus carefully on the questions so that they could provide feedback on whether there were redundant or irrelevant questions. They were also asked to provide feedback on the contents and order of the questions and the language used, given the fact that the questionnaire was administered in English. English was chosen as the questionnaire language because the students were all studying at the trilingual Faculty of Economics, which means they had all had to certify at least a B2 level in English in order to enrol for the undergraduate programme. Further, the cohorts involved in the study had a multitude of L1s, mainly German and Italian, but also Ladin, Spanish, Albanian and Russian amongst others, so the prospect of having to produce a version in all these other languages was too vast to contemplate given the scope of this research.

Once the students had completed the draft questionnaire, we discussed its contents. Much of the feedback from the students concerned the questions that refer to what they have to do in English during their studies. I had prepared a list of tasks that I believed students had to complete for their courses but the students provided further details. In fact for the part of question 10 which asked *what do you have to do in English when at the unibz – writing*, the task that scored the highest response rate in questionnaire 1 and 2 and the second highest in questionnaire 3 was *write exam answers*. This task was added due to the students' suggestions in the piloting phase.

Further disadvantages of questionnaires have been highlighted by Dörnyei (2003a, p. 13) concerning the behaviour of respondents especially if the researcher is known to them. These aspects, "acquiescence bias", the "halo effect", "self-deception", and "social desirability bias" were discussed in Section 4.6 when reflecting on the multiple roles that I assumed in this study. Further reference to these points will occur in Chapter 6 when discussing the findings generated by the questionnaires.

4.7.2.2 Design and objectives

As far as the design of questionnaires is concerned, they can contain open questions, closed questions, or a combination of both. As Nunan (1992b, p. 143) observes, "while responses to closed questions are easier to collate and analyse, one often obtains more useful information from open questions" and Long (2005c, p. 39) echoes this: "closed items provide standardized, easily coded and quantified data, but they may limit possible responses and may result in overly simple treatments of complex issues". However, although open questions may provide extremely interesting and more accurate or relevant responses, respondents need more time to complete them. Additionally, for this study there were few incentives for the students to complete the questionnaire because they themselves were unlikely to reap immediate or even future benefit from any findings or results from this work. Many who completed the questionnaire had already attended or were attending the ESAP course and this aspect might have affected the response rate to a degree.

Further, the choice to conduct the questionnaire in English meant that if there had been a focus on open questions, the respondents would probably have felt they should have answered in English. It is likely that if the questionnaire had required respondents to answer open questions in English, some would have abandoned the questionnaire early on as they may have felt I, as their current (or future) English tutor, would judge them on the accuracy of the English used. Therefore closed questions were used in the questionnaire in order to encourage as many responses as possible, as well as to facilitate the collection and analysis of the data.

The questionnaire aimed to identify the common features of the students' English language use and any problems they might have in the language as well as provide some answers to the first research question. The closed questions that were used to obtain the variables that would then be analysed covered various categories. Classification questions, which are questions about the respondents themselves, included asking them to identify which degree programme they were following, which year of study they were in, whether they had any international English-language certificates, their age, sex and first language. These questions were included so that these independent vari-

ables could be analysed subsequently to identify whether they had any relation to the responses to some of the other questions, which were attitudinal or behaviour-related questions about studying in English and English-language proficiency levels. These classification questions were also included so that they could be compared across the three questionnaires over the three years to establish how generalisable the findings could be for any adaptations to the syllabus during and after the study.

Many of the other questions contained in the questionnaire were attitudinal questions, such as question 20 "How difficult do you find the following in English?" and behaviour-related questions mainly referring to the frequency of engaging in the various language skills in questions 7, 12, 14 and 19. These attitudinal questions were used as the questionnaires sought to explore the respondents' opinions about their own English proficiency and the level of proficiency they felt was needed to study at the university. These questions were also designed to provide responses that could be compared with the responses from the EMI lectures in an attempt to achieve triangulation between the data sources. The behaviour-related questions, however, were used to investigate whether there was any relationship between the amount of time the respondents stated they were practising the skills needed to study in English and their self-reported level of difficulty in each skill. As such they aimed to explore the second research question, which was "What skills practice should be maintained or enhanced in the syllabus?"

Other questions contained in the questionnaires aimed to provide further information about what effectively students had to do in English in the four skills (questions 8-11), where a list of activities were provided and respondents could choose as many as were pertinent. Again, these questions were included so that they could be compared with the responses provided by the EMI lecturers. Other questions also sought to investigate respondents' motivation towards learning English (questions 30–33).

In order to gather this information, the questions were presented in different formats depending on whether the questions were classification, attitudinal or behaviour-related questions. Certain classification questions were simply presented as yes/no questions (e.g. question 4: Do you have an international language certificate?) or as drop-down lists such as in the questions

seeking to identify the respondents' L1, their age and their year and programme of study. Other lists were also used in questions 8-11 where respondents were asked to indicate what type of writing tasks they undertook, for example. Other questions aimed to obtain respondents' attitudes about using English in their university studies, so various rating scales were used, which "require the respondent to make an evaluative judgement of the target by marking one of a series of categories organized into a scale" (Dörnyei, 2003a, p. 36). Rating scales are often used in applied linguistics as "they can be used for evaluating almost anything" (Dörnyei, 2003a, p. 36) and as one of the aims of the questionnaires was to obtain evaluative responses from the students, different types of rating scales were used for this study. Question 20 used a 4-response Likert-type scale to answer the question "How difficult do you find the following in English?", referring to the four skills, reading, listening, writing and speaking and providing four response options – "very difficult, quite difficult, quite easy, very easy". Original Likert scales are used in questionnaires to gauge respondents' attitudes to statements by asking them to indicate how strongly they agree or disagree with the statement and there are usually five response items: strongly agree – agree – neither agree or disagree – disagree – strongly disagree (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 105). As the aim of this particular question was to obtain students' attitudes about how difficult they found the individual skills, the scale was represented as a Likert scale, but used an even number of responses to avoid respondents taking the middle category that offers them the opportunity not to make a real choice. Research indicates that approximately 20% of respondents are likely to make this "undecided" choice, (Dörnyei, 2003a, p. 38), and as I felt the response "neither difficult nor easy" would not be providing any useful data for this study, four responses were included. Moreover, although this rating scale for question 20 was represented as a Likert-type scale, it was more similar to a semantic differential scale, which is a "continuum … between two bipolar adjectives at the extremes" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 105). Generally they are represented as can be seen below, where the respondents then place their mark or *X* in the corresponding position on the scale, but the questionnaire software I used did not allow me this option and therefore I chose to scale them as "very difficult", "quite difficult", "quite easy", "very easy".

difficult____:____:__x__:____:____:____:____easy

In order to obtain respondents' perceptions of what their proficiency was in the four skills in English and what they felt the corresponding levels needed to study at the university were, in questions 21-24, a different rating scale was used: "Level of competence in English. Please indicate your level (from + to ++++++)". These six levels were based on the levels of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) so that + corresponded to A1, ++ to A2 and so on, and were articulated in a similar way to the "can do" statements from the CEFR's self-assessment grid (Council of Europe, 2001, pp. 26–27). However, they were rewritten to focus more specifically on what the students "can do" in English for their studies so, for example, the descriptor in the questionnaire for "Speaking ++++ "(which corresponded with the B2 level from the CEFR) read "I can take an active part in discussions in familiar contexts and express myself clearly on subjects related to my studies and interests". This adaptation of the original descriptor integrated and foregrounded the element of *studies* to make it more specific to the aims of the questionnaires, which were to obtain data on the students' self-reported proficiency levels and the problems they may or may not have when studying in and using English at the university.

Further considerations concerning the design of the questionnaire included ensuring that the general introduction explained clearly the purposes of the questionnaire and that the responses were confidential and anonymous. The layout was largely dictated by the software that was used but I did ensure that the questions were organised thematically and followed a logical sequence:

- general information about the student's university education
- international language exams
- how often and for what they use English at the university
- how often and for what they use English away from the university
- how difficult they find the four skills
- their perceived proficiency level in the skills and how this matches the required level

- problems they experience with English at the university and away from the university
- what they are doing to improve their English
- personal classification questions (sex – age – L1)

The personal classification questions were placed at the end of the questionnaire as from an ontological perspective, I concurred with Dörnyei (2007, p. 111) and felt these personal questions could be potentially off-putting for the respondents if placed at the beginning of the questionnaire and could be construed to partially contradict the promise of anonymity in the introduction.

As far as the layout is concerned, moreover, the items in the rating scales were varied both in where they were placed in the questionnaire (the rating scales almost always appeared singularly and were preceded and followed by lists, except for questions 21-24) and how they were presented. This was done "to create a sense of variety and to prevent respondents from simply repeating previous answers" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 111). When analysing the data, it becomes clear that some of the respondents did seem to repeat previous answers, but discussion of that aspect can be found in Chapter 5.

4.8 Approach to Data Analysis

The data that were collected in this study occurred in various forms: qualitative data in the form of the coding and categorising of interview transcripts and end-of-course survey responses, and field notes from classroom observation, and quantitative data mainly from the various questionnaires administered over the AR cycles that characterise this study. Therefore, I have used different approaches when analysing the data from each collection method.

As this study used mixed methods as a research design, and specifically a convergent parallel design, the data collected in AR Cycle 1 were analysed "to address the mixed methods question" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 128), in other words the data from the two approaches were analysed separately and then merged to identify any commonalities or discrepancies between the data.

4.8.1 Approach to data analysis – Qualitative data

4.8.1.1 Semi-structured interviews

The main qualitative data collected for this study were from the ten EMI lecturers in the form of semi-structured interviews in AR Cycle 1. According to K. Richards et al., data analysis in qualitative research "involves a process of breaking down and building up the available data" (2012, p. 77). If the data is written, as is the case in this study with the interview transcripts, the data has to be coded so that categories and concepts can be identified and any relationships that there are can then be extrapolated. In order to code the data, there are two differing methods: the deductive and the inductive method. The deductive method looks at the data from the categories already decided upon by the research questions, and any references to these categories are then identified. The inductive method on the other hand, uses the data to generate the categories. Altrichter et al. suggest that both methods can be used in AR so that the researcher remains "open to the surprises the data can contain" (1993, p. 124) and Creswell & Plano Clark assert that "inductive and deductive thinking" are often combined in mixed methods research design due to its practical nature (2007, p. 10). Predominantly for this study, a deductive approach was used to generate data as "often what researchers are doing is checking hunches" (Gibbs, 2007, p. 5) and being the instructor of the course, I was aware many students had problems both with studying in English and studying English. It was for this reason that the interview guide used in the interviews asked the same questions to all respondents and concentrated mainly on investigating the target situation and the language problems that arose in each interviewee's classroom. However, given the semi-structured nature of the interviews and the unexpected directions that some interviews took, categories were also generated inductively during the subsequent analysis of the data.

In order to analyse the spoken data collected in the interviews, categorical analysis and coding were used. *Categorical analysis* and *coding* can be used interchangeably, but Lankshear & Knobel define categorical analysis as "the systematic organization of data into groupings that are alike, similar or homogenous" (2004, p. 270) and it "refers to the process of developing and applying codes to data" (2004, p. 270). Coding, on the other hand, refers to applying codes

to information that belongs to the different categories identified; they are "labels that assign symbolic meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 71). Categorical analysis is "an iterative process" whose aim is to "identify logical relationships among categories of items in order to refine the number of categories to be used in writing up the study" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 271). Certainly in this study, the analysis of the spoken data followed an iterative process and will be discussed further in the data analysis chapter.

As far as coding is concerned, there tend to be three types of coding, known as open (or initial) coding, axial coding and selective coding. Open coding is the stage where the data is broken down and codes are affixed to the data transcribed. Axial coding is the organisation stage of coding, where categories are related to other categories or sub-categories and any connections that appear can be made. The axis of the axial coding is therefore a category. Selective coding is the stage where "a central category… is identified in terms of which other categories can be refined and unintegrated" (K. Richards, 2003, pp. 276–277).

The open coding, which tends to be descriptive rather than analytical, was completed once the interviews had been transcribed. The texts were inserted into the NVivo programme and codes were allotted following the common themes that were referred to by the interviewees based on their responses to the questions from the interview guide. *In vivo* and descriptive coding were used in the open coding phase. *In vivo* is when the exact word or phrase used by the interviewee serves as a code. In order to distinguish *in vivo* codes, they are normally placed between inverted commas, which is also the convention adopted in this volume. *In vivo* coding identifies words or phrases that seem to be conspicuous, particularly if they are used repeatedly by participants, as these "often point to regularities or patterns in the setting" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 74). An example of *in vivo* coding is in the following example from interview transcript 1, which describes a strategy the lecturer used to mitigate students' comprehension problems in his class:

Yeah so after the first time I understood that the [1] only way to get them to understand something was to [2] first show all the footage and [3] then talk about what was told and [4] then	[1] "only way" [2] "first" [3] "then"

show it again – [5] piece by piece discussing what we had just heard –	[4] "then" [5] "piece by piece"

Descriptive coding is when a label is assigned to a word or short phrase to summarise the main topic of the utterance. Often descriptive coding uses a noun or noun phrase as the code, which then "provide an inventory of topics for indexing and categorizing" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 74). An example of descriptive coding can be seen with the same extract as before:

Yeah so after the first time I understood that [1] the only way to get them to understand something was to first show all the footage and then talk about what was told and then show it again – piece by piece discussing what we had just heard –	[1] strategy

Once this stage had been completed, axial coding occurred where the main thematic categories across the spoken data were identified and analysed. This stage occurred manually through the addition of notes and highlighting techniques on the transcripts. Selective coding was then undertaken again through the application of labels and notes to the transcripts and the main categories were further analysed and identified. The various phases of coding and categorising are illustrated in the data analysis framework in Section 5.2.

4.8.1.2 The end-of-course surveys

The end-of-course surveys were the other main dataset that were analysed predominantly qualitatively. To analyse the first end-of-course survey, basic descriptive statistics and coding were used due to the fact that the students just had a choice of 7 responses (plus an "other (please specify)") and the aim of the data collection was to understand why students had not chosen to engage with the first version of the negotiated syllabus. The second end-of-course survey that was conducted with both the PPE and E&M students and then analysed at the end of AR Cycle 3 together were a mixture of closed and open questions, as discussed in Section 4.7.1 and so content analysis was used, which is "a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text" (Weber, 1985, p. 9). In this case, it was used inductively, in

order to "search through the text, word by word, phrase by phrase, or paragraph by paragraph to distil important ideas and themes therein" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 336). The conceptual framework that evolved from the coding of this second end-of-course survey is presented and discussed in Sections 5.6.1 and 7.5.6.

4.8.2 Approach to data analysis – Quantitative data

The initial data obtained for the needs assessment were from both quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (semi-structured interviews) approaches and were collected in parallel in the first AR cycle. Following the convergent mixed methods design, they were then analysed and merged to provide a more complete analysis of the research problem. However, given the various phases of this action research study, the quantitative data were collected at different points throughout the research, as was illustrated previously in the Data Collection table (Table 4.2). The first questionnaire from student target population A in AR Cycle 1 generated 151 completed responses from 218 accessed. The raw data were prepared by transferring them from the questionnaire programme into an Excel file where they were organised and coded. Excel allows the user to easily sort data, so the completed responses were sorted following the degree programme: first PPE and then E&M so that the two student cohorts would be listed together. The sequence of the responses within each degree programme was dictated by the *respondent number* that the questionnaire software had assigned to each respondent chronologically when they logged into the questionnaire, and which I had no control over. Moreover the allocation of this respondent number ensured the anonymity of the participants.

The partially completed questionnaires were not included in the analysis as they had all been abandoned at different stages of the questionnaire (and some had been accessed but not even the first question had been answered). Missing data can be a "nuisance" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 205) because it is often unclear whether the missing response is deliberate or has been an oversight on the part of the respondent. Moreover, when many variables are examined, which is the case of this study, there tends to be the necessity for every respondent to have values for each variable, otherwise these values are excluded

from the analysis (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 205). Due to having a great amount of data with the completed responses, therefore, only these were analysed and all partially completed responses were discarded.

Once quantitative data are sorted, it is important to compile a "coding frame that specifies the meaning of the scores for each item" (Dörnyei, 2003a, p. 98). A coding frame is a means to provide an answer with a numerical score so that subsequently statistical packages can analyse the results. With the transfer of the data from the questionnaire software to Excel, this phase was almost completely automatic. Consequently, for question 20, "How difficult do you find the following in English?", referring to the four skills, reading, listening, writing and speaking, the four response options – "very difficult", "quite difficult", "quite easy", "very easy" – were automatically transferred into 1, 2, 3, 4. The responses to other questions that used drop-down menus, such as the last question that asked for the L1 of the respondent, were transferred into the Excel file as they had appeared in the questionnaire: German, Italian, Ladin, German+Italian, Other (with the language as entered by the respondent).

However, it was clear that Excel would not be able to analyse effectively the data that I had collected and so the data to be analysed was then inserted into the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) programme, version 24, which was deemed to be a more suitable tool for the type of data analysis needed. As this had to be done manually, a coding frame then had to be compiled for the selected data to be analysed. Therefore for the question asking respondents if they had an international English-language certificate, for example, the answer was either yes or no and so yes was coded 0 and no was coded 1. For question 20, "How difficult do you find the following in English?", referring to the four skills, reading, listening, writing and speaking, the four response options – "very difficult", "quite difficult", "quite easy", "very easy" – were allotted the same codes as in the Excel file, so 1, 2, 3, 4. Although it has been suggested that different variables should be labelled with a different coding frame (Dörnyei, 2003a), the codebook that was compiled for the SPSS data was clear and so there was no confusion. The codebook is a means to "provide a comprehensive and comprehensible description of the dataset" (Dörnyei, 2003a, p. 100) and can contain various pieces of information about

the variable including its name and coding frame. For this study the following codes were allotted to each response:

- name of variable
- coding frame
- whether the variable was nominal or ordinal

Once all the data had been inserted into SPSS and the codes had been allotted, statistical analyses were run to investigate the data and generate findings. Given that the questionnaire data had been collected to explore what language problems the students felt they had while studying in English at the University, as well as to investigate any relationship between how much they stated they practised English and their self-reported levels, a series of descriptive statistics were generated to examine whether there were any relationships between the variables. Further analyses were run to ascertain whether there were any relationships between the students' L1, their degree programme and their self-reported difficulties they had studying in English. A detailed description of the data analysis of the questionnaires can be found in Section 5.4.

As there were two other questionnaires conducted over the course of this study, the whole process described above was repeated in AR Cycles 2 and 3 over the subsequent two years. Once all the data had been inserted into SPSS, further statistical analyses were run to compare the data across the three questionnaires, as well as to identify any patterns or deviances. Full details of these tests are provided in the Data Analysis chapter.

A further point about the analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative data is that data reduction or "data condensation" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 12) was performed during this study. Data reduction "involves reducing the dimensionality of the qualitative data … and quantitative data" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 22) through a process of selection, focusing and transformation. Miles et al. prefer the term "data condensation" because data reduction "implies we're weakening or losing something in the process" (2014, p. 12) and in fact data reduction makes the data stronger as it is a method of analysis that "sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards and organizes data in such a way that "final" conclusions can be drawn and verified" (2014, p. 12). Data

reduction progressed throughout the data analysis stages due to the various stages of coding and thus contributed to the iterative nature of the process.

4.8.3 Approach to data analysis – Mixed methods

Convergent parallel mixed methods design

Given the convergent parallel mixed methods design for the research in the initial needs assessment stage, the quantitative and qualitative data were analysed separately, as described in the preceding two sections and then the results were compared "to see if the findings confirm or disconfirm each other" (Creswell, 2014, p. 219) as illustrated in Figure 4.1 previously.

Consequently in this design, once the quantitative and qualitative data have been collected, analysed and the results have been represented, the researcher has to merge the two datasets so that "a more comprehensive account" (Bryman, 2006, p. 106) of the situation can be obtained. In this way the research questions that are associated with the mixed methods design can be answered more fully. When merging these datasets, it is important to investigate to what extent the quantitative and qualitative data merge and what similarities and differences there are between the data. Creswell & Plano Clark suggests that there are two ways to merge quantitative and qualitative data: either to transform one type of data into another so it can be easily merged and then compared across the datasets or to compare the data through a discussion (2007, p. 137). The data transformation stage, where qualitative data is turned into numerical code that can then be represented statistically, or "quantitized" (Tashokkori & Teddlie, 1998), or where quantitative data is converted into narrative data that can be analysed qualitatively, or "qualitized" (Tashokkori & Teddlie, 1998), is regarded by some as optional (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Others (Riazi & Candlin, 2014; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007) discuss how this transformation stage often only affects the *quantitization* of the data, where qualitative data are quantified to then generate statistical analysis, and in fact "far fewer examples exist of the transformation of quantitative data into qualitative data" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 140). A further problem with the transformation of data is that often in MMR the number of individuals in the quantitative and the qualitative datasets are far from equal and yet to make any direct comparison some balance would be

necessary. In this study, 151 respondents completed the first questionnaire and yet there were only 10 EMI lecturers interviewed, so transforming the data into one dataset or the other would have led to an unbalanced analysis of the participants' perceptions.

In order to merge the data, therefore, I compared the datasets and discussed the similarities and differences between the quantitative and qualitative results, which can be found in Section 6.3. This approach is known as a "side-by-side comparison" (Creswell, 2014, p. 222) and is commonly used in convergent parallel mixed methods design.

5. Data Analysis

5.1 Data Analysis Framework

Given that this research collected both quantitative and qualitative data and that they were analysed over the same time span due to the convergent parallel mixed methods design of the first phase of the study, a clear analytical framework was required. The data analysis framework that was adopted in the initial AR cycle to analyse the needs of the students and inform the first modifications to the syllabus comprised two frameworks, one for the qualitative data analysis and one for the quantitative data analysis. For clarity, these two frameworks have been visually represented side by side in this volume, which is a typical way to represent data analysis in mixed methods research (Bryman, 2006; Riazi, 2017). However, it is important to note that the stages in the framework did not necessarily take place at exactly the same time, nor are they in any sense comparable with each other from a theoretical perspective. The qualitative data analysis concerned the semi-structured interviews with the EMI lectures and the quantitative data analysis focused on the questionnaire responses from the first questionnaire conducted in May 2014.

In order to analyse the qualitative data, the eight-step coding process according to Tesch (1990), as summarised in Figure 5.1, was the sequence that was used.

1. Get a sense of the whole. Read all the transcriptions carefully. Perhaps jot down some ideas as they come to mind.
2. Pick one document (i.e., one interview)—the most interesting one, the shortest, the one on the top of the pile. Go through it, asking yourself, "What is this about?" Do not think about the substance of the information but its underlying meaning. Write thoughts in the margin.
3. When you have completed this task for several participants, make a list of all topics. Cluster together similar topics. Form these topics into columns, perhaps arrayed as major topics, unique topics, and leftovers.
4. Now take this list and go back to your data. Abbreviate the topics as codes and write the codes next to the appropriate segments of the text. Try this preliminary organizing scheme to see if new categories and codes emerge.
5. Find the most descriptive wording for your topics and turn them into categories. Look for ways of reducing your total list of categories by grouping topics that relate to each other. Perhaps draw lines between your categories to show interrelationships.
6. Make a final decision on the abbreviation for each category and alphabetize these codes.
7. Assemble the data material belonging to each category in one place and perform a preliminary analysis.
8. If necessary, recode your existing data.

Fig. 5.1 – Eight-step coding process (based on Tesch, 1990) in Creswell (2014, p. 198).

The data analysis framework for the qualitative analysis adopted for this study largely adhered to the above model as initially it involved affixing *in vivo* and descriptive codes (phases 1 and 2 in my research). Categorising was undertaken through axial coding (phases 3 and 4 in my research) and then the number of categories were condensed to the three superordinate categories through selective coding (phase 5 in my research). The phases can be seen in Figure 5.2 in the left column.

	Qualitative data Interviews with lecturers		Quantitative data Questionnaires from students (May 2014)
Phase		Phase	
1	Transcribing interviews with EMI lecturers	1	Completed questionnaires transferred to Excel file and coding frame applied
2	Open coding: affixing in vivo and descriptive codes to transcribed interviews and putting notes in the margins	2	Data transferred to SPSS and further coding frame applied to SPSS data; codebook created
3	Axial coding 1: looking at all the coded transcripts and finding links between the data	3	Data screening and cleaning
4	Axial coding 2: Categorising through conceptual frameworks: identification of superordinate categories concerning what language skills and proficiency are required by students; problems students have with English in class; problems lecturers have in class	4	Data manipulation
5	Selective coding: generation of "core category" (Dörnyei 2007, p. 61) and subcategories of language use and proficiency; subcategories of students' language problems and strategies implemented by the lecturers and/or students	5	Exploring the data: descriptive analysis of questionnaires from students: identification of general problems
6	Representation of results	6	Representation of results

7 Merging of QUAL and QUAN data and comparison: identification of categories concerning what language skills and proficiency are required by students; problems students have with English in class.

8 Sorting of data from interviews with lecturers and the questionnaires with students to identify any links between the data

9 Mapping the data: translating them into visuals where possible/necessary and theorising the findings

10 Theory to practice: integrating findings into a proposed syllabus in AR Cycle 2

11 Evaluation stage of syllabus in AR Cycle 2: student end-of-course surveys and analysis

12 Analysis of in-class worksheets + field notes collected in AR Cycle 3

13 Evaluation stage of syllabus in AR Cycle 3: integration of data from further questionnaires – analysis and comparison across all three questionnaires

14 Evaluation stage of syllabus in AR Cycle 3: student end-of-course surveys and analysis

Fig. 5.2 – Data Analysis Framework

Regarding the analysis of the quantitative data, the procedure presented by Dörnyei (2003a, p. 2007) was used as a basis for the right-hand section of the data analysis framework and can be summarised in the following diagram represented in Figure 5.3.

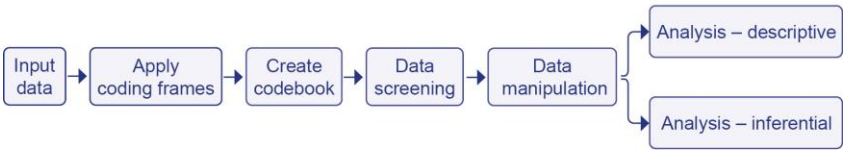

Fig. 5.3 – Quantitative data analysis sequence based on Dörnyei (2007)

Because the procedure proposed by Dörnyei was adopted for this study, the stages that have been represented in the diagram in Figure 5.3 map exactly the phases in the quantitative data analysis framework in Figure 5.2.

Once the data had been explored, coded and displayed, the results that were produced were then merged following the procedure for convergent parallel mixed methods design as introduced in the previous chapter and which will be explained further in Section 5.6.

5.2 The Data

The raw data used in this study are summarised in Table 5.1. There were various stages of data collection in the study due to the AR Cycles that were used and these are illustrated in the first column. The data analysis also occurred

at various stages during the study, starting with the initial data analysis in the needs assessment stage in AR Cycle 1. Further data analysis stages occurred in AR Cycles 2 and 3 following the collection of further data from the students predominantly as a means to evaluate the implementation of the various forms of the syllabus. The data collection methods, and timeframes for the collection and analysis can be seen in Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1 – The raw data

AR cycle / time	Questionnaire	Interviews	In-class worksheets	Field notes	End-of-course surveys
1 / May – August 2014	151 completed (218 accesses)	10 EMI lecturers	×	×	×
2 / November 2014 – September 2015	99 completed (141 accesses)	×	×	×	63 (E&M)
3 / October 2015 – July 2016	115 completed (147 accesses)	×	11 (PPE) + 27 (E&M)	✓ ✓	15 (PPE) + 90 (E&M)
Total	365	10	38	2 sets	168

There were two data collection methods in AR Cycle 1, as described in the previous chapter, and the data from these two methods – the questionnaire to the students and the semi-structured interviews with the EMI lecturers – were analysed progressively over time. The questionnaire to the students was online for a month and the results were then transferred into an Excel file immediately after the questionnaire time limit expired, which coincided with the period in which the interviews were being conducted. The transfer of the questionnaire data into SPSS, however, only took place later in the following academic year due to work commitments and the fact that the transfer of the data was predicted to be a long process due to the quantity of the data collected.

The interviews with the EMI lecturers were conducted between May and July 2014, so some of them were conducted at the same time as the questionnaire was online, and they were transcribed over the rest of the summer. The

transcribing process was a "time-consuming" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 246) enterprise as although there was only 2 hours and 20 minutes of interviews to be listened to, some parts of the interviews were challenging to transcribe due to the speed of speaking and the English used by the interviewees. However, transcribing them myself provided an opportunity for me to "get immersed in the data, an experience that usually generates emergent insights" (Patton, 2002, p. 440). Although the initial coding of the interviews was only done in the following academic year, data analysis was effectively occurring from the very start of the data collection during the interviews themselves and again during the transcribing process. This process has been noted by Miles et al., who contend that "the qualitative analyst interprets what things mean by noting patterns, explanations, causal flows, and propositions" (2014, p. 13). While "research texts typically make a hard-and-fast distinction between data collection and analysis" (Patton, 2002, p. 436), the iterative nature of this study, as well as its duration, meant that data were collected and analysed at many different stages and not necessarily in such a linear manner as the data analysis framework or Table 5.1 may suggest. Miles et al. (2014, p. 12) further suggest that data analysis involves three "flows of activity": data condensation (as they prefer to call data reduction), data display (the creation and use of instruments to present data, whether that means with text or with visuals), and drawing and verifying conclusions. These activities can often occur concurrently in research and data analysis, thus emphasising the iterative nature of qualitative research particularly.

The data in AR Cycles 2 and 3 were mainly collected and analysed in close sequence: the end-of-course surveys were coded, the in-class worksheets were read in detail and the first set of field notes were typed up quite soon after being taken and were then analysed. The questionnaire data were processed and descriptive statistics were generated using SPSS as explained in Section 4.8.2 although the comparison of the three questionnaires only occurred at the end of AR Cycle 3. A detailed account of the data analysis in AR Cycles 2 and 3 is to be found in Section 5.6.

5.3 Analysing the Quantitative in AR Cycle 1 – The Questionnaire

The questionnaire data collected in the first AR cycle of this study comprised 151 completed answers. Table 5.2 below summarises the characteristics of the sample who completed the first questionnaire (*n*=151).

Table 5.2 – Basic characteristics of respondents in the first questionnaire

Characteristic		%	n
Sex	Female	72.8	110
	Male	27.2	41
Age	18	0.66	1
	19	13.24	20
	20	16.55	25
	21	25.16	38
	22	16.55	25
	23	11.25	17
	24	7.94	12
	25	3.31	5
	27	4.63	7
	30	0.66	1
L1	German	39.07	59
	Italian	42.38	64
	German+Italian	7.28	11
	Ladin	5.29	8
	Other	5.96	9
Degree course	PPE	21.85	33
	E&M	78.14	118
Study year	1st	25.82	39
	2nd	33.77	51
	3rd	26.49	40
	"fuori corso"	13.90	21
International certificate	Yes	53.64	81
	No	46.35	70

As can be seen from Table 5.2, and as summarised in Prior (2021), almost 80% of the sample were following the E&M degree programme, and a third of them were in the second year. The course that I was teaching at the time the questionnaire went online was the course for second-year E&M students, which could explain why more students from these two cohorts completed the questionnaire, even if numerically there were more first-year students enrolled at the Faculty. The "fuori corso" label in the category titled "Study year" refers to students who have exceeded the statutory three years for an Italian undergraduate degree programme. As far as their first languages are concerned, the groups comprised an almost equal distribution between L1 Italian and L1 German, despite the Faculty having an overall distribution of approximately 70% Italian L1 students at the time of the study. The next L1 group, German+Italian, was included so that any local students who are bilingual would be represented, given the specific language context of South Tyrol, where the university is located. In South Tyrol approximately 3.8% of the population declare they are bilingual German-Italian speakers (ASTAT, 2015, p. 35) and so the category was pertinent for this context. The next language in the list is Ladin, one of the three official languages of South Tyrol together with German and Italian, and which comprises 4% of the South Tyrolean population (ASTAT, 2015, p. 22). The final group for L1 is "other" to account for any students who did not have the local languages as their L1. The languages represented in this category were Ukrainian, Russian, Hungarian and Albanian. No students declared themselves to have English as an L1. Finally, just over half of the respondents stated they held one or more international English-language certificates, which ranged from the Cambridge English First to IELTS and TOEFL.

5.3.1 Applying coding frames

As explained previously, the data from these questionnaires were extracted from the Opinio questionnaire software and transferred via an Excel file into SPSS, given its user-friendliness and greater range of functions for the specific statistical analysis that was suitable for this study. The data that was to be analysed in SPSS had coding frames applied to the variables that had been selected, which initially were the variables from rows 1 to 20 in Figure 5.4

below. The coding frames for each variable were applied once a label had been provided for each variable and which constituted the codebook for the data, which was discussed in Section 4.8.2. Figure 5.4 shows the variable view that is produced by the SPSS programme showing the variable labels in the second column entitled "Name".

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	Name	Type	Width	Decimals	Label	Values
1	Time	Numeric	8	2		{1.00, time 1...
2	Programme	Numeric	8	2		{1.00, PPE}...
3	CertQu4	Numeric	8	2		{.00, Yes}...
4	L1	Numeric	8	0		{1, German}...
5	PracticeFreqR	Numeric	8	2		{1.00,never}...
6	PracticeFreqL	Numeric	8	2		{1.00,never}...
7	PracticeFre...	Numeric	8	2		{1.00,never}...
8	PracticeFreqS	Numeric	8	2		{1.00,never}...
9	DifficultyR	Numeric	8	2		{1.00, v diffic...
10	DifficultyL	Numeric	8	2		{1.00, v diffic...
11	DifficultyW	Numeric	8	2		{1.00, v diffic...
12	DifficultyS	Numeric	8	2		{1.00, v diffic...
13	IcanR	Numeric	8	2		{1.00, A1}...
14	IhavetoR	Numeric	8	2		{1.00, A1}...
15	IcanL	Numeric	8	2		{1.00, A1}...
16	IhavetoL	Numeric	8	2		{1.00, A1}...
17	IcanW	Numeric	8	2		{1.00, A1}...
18	IhavetoW	Numeric	8	2		{1.00, A1}...
19	IcanS	Numeric	8	2		{1.00, A1}...
20	IhavetoS	Numeric	8	2		{1.00, A1}...
21	PracticeFre...	Numeric	8	2		{1.00, once ...
22	PracticeFre...	Numeric	8	2		{1.00, once ...
23	PracticeFre...	Numeric	8	2		{1.00, once ...
24	PracticeFre...	Numeric	8	2		{1.00, once ...
25	L1_ITDT	Numeric	8	2		{1.00, Germ...
26	IcanS_2	Numeric	8	2		{1.00, A1-B2...
27	filter_$	Numeric	1	0	Programme = 2...	{0, Not Sele...

Fig. 5.4 – "Variable view" from SPSS

The first variable in row 1 in Figure 5.4 is labelled "Time" and referred to each of the three timeframes when the questionnaires that were analysed during

this study were online, so the coding frames that were applied were 1, 2 and 3 for the three years of the data collection and analysis. The second label is "Programme" and referred to the two undergraduate degree programmes that the students were following so it contained two values, PPE and E&M. "CertQu4" refers to whether the students had stated they had an international English-language certificate and coding frames were applied to comprise the two values corresponding to yes or no. L1 refers to the first language of the students. The next four variables refer to the frequency of practice of each skill that each respondent claimed they did, so "PracticeFreqR" corresponds to reading and so on. This was designed in the questionnaire as a rating scale and there were five choices: never, once a month, once a week, 2–3 times a week, every day, so the coding frame that was applied was 1–5 for the five responses. The next four variables refer to question 20 in the questionnaire that used a 4-reponse Likert-type scale to answer the question "How difficult do you find the following in English?", referring to the four skills, reading, listening, writing and speaking and providing four response options – "very difficult, quite difficult, quite easy, very easy". "DifficultyR" therefore refers to reading, "DifficultyL" to listening and so on. Row 13 to row 20 in Figure 5.4 refer to questions 21–24 in the questionnaire which were "Level of competence in English. Please indicate your level (from + to ++++++)", which had a different rating scale to the "DifficultyR" responses. For these responses, the coding frames 1–6 were used to refer to the language proficiency levels A1–C2 from the Common European Framework of Reference.

5.3.2 Data screening

Once the data were inserted, labelled and the coding frames were created, data screening was performed, which "involves spotting and correcting as many … errors and inaccuracies as possible before starting the analyses" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 202). As all the data were inserted manually into SPSS, mistakes did occur due to some values being inserted incorrectly. Dörnyei suggests the only way to detect these mistakes is to take the entire dataset and reinsert it into a new SPSS file, which he characterises as "a very laborious procedure" (2007, p. 202). For this study, however, I chose to verify the correctness of the data

inserted into SPSS by manually comparing them with the data that had already been transferred and processed into Excel files by the questionnaire software. As this process had been performed automatically by the software, there were no inaccuracies in the Excel files. This alternative way of data screening was also laborious but allowed me to correct the inaccurately inserted values. Dörnyei refers to "contradicting data" as another cause of inaccuracies when data are being inserted into statistical software mainly due to routed items in a questionnaire (2007, p. 203). The questionnaires used in this study did contain routed items, which are questions that are only answered if a respondent gives a certain answer. For example, question 4 asked "Do you have an international language certificate?" and there were only two possible answers, yes or no. If respondents answered "yes", they were routed to the next question which required them to select which certificate(s) they had taken, with the grade and year passed. If they answered "no", they were routed on to question 6 requesting information about the in-house language exam used at the University, thus skipping the question about which international certificates they possessed. However, the questionnaire software allowed for this routing when the data were transferred into the Excel files and so there were no errors due to contradicting data.

5.3.3 Data manipulation

In Dörnyei's sequence used for data analysis in Figure 5.3, the final stage before the analysis itself is "data manipulation", which he describes as

> making changes in the dataset prior to the analyses in order to make it more appropriate for certain statistical procedures; it does *not* involve biasing the results one way or another. (2007, p. 204 original italics)

Data manipulation was undertaken for certain variables due to the statistical analysis that was deemed appropriate for the data that had been collected. Therefore, as an example, rows 21–27 were subsequently added to the SPSS file to manipulate certain variables for analysis. Row 21 was labelled "PracticeFreqR_2" and the initial coding frames of 1–5 that had been applied to the five choices, "never, once a month, once a week, 2–3 times a week, every day", were changed as the first three responses contained fewer than five responses.

As this represented too few responses for meaningful analyses to be generated, the first three responses were aggregated and recoded as 1, "2–3 times a week" was recoded as 2 and "every day" became 3. This procedure was replicated for all the variables referring to frequency of practice (rows 21–24). Row 25 contains the variable label "L1_ITDT" and refers to the L1 of the students excluding all the choices apart from Italian and German. Again, this was done in order to avoid having any values with fewer than five responses when the analysis was run. Row 26 shows the variable label "IcanS_2" and this was recoded to contain only three values where 1=A1–B2, 2=C1 and 3=C2. This was also done to avoid having cells with fewer than five responses when the analyses were run. Consequently, as can be seen above, data manipulation was necessary in this study in order to make the data analysis meaningful, which is described in the next section.

5.3.4 Data analysis – Descriptive statistics

he data that were collected from the students in the questionnaires sought to investigate various aspects connected to studying subjects where English is used as a medium of instruction. These data were also used as part of the needs assessment stage for the design and implementation of a new syllabus for the students' ESP course that takes place in their second year of studies. The questionnaires sought to provide some answers to the first research question of this study, which aimed to discover what English-language skills are needed by economics students at this trilingual university. Therefore, one aim of the questionnaires was to collect data regarding effectively what skills students had to use in their studies at the Faculty. The questionnaires also sought to explore the frequency of practice of each skill and respondents were asked how often they engaged in practice of these skills. In this way these data could be analysed and then merged with the data collected from the EMI lecturers for triangulation purposes to ascertain what similarities or differences there were between the datasets (as from phase seven in the data analysis framework in Figure 5.2).

The questionnaires also sought to elicit what students perceived to be their strengths and weaknesses in the four language skills, reading, listening, writing and speaking. The aim of these questions was to provide further data

to help answer the first research question and to understand which skills could then be focused on in the development of the syllabus given the relatively short course length of 30 hours. Therefore, various questions were included regarding whether they experienced any difficulties in the skills (question 20 in the questionnaires) and what they felt their proficiency level was in each skill and what level they felt they needed in each of the skills (questions 21–24). The responses provided created ordinal data, which are used to place people in order on a scale. Therefore, students who selected 1 for speaking level of difficulty in question 20 can be said to find speaking more difficult than those who selected 4, which corresponded to the answer "very easy". However, the difference between 1 and 2 on the scale cannot be said to be the same as the difference between 3 and 4 and so the intervals were not equal on the scale. Data that produce scales that have equal intervals, and which are placed in an order of magnitude, are known as interval or continuous data. Although interval data tend to produce more "precise" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 227) information than nominal or ordinal data, the questionnaires were not designed to elicit this type of data due to the context and the research questions. The *I can, I have to* questions (questions 21–24) were also ordinal scales because the intervals are not equal on the scale, although, again, it can be said that response 5 is larger in magnitude than response 2.

Moreover, the questionnaires aimed to investigate whether there was a relationship between how much practice students stated they did of a skill and their self-reported proficiency in that skill, in order to support the rationale for the skills-based approach to the syllabus and to advocate an increase in the amount of certain skills work done in the course. This is known as hypothesis testing and so a test was needed to examine whether the variables concerning students' self-reported difficulty and proficiency levels in the skills were related in any way to the frequency of practice that they stated they did.

The questionnaires also contained questions that were designed to elicit from the students specific information about their degree programme and study year, their L1, age and gender, and whether they had done any international English-language exams. These questions produced variables to be analysed that were nominal data, which "concern facts that can be sorted into

various categories" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 228). Unlike ordinal data, nominal data refer to data where there is no order of magnitude, such as gender, since people can be placed into the two categories for gender but these categories cannot be ranked. Therefore, the data obtained from these questions are in the form of frequency counts. These nominal data were collected in order to assess whether there were any relationships between the variables used and the students' self-reported proficiency and/or difficulty in the skills, so again hypothesis testing was being undertaken. These data about L1 and degree programme were also collected so that they could be compared with the data collected from the EMI lecturers so that the findings generated could be triangulated in the data merging phase.

5.3.5 Pearson chi-square test

One of the aims when designing the questionnaires was, as stated, to collect data for hypothesis testing, in other words to determine whether there were relationships between certain variables analysed. Therefore, in the analysis stage, a procedure needed to be used that would be able to identify whether there were significant relationships between these variables, thus demonstrating that the variables were dependent. Moreover, since the variables were all nominal and ordinal data rather than interval or continuous data, a test was required that could be used with these data. The Pearson chi-square test, otherwise known simply as the chi-square test, is used to investigate relationships between variables, and "is one of the few procedures that can deal with nominal data" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 228) and for this reason it was selected as the most appropriate test to use. The chi-square test is used in hypothesis testing, which considers the null hypothesis that states that "any observed pattern is due solely to chance and that, hence, no relationship exists" (Berman & Wang, 2017, p. 181). In statistics, the fact that no relationship exists, the null hypothesis, is assumed because there is always the concern that a relationship might appear in the sample taken for the study, but this relationship might only have appeared by chance. Therefore, one of the aims of running statistical tests is to ascertain whether the null hypothesis can be precluded. In this study, one aspect that was investigated was whether students' self-reported proficiency in a skill had any relationship with the amount of practice they stated they did

in that skill. The null hypothesis in this case would be no relationship exists between skill proficiency and frequency of practice and the alternate hypothesis, which is the logical opposite of the null hypothesis, would be that there is a relationship between skill proficiency and frequency of practice. If there is a relationship between two variables, hypothesis testing will then test the significance of the relationship and a Pearson chi-square value is produced. In the social sciences the statistical standard of significance is often 5% or $p < .05$, which signifies that the variables are dependent and the relationship is significant. Therefore, to test whether there was a relationship between skill proficiency and frequency of practice, cross-tab analyses were run in SPSS using the data related to the frequency of practice in the different skills and the respondents' self-reported difficulties in those same skills in order to produce chi-square results. Tables were generated in SPSS for the skill of writing relating to the full questionnaire data, in other words the results of the three questionnaires combined (n=365) and the table below summarises the main findings from the analysis:

Table 5.3 – Relationship between frequency of practice and self-reported difficulties regarding writing

	very difficult	quite difficult	quite easy	very easy
never	**41.7%**	**50.0%**	8.3%	0.0%
once a month	9.5%	49.2%	38.1%	3.2%
once a week	3.7%	43.1%	44.0%	9.2%
2-3 times a week	7.0%	29.6%	51.3%	12.2%
every day	7.4%	37.3%	44.4%	11.0%

Reading along the rows, it can be seen that almost all of the students (91.7%) who stated they never practised writing found it "difficult" whereas a significant proportion of students (55.4%) who practised every day found writing "quite or very easy".

Moreover as can be seen in the second table in Figure 5.5, the Pearson chi-square value, which is highlighted, is .000, in other words much less than $p < .05$, which signifies statistical significance. However, as mentioned, some of the cells contained fewer than five results, which is always identified by

SPSS (see second highlighted section in Figure 5.5) and so the data were manipulated to remove this problem. As these cells with fewer than five results concerned the first three practice frequency variables, these were merged to produce three frequencies as can be seen in Table 5.4 in the first column:

Table 5.4 – Relationship between frequency of practice and self-reported difficulties regarding writing – after data manipulation

	very difficult	quite difficult	quite easy	very easy
once a week or less	8.2%	45.7%	39.7%	6.5%
2–3 times a week	7.0%	29.6%	51.3%	12.2%
every day	7.4%	37.3%	44.4%	11.0%

Once the data had been manipulated, although the values for 2-3 times a week and every day remained the same, just over half (53.9%) of the students who stated they practised writing once a week of less found writing difficult. However, the Pearson chi-square test that was generated with this new test still shows a significant *p*-value of 0.004.

These analyses were run for all the skills to test for relationships between the variables. These cross-tab analyses were also run to test for relationships between frequency of practice and the responses to questions 21–24 where respondents were asked to rate their proficiency according to what they could do in each skill and what they felt they needed in the *I can, I have to* questions. Other cross tab tests were run to test for any significant relationships between the nominal variables concerning programme and L1 and the frequency of practice of the skills and respondents' self-reported proficiency in the skills. The results of these analyses and discussion can be found in Section 6.2.1.

The quantitative data, once analysed, were then merged with the qualitative data from the interviews, the analysis of which is detailed in the following section. The merging of the data is described in Section 5.6.

5.4 Analysing the Qualitative Data in AR Cycle 1 – The Semi-Structured Interviews

The spoken data in this study comprised the ten semi-structured interviews conducted with the lecturers who were using English as a Medium of Instruction at the time of the interviews (2013/2014 academic year) and which

were all recorded in their entirety. Table 5.5 on the following page presents basic details about the interviewees, whose names have all been changed to guarantee anonymity. However, their L1 and teaching subjects are real as they are relevant to this study. The analysis of the transcribed data involved coding and categorising and will be explained in the following subsections.

Table 5.5 – Interview participants – basic data

	Alias	Subject taught	L1	Length of interview
Interview 1	Dario	International Finance	Italian	10:35
Interview 2	Enzo	Economic Policy for PPE	Italian	9:07
Interview 3	Ivan	Financial Analysis	Russian/ Byelorussian	13:09
Interview 4	Riccardo	Financial Risk Management	Italian	10:52
Interview 5	Oscar	Principles of Philosophy	Italian	20:18
Interview 6	Claire	Introduction to Accounting	French	21:09
Interview 7	Ottavio	Information Systems and Data Management	Italian	10:15
Interview 8	Fabio	Economics	Italian	12:34
Interview 9	Benno	Political Science 1	Italian	20:30
Interview 10	Rodion	Mathematics for Economists A & B	Russian	10:00
				2 h 18 mins 29 seconds

5.4.1 Coding the interviews – Open coding

Once the spoken data had been transcribed, the data were coded for the first time, corresponding with phase two in the data analysis framework (Figure 5.2). As discussed in Section 4.8.1, categorical analysis was undertaken following a predominantly deductive approach due to the fact that an interview guide had been used, which aimed to analyse the target situation and investigate the problems lecturers felt they themselves and their students were experiencing when learning and teaching in English. Therefore, the open coding phase involved *in vivo* coding, where "words or short phrases from the participant's own language" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 74) were used as codes when

referring to the answers to the target situation analysis that lecturers discussed in the interviews. Table 5.6 below shows some examples of *in vivo* coding taken from interview 6 with Claire, the French L1 lecturer of accounting. In the first column, there are extracts where she describes the skills used in her class. The skills she uses are typified by the first-person singular pronoun "I lecture", "I ask questions" whereas the skills the students use are referred to using "they have to…" (these parts are in bold for clarity).

Given the person-centred approach to this study, and therefore for ontological reasons, *in vivo* coding was also used in this phase as this type of coding is often used in "studies that prioritize and honor the participant's voice" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 74). The *in vivo* coding was done on paper with different coloured highlighters and identified words and phrases that referred to problems experienced by students and lecturers in the courses and how English was used in each lecturer's course as expressed in the answers to questions 1 and 2 in the interview guide.

Table 5.6 – Examples of *in vivo* and descriptive coding for categorical analysis

Skills used by the students and lecturers (orange)	Lecturers' problems (green)	Students' problems (pink)
"**I lecture**, **I ask questions** from the students" "Er, so in class **they have to** listen… the course it's all in English **they have to** understand. **They have to** do the reading, well that's not in class. Sometimes I give them some… in my slides there is always some questions or some multiple choice things and **they have to** read it on the spot, think about it and then, you know, choose the right answer and then I show the right answer"	"I have the same problem in speaking all languages is I lose my words" "It started when I first started being bilingual French English and so I see the sentence I build the sentence in my head and I see there's a hole in it and I see it coming and the hole is there… and I panic I do paraphrases and sometimes I just block and students help me find the right word. Sometimes it comes in the wrong language, even in German which I don't speak"	"Sometimes they will act as if they are struggling with the content but in fact they just don't want to answer in English I think" "the written production usually I mean some of them are not very good but most of them are quite good and so but I see that they have they're not confident with their speaking…"

Once the *in vivo* coding had been completed, descriptive coding occurred where descriptive labels were affixed to the interview transcripts to summarise the *in vivo* coded data. As categorical analysis was being used, these descriptive codes were actually the main categories that had been determined before the analysis by the interview guide questions, and there were three: "skills used by the students and lecturers", "lecturers' problems" and "students' problems". This was initially done manually but was then repeated using the NVivo version 12 software where the transcripts were coded by affixing nodes to the data. As this was descriptive coding, phrases, sentences and even whole paragraphs were coded in this way. Although this coding only remained on the transcripts of the interviews and in the NVivo programme, Table 5.6 above summarises how this colour-coding was undertaken, using examples of *in vivo* coding from interview 6 with Claire.

5.4.2 Coding – Axial coding – First attempt

Through this initial coding process, however, it became apparent that besides the many different problems experienced by the students and the lecturers that were being described, certain other themes began to recur during the lecturers' accounts of their classroom experiences and the problems that arose during their course. This was emphasised by the fact that sometimes large sections of the interview transcripts had not been colour-coded, a phenomenon also reported by Lankshear & Knobel (2004, p. 271) in one of their own studies. Therefore, axial coding, where "the researcher makes connections between categories, thereby attempting to integrate them and group them into more encompassing concepts that subsume several subcategories" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 261) was used to identify the axis of the three superordinate categories that emerged in this phase. Moreover the emerging categories and subcategories were explored and connections were made (phase 3 in the data analysis framework). The terms *main* and *superordinate* are both used to refer to the principal category in coding, so for ease of explanation in this volume, *main* categories refer to the three categories that were identified in the open coding phase as described above, and *superordinate* will now be used to refer to the principal categories identified in the axial coding phases.

Axial coding was undertaken using a mixture of NVivo and hand-written mind-maps and notes where various conceptual frameworks were mapped out in an attempt to identify the superordinate categories and subcategories that were emerging from the interview data and how, and how far, they connected. A conceptual framework is "a visual representation of your main conceptual ideas about a study and how they interact and interplay with each other" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 24) and functions as a means to observe how the research is evolving. As such a conceptual framework is a means to display data, one of the three activities that Miles et al. identify as being integral to data analysis (see discussion previously in Section 5.3) and given the iterative nature of qualitative research, therefore, a conceptual framework tends to be relatively dynamic and will transform over the course of the study.

This process of evolution was certainly present in this study. Although the interview guide had been used to direct the interviews and to try to make them more systemic and comprehensive, the lecturers were all teaching completely diverse subjects with differing levels of English-language proficiency needed from themselves and from the students. Further, as clearly they were all individuals with their own experience and approach to teaching, and they all had a different level of English-language proficiency which also affected the data being provided, their "stories" (Patton, 2002, p. 10) differed widely. Consequently, although they were all asked fundamentally the same questions, the answers varied depending upon their own experience and context. Using visuals to map out the conceptual frameworks in this phase of the coding therefore facilitated the identification of the emergent categories.

5.4.2.1 Superordinate category 1 – Classroom interaction

The first superordinate category that emerged in this phase of axial coding was integrated into the following visualisation below that aimed to capture the "skills used by the students and lecturers" category that had been colour-coded orange in the open coding phase by creating a new superordinate category "Classroom interaction". This new superordinate category also allowed the new category that emerged from the interviews, "strategies lecturers use to aid comprehension", to be integrated as a subcategory, as can be seen below.

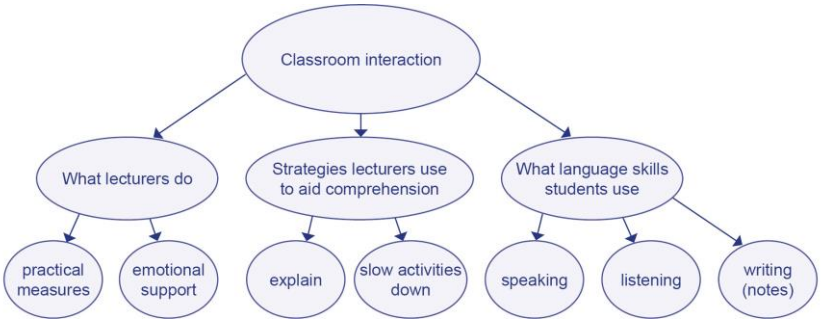

Fig. 5.5 – Data display during axial coding phase to visualise the "classroom interaction" superordinate category

Although the main categories identified in the open coding phase had been generated deductively, the subcategory referring to the strategies lecturers used in class was generated inductively. Reference to strategies being used in class already appeared in the first interview with Dario, the lecturer for International Finance, as can be seen in the descriptive coding of the instance in the following example:

Yeah so after the first time I understood that [1] the only way to get them to understand something was to first show all the footage and then talk about what was told and then show it again – piece by piece discussing what we had just heard –	[1] strategy

Through the data collection phase, therefore, it became increasingly apparent that the lecturers were spontaneously referring to the strategies that they used in class to facilitate learning and teaching without my prompting and in fact, every single lecturer referred to measures they took. This inductive coding, which is "better grounded empirically and [is] especially satisfying to the researcher who has uncovered an important local factor" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 81), effectively allowed me to discover significantly relevant data concerning the use of English in the lecturers' classrooms and courses. Further, the use of the conceptual framework to map "classroom interaction" in the axial coding phase helped to illustrate how this emergent subcategory was linked

to the other subcategories concerning skills that had been coded deductively, and demonstrated again the iterative nature of the data analysis phases.

5.4.2.2 Superordinate category 2 & 3

There were two other superordinate categories that were developed during the axial coding phase: "Language problems" and "Lecturers' approach to students' language proficiency". The "Language problems" category grew from the two other main categories that were coded in the open coding phase during a discussion with my supervisor. This meeting resulted in "peer checking" occurring, which involves "asking a colleague to perform some aspect of the researcher's role – usually developing or testing some coding scheme" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 61). Peer checking is a means to ensure that the data being generated is valid and was therefore one of the validity checks put in place for this study.

The three superordinate categories that emerged during the axial coding phase, therefore, were:

- classroom interaction
- language problems
- lecturers' approach to students' language proficiency

The conceptual framework for the first category was discussed above and illustrated in Figure 5.7. A different conceptual framework was developed for superordinate category 2 and was represented in a table as can be seen in Table 5.7.

Table 5.7 – The "language problems" superordinate category and its subcategories

Superordinate category	Subcategories	Characteristics
Language problems	Students' language problems	Comparisons (Italian vs. German) Language v content Adjectives referring to problems: "afraid" – "shy" – "handicapped" – "less able" – "(not) adequate" – "(not) confident" "they" + negative verb forms
	Lecturers' language problems	Pronunciation (non-native accents) Technical language

The subcategories mirrored the main categories already identified in the open coding phase but were then integrated into one superordinate category, "Language problems". The characteristics of the two subcategories emerged from the data that had been coded *in vivo* and descriptively in the initial coding phase and concerned recurrent themes. One of these themes was the perceived difference in language proficiency between the students with German and Italian as their L1 and particularly the view that Italian students had a lower proficiency than German students as in the following examples:

> Dario (1): Because I noticed that Italian students are actually less um – prepared in English and this is just my feeling than German background students are
> Enzo (2): Well the level of their English is is not let's say it's quite heterogeneous there are some students especially the German-speaking students who are really good I mean some students speak even better than me actually and probably the Italians have more problems and so I mean the level is quite heterogeneous actually but I guess that since I am Italian probably Italians can understand me because my English is with an Italian accent and so they probably no problems understating what I say and at the same time you know the German guys are good so
> Ivan (3): I see a big difference between German and Italian students. German students come here and they speak well almost perfect English when you have Italian students it's always much lower level

Moreover, there were references to the fact that the problems the students were experiencing were sometimes due to the language but often they were due to the content. In fact, this issue was mentioned by seven of the ten lecturers, for example:

> Rodion (10): They have never had mathematics in English, first. Second, their knowledge of mathematics even in their national languages are not always good enough. That is it.
> Interviewer: So the problems they have, do you think they're more problems with mathematics or is it problems with English?
> Rodion: It is both.

However, the many references to problems with the content of the subjects, although they had been coded in the open coding phase, did not fit very well

into the "language problems" category. Therefore, this category needed to be revised. Miles et al. make the point that "some codes do not work; others decay" (2014, p. 82) and in this particular case it was the organisation of the category that did not seem to fit into the analysis.

The characteristics referring to the students and their language problems were often expressed by the lecturers using adjectives, and this element emerged also due to the *in vivo* coding undertaken with NVivo. The software has a function that displays the frequency individual words appear and provides either an exact match (e.g. talk) or a match with words that have the same stem (e.g. "talk" and "talking" are counted as the same word). Using the stemmed word frequency analysis helped to identify recurrent themes in the interviews. The figure below shows a word frequency analysis displayed as a tree diagram with some of the words that were coded indicated in the red circles.

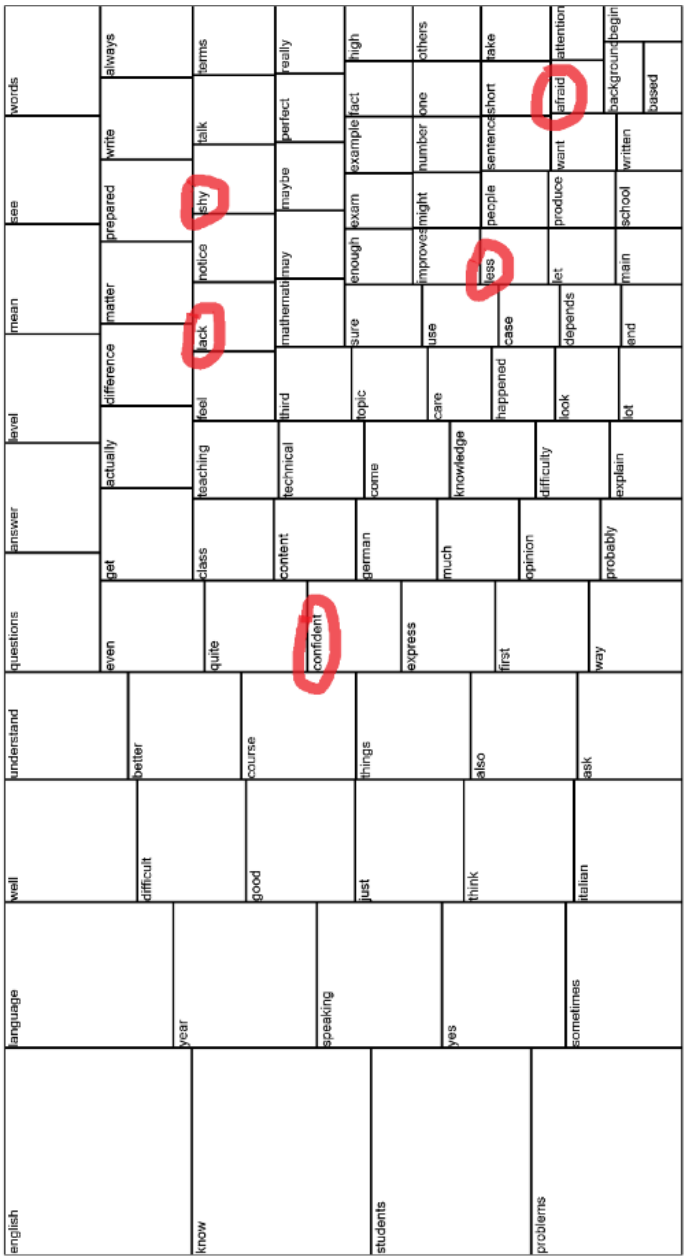

Fig. 5.6 – NVivo tree diagram displaying word frequency

The programme also provides a count of the word frequency and the table below summarises the word count of each highlighted stemmed word shown in the previous figure over the ten interviews:

Table 5.8 – Number of occurrences of certain in vivo coded words

Word	No. of occurrences
Confident	9
Lack	6
Shy	6
Less	4
Afraid	3

These features of NVivo therefore allowed me to identify recurring themes and patterns but also allowed me to "[make] connections between categories, thereby attempting to integrate them and group them into more encompassing concepts that subsume several categories" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 261) in this axial coding phase.

The third superordinate category that emerged during axial coding was "Lecturers' approach to students' language proficiency" and this category was an attempt to capture the lecturers' reflections about their courses and the students' language proficiency and problems. It comprised characteristics such as the ways lecturers approached the fact that they were teaching their subjects using EMI and an example that was descriptively coded was "language mistakes not penalized". However, this category was much less well defined than the other two superordinate categories and it contained references to the exams that each lecturer held for their courses, which did not necessarily relate well to the superordinate category. Therefore, like the category referring to the students' problems with the content of the courses, this also needed to be revised.

5.4.3 Coding – Axial coding – Second attempt

Given the fact that some of the categories established in the previous phase of coding did not seem to be fitting together effectively, I decided to suspend the coding. Coffey & Atkinson acknowledge that coding might not necessarily follow a neat, sequential process and state "analysis is not about adhering to

any one correct approach or set of right techniques: it is imaginative, artful, flexible and reflexive" (1996, p. 10). K. Richards agrees and states that the researcher might need to "make time to stand back and find different ways of seeing the data" (2003, p. 269). Therefore, after a couple of months I revisited the interview data in an attempt to revise the categories identified in the first axial coding phase. This next phase corresponds to phase 4 in the data analysis framework in Figure 5.2. The data were revisited using NVivo and all the interviews were coded again using in vivo and descriptive coding as occurred in the open coding phase, but conceptual frameworks were being created simultaneously in an attempt "to find alternative approaches to organisational and interpretive challenges" (K. Richards, 2003, p. 269). Therefore through this approach, three revised superordinate categories emerged:

- use of English
- problems encountered in the target situation
- lecturers' approach to language difficulties

5.4.3.1 Superordinate category 1: Use of English

The first superordinate category, "Use of English" attempted to summarise how English was used in the classroom but also in the exam for each of the lecturers' courses. In this way, it presented information about the target situation, as the interview guide had been designed to do, and addressed the first research question of this study, "What are the English-language skills needed by economics students at this trilingual university as perceived by the main 'actors', i.e. students and lecturers?" It also presented data that could be directly compared with the data collected from the questionnaire to the students, who had been asked to provide details concerning what exactly they had to do for their EMI courses for each skill. Because neither the quantitative nor the qualitative data had been transformed as is often the case in mixed method designs (Creswell, 2015; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007) and as discussed in Section 4.8.3.1, the "Use of English" superordinate category was developed in this way to make the merging of the quantitative and the qualitative data more meaningful for triangulation purposes. The first superordinate category that evolved in the selective coding phase is represented in the conceptual framework in the figure below.

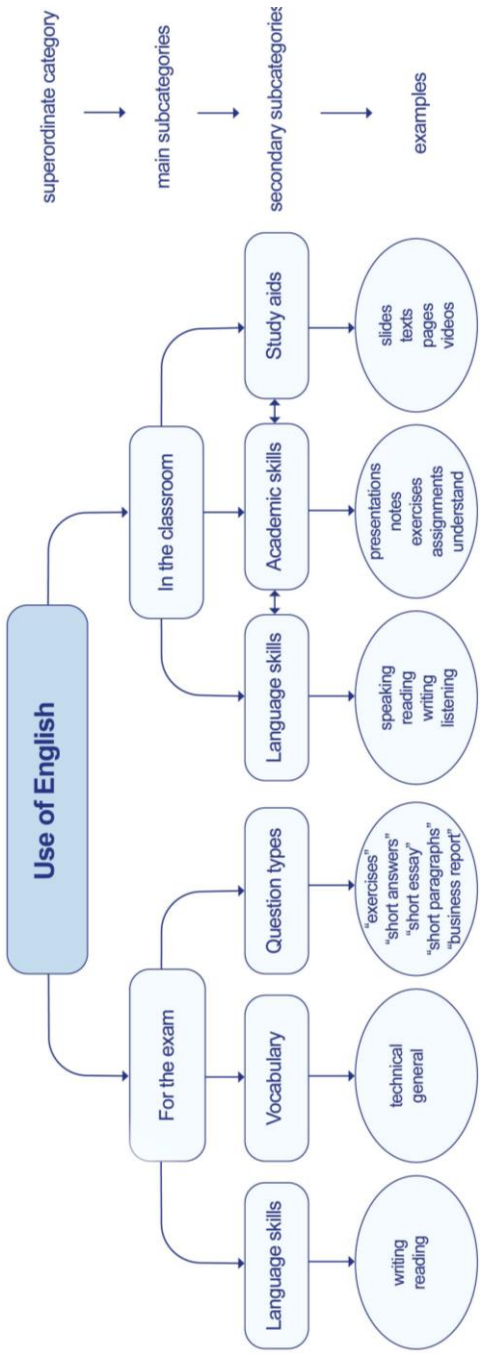

Fig. 5.7 – " Use of English" Category conceptual framework From *Innovative ESAP Syllabus Design: A Means to Address English-Language Problems in EMI Programmes*, by J. Prior (p. 29). 2021, bu,press (https://doi.org/10.13124/9788860461827_02). CC BY-SA 4.0.

As can be seen, the superordinate category allowed for the inclusion of the use of English in both the classroom and in the exam, the two contexts that were important for the lecturers' courses. It also comprised the skills that the lecturers stated were necessary for the students to use in both the exam and in the classroom. The skills used in the classroom had already been coded as noted previously, but they were recoded to account for the difference between the language skills used and the academic skills used and as there was reference to the study aids used in the classroom, this was included as a distinct subcategory of the use of English in the classroom. Therefore the initial *in vivo* coding that was undertaken in the open coding phase was re-examined and the word frequency function in NVivo was used and then the words were re-coded to distinguish between the two subcategories of "Language skills" and "Academic skills". The word frequency table can be seen below in Table 5.9.

Table 5.9 – Characteristics of the "in the classroom" subcategory and number of occurrences of coded words

Word in vivo coding	No. of occurrences	Code
"ask questions"	27 + 26	Language skill
"reading"	17	Language skill
"talking"	16	Language skill
"interact"	14	Language skill
"slides"	14	Study aid
"discuss"	11	Language skill
"presentation"	11	Academic skill / Study aid
"notes"	10	Academic skill
"writing"	10	Language skill
"exercises"	9	Academic skill
"texts"	9	Study aid
"pages "	9	Study aid
"speaking"	8	Language skill
"books"	6	Study aid
"assignments"	6	Academic skill
"listen"	6	Language skill
"powerpoint"	6	Study aid
"video"	6	Study aid
"understand"	4	Academic skill

The most frequent words that were coded were "ask" and "question" with 27 and 26 occurrences respectively. Although these two words referred to the lecturers asking questions to the students, rather than what the students themselves had to do in class, this implied that students would have to answer the questions either orally or as written answers, and so these were included in the examples of the language skills needed by the students. The language skills were visualised in the conceptual framework in the order of frequency that they occurred, thus the order speaking – reading – writing – listening.

The academic skills coded were "presentations, notes, exercises, assignments and understand". Note-taking is such a common activity in university settings that it has been suggested that it is the "primary means of learning content" (Boyle & Forchell, 2014, p. 9) and so its frequency in this context is not surprising. Exercises, although not necessarily specifically defined by the lecturers, tended to be mentioned by the lecturers teaching the more mathematical subjects that were taught in English, and as such were coded "academic" rather than "language skills". "Assignments" were mentioned by two lecturers, Claire and Benno. While Claire's assignments were written tasks, Benno referred to them as reading tasks. "Understanding" is a key academic skill in lectures and has actually been classified as one of the main academic problems that students experience when attending lectures (James, 1977 quoted in Jordan, 1997), and as "comprehension difficulties may be compounded by insufficient knowledge of the specialist subject" (Jordan, 1997, p. 179), it was coded as an "academic skill".

The words referring to the study aids used in class and in the exams were also coded at this stage and as can be seen, the most frequent references were to "slides" and "PowerPoint", "texts" or "books" and "pages", thus implying the students had to practise a significant amount of reading in their classes. Although "presentation" was coded eleven times, most references to making presentations were to the lecturers themselves using presentation software rather than students having to give presentations in class. Therefore, it was coded as both an academic skill for when students had to give presentations in class and as a study aid to be combined with slides and PowerPoint. There were also six occurrences of "video", but these were only mentioned by two of the lecturers, Dario and Ottavio. Dario referred to videos sourced from the

Financial Times and the *Economist* news websites that he used in class (interview 1) whereas Ottavio stated "I produce videos so they will relisten to my voice recorded in the video".

The other main category in this superordinate category was the use of English "in the exam". This category was subdivided into the three characteristics that emanated from the interview data: "language skills", "vocabulary" and "question types". Only one language skill was mentioned, and this was writing, given that all the exams at the Faculty are written. Vocabulary was mentioned by several lecturers and comprised references predominantly to the use of technical language both in the exam questions and in the answers required from the students. The final characteristic of the use of English in the exams referred to the type of questions used in the exam. Some lecturers explicitly mentioned that their exams were almost completely number-based, given the proliferation of financial and mathematical subjects taught in English at the time the data were collected, but when answers were required to be written, these questions were coded as mainly "short". Only Claire (interview 6) referred to anything longer than a short text, which in her case was a business report that had to be completed as an assignment, so therefore not in exam conditions.

Consequently, this first superordinate category, entitled "Use of English", aimed to capture all references the lecturers made to how English was used in their courses, both in their exams and in the classroom.

5.4.3.2 Superordinate Category 2: Problems encountered in the target situation

The second superordinate category that emerged in this second axial coding phase was "Problems encountered in the target situation", which subsumed the "Language problems" category in the first axial coding phase. It also integrated all the other non-language related problems that had emerged in the various interviews but which I had not been able to incorporate satisfactorily in the categories created in the previous coding phase.

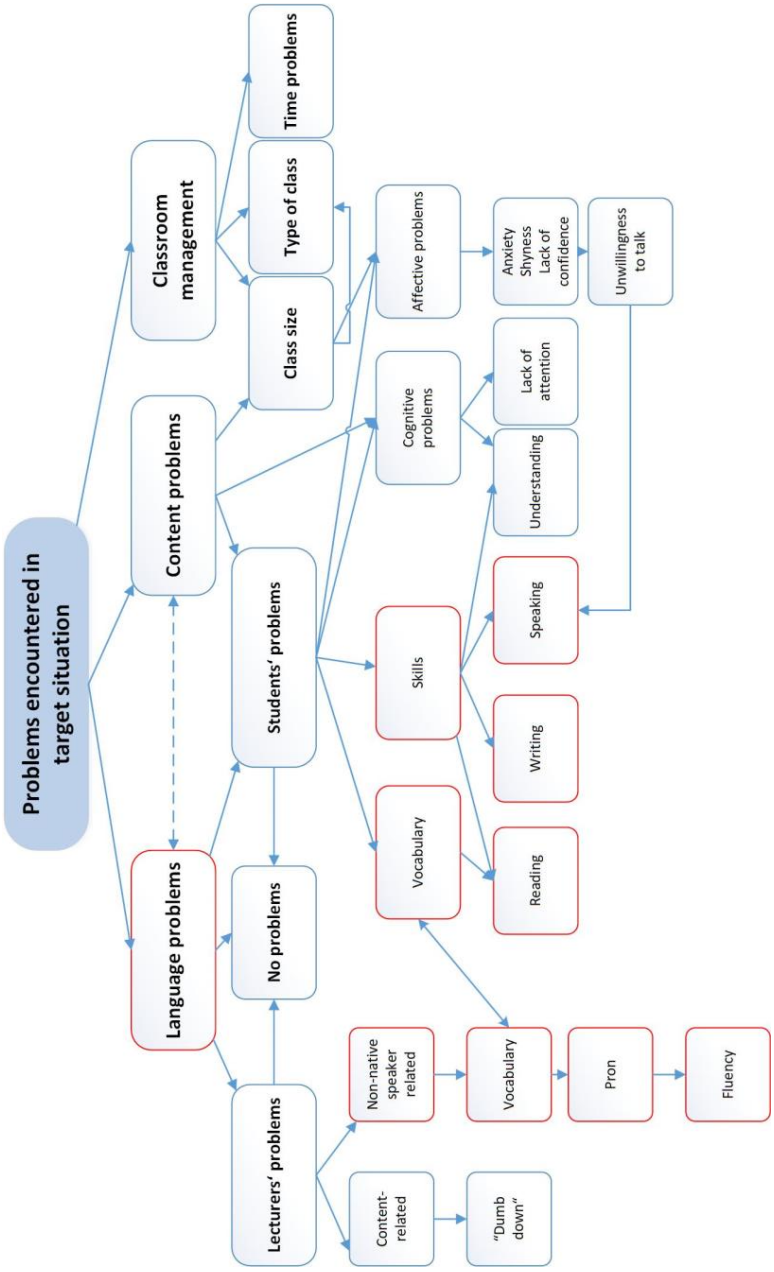

Fig. 5.8 – Problems encountered in the target situation category conceptual framework. From *Innovative ESAP Syllabus Design: A Means to Address English-Language Problems in EMI Programmes*, by J. Prior (p. 29), 2021, bu,press (https://doi.org/10.13124/9788860461827_02). CC BY-SA 4.0.

As can be seen from the figure on the previous page, this superordinate category can be considered the most complex category of the three superordinate categories as it concerns all the problems that the lecturers deemed were specific to their contexts. The "Language problems" maintained its distinction between the problems lecturers said they faced and the problems they identified the students faced, as had been categorised in the first axial coding phase, but a further subcategory was added, "no problems". Two lecturers very explicitly asserted that they themselves did not have any language problems and one felt that the students did not have any problems. Therefore, although the interviews were designed to investigate the language problems that were present in the EMI classrooms, this subcategory was added to reflect the reality of some of the contexts under examination in order to "take account of all available evidence including discrepant cases" (K. Richards, 2003, p. 270). The lecturers' language problems were further broken down into two subcategories given that all the instances of language problems they described either originated from their not being native speakers of English, or due to aspects related to the content of what they were teaching. The students' problems the lecturers described, as can be seen in Figure 5.10, were considerably more diverse and numerous than those the lecturers identified for themselves and ranged from problems regarding vocabulary and skills to cognitive and affective problems that interlinked with the "content problems" and "classroom management" categories.

Although many of the problems the lecturers described referred specifically to language problems due to the EMI context, they continually referred to many other problems, thus the two other subcategories that were coded as "content problems" and "classroom management". "Content problems" had been identified in the open coding phase, and were unable to be integrated satisfactorily in the first axial coding phase, but the development of the "Problems encountered in the target situation" superordinate category enabled them to be incorporated perfectly. The content problems included aspects concerned with students not understanding due to lack of subject knowledge often due to insufficient studying, such as in this example from Claire, who stated:

> it's not because they don't know English. It's because they haven't studied. Whether they haven't studied because it's too difficult because it's in English is another matter but I can't go that far.

However, problems regarding the content of the lectures did not only arise from lack of subject knowledge. Ottavio, the lecturer in Information Systems and Data Management (interview 7) stated the following: "Others are attention problems, so they don't pay enough attention to what I write or they don't have any idea that that thing may be important". As this statement was clearly referring to cognitive problems rather than problems concerning the subject knowledge, a further subcategory was added to include cognitive problems, which was positioned in the conceptual framework to show that it arose from the content but also that it was a problem some students were experiencing.

Another recurring theme that again had been coded in the open coding phase but had not been subsumed into a superordinate category referred to problems linked to classroom management. Five of the lecturers made explicit reference to the size of the classes; some in a positive way if they had small class sizes as in the example from Enzo (extract no. 2):

> let's say classical lecture but since as I said students was like very small class so there was a kind of interaction so I don't know what you mean by seminars but it was quite interactive let's say

However, if class size was mentioned, it was predominantly due to the problems created by large class sizes such as Dario (extract no. 1) who affirmed "it would be easier of course if there were fewer students". Claire also raised the issue of large class sizes and the direct effect it had on the students' speaking skills when she stated that "the fear of speaking out is especially in third year and first year with 100 students". Fabio, the lecturer for the first year core Economics course referred to the large class size and how that might affect the students' willingness to contribute in class and was *in vivo* and descriptively coded as below:

Fabio (8): This year for instance I had a very low responses to I don't know what happened, [1] they were quite shy.	[1] "shy"
Interviewer: So you have big classes, yeah?	
Fabio: [2] Yes, I teach to the biggest course of economics students which is about 150 students. I used to have 60 even 60-70 students in class. Perhaps they are very, you know…	[2] class size
Interviewer: So you think they didn't answer or they weren't so chatty let's say because maybe they are shy in the end?	
Fabio: [3] Yes, yes	[3] class size ➔ shyness

Fig. 5.9 – Coding showing two categories in one extract

The "classroom management" subcategory also contained the further subcategories of "type of class" and "time problems". The "type of class" subcategory attempted to group aspects concerning the style of lecturing used, which was variously described as "old-style", "formal", "frontal", "classical" and "face to face". Although these descriptions do not necessarily imply problems, they were inextricably connected to the class sizes, which did create problems, especially affective problems for the students and therefore the double arrow connecting class size to the type of class and affective problems in the conceptual framework. The other aspect that was included in the "type of class" subcategory was an attitude expressed by Claire, who stated that "the room is horrible". I felt such a strong comment needed to be included in the category given that it has been acknowledged that "the formal physical environment in which students take their courses has a significant impact on measurable student learning outcomes" (Brooks, 2011, p. 719). The final subcategory in this section was "time problems", which was referred to by several lecturers with the common complaint that "I don't have time".

5.4.3.3 Superordinate category 3: Lecturers' approach to language difficulties

The third superordinate category that emerged from this second axial coding phase was the "lecturers' approach to language difficulties" category that evolved from the initial "classroom interaction" category and which had mainly concerned the strategies that lecturers stated they used to aid comprehension in their EMI classrooms. Figure 5.12 shows the conceptual framework that was developed to represent this superordinate category:

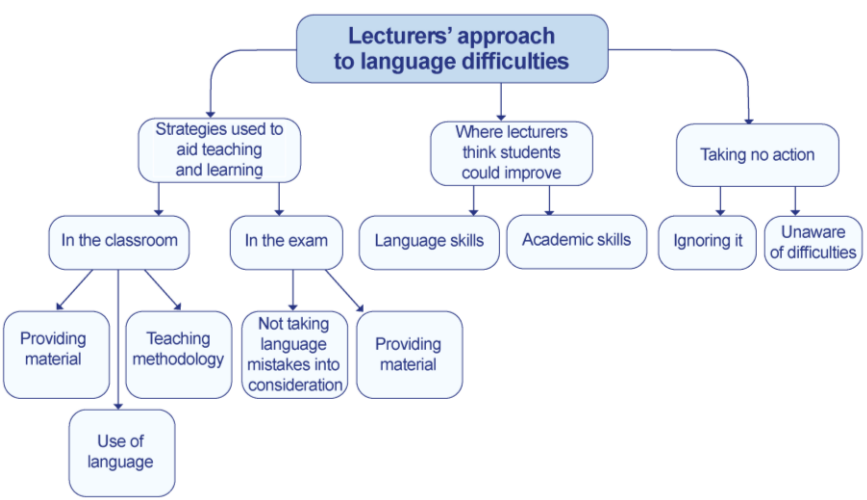

Fig. 5.10 – Lecturers' approach to language difficulties superordinate category conceptual framework

The approaches that the lecturers stated they used to mitigate language difficulties in the classroom included providing support material that ranged from translations of texts and glossaries of specialised vocabulary in three cases to providing past exam papers. Many identified ways they would employ language to assist students who were having difficulty in the classroom. Two of the lecturers stated they spoke "very slowly" if they realised students had difficulty following their class, whereas Dario stated he tried "to mimic the British accent and not talk too much like an Italian" given the number of German L1 students in his class. Others identified that complex language was often a

hindrance to comprehension and would use simpler language or explain unknown words (Ottavio and Fabio). Others used strategies that were less connected with purely language aspects and so were categorised as "teaching methodology", which included encouraging the students to ask questions (Benno), providing examples where necessary (Dario and Ottavio), providing longer wait time for students to formulate answers (Ivan, Claire and Ottavio) and nominating students stronger in English to answer (Claire).

Strategies used to manage difficulties in the exam were less numerous than those used in the classroom but the main one was the subcategory that had been descriptively coded as "language mistakes not penalized" in the first axial coding phase. With the revision of the superordinate categories and their subcategories in the second phase of axial coding, the "language mistakes not penalized" subcategory that had been much less well defined was now assimilated into the revised "Lecturers' approach to language difficulties" superordinate category and was relabeled "not taking language mistakes into consideration". The strategy of lessening the impact of students' language difficulties on their exam performance by actually ignoring the mistakes had been mentioned by six of the ten lecturers and its inclusion was therefore fundamental.

The "Lecturers' approach to language difficulties" superordinate category further evolved through the addition of two more subcategories which despite being coded in the open coding phase, had found no satisfactory position in the first categories that developed in the first phase of axial coding. These subcategories were coded "where lecturers think students can improve" and "taking no action". The first of these subcategories referred to comments from six of the ten lecturers who reflected on what aspects would improve either the students' performance in their classes or the teaching of the subjects themselves. These aspects referred exclusively to either language skills or academic skills, including a remark from Benno, the lecturer of Political Science who stated

> I would suggest one more course of English for academic writing or … so it could be also academic speaking or a scholarly… how to express yourself in a scholarly fashion

Although others (Oscar and Ottavio) also referred to students needing to improve their writing skills, Benno's focus on academic writing was unique. However, his Political Science course was the most language-heavy of the subjects apart from Philosophy, and so this attitude is certainly understandable.

The "taking no action" subcategory was included in this superordinate category because several lecturers referred to the fact that their primary focus was the subject they were teaching and the students' language difficulties were not of their concern. Dario states "regarding students' performance in English I mean I don't really care much about it because the course is about finance" and Rodion states "it's not my business" with regard to the language difficulties experienced by his students.

The second approach to axial coding therefore not only clearly identified the main themes that had emerged from the interview data but enabled me to group them satisfactorily into three superordinate categories, which served as the basis of the selective coding phase that followed.

5.4.4 Coding – Selective coding

The last phase of coding took place soon after the axial coding phase and was the selective coding, which is represented as phase five in the data analysis framework. Selective coding is the phase where a central category is selected and which acts as the focal point of the study and connections are made between the existing categories. Dörnyei states that because as much of the data as possible needs to be integrated, "the central category/theme needs to be of a sufficiently high level of abstraction to be able to subsume other categories" (2007, p. 261) and in order to achieve that, the ideas that are explored in the axial coding phase should be further developed. In this study, therefore, the main core category was produced in the selective coding phase by "identifying just one of the coded phenomena or themes that seem central in the study" (Gibbs, 2007, p. 87), the first superordinate category, and then integrating the other superordinate categories that emerged from the interviews with the EMI lecturers through the open and axial coding phases as explained in the previous section. The analysis of the interviews was part of the needs assessment that took place in AR Cycle 1, which aimed to answer the first research ques-

tion of this study. Therefore, the core category that was produced in the selective coding phase aimed to provide a clear answer to the research question and so the first superordinate category was recoded as "Use of English at the Faculty of Economics". The core category is illustrated below in the conceptual framework that sought to combine it with the other two superordinate categories.

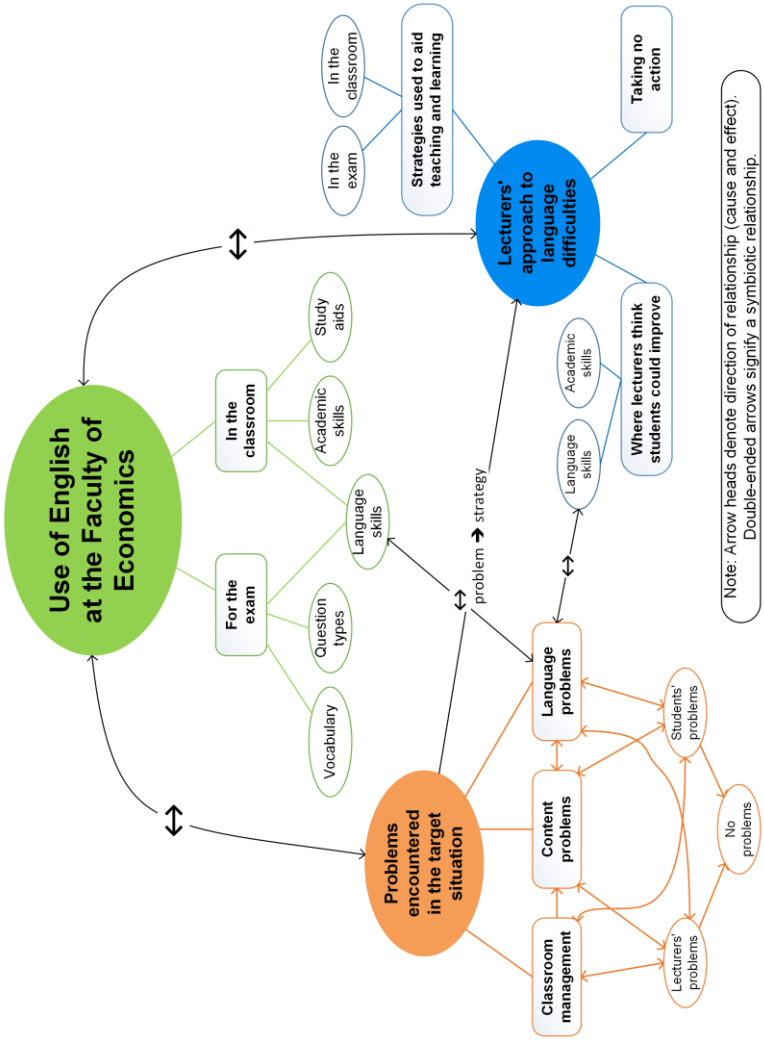

Fig. 5.11 – Core category produced in the selective coding phase

Visually, the core category is placed at the top of the conceptual framework to emphasise its importance for this study as well as its importance in the context under study where English is used as a medium of instruction but is seldom the L1 of the students or the lecturers using EMI, which, as stated previously, differentiates English from German and Italian at the Faculty. This core category includes the two main subcategories that emerged in the axial coding phase, which identified the contexts in which English is used, and the secondary subcategories detailing how it is used. The core category has been placed in this initial position not only because of its crucial role in this study and in the Faculty but also "because we need such a focal point to be able to bring together the other categories in a coherent manner" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 261). In order to incorporate all three superordinate categories identified in the axial coding phase, therefore, the core category is placed above the other two superordinate categories but they are all joined together to demonstrate the interconnected relationships between these three categories. With this arrangement, and the use of the connectors between the categories in the conceptual framework, the coherence between all three superordinate categories is shown.

The core category, "Use of English at the Faculty of Economics", is connected to the "Problems encountered in the target situation" since it was often the use of English itself that led to various problems in the target situation, such as students' inability to understand the lecturers in class, or problems with unfamiliar vocabulary, as discussed. However, the conceptual framework above aims to visualise not only how the use of English in the target situation leads to problems for both the students and the lecturers that are of both a language and a content nature, but it also aims to capture how the specificity of the target situation had an impact on the classes where EMI was implemented. In other words, as has been described previously in this chapter, some of the lecturers referred to how using EMI contributed to problems relating to how they taught their subject's content. This was often due to the perception that the students' English-language proficiency level was low or at least insufficient for the subject, or because the lecturers themselves felt they experienced problems with English or perhaps were not aware of methodological strategies that could assist in EMI contexts where most students do not

have English as their L1. Others concentrated on how the subject's content matter or the classroom environment contributed to language problems, often also due to affective issues where students proved to be reluctant to contribute in class. Therefore, this symbiotic relationship is captured by the ↔ label joining the core category to the "Problems encountered in the target situation" superordinate categories. The "problem ➔ strategy" label joining the other superordinate category, "Lecturers' approach to language difficulties" with the "Problems encountered in the target situation" superordinate category aims to capture the problem/solution relationship between the two.

The core category is also connected to the other superordinate category, "Lecturers' approach to language difficulties", and labelled with the double-headed arrow ↔ to emphasise the two-way relationship between the two categories. The approaches lecturers used to manage the various language difficulties are a direct consequence of using EMI (as opposed to the students' L1) for the courses, and the approaches the lecturers used are also part of the use of English in the courses.

The importance of the language skills and their use in the EMI courses has also been highlighted by placing it in the centre of the conceptual framework. This central position emphasises how the language skills that are needed for the courses, both in the classroom and the exam, are also a source of problems for the students. However, language problems were also seen to affect the skills, often due to affective aspects, as explained previously. Therefore, the ↔ label is used to signify the dual relationship between the two subcategories.

The conceptual framework that illustrates the core category with the superordinate categories placed around it in Figure 5.13 has been compressed and only contains two levels of subcategories branching from each superordinate category. Consequently, as can be seen in the enlargement of a part of the conceptual framework in Figure 5.14 below, the ''problems encountered in the target situation'' superordinate category has the subcategory "Language problems" and the characteristics of that subcategory "students' problems", "no problems" and "lecturers' problems". The examples that were illustrated in the conceptual framework in Figure 5.10 are no longer represented. This

compression has been done purely due to space reasons and ease of illustration and each superordinate category is to be understood to contain all the subcategories, characteristics and examples as illustrated the previous figures.

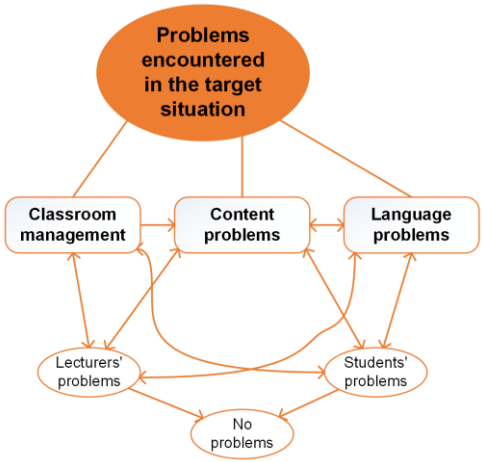

Fig. 5.12 – Enlargement of a part of the core category conceptual framework

Once the core category had been produced from the interview data, and had been visualised in the conceptual framework, it could be merged with the data obtained from the questionnaires for triangulation purposes following the convergent parallel mixed methods research design that characterised this phase of the study, corresponding to Phase 7 in the data analysis framework in Figure 5.2.

5.5 Merging the Data

The two sets of data that were collected and analysed in AR Cycle 1 of this study aimed to provide insights into the use of English in courses that were taught in English at the Faculty as a means to conduct a needs assessment and analysis for the development of the blended syllabus for the ESP course. These data were also analysed in order to provide answers to the first two research questions of this study. Therefore, these data were to be merged to determine to what extent the qualitative results confirmed the quantitative results as can be seen in Phases 7–9 of the data analysis framework (Figure 5.2). As explained

in the previous chapter, there are various ways to merge the data in mixed methods research, and an approach that is commonly used in convergent parallel mixed methods design, and therefore for this study, is using a "side-by-side comparison" (Creswell, 2014, p. 222) where the findings from the quantitative and the qualitative analysis are compared. This is usually undertaken either using a side-by-side joint display table, which presents "both qualitative themes and quantitative statistics results side by side in a table" (Creswell, 2015, p. 85) or using discussion. Given the complexities of the conceptual frameworks developed for the qualitative analysis and the amount of data analysed from the questionnaires, a side-by-side joint display table was considered inadequate to represent all the relevant data effectively, although the conceptual frameworks developed for the qualitative analysis were still used. Therefore, the results from the two datasets were compared and the discussion of these results can be found in Section 6.3. Once the data had been merged, the first redesigned syllabus that was implemented in AR Cycle 2 was created (phase 10 in the data analysis framework, see Figure 5.2), and this is also discussed in the following chapter.

5.6 Analysing the Other Collected Data

The following sections will now describe the analysis of the other data collected during the study: the end-of-course surveys that were conducted with the students at the end of the two academic years to evaluate the implemented syllabus, and the in-class worksheets and field notes that were used twice in class. There will also be a discussion of how the data from the second and third questionnaires administered to the students were compared with the initial questionnaire. The findings from these analyses will be presented in the following chapters.

5.6.1 Analysing the data in AR Cycles 2 and 3 – The end-of-course surveys

5.6.1.1 The first end-of-course survey

Data collection occurred at various stages during this study after the initial needs assessment and analysis in AR Cycle 1. Further quantitative data were

collected, as has been described in Section 4.7, in the form of two end-of-course surveys, which were conducted during the written exams at the end of the two courses. The first survey was conducted since only two students had opted to follow the newly designed syllabus that was used in AR Cycle 2, and all the other students chose to follow the existing syllabus. Therefore, it was crucial to understand why there had been such a low take-up of the new syllabus so that adjustments could be made for the following academic year. As this was an action research study, reflection about the practice is an integral part of the whole process and this "reflection on practice is what gives rise to further ideas for practice" (Burns, 2010, p. 142). The end-of-course survey was therefore administered not only as a means to understand and reflect on the low participation rate but also to provide input for a revised version of the syllabus in the following year. The changes that were subsequently made to the syllabus due to this unexpected lack of interest from the students are detailed in Chapter 6.

The survey consequently gave a list of seven possible reasons why the students had not chosen the modified syllabus and an "other" at the end for any reasons that had not been covered, and the students were requested to choose the reason that best conveyed why they had not chosen to follow the new syllabus (see Table 5.10 below for the list of responses). There was also a space for students to write an optional follow-up comment. The responses were chosen based on my experience with university students so responses 1–3 covered typical scenarios that had arisen in past courses and experiences with Economics students. Question 4 was included because one of the main complaints from students from my university is that they believe there is too high a workload. As it has been suggested that university students' perceptions about workload should be considered more often (Kember, 2004), this response was included for that reason. Questions 5 and 6 were included to understand how effectively the information about the Negotiated Portfolio had been communicated while Question 7 was included because I had received feedback from previous years' students about how much they enjoyed reading *Freakonomics.*

The analysis of this survey was relatively uncomplicated as there were only eight responses possible so a simple count was made of the responses and a tally was created as can be seen in Table 5.10 below (*n*=63):

Table 5.10 – Responses from end-of-course survey

Response	Single response	Multiple response	Total responses
I don't know what the Negotiated Portfolio is	1	0	1
I didn't think it would be interesting	2	0	2
I forgot about it	3	1	4
I thought it would be too much work	9	12	21
I didn't understand what it was so preferred to do the Freakonomics Portfolio	3	2	5
I don't think there is enough support for the Negotiated Portfolio	3	6	9
I like reading Freakonomics and wanted to work on that	21	13	34
Other (please specify): _____	2	4	6
Totals	44	19	81

As can be seen from the results above, 63 students took the survey but 81 responses were generated. Because the survey was a simple pen-and-paper survey that did not envisage one response only, some students put multiple responses. Consequently, reading vertically, the "Single response" column lists the total number of students who only used one response (44) and a further 19 completed the survey with more than one response. Reading horizontally, the total number of students who chose each response is shown in the final column. Therefore, a basic analysis that counted the responses was undertaken for questions 1–7. Question 8 "other" was answered by six students and the responses were coded using descriptive coding where descriptive labels were affixed to the responses to summarise the coded data. These codes were grouped into the categories that emerged, which were:

- inability to find an interesting topic
- lack of time
- already read *Freakonomics*

One of these six responses did not seem to indicate that the writer had understood the question, and so was discarded.

Question 2 in the survey asked "Please provide any other details you may have here" and only two people provided comments. One comment seemed to be answering the "other" question as the student had written:

> I thought it would be interesting to analyse, with an economic perspective, a book of my choice … However I had no idea on how to elaborate an analysis of such a book.

As this response seemed to be suggesting that the student had not been unable to find an interesting topic, it was coded with the other two responses for question 8. The other comment referred to the theme covered by response 7 as the student wrote: "I think it would be hard to find a comparable reading to *Freakonomics*".

The analysis of the first end-of-course survey therefore produced the results that the students predominantly felt that reading *Freakonomics*, the set book that was the basis of the Portfolio that was the alternative to the Negotiated Portfolio, was more interesting than negotiating their own content for the Portfolio. Further they expressed the opinion that negotiating the Portfolio would be more work than doing the one that had been devised by me on *Freakonomics*. As such, therefore, it seemed clear that if I wanted more students to participate in the negotiated Portfolio, I would have to make the decision about the source material, whether that was *Freakonomics* or something else.

5.6.1.2 The second end-of-course survey

The second end-of-course survey, which was conducted in AR Cycle 3, was more detailed in its design than the first survey as it aimed to gather data in order to evaluate the redesigned syllabus that was used in this third and final AR cycle of the study. This survey used a mixture of closed yes/no questions about the course and then asked follow-up open questions to explain why the respondents had chosen yes or no. As discussed in Section 4.8.3.2, the purpose of using a more qualitative approach to data collection in this particular evaluation stage was to generate findings that would be useful for the subsequent course the following year. Moreover, given the learner-centred approach to

the syllabus and due to my beliefs that the students should have a voice in the evaluation process, a qualitative approach that would provide a more detailed analysis was preferred.

The second end-of-course survey was administered twice: once in February 2016 with the PPE students and again in July 2016 with the E&M students. Both surveys were conducted on paper at the beginning of the students' written examination. The surveys were used as an evaluation tool to assess how effective the Negotiated Portfolio in AR Cycle 3 had been, which had been based on *Freakonomics.* Some of the questions in the survey, however, were also designed to investigate various practical aspects of the course. As there had been a problem with irregular attendance in the PPE course, one question required students to state how much they had attended and the E&M end-of-course survey included a question relating to the introduction of extra credit exercises. As the analysis was extremely straightforward and only required a tally, the findings from these questions will be discussed in Chapter 7. The question that required more analysis, however, was Question 2, and some basic descriptive statistics concerning this question are presented in the table below:

Table 5.11 – Responses to question 2 in the second end-of-course survey (* one student did not answer the question)

Question	PPE students n= 15		E&M students n=90*	
Do you think it's a good idea for you to be able to negotiate the contents of (some of) your course?	Yes 15	No 0	Yes 86	No 3

This question was then followed with a request to explain why they thought it was a good idea (or not) to negotiate some of the contents of their course and was formulated as "If you have answered yes, could you briefly explain why you think it is a good idea?" As detailed in Section 4.8.3.2, the responses were coded inductively using content analysis, which "takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings" (Patton, 2002, p. 453). The same sequence that was used for the coding of the interviews was also used in this case, in other words, first open coding, then

axial coding and then selective coding. As all the responses were handwritten, NVivo was not used to undertake this coding, and it was done manually.

In order to prepare the data for analysis, the 105 surveys were numbered. Then during the open coding phase, the responses were read and recurring words and topics were highlighted and descriptive labels were developed inductively with the aim of "discovering patterns, themes, and categories" (Patton, 2002, p. 453). These labels referred to the reasons why students thought negotiating the Portfolio was a good idea and comprised the following:

- chance to decide
- choose topics
- amount of work
- interests respected
- motivation issues
- individual needs
- lecturer is open to discussion
- cooperation with lecturer

Once this first reading had been completed, the responses were read again and a word frequency analysis was taken in an attempt to identify further categories. This was undertaken in a similar way to NVivo's word frequency analysis, which had helped to identify recurrent themes in the interviews. Further, like in the analysis of the interview data, the words were counted by matching words that had the same stem (e.g. "interest" and "interesting" are counted as the same word) and words that had similar meanings within the context were aggregated. Table 5.12 below shows the frequency analysis of the words used to directly answer Question 2, which was "If you have answered yes, could you briefly explain why you think [negotiating the contents of (some of) your course] is a good idea?" Only nouns, verbs and adjectives that were used to give reasons why they thought negotiation was a good idea were counted, and not words that were either off-topic, or were expected, such as "students". Further the second line shows an example where a variety of words to express the same idea, choosing content, were aggregated.

Table 5.12 – Word frequency analysis of survey

Word	Count
Interest / (Most) interested in / (Most) interesting	30
Focus on / Choose / Influence topics / Content / Chapters / Subjects	25
Good	20
Give / Express / Share our opinion	9
Amount of work / Workload	9
Important	8
Participation / Participate / Feel part of	7
Decide (together)	6
Enjoy / Like /Care about	6
Motivated / Motivation	6
Useful	4
Be (more) involved / Involve	3
Great	3
Improve / Take into account our skills	2
Preferences	2
"To meet students' needs"	2
Cooperation / collaboration	2
Compromise	1
Contribute	1
(More) personal	1
Democratic	1
A right	1

Once this coding had taken place, the axial coding phase occurred where the *in vivo* and descriptive coding that had been undertaken was sorted and organised into categories. As the use of conceptual frameworks had helped to organise the themes that had emerged from the interview data, the same approach was used to categorise the students' responses from the survey. The conceptual framework that emerged in this phase can be seen in the figure below.

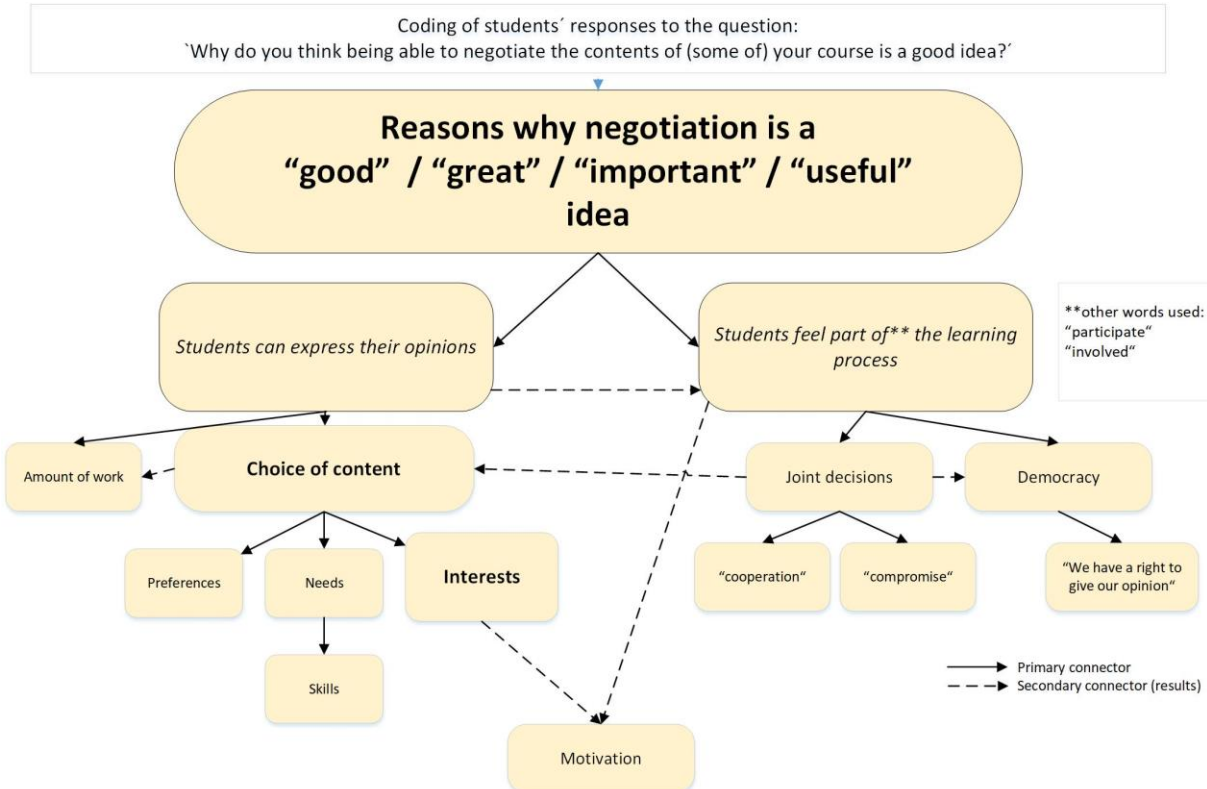

Fig. 5.13 – Conceptual framework of students' responses in the survey. From *Innovative ESAP Syllabus Design: A Means to Address English-Language Problems in EMI Programmes*, by J. Prior (p. 46), 2021, bu,press (https://doi.org/10.13124/9788860461827_02). CC BY-SA 4.0.

As can be seen, the superordinate category stated the answer to the question that had been asked. Some students had answered the question using the expression "a good idea" (20 examples in the word frequency analysis) but others had used the other adjectives *great*, *important* and *useful*. The reasons why students thought negotiation was a good idea were divided into two main categories, which were coded as "Students can express their opinions", to reflect the more practical, yet relational aspect of the students' responses while others concentrated on the more participatory aspects of negotiation and so was coded "Students feel part of the learning process".

The "Students can express their opinions" category was divided into what students could express their opinions about, which comprised two main elements – the amount of work to be undertaken and the contents of the course. As already mentioned, students had tended to complain about the amount of work expected for this language course, so the mentioning of this aspect nine times (see word frequency analysis in Table 5.12) is not surprising. However, many more of the students who stated that negotiation was good because they could express their opinions tended to refer to the contents of the course, as the question that they were answering had suggested. As can be seen in Table 5.12, this aspect was coded 25 times. To highlight the importance of this aspect, therefore, the "choice of content" category in the conceptual framework is significantly larger than the "amount of work" category. The "choice of content" category is further subdivided into three subcategories that comprise the aspects that the students mentioned about being able to choose the content. As can be seen from the word frequency analysis, the reference to content that was "interesting" or that students were "interested in" was coded 30 times. In other words, almost a third of the survey responses that agreed that being able to negotiate the contents of their course was "a good idea" felt it was a good idea because they could negotiate content that they personally found interesting. As this was by far the most frequent reason stated, its visualisation as the subcategory in the conceptual framework is larger than the other two reasons, which were coded as reflecting the "needs" of the students and their "preferences". The "needs" subcategory is the only one that contains a further element, which is a reference to skills work, which was explicitly mentioned in two surveys (see Table 5.12).

The other main category that answered the question was coded as "Students feel part of the learning process" in an attempt to capture the more participatory aspects of why the students felt negotiation was a good idea. The students used various expressions to refer to this category and the conceptual framework notes the words used. One word was "participate" and other forms of this lexeme, as in the following examples. "Because [negotiation] enhances … participation of the students" and "A person should always be able to participate in a discussion and negotiate for the desired aims".

However, the students also used other words to refer to the participatory aspects of negotiation, such as in the following examples where the word "involved" was used: "I believe [negotiation] makes students more involved" and "[negotiation] is a good way to involve the students and to let them express their opinions".

Consequently, when respondents explained why they felt negotiation was beneficial, the participatory aspects, although less numerous than the practical aspects, were still frequent enough to merit their own category.

Many students did not go beyond expressing anything further than the purely participatory aspect of negotiation, which was coded as "students feel part of the learning process", but some did elaborate on the theme. Therefore, the two subcategories of "Joint decisions" and "Democracy" were integrated to reflect these aspects. One example that was coded as "joint decisions" was the following statement:

> students and professors often have different expectations of the portfolio, so they can explain them to each other, find a compromise

Other examples that were coded in this subcategory included references to "cooperation" and "collaboration". An example that was coded in the "Democracy" category is the statement that appears in the conceptual framework in Figure 5.15, where one student declared: "We have a right to give our opinion".

Given the fact that many of the categories that were generated in the coding of the survey responses tended to intermingle, these relationships are shown in the conceptual framework with the connecting lines, the solid lines

show the primary connectors in the categories, whereas the dotted lines demonstrate secondary connectors, which always referred to a result. To exemplify this, the statement below was coded as "Joint decisions" but the result is "Choice of content":

> I think it is a good idea because the professor can understand the interests of the students and take them into account during the preparation of the lectures

The final category visualised in the conceptual framework is "Motivation", which although appearing explicitly six times, always appeared as a consequence of one of the other categories. In the following statement, for example, motivation comes from the interest: "if students find [the course] interesting, they will have more motivation to do it" whereas another referred to the motivation coming from the ability to choose: "if we can negotiate the contents we can choose topics which we like and we are more motivated".

The analysis of this second end-of-course survey proved valuable in the evaluation of the implementation of the blended syllabus in AR Cycle 3, and contributed significantly to exploring the fifth research question of this study, regarding the evaluation methods needed to ascertain the effectiveness of this proposed syllabus.

5.6.2 Analysing the data in AR Cycles 2 and 3 − Analysis of classroom-based data

There were two other data collection stages in this study, the collection of data from the in-class worksheets used during the Negotiated Portfolio classes in AR Cycle 3 (see Section 4.7.1.3) and field notes taken during these classes (see Section 4.7.1.4). As previously discussed, the worksheet had two main aims, the first of which was to act as a framework for the students' interactions during the discussion phase of the negotiated class so that the negotiation together would be more focused and efficient. For the purposes of the study and the syllabus itself, the second aim of the worksheet was to provide evidence of what had been discussed and negotiated in class, given the importance of record keeping when implementing a negotiated syllabus (Clarke, 1991; Hedge, 2000). Therefore, requesting the students to provide me with their worksheets acted as a means to corroborate the notes that I had taken in class.

As the students were asked to provide me with their worksheets on a voluntary basis, a total of 11 were collected from the PPE students in October 2015 and 27 from the E&M students in March 2016 in AR Cycle 3.

The field notes were taken twice, once in the Negotiated Portfolio class in AR Cycle 2 and again in the Negotiated Portfolio class in AR Cycle 3. The field notes taken in the classes aimed to describe what was being observed in order to act as further data to support the outcomes of the negotiated class, which were the contents and procedures concerning the Portfolio that were agreed upon with the students.

5.6.2.1 In-class worksheets

In order to fulfil the dual purpose of the worksheet, the questions in the worksheet were divided into three sections, entitled "A – Yourself", "B – Freakonomics" and "C – The Portfolio". Section A asked the students to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses in English. This question had two aims: to provide further data to compare with the data analysed from the questionnaires and from the semi-structured interviews with the lecturers, but mainly to encourage the students to reflect on their own individual language needs. The analysis of this section involved reading the responses given by the students and comparing to what extent they corresponded to the responses from the questionnaires. The analysis comprised coding of the responses and given that the vast majority of the responses were presented as a list of mainly skills, the analysis was a relatively straightforward matter where tallies were collected for each skill or language aspect. Table 5.13 below presents the main strengths and weaknesses listed by the students in descending order, showing the top six mentions in each category (n=38).

Table 5.13 – Students' self-reported strengths and weaknesses taken from in-class worksheets

Strengths	Count	Weaknesses	Count
Listening	27	Speaking	20
Reading	27	Vocabulary	19
Grammar	11	Grammar	17
Writing	7	Writing	12
Speaking	7	Pronunciation	6
Vocabulary	5	Spelling / Presentations / Phrasal verbs	2

As can be seen from the analysis, the students who contributed their worksheets felt that their main strengths were the receptive skills, as well as grammar, and only a few felt that their strengths were writing and speaking. Although most did not elaborate on their strengths and just listed them, some did provide reasons for them, such as one who stated that listening was a strength because "I listen to a lot of TV series and YouTube videos". Others gave further information, such as "listening – I consider myself good at understanding different kinds of pronunciation and generally good at extracting the key points from a general speech". As far as the weaknesses were concerned, the main weakness was speaking, followed by vocabulary and grammar. Again, most just listed their weaknesses but some did provide further information, including reasons for their weaknesses. As far as speaking is concerned, two explicitly mentioned the fact that they felt anxious when having to speak English, and another wrote "I feel not comfortable in speaking even if probably I would be able to do it". One even expressed a desire to have more speaking practice when they stated "Speaking. Although we do study in a trilingual university, I think there should be more opportunities to practice our speaking capacity". Vocabulary was listed as the second most common weakness, but it was either almost always qualified with the adjectives "formal", "advanced" or "specific", with one student referring to "jargon", or was described as "poor", or was referred to in the negative with the adjective "wide".

Section B, however, focused on the content of the book and invited the students to discuss the more relevant chapters for their interests and needs. This section therefore aimed to provide them with the opportunity to negotiate the content of their Portfolio. Once the class had finished, I read this section of the worksheet and then compared the responses with the notes I had taken during the subsequent phase of the class when the whole group discussion was underway and the Portfolio was being negotiated. I made this comparison to ensure that the notes I had taken reflected what had been discussed in the whole group negotiation as well as to ensure that as many students' opinions were taken into consideration. During the classes when this negotiation occurred, the number of students present ranged from 15 to 62, and so not all students had the opportunity to give their own personal contribution in the

group negotiation phase, especially in the larger groups. However, given that the whole-class group negotiation took place after the discussion in smaller groups, every student present in the classes had had opportunities to engage in speaking practice.

Section B had focused on the content to be negotiated, while Section C focused on the procedures to be negotiated, thus giving students the opportunity to further identify needs, prioritise their aims, and choose what type of writing tasks they felt they wanted to do and how much they wanted to produce for the Portfolio. The responses were again read and compared with the notes that I had taken during the negotiation phase as described previously.

5.6.2.2 Field notes

Field notes were taken in the negotiated class twice – once in the PPE course in October 2015 and again in the E&M course in March 2016. The field notes were taken while in class on both occasions and for the PPE course, they were written up on the computer a few days after the class. The field notes taken during the class tended to record a selection of the actions undertaken in the classes and some of the words uttered and as such were predominantly descriptive. Moreover, as they were written "in the heat of the moment" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 229), they tended to be characterised by abbreviations and other shorthand conventions, which is a typical feature of field notes taken in this way (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004; Miles et al., 2014). However, K. Richards asserts that "fieldnotes can take different forms" (2003, p. 137) and can include more than just descriptions of what is being observed. I endeavoured to be non-judgmental, as recommended by Lankshear & Knobel (2004), and to concentrate on descriptions of the actions observed. However, the field notes taken also refer to "relational issues" (K. Richards, 2003, p. 137) where my personal reflections as the teacher/researcher were noted. Given that "it is almost impossible to attribute states of being to others during observations where we only have external indictors to go on" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 231), these reflections were expressed in a cautious manner. Examples of these from the second set of field notes taken in the E&M class included the comment "everyone seems fine" when referring to the students engaged in the preliminary discussion phase in small groups

after initial queries had been addressed. Another example of a personal reflection, although less cautiously worded, was this note referring to the attendance of students in Group B of the E&M course: "surprised there aren't more present – obviously some aren't more interested in active democracy", demonstrating my surprise and frustration that fewer students than expected were in attendance that class.

The field notes that had been taken in the PPE class were written up some days later, a procedure that is recommended by many (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004; Gibbs, 2007; Miles et al., 2014). Writing up field notes is recommended because the process of writing helps to remember more details about the observed situation after the event: "raw field notes, when reviewed, stimulate the field-worker to remember things that happened at that time that are not in the notes" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 71). Moreover, similarly to the process of transcribing interview data, the "process of writing up is actually the first step in your qualitative analysis" (Gibbs, 2007, p. 27) as it allows the researcher to start reflecting on the data collected. Writing up field notes tends to involve recording what happened during the observed situation as well as recording the reflections of the observer. It has been suggested that these two aspects should be kept separate (K. Richards, 2003; Gibbs, 2007) as the field notes taken while observing can be regarded as primary data, whereas their writing up includes subsequent reflection and analysis of the observed situation. However, taking field notes is not "value-free" (Gibbs, 2007, p. 28) given that they will always reflect the human bias of the researcher, so the written-up field notes in this study incorporated both the descriptive elements from the hand-written notes, plus a follow-up reflection and analysis of the class.

The analysis of field notes can be undertaken in various ways, including following a coding procedure that is often similar to the one detailed in this volume for the semi-structured interviews and students' end-of-course survey. However, given the fact that the field notes were primarily taken as a means to act as a memory aid for the design and then the actual implementation of the Portfolio, and the value as a means of data collection for this study was secondary, they were only read through and stored. Discussion relating to the findings that emerged from these field notes is in Chapter 7 when referring to the design of the modified syllabus.

5.6.3 Analysing the data in AR Cycles 2 and 3 – Comparison of the questionnaires

The questionnaire that was administered to the students at the beginning of AR Cycle 1 was done in order to provide input for the needs assessment and analysis stage of this study. This questionnaire was then administered twice more at the same time of the year (May), in an attempt to obtain a longitudinal view of the students' needs and English-language proficiency and difficulties. The data from the second and third questionnaires were analysed following the same sequence as the first questionnaire and as detailed in Section 5.4, but further analyses were run to compare the data between the three questionnaires to understand to what extent the responses compared or were dissimilar.

6. Findings From the Data Analysis in AR Cycle 1 and Discussion

6.1 Findings From Data Analysis in AR Cycle 1

The data collection and analysis that were detailed at length in Chapters 4 and 5 occurred at various intervals throughout this three-year action research study. During AR Cycle 1, once the context had been problematised, a plan had been devised and the target populations identified, the collection and analysis of the quantitative data from the questionnaires to students and the qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews with the EMI lecturers took place. This collection and analysis were part of the target situation analysis so as to better understand how English was used in the Faculty and to investigate the language problems that students encountered. As detailed in Section 5.2, following a convergent parallel mixed methods design, the two datasets were analysed separately and the results were merged and then triangulated to identify any similarities and differences between them and as such provide answers to the first two research questions.

The first of the two datasets that were analysed was the questionnaire responses from the students. These responses had been transferred into an Excel file and were then transferred into SPSS for analysis. The other dataset analysed was the conceptual frameworks that emerged from the coding of the semi-structured interviews with the EMI lectures. Once these two datasets

had been analysed separately, the results were merged. Merging data in the convergent parallel mixed methods design, as discussed in Section 5.6, can be undertaken in different ways, and for this study, a side-by-side visualisation was used in the data analysis framework (Figure 5.2). However, as explained in Section 5.6, because the two datasets were very different in size and their analysis was visualised in very distinct and differing ways, the actual integration of the data in this study will be presented as a discussion, "a popular way to represent integration" (Creswell, 2015, p. 84) in a mixed methods study, especially one with a convergent design, as is the case in this study. This discussion will be presented integrated with the findings that are examined in the current and following sections.

Before discussing the results from the two datasets, however, it is useful to outline the context that is being studied, and particularly how the classes using EMI are organised and delivered at the Faculty of Economics and Management. The University is quite small in comparison to others in Italy. In Table 6.1 on the following page, data concerning the number of active student enrolments at the university as a whole, and the Faculty itself in the three academic years that were covered by the action research cycles are presented as well as data referring to the most recent full academic year (2021/2022)[1]

Table 6.1 – Enrolment numbers for the University and Faculty in the period covered by the study and in the last full academic year

	2013–2014 (AR 1)	2014–2015 (AR 2)	2015–2016 (AR 3)	2021–2022
Faculty of Economics and Management	909	1028	1095	1164
University	3615	3506	3392	4488

1 Data retrieved from the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano – https://www.unibz.it/it/home/profile/ on 10 October 2022

As can be seen from the table, in the academic year that corresponded with this study's AR Cycle 1, the Faculty had a total of just over 900 students enrolled in its various degree programmes, which included the two undergraduate programmes that are the focus of this study, as well as on the other undergraduate degree course that takes place on a different campus, and the Faculty's master programmes. The total numbers enrolled in E&M and PPE for the three academic years when this study took place are no longer able to be extrapolated as the university's data system cannot filter and retrieve such data from previous academic years. However, for reference purposes, in the last full academic year (2021/2022) there were 413 students enrolled for E&M and 185 in PPE.

Moreover, during the interviews with the EMI lecturers, it became clear that the classes using EMI tended to be lectures with relatively large student numbers, sometimes reaching 150 students to a class. This aspect was coded as described in Section 5.5.3.2 and was included in the "Problems encountered in the target situation" conceptual framework that was presented in Figure 5.10, specifically in the "Type of class" subcategory. The style of teaching used in these EMI classes was variously described by the lecturers as "old-style", "formal", "frontal", "classical" and "face to face". This style of teaching seems to be relatively typical in Italian university contexts as has been demonstrated in the results from a national survey of English-medium instruction in Italian universities, which comprised a questionnaire survey sent to all the 76 universities in Italy (Costa & Coleman, 2013). In this survey, over 70% of the universities that responded confirmed that formal lectures were used more than 70% of the time when delivering classes taught in English, as opposed to seminars which would typically have fewer students and would almost undoubtedly provide more opportunities for interaction between the students and lecturer. Therefore, the data collected in this other study about how lectures are conducted for EMI classes, "testify to a very traditional type of teaching style" (Costa & Coleman, 2013, p. 14) and as such, largely correspond with the findings that characterise the context under study for this volume.

The following sections will now examine the main findings that emerged during the reflection stage of AR Cycle 1 when the quantitative and qualitative data were merged. There will be a discussion of the quantitative results from

the questionnaires that directly relate to the first and second research questions, and these will be compared with the findings from the interviews to identify how far the findings converge. Once these findings have been presented and discussed, I will describe how they informed the design of the syllabus that was implemented in the action stage of AR Cycle 2 (see Figure 6.1).

6.1.1 Research Question 1: Discussion of quantitative results with comparison of findings from interviews

In order to answer the first research question, and referring to the questionnaires completed by the students, the responses to Questions 8–11 are important as these questions requested students to provide an answer to "What do you have to do in English when at the unibz?" for reading, listening, writing and speaking. Each question provided a list of activities and respondents were able to choose as many of the items as were relevant. Table 6.2 below displays the results for question 8, referring to reading, showing the relative frequency of each choice based on the total number of respondents.

Table 6.2 – Answers to the question "What do you have to do in English when at the unibz?" – reading, as percentages of total number of respondents

Reading activities undertaken at the university	%
Read study material from professors (e.g. slides, assignments, handouts)	96.15
Read text books	95.60
Read emails	95.60
Read journal articles	58.79
Read financial documents	48.35
Read research reports	47.80
Read business reports	37.91
Read contracts and agreements	28.02
Read technical manuals	14.84

As can be seen, the vast majority of respondents (over 95%) selected the three most frequent choices which referred to reading material prepared by the lecturers, reading textbooks and reading emails. Reading study materials (assigned by lecturers) implies that students have to read both during class time and outside class time and although the questionnaire made no provision to discover when this reading occurred, the lecturers provided further information regarding this point. Almost all of them mentioned that reading was envisaged during the class, including reading slides and handouts. Only Rodion, the Mathematics lecturer and Ottavio, the Information Systems lecturer did not specifically refer to reading texts in class. This finding corresponds with results from the survey of English-medium instruction in Italian universities, which reported that PowerPoint presentations were the most popular teaching material used by EMI lecturers and that this tendency was growing (Costa & Coleman, 2013).

Most of the lecturers also referred to reading outside of class, including reading textbooks, handouts and in the case of Philosophy, parts of longer texts. The students concurred that reading textbooks was a frequent activity as it was in fact the joint second most frequent reading activity that they had selected. "Reading to learn" (Grabe, 2009, p. 9) is an activity that is often carried out by students in academic contexts typically using textbooks or material provided by the lecturers, and it has even been suggested that "the greatest need of students is the ability to read textbooks" (Jordan, 1997, p. 50). This finding was also consistent with the national survey, which found that the use of textbooks in EMI courses was almost as frequent as the use of presentations (Costa & Coleman, 2013). Consequently, the findings from the analysis of the two datasets regarding what texts were commonly used in the context under investigation in this study tend to correspond consistently with findings from other Italian universities and from international studies. Reading emails was also a frequent activity according to most students and was in joint second place with reading textbooks as the most frequent reading activity. This result is unsurprising given the ubiquity of email use in everyday life as well as at the University.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to present the full results from the other questions seeking information on the other skills, but Table 6.3 below

summarises the most frequent responses for each skill, with the percentage referring to how many respondents selected each one:

Table 6.3 – "What do you have to do in English when at the unibz?" – the other skills as percentages of total number of respondents

	Listening activities undertaken at the university	%
1	Listen to lectures	98.90
2	Listen to presentations given by other students	79.56
	Writing activities undertaken at the university	**%**
1	Write exam answers	94.97
2	Write emails	93.85
3=	Write essays	74.86
3=	Write lecture notes	74.86
	Speaking activities undertaken at the university	**%**
1	Engage in interaction with professors (e.g. in class and/or in office hours)	86.21
2	Make formal presentations in class	81.61
3	Engage in interaction with other students	69.54

The two most frequent listening activities that students stated they engaged in were listening to lectures and listening to presentations given by other students, presumably in those same lectures since the teaching model at the Faculty only provides one type of class delivery. Listening to lectures is unsurprisingly in top position given that the lectures were all delivered in English. Perhaps what is unexpected is that it does not reach 100%, although it is likely that this is due to some questionnaire respondents being non-attending students, either because they were "fuori corso" (see Section 5.4 for an explanation) and so were no longer attending lectures, or simply because attendance is not compulsory at the Faculty. The second most common listening activity was listening to presentations given by other students selected by nearly 80% of the respondents. As the undergraduate programmes that were the focus of this study progress into the second and third year, the number of attendees in

many classes generally decreases due to the students being able to choose specific courses outside the core courses that comprise the two degree programmes, which are still delivered as large lectures. Therefore, it is not surprising that of all the respondents who stated they listened to presentations given by other students, over 60% (n=96) were from the second year and above, indicating that this practice is relatively common in second and third-year classes.

As far as writing is concerned, the questionnaire contained many more options for writing activities than for the other skills, given the prevalence of writing at the Faculty, and the most frequent was writing exam answers, which was selected by almost 95% of respondents. As all the exams at the Faculty are required to be written exams, which has been noted as being typical in Italian universities (Costa & Coleman, 2013), this result was not unexpected. Emailing was the second most frequent activity, which mirrored how frequently emails appeared in the results regarding reading, and thus confirmed the prevalence of email correspondence at the university. The third most frequent writing activity was jointly writing essays and writing lecture notes, selected by three-quarters of the respondents. Writing notes in lectures is a common and critical activity at undergraduate level (Badger et al., 2001; Boyle & Forchell, 2014) and its frequency here was unsurprising. Writing essays, however, was an unanticipated addition to the list given the fact that many courses that were being taught in English when the data were collected for this study were subjects connected to mathematics, finance and computing skills and as such would not necessarily require essay-writing skills. Indeed, comparing this finding from the questionnaires with the interview data shows that very few EMI lecturers made any reference to essay writing. Two who did mention essay writing were the two PPE lecturers: Oscar, the lecturer of the Principles of Philosophy course used a "take-home essay" as a means of assessment, and Benno, the lecturer for Political Science 1, stated that his students had to "write like a small essay in English" for his exam. These two subjects, however, were the two most "language heavy" of the subjects taught in English at the time of the study and in any case the PPE students only comprised just over a fifth (21.85%) of the respondents in the questionnaire conducted in AR Cycle 1. Dario also mentioned that in his exam the question "[is]

always a short essay". However, Dario specifies later that he taught third-year students on the Economics and Management course, which would only account for approximately a third of that particular student cohort over all. Consequently, this incongruity in the findings from the two datasets could indicate a limitation of the questionnaire in this study and questionnaires in general, which often "provide a rather 'thin' description of the target phenomena" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 115). It was noted in another study where results from questionnaires diverged that respondents can "rush through the questionnaire giving token responses" (Huang, 2010, p. 535) and this could therefore lead to the responses being inaccurate. In the case of the study that is the focus of this volume, it is likely that either the students misinterpreted what "essay writing" actually means, or this response is an example of a "social desirability bias" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 54) as discussed in Section 4.6.

The final category concerned speaking and the most frequent speaking activity, chosen by 86% of the students, was engaging in interaction with lecturers either in class or in office hours. The interview data tended to confirm this finding as spoken interaction taking place between the lecturer and students in class was mentioned as an activity by all the lecturers, and three also mentioned using English when speaking to students during their office hours (Dario, Ivan and Claire). Although the findings from both datasets revealed that speaking was a frequent activity undertaken by students with their lecturers, there was no indication as to how long these interactions lasted nor whether they were useful for the development of the students' speaking skills. In Costa & Coleman's national survey of EMI courses, however, not only did they use a questionnaire to gather data but they also used case studies where a number of EMI classes were observed. They found that in these observed classes "there was little interaction and very few occasions for the students to speak" (2013, p. 15), despite the lecturers surveyed claiming that their classes developed speaking skills. This implies, therefore, that even if students and lecturers believe that a skill is practised frequently, the type of practice that Costa & Coleman witnessed in the classes they observed, which broadly correspond to the classes that typically take place in my context regarding the teaching style and number of students, was not necessarily useful for skill development. In order to develop undergraduate students' speaking skills,

therefore, just attending classes where English is a medium of instruction does not seem to be sufficient, and an approach would be needed that could provide not only a greater number of opportunities for speaking but that these opportunities would also need to provide more prolonged interaction. This consideration was therefore fundamental when designing the ESAP syllabus.

The second most frequent speaking activity chosen by the students was making presentations in class. However, the data from the interviews revealed that only Riccardo stated that he used this type of activity in their classes: "usually at the end when they have solved the exercise they have to present the solution" whereas Oscar stated categorically "there are no presentations or anything else" and Benno stated that he had ceased using presentations in class:

> I used, you know, like midterm and in-class presentations for all the students in [the] first year I was here, but I… it's difficult for me to explain why, but I realized this was not helpful

Therefore, the data from the lecturers tended to refute the students' assertions that they were required to give presentations in class.

The third most frequent speaking activity mentioned by nearly 70% of the students was speaking to other students. However, the questionnaire did not make provision to identify where this interaction with other students would take place and whether the interaction was related to their academic tasks or was of a more social nature.

From the findings generated by the responses to questions 8–11 in the questionnaires, therefore, the activities that students engaged in most frequently concerning the receptive skills were reading study material, textbooks and emails, and listening to their lecturers and other students giving presentations in class. As far as the productive skills were concerned, the most frequent writing activities were writing exam answers and emails and the most frequent speaking activities were interacting with academic staff and other students, and making presentations.

Not only did the questionnaire seek to discover effectively what skills were being used in the target situation, it also sought to investigate how often the skills were used. This was done in order to provide more data for research

question 1, and to investigate whether there was any relationship between the frequency of practice of a skill and students' self-reported proficiency in each skill to provide data for research question 2. The data were simply generated as frequencies from the first questionnaire results in SPSS.

As can be seen from the charts in Table 6.4 below, the most frequent skill practised was reading, which was practised by more than half of the respondents every day. Listening was practised by almost half of respondents every day whereas the productive skills were practised less frequently although over three-quarters of the students identified that they spoke and wrote English at least once a week for their studies.

Table 6.4 – Frequency of skills practice from first questionnaire data

Reading	Number	%
Once a month	9	6.0
Once a week	12	7.9
2–3 times week	44	29.1
Every day	86	57.0
Total	151	100.0

Listening	Number	%
Once a month	5	3.3
Once a week	18	11.9
2–3 times week	58	38.4
Every day	70	46.4
Total	151	100.0

Writing	Number	%
Never	4	2.6
Once a month	28	18.5
Once a week	43	28.5
2–3 times week	48	31.8
Every day	28	18.5
Total	151	100.0

Speaking	Number	%
Never	9	6.0
Once a month	23	15.2
Once a week	40	26.5
2–3 times week	48	31.8
Every day	31	20.5
Total	151	100.0

Although the questions regarding frequency of skill use did not endeavour to investigate whether the skills practised were being used in the classroom, in the exam or for self-study, the data generated showed that the students engaged extremely frequently with the receptive skills and less frequently with the productive skills. As reading was the skill that was used the most often, it can be assumed that the sheer variety of reading texts that were identified by the students in question 8 of the questionnaire (see Table 6.2) contributed to the frequency of the reading done. Moreover, reading can be undertaken in

many different situations, from in the library to on the bus, and texts are now available in various forms, from the traditional textbook to digital versions that can be read on a phone, so it is unsurprising that reading is the skill with which students most frequently engaged. Moreover, a crucial aspect of reading in academic settings is that "when students read it is for a *purpose*" (Jordan, 1997, p. 143 original italics). However, there is not only one, but numerous purposes for reading in academic settings, including reading for information, reading to learn, and reading to integrate information, amongst others (Grabe, 2009, p. 8). Given the numerous purposes for reading in academic contexts, as well as the number of different texts to read and the relative ease to read in many contexts, it is understandable that reading was the skill that was undertaken the most frequently.

The other receptive skill, listening, was also undertaken very frequently, with over 80% of the students stating they listened to English at least 2–3 times a week. This can certainly be linked to the fact that almost all of the students had identified that they listened to lectures in English, and these lectures where English was used as a medium of instruction must have been scheduled on a very regular basis due to the reported frequency of listening to English. Since the subjects taught by the lecturers interviewed for the study occurred in both PPE and E&M at the Faculty as well as across the three years of the programmes, these data seem to indicate therefore that most students were regularly attending classes where English was used. Consequently, listening to lectures in English was not only a prevalent activity, but it was evidently recurrent and regular.

These data also showed that although there was a high frequency of practice in the receptive skills, the productive skills were practised less often. This phenomenon can also be seen in the responses to the question "What do you have to do in English when at the unibz?" in Table 6.4, where the top speaking activity was "engaging in interaction with professors" but which was only chosen by 86% of the respondents, as opposed to the most frequent reading and listening activities that were selected by over 95% of respondents. Although the students were studying at a trilingual faculty, and it seems evident that lectures in English were held regularly, it is likely that there was not an EMI lecture every day of the week, given the number of other subjects that

were taught in Italian and German. Moreover, given the class sizes and affective aspects related to the context, which will be discussed at length when considering the findings from the interviews, even if students had been regularly attending classes taught in English, they might not have had many, if any, opportunities to engage in spoken interaction with the lecturer. Therefore, if students chose not to attend office hours when offered in English, which would have provided them with an opportunity to interact at length in English with the lecturers, then it is not surprising that speaking was practised less often than the other skills. Similarly, as the main writing activity identified was "writing exam answers", exams were not held on a weekly basis and so this will also have had an impact on the frequency of practice.

The questionnaire, as well as functioning as a means to gather data on the target situation, was also devised as a present-situation analysis to estimate the strengths and weaknesses in the language skills. Asking students what level of difficulty they felt they experienced in the four skills (question 20) would therefore provide further data to answer the first research question. Moreover, the questionnaire required the students to provide information about their perceived proficiency levels in the skills and what levels they considered were needed to study at the Faculty at the time they were completing the questionnaire (questions 21–24). For these two aspects, as explained in section 5.4.4, descriptive statistics were generated using SPSS to create ordinal data to identify which skills were regarded as being the most problematic for the students. The responses to question 20 were coded from 1 to 4 to refer to the four levels of difficulty used: very difficult, quite difficult, quite easy and very easy. As can be seen from the chart reproduced from SPSS in Table 6.5 on the next page, the skill that was evaluated as being the least difficult with a mean of 3.42 was reading, followed by listening with 3.14. Speaking was rated with a mean of 2.77, while the most difficult was writing with a mean of 2.53.

Table 6.5 – Descriptive statistics of responses to question 20. Difficulty was rated as 1=very difficult, 2= difficult, 3=easy, 4=very easy. Note: time 1 refers to the first questionnaire of the three administered over the AR cycles

Descriptive Statisticsa

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
DifficultyR	151	2.00	4.00	3.4172	.56988
DifficultyL	151	2.00	4.00	3.1391	.62225
DifficultyW	151	1.00	4.00	2.5364	.77266
DifficultyS	151	1.00	4.00	2.7748	.84988
Valid N (listwise)	151				

a. Time = time 1

Further analysis of Table 6.5 shows the standard deviation (SD) in the final column, which gives an indication of the spread of all the responses and as such measures the variance from the mean. The SD for reading is .569, which signifies that the majority of students' responses were within .569 units above and below the mean of 3.42. This indicates the scores obtained from the sample were relatively homogenous with regard to reading. In contrast, speaking had the highest SD with .849 from the mean of 2.77 signifying that there was greater variance in the responses and so the scores were more heterogeneous than for reading and indeed the other skills. Consequently, the SD is important in this case as it provides further information about the level of difficulty of the skills. Although writing had the lowest mean, which suggests that it is the skill that students find the most difficult, its SD was lower than that of speaking, which means that the scores were more tightly clustered around the mean. The mean for speaking was higher than that of writing, which suggests that speaking is less difficult for students, but its SD is higher. This, therefore, demonstrates that it is in fact speaking that these students feel is the most difficult skill.

The findings from these data indicate that reading is regarded by students as the least difficult skill, which has been noted in the past (Jordan, 1997). However, a limitation of the questionnaire used in my study was that it only referred to the main skill and not all the subskills that are typically needed in academic reading such as skimming, scanning, inferences, distinguishing between facts and opinions, important and unimportant information and so on. Because of this, there is a possibility that the respondents overestimated

their ability in reading, which was also the case in a similar study where students were also asked to complete self-assessment surveys (Huang, 2010). There have also been concerns raised with using self-assessment data from learners in needs analysis since the data they provide may not always be reliable (Auerbach, 1995; Long, 2005c; Huang, 2010), which is one of the reasons why this study used a mixed methods approach when collecting the data and approached two target populations. As far as the productive skills were concerned, however, similar to other studies that examined language difficulties faced by students on English-language programmes (Jordan, 1997; Huang, 2010; Evans & Morrison, 2011a), writing was considered to be more difficult than reading and listening by the respondents in my study. However, one significant divergence in my study compared to these other studies is that speaking was recognised as being the most difficult skill overall (Prior, 2021).

The responses to questions 21–24 were also analysed using descriptive statistics and the results for the four skills can be seen in Table 6.6 below. As noted, the six responses available were coded from 1 to 6, with 1 corresponding to the A1 level and 6 corresponding to the C2 level from the CEFR. Moreover the first column shows R, L, W and S referring to reading, listening, writing and speaking and each skill is divided between "I can" and "I have" *to* following the question format in the questionnaire.

Table 6.6 – Descriptive statistics of responses to questions 21-24. Difficulty was rated as 1=very difficult, 2= difficult, 3=easy, 4=very easy. Note: time 1 refers to the first questionnaire of the three administered over the AR cycles

Descriptive Statistics[a]

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
IcanR	151	3.00	6.00	**4.8079**	.77214
IhavetoR	151	1.00	6.00	5.1391	.99358
IcanL	151	2.00	6.00	**4.7417**	.85216
IhavetoL	151	1.00	6.00	5.0530	1.00524
IcanW	151	1.00	6.00	**4.4636**	.85459
IhavetoW	151	1.00	6.00	5.1192	.96559
IcanS	151	2.00	6.00	**4.3907**	.96591
IhavetoS	151	1.00	6.00	4.9669	1.04828
Valid N (listwise)	151				

a. Time = time 1

Certain significant results are immediately apparent. The mean value for all the skills for the "I can" response is always lower than the mean for the "I have to" response, implying that the students generally felt that their level in all the skills was not as high as the level needed in those skills to study at the Faculty. Moreover, there is a clear distinction between the receptive skills and the productive skills, where the receptive skills are rated at a higher proficiency than the productive skills (see figures in bold in the table), with reading at 4.80 and listening at 4.74 but writing at 4.46 and speaking at 4.39. These results mirror the findings from the question discussed previously, where students stated that they generally had a lower level of difficulty with the receptive skills than the productive skills.

Observing the standard deviation values that are presented in table 6.6, it can be seen that there is more variance in the "I have to" results than the "I can" results, perhaps suggesting that the students were somewhat unsure about what levels were required for their studies. The fact that the minimum value chosen for each skill in the "I have to" category was 1, which corresponded to the A1 level, would indicate that some had either underestimated the levels required, or had not necessarily understood or engaged with the questionnaire. Further analysis of the SD results shows that there is a difference in the SD of the "I can" results, where the value for reading (.77) is significantly lower than for the other skills. Again it seems that the students rated themselves at a generally higher level in reading than any other skill, given the minimum value that was selected for reading was 3 (which corresponded to the B1 level) and "I can" values for all the other skills were at 2 (A2) or 1 (A1). Moreover, comparing the SD values across the four skills shows that speaking showed the most significant variance (.96), indicating that, again, the respondents' self-reported proficiency levels in speaking were much more heterogeneous than in the other skills.

Furthermore, all the skills were rated at a mean of between 4.4 and 4.8 for the "I can" responses, which is above B2, which was coded 4, and approaching the C1 level, which was coded as 5. Consequently, it can be supposed from these results that the students believe they have, on average, a good B2 level in all four skills. The ESAP course that is the subject of this study is pitched at

the C1 level and takes place in the second year of the two undergraduate programmes. In order to be able to enrol for undergraduate programmes at the Faculty of Economics at the time of the study, students would have had to have certified a B2 level in two of the three teaching languages of the University (German, Italian and English). The third language had to be certified at the B1 level before students could enrol into the second year of their studies. However, 26% of the questionnaire respondents were first year students, so some of them would not have certified a B2 in English in order to enrol. Further only 81 students, which corresponded to just over half of the 151 students who responded to the questionnaire administered in AR Cycle 1, stated they had any international language certificate as can be seen in Table 6.7 below. Consequently, it seems questionable that the general level across the four skills would be at this high B2.

Table 6.7 – Data from first questionnaire regarding international certificates

Certificate	n	A	B	C	B1 Pass (FCE)	B2 Pass (CAE)	Grade
FCE	44	8	22	13	1	–	
CAE	22	2	6	11	–	3	
CPE	1	1	–	–	–	–	
IELTS	11						
TOEFL	3						
	81						
No certificate	70						
Total	151						

In summary, the quantitative data gathered from the students in response to the first research question showed that as far as frequency was concerned, the skills most "needed" were the receptive skills, reading and listening, followed by the productive skills, writing and speaking. Over 90% of students stated they read or listened to English at least once a week, dropping to just under 80% for writing and speaking. However, as mentioned, the questionnaire also sought to investigate the estimated strengthens and weaknesses of the students for each skill and as such functioned as a present-situation analysis of

their language needs. Regarding this aspect, the findings in fact showed the opposite trend, where students had greater difficulties with the productive skills than with the receptive skills and in particular, they reported that speaking was the skill that presented the greatest level of difficulty.

Further data were collected from the questionnaires but for the purposes of providing information for the first research question of this study, the questions and their findings that have been discussed in this section were the most relevant and useful. These findings, as discussed, were merged with data collected from the interviews as a means to achieve triangulation and identify the similarities and differences between the two datasets referring to the first research question.

6.1.2 Research Question 1: Discussion of findings from qualitative analysis

The interviews that were conducted in AR Cycle 1 in order to gather further information about the target situation took place with ten lecturers who were teaching subjects using EMI. The details concerning these lecturers were already presented in Chapter 5, Section 5.5.

6.1.2.1 Findings from the "Use of English" conceptual framework and implications

The data collected and analysed from the interviews with the academic staff tended to intersect with much of the data analysed from the questionnaires concerning the skills needed and used in the subjects using EMI, although there were some important divergences as has already been specified. The "Use of English" conceptual framework depicted in the previous chapter presented the skills that were mentioned by the academic staff as being used in the classroom and for the exam. In the classroom, reference to all four skills was coded and integrated into the "Language skills" subcategory. Reference to the skills used in the exam, however, was included in the "Language skills" subcategory emanating from the "For the exam" main subcategory, as can be seen from the conceptual framework reproduced below in Figure 6.2. Although all four skills were used in the classroom, the main skill mentioned for the exam was writing, with only one reference to reading.

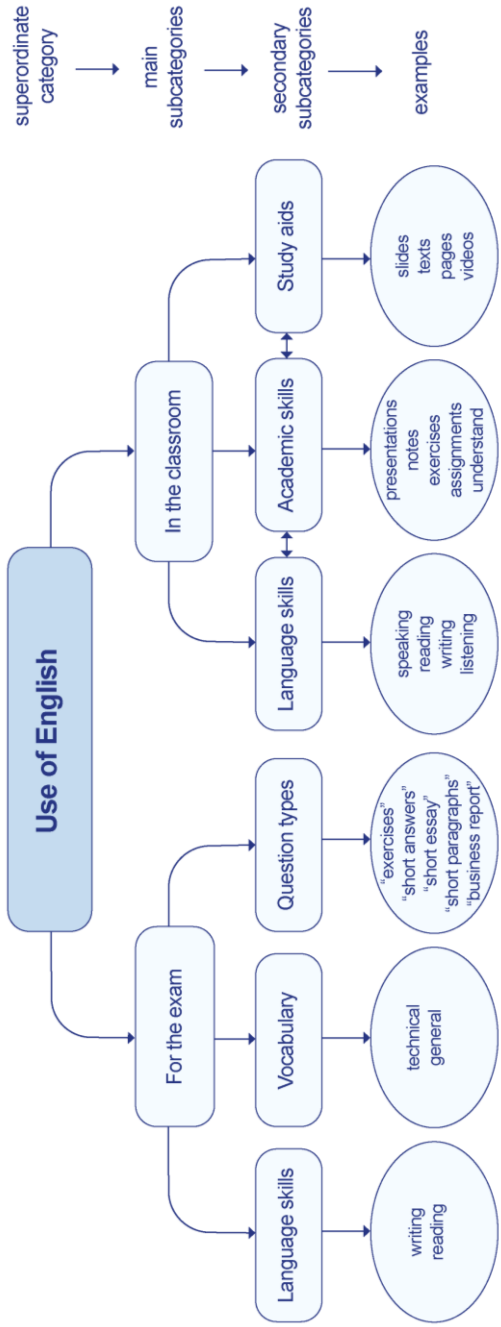

Fig. 6.2 – The " Use of English conceptual framework

The order that the skills are presented in the conceptual framework above shows the frequency of the references made, so speaking in the classroom was referred to more often than any of the other skills. As discussed in Section 5.5.3.1, a word frequency analysis was undertaken using NVivo to establish this aspect, and Table 5.9 presented the frequency of the references to the skills and their subsequent coding into "Language skills" but also into "Academic skills" or "Study aids". Below in Table 6.9, the same results have been aggregated to show more clearly how the four language skills were referred to. Only explicit references to the skills have been included in this aggregation so "ask questions", which were the words that were most frequently coded in the "Language skills" category, was excluded. Many EMI lecturers stated that they asked questions in class, and the fact of asking questions would imply that students would have to answer. Therefore, this was coded as a "language skill" in the second axial coding phase as explained in Section 5.5.3.1. However, it is not possible to extrapolate any further findings concerning which skills the students would have used to answer these questions, given they could answer using spoken or written language, thus the exclusion of this particular value.

Table 6.8 – Aggregated references to skills use in the classroom from the interview data

Skill	In vivo coding aggregated	No. of occurrences	Total occurrences
Speaking	"talking"	16	
	"interact"	14	
	"discuss"	11	
	"speaking"	8	49
Reading	"reading"	17	17
Writing	"notes"	10	
	"writing"	10	20
Listening	"listen"	8	8

From this analysis shown in Table 6.9, therefore, it can be seen that speaking was the skill used in the classroom that was referenced the most frequently with 49 occurrences in total, considering the synonyms and other related words for speaking. In fact, all of the lecturers, except for Rodion, the lecturer for Mathematics for Economists A & B, explicitly mentioned that the students were required to speak English in their classes. The next most frequent activity that was mentioned was "reading", followed by "writing" with twenty occurrences, and "listening". As can be seen from the table, there were ten occurrences of the word "writing" yet there were also ten occurrences of references to "notes", which, in the conceptual framework, was coded separately as the academic skill "note-taking". For this particular analysis in Table 6.9, however, it is included in the "writing" category given that taking notes is a writing activity.

The conceptual framework in Figure 6.2 also depicts the skills used in the exams administered for the different courses taught in English and the main skill that was referred to was writing, which occurred 17 times. As mentioned previously, all the exams at the Faculty are administered as a written exam, and no oral exams are required apart from in the exams for the various language for specific purposes courses, which are not only offered in English but also in German and Italian. Therefore, the fact that writing was the main skill that was referred to being used in the exams is not surprising. However, some lecturers mentioned that the exams they administered did not even require much writing in English given that some of the courses taught in English at the time were mathematical or financial subjects. Ivan, the lecturer for Financial Analysis stated that "the exam is on the laptops, they do the exercises which are very much numerically based so they don't have to write lots" and Riccardo, who taught Financial Risk Management, stated "they don't need English it's just maths" when referring to the questions used in the exam. The other skill that was referred to for the exam was reading, but this was only mentioned by Ottavio when discussing the students' problems in his exam. Consequently, the use of skills mentioned by the lecturers in the interviews tended to focus more on the multiple skills needed to be used in the classroom, rather than the skills needed in the exam.

However, one aspect that emerged clearly from the "Use of English" conceptual framework concerning the type of writing used in the exams was the fact that when students were required to write for their exams, as opposed to using mathematical calculations or formulas, the question types mentioned by the lecturers often referred to specific types of writing that were "short". There were three references to "short answers", two to "short essay", one to "short small questions essay-like" and one to "short paragraphs". These findings can be compared with the thirteen genre families that Nesi & Gardner (2012) have identified in student writing in higher education, and the types of writing texts identified by the lecturers in my study seem to correspond almost exactly to the "explanation" and "exercise" genre families, where

> Explanations are set to develop students' understanding of an object of study, and their ability to describe it and account for its significance, whereas Exercises are intended to give students practice in key skills and consolidate knowledge of key concepts. (Nesi & Gardner, 2012, p. 61)

Not all the lecturers gave reasons why they asked students to produce these writing tasks in the exam, but some of the reasons included references that can be interpreted as being part of the "explanation" genre. Dario stated the exam questions he set required the students "to comment the result", which seems to be referring to accounting for significance. Another reference to "explanations" was in this statement from Oscar, the Principles of Philosophy lecturer, who stated that in the exam he provided:

> questions … to understand who really understood something … and then I give a bit more complicated questions or a question which involves a step more than just remembering and having more or less understood.

This statement appears to indicate that some of the questions he sets for his exam aim to develop understanding through an ability to provide descriptions. A reference to the "exercises" genre family, however, comes from Ottavio, who describes how he required students to describe a database using a "schema" or framework, which could be completed with key words only and

did not need full sentences. However, he did also state that "any further explanation will help me understand what they are doing", which seems to be clearly referring to consolidating key concepts. He also made a reference to the "explanations" genre when referring to a different exam he held: "I expect them to produce, let's say, an answer of at least 5–10 lines, so rather short answer but in full English with a description". As can be seen from these findings from the data, and as presented by Nesi & Gardner (2012, pp. 61–62), one of the key features of both "explanations" and "exercises" is that they tend to be shorter than the other genre families that were studied, such as essays, case studies or reports. Moreover, Nesi & Gardner (2012, p. 72) identified that when exercises are used in business courses, they tend to be used in accounting and finance or statistics courses, as well as in mathematics and computer science, which largely corresponds with the courses that were taught by the lecturers interviewed for this study who made reference to this aspect.

The other reference to writing for the exam came from Claire who referred to writing reports, when she stated, "In the first year they have to do three assignments which are basically technical not really a lot of writing to do but I also have them write a business report". This report, although for the exam, was to be completed as an assignment and in fact she stated later that "they do it in groups". Therefore, although this piece of writing was for the exam, it could be prepared by more than one student in their own time rather than in traditional exam conditions.

The main findings from the analysis of this first conceptual framework concerning the language skills needed therefore showed that all the language skills were required in the classrooms that were studied, but only writing was required in the exams. Of the skills needed in the classroom, speaking was the most frequently mentioned, followed in order of frequency by reading, writing and listening.

Further findings from this first conceptual framework concerned the other characteristics that were coded in the "In the classroom" category, which were "Academic skills" and "Study aids". As discussed in Section 5.5.3.1, these were coded as being distinct from the "Language skills" category, although clearly they are still connected to the language skills, thus the connect-

ing arrow between the three secondary subcategories in the conceptual framework depicting the use of English in the classroom (Figure 6.2). The main study aids mentioned, which were used in the classroom during the teaching of the subjects, were *slides*, followed in order of frequency by *texts* and *pages*, thus demonstrating material that would require reading. This finding wholly corresponded with the data provided by the students in the questionnaires, who had identified study material provided by their lecturers as the most frequent source of reading they were required to do in English for their studies. The lecturers also made references to "videos", which implied they would provide additional opportunities for listening practice. In fact Ottavio, who mentioned using videos, used recordings of himself for further input for his course, although it was not clear whether he used these in class or if they were made available to the students for consolidation purposes. Dario, however, stated he used commercially available videos from news websites during his classes.

The academic skills mentioned by the lecturers comprised "presentations", which were included in this category when lecturers referred to the students having to make presentations in class rather than presentations being used as a listening activity when they were given by the lecturer or others, followed by "notes", "exercises" and "understand". As discussed in the previous section, some of these findings tended to differ from the findings generated from the students' data analysed from the questionnaire responses, for example regarding the prevalence of the use of presentations as a means for student participation in the classes. However, the lecturers concurred with the students that taking notes was a frequent activity undertaken in their classrooms, which had been the joint third most frequent writing activity chosen by the students. The lecturers also provided information to confirm that these notes were being taken in English and not in the students' first languages. Fabio affirmed that he had noticed "a couple of them taking notes in English". Claire also made comments about observing her students' taking notes in English and how she felt it would be problematic for them to take them in a language other than English. She stated "the notes I have seen are in English… I mean I know it's just too difficult to take notes in another language". Rodion also commented in a similar manner:

> … take notes and 99% of them take [them] in English. I have seen some attempts to do it in national languages but without any success [and] usually it expires after one day. The second day it's already in English. It's really difficult to translate.

Consequently, both the students and the lecturers agreed that taking notes in English in the classroom was a frequent activity, which has been noted by others (Boyle and Forchell, 2014; Siegel, 2018).

As far as the other non-language categories in the "Use of English" conceptual framework are concerned, therefore, the main academic skills that were mentioned by the lecturers were being able to give presentations and take notes in English. The main study aids that were used in the EMI classes were principally materials that needed to be read, and comprised slides and texts from various sources. The findings from this conceptual framework generally corresponded with the findings from the questionnaires although there were the divergences regarding students giving presentations and the use of essay writing, as has been discussed.

6.1.2.2 Findings from the "Problems encountered in the target situation" conceptual framework and implications

The interviews also sought to investigate the problems encountered by the students and lecturers in the target situation and as such functioned also as a present-situation analysis, like parts of the questionnaire. The "Problems encountered in the target situation" conceptual framework depicted in Figure 5.10 presented the findings from this analysis and divided the problems into the three main categories, language problems, content problems and problems related to classroom management. Again this visualisation appears in Figure 6.3 for ease of reference.

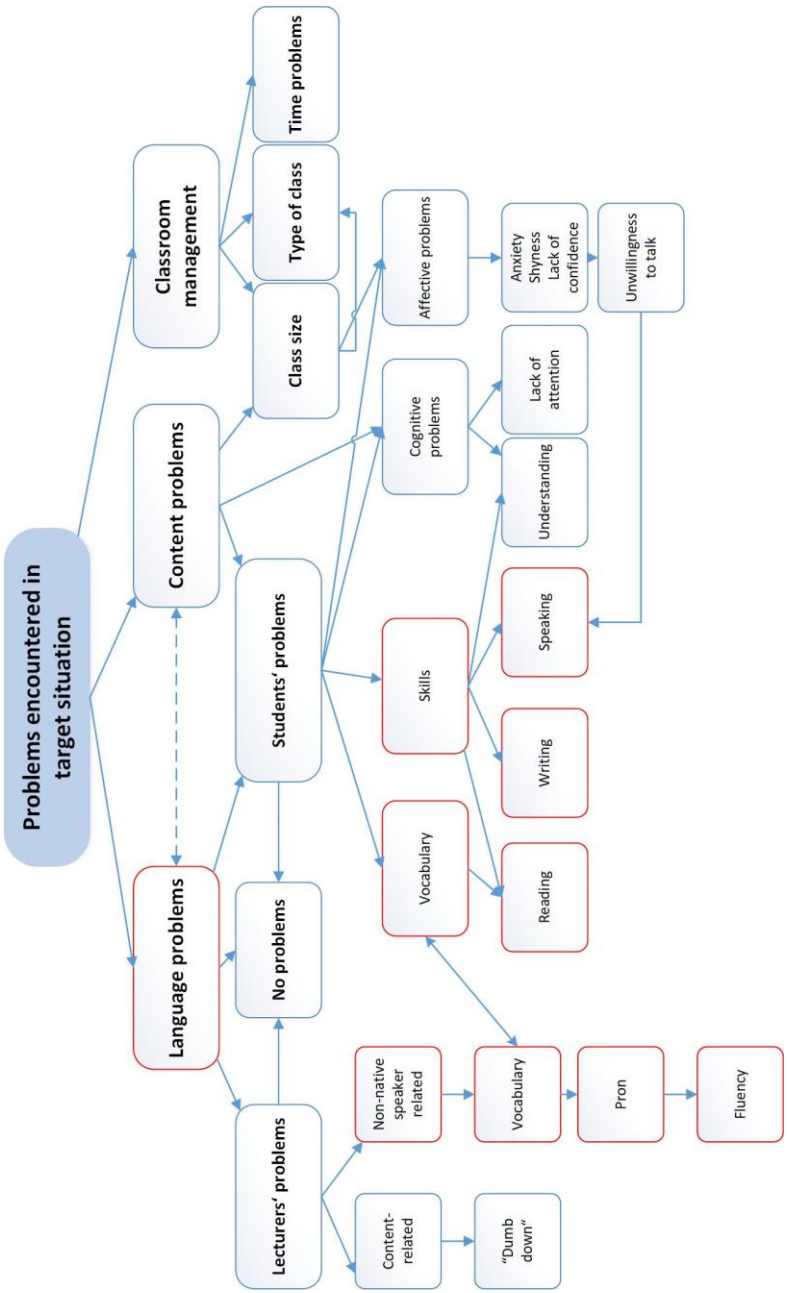

Fig. 6.3 – Problems encountered in the target situation category conceptual framework. From *Innovative ESAP Syllabus Design: A Means to Address English-Language Problems in EMI Programmes*, by J. Prior (p. 29), 2021, bu,press (https://doi.org/10.13124/9788860461827_02). CC BY-SA 4.0.

The language problems were further divided into the lecturers' problems and the students' problems as well as the subcategory "no problems". This third category was added as several lecturers had referred to areas where there were no problems, especially when referring to their own use of English as a medium of instruction. Dario, when referring to his own language problems, stated "Usually no I don't have any problem when I lecture absolutely no". Benno also answered in the negative when asked about any problems he may have had lecturing, "I don't think I have any particular problem". Rodion, the mathematics lecturer, also felt he had no problems with the language. The fact that some of these comments came from the lecturers of mathematics and scientific subjects mirrors findings from a recent study conducted with participants from Austria, Italy and Poland that examined higher education teachers' attitudes to English-medium instruction. This study showed that some lecturers felt they had few or even no problems teaching in English since "there was a belief that teaching science and maths was easy and required little language" (Dearden & Macaro, 2016, p. 471). However, the study did also highlight the many language problems lecturers experienced, and which will be referred to in due course.

The comments that were coded into the "no problems" subcategory, however, almost always related to the lecturers not having problems with the language. It was only Riccardo who actually referred to the students not having any problems with the language. He explicitly mentioned three times in his interview that in his view the students did not have any problems, even going as far as stating at one point, "they speak very well, they haven't problem about the English no no absolutely no". However, he was also the only interviewee who stated that he felt that his English was of a lower proficiency level than that of the students: "my level is not so high … in my opinion the background of this student is higher than mine". Consequently, because he was the only lecturer to admit that his English skills were perhaps lower than those of some of the students he was teaching, this could imply that he was unsure what English language level would actually be required by his students. The fact that lecturers who teach in English may be unaware of the language levels needed by their students to follow an EMI course has been noted elsewhere (Dearden & Macaro, 2016, p. 472). However, another reason for Riccardo's

statement could be due to the fact that "Italy lags behind other European countries in terms of multilingualism and in particular the learning of English" (Costa & Coleman, 2013, p. 6). The Eurobarometer survey conducted by the European Commission (2012) showed that Italy was ranked second from last among 27 EU nations regarding self-reported proficiency in a second language. In fact only 38% of Italians surveyed claimed to be able to speak at least one foreign language, compared to the EU average of 54%. There is therefore a tendency for Italians to admit to a low level of competence in other languages, especially English, which was documented by Dearden & Macaro in their study (2016), even if perhaps this is only a perception. Thus, this general lack of confidence in their foreign language skills shown by Italians could be a reason for Riccardo's statement that his English was lower than that of some of the students.

The lecturers' problems in the "Language problems" subcategory, as can be seen in the conceptual framework in Figure 6.3, were divided into two further categories. The first and smaller of the two was coded "content related" problems, and the other, larger category was related to the fact that the EMI lecturers were all non-native speakers of English. The content-related category contains the *in vivo* coded expression "dumb down" which was mentioned by Ottavio, who stated "I tend to dumb down, downgrade my English" in order to make his English more comprehensible for the students. This implies, therefore, that he was taking measures to simplify his language, which is a strategy that can be used to modify the comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982) for L2 learners and can "involve reduction or regularization of surface forms (restrictive simplification) or, alternatively, an increase in surface forms for the sake of elaboration or clarification (elaborative simplification, as in the case of repetitions and paraphrases)" (Chaudron, 1983, p. 439). Although the exact type of simplification to which Ottavio was referring cannot be inferred from his statement above, the fact that he felt he needed to simplify his language implies the language proficiency of the students was not sufficient to engage fully with the content of his subject. The concern that teaching in learners' L2 (or even in the students' L3 in some cases) can have an adverse effect on the teaching and learning of content in EMI contexts has been reported by others (Coleman, 2006; Wilkinson, 2012; Guarda & Helm, 2016; Briggs et al., 2018)

because of low language proficiency either of the lecturer or the students. In this particular case, Ottavio was aware that the language he was using might not be comprehensible for all the students due to their language proficiency, but using terminology that might be less problematic to understand could have had a negative impact on these students' content learning. In Briggs et al.'s recent study of EMI teachers' beliefs, it was observed that "students with a deficit of English language proficiency were likely to be negatively affected with regard to their subject discipline content learning" (2018, p. 687). However, it has been noted elsewhere that "teachers' limited language skills negatively affect elaboration, explanation and classroom interaction … which do not encourage … student participation" (Drljača Margić & Vodopija-Krstanović, 2018, p. 32). Although there is little evidence that language proficiency problems experienced by students in this study had a direct impact on their content learning, various suggestions that a relationship did exist were made by the lecturers in the interviews. Consequently, this tentative relationship is expressed in the conceptual framework in Figure 6.3 with a double-headed dotted arrow between the main subcategories of "Language problems" and "Content problems".

The other language problems that lecturers mentioned they experienced were all related to their not being native speakers and Enzo even commented "Well clearly it's not my mother tongue so that's the basic problem". One of these problems related to vocabulary, where lecturers mentioned that their "vocabulary is limited" (Oscar) and that they have difficulties producing the correct terminology (Riccardo, Oscar, Claire), whether that be general words or specific words. However, both Dario and Enzo felt that the production of specific terminology was actually easier in English than in Italian, given the status of English as the international academic community's lingua franca (Crystal, 2003; Mauranen et al., 2010). Dario stated clearly "I am more used to teaching in English, talking in English about finance than in Italian". This finding from the interview data, which suggested that vocabulary was more of a weakness than a strength, resonates with some of findings from a subsequent study at the same university (Quick, 2021). It also corresponds with findings

from a broader survey of Italian lecturers in EMI contexts where some lecturers felt confident about their use of vocabulary in their teaching, but many others felt that it was a problem (Helm & Guarda, 2015).

Other problems relating to the lecturers' not being L1 English speakers were their lack of fluency (Fabio) and their pronunciation (Dario, Enzo, Ivan, Riccardo). Fabio stated that he encountered a lack of fluency when he first started teaching in English but that "it is a matter of warming up" and through continued use of English the problem had lessened. Pronunciation problems, however, were mentioned by several lecturers, often referring to their perceived marked Italian accents, such as Enzo who stated "my English is with an Italian accent". Concerns about pronunciation were also frequently expressed by the Italian lecturers surveyed in the study undertaken by Helm & Guarda (2015). Particularly, in their study, some lecturers expressed concern because their pronunciation did not follow native-speaker norms, which was also apparent from the data collected in my study. Dario, for example, stated, "I try to kind of mimic the British accent and not talk too much like an Italian", and Ivan affirmed "I have a non-British accent". Claire, despite not referring to any issues about her pronunciation, did mention her teaching assistant, who "has a nice British accent". The prevalence of references to a "British" accent, although perhaps unusual due to its specificity, certainly originated from my prior relationships with all the interviewees and that the interviews conducted in this study can most definitely be classed as "acquaintance interviews" (Garton & Copland, 2010). Although data generated in acquaintance interviews are not "in any way more valid (or invalid) than data collected in more traditional social sciences interviews" (Garton & Copland, 2010, p. 548), it is likely that the references to a British accent would not have been so frequent had I been a different researcher.

The "Language problems" category in the "Problems encountered in the target situation" conceptual framework depicted in Figure 6.3 also comprised the students' problems, and this was unsurprisingly the category that covered the most areas in the conceptual framework, given the focus of the target situation analysis and therefore the questions asked in the interviews. The students' language problems were subdivided into "vocabulary" and "skills" and were coded as purely language problems in the conceptual framework

using red as the outline for the language problems and using one arrow originating solely from the "Students' problems" subcategory. The lecturers also referred to other problems experienced by the students, which were coded as "cognitive" and "affective" problems, but because these could not be classed as pure language problems but clearly influenced the language aspects, they were connected by more than one arrow. Therefore, some lecturers reported that students manifested problems that were coded as "cognitive", but these tended to originate from issues regarding the content of the classes rather than the language used.

Vocabulary problems were mentioned by several lecturers, referring mainly to students having difficulty with the specific lexis used for the subject. Oscar, the lecturer of Philosophy, mentioned the problems the students experienced with the specific terminology used in philosophy on several occasions and at one point discusses the problems students faced at length:

> I don't know how much they read the text but even in class we read the text together and they don't ask the words they don't know. I have to ask them, do you know this word and they're uh? and then I explain it but it's strange, I don't know why they don't do that because maybe they are afraid …

As mentioned previously, philosophy is one of the more language-heavy subjects that is taught in English at the Faculty, and so the fact that students experienced problems with specific terminology would be understandable. However, he went on to admit that perhaps it was the subject of philosophy itself that was the challenge, rather than the fact that it was taught in English when he stated "there is a very specific language I have to rely heavily on single words, analyse them and so on and this is something generally they are not confident with in any language". Other lecturers mentioned problems with specific terminology, including Ottavio, who stated "Sometimes they have problems knowing the right words, depends on the topic but some topics they have problems knowing the right English words". Ivan also recognised that students had problems in his Financial Analysis course and referred to how he tried to mitigate these problems: "I try to simplify the scientific language so that I am sure they have come across the words and I am using in

the exam questions during the course". In contrast, Fabio stated that the students did not have a problem understanding technical terms but in fact had problems understanding more general words. He gave the following example:

> I'm there to explain the technical terms but sometimes either in the exam and in the class they lack in understanding also basic terms, that is for instance… once I made the example of demand and supply in the automobile sector, what happens to the sector of tyres. I had questions… what does tyre mean?

Consequently, although many of the lecturers did not explicitly state that they felt students experienced problems with vocabulary, when problems were mentioned, they tended to focus on the specific vocabulary needed for the subject. This finding corresponds with another study conducted by Evans & Morrison (2011a) that investigated the use of English in an English-medium university in Hong Kong using a similar approach to that used in my study where a questionnaire to students to elicit their perceived strengths and weaknesses in the four skills was administered, although they then conducted follow-up interviews with a sample of those students. An important general theme that emerged from their interview data was "technical vocabulary" and in particular, students' "inability to understand key technical vocabulary" resulted in problems in reading and listening (Evans & Morrison, 2011a, p. 393). However, in their study, it emerged from the students' accounts that the lecturers of the EMI classes were often "oblivious" to the problems caused by a lack of technical vocabulary knowledge (Evans & Morrison, 2011a, p. 393), which certainly contrasts with the findings from my study. Moreover, in my study, one lecturer referred to the problems students had with general vocabulary.

Although some of the lecturers mentioned problems the students experienced with vocabulary, the main language problems tended to focus on the skills. Reference to problems in all the four skills was made, but the skills that were regarded as presenting the most problems were speaking and writing. Speaking problems were identified by five of the lecturers (Dario, Ivan, Claire, Ottavio and Fabio) and comprised difficulties connected to a lack of fluency (Fabio). However, most lecturers did not necessarily focus on the speaking problems themselves but rather the cause of the problems, which became its

own category, "affective problems", and included "anxiety", "shyness" and "lack of confidence" in the conceptual framework due to the prevalence of these aspects being mentioned. Some of the comments from the lecturers concerning this aspect concentrated solely on students' lack of confidence with spoken English: "I see that they have… they're not confident with their speaking" (Claire) and "In class of course some of them are not confident with their spoken English" (Oscar) whereas Dario felt that it was the use of English that exacerbated an already existing lack of confidence: "well probably some of them are shy beforehand but I believe that – the speaking in a foreign language is part of the story". Moreover, Fabio stated "this year for instance I had a very low responses to… I don't know what happened, they were quite shy", implying that he felt that it depended on the cohort and that a lack of confidence was perhaps not necessarily a regular occurrence. This general problem of students lacking confidence in their speaking has been noted in another study on EMI undertaken at the neighbouring University of Trento in northern Italy, where the lectures who were interviewed stated their main concern was that "their students were reluctant to use English (due to shyness, fear of making mistakes, insecurity, etc.)" (Polli, 2021, p. 88). Costa & Mariotti (2020) also noted this lack of confidence in their study where they compared Italian students' attitudes to studying on an EMI programme with those of international students. However, in their study, the local students' lack of confidence was significantly more marked than that of the international students.

Students' reticence to speak in the EMI classroom is a phenomenon that has been observed for some time (Tsui, 1996; Chang, 2010; Soruç & Griffiths, 2018), and this has been attributed to multiple factors originating from the learners themselves, from the methodology used by their teachers and from the settings in which the learning takes place. Benno, when mentioning this aspect, focused on the fact that although some students seemed to understand the subject matter, he felt that it was anxiety about their English proficiency that was preventing them from interacting in the classroom:

> sometimes the students who are less confident, not so much in the discipline that is being taught but in the language, in English, actually are more shy.

The phenomenon of shyness hindering speaking output was also observed in the study by Dearden & Macaro where it was the "students' poor level of English [that] inhibited their learning, made them embarrassed" (2016, p. 473). Indeed, this fear that is often displayed by less proficient language learners has shown to increase what is known as "communication apprehension", which refers to an individual's "fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey, 2001, p. 40). This apprehension can lead to learners actively avoiding situations where speaking is required, which "deprives learners of the practice that they need in order to improve their speaking skills and become confident language users" (Zhang & Head, 2010, p. 2). This aspect was also mentioned by Dario, who referred to the fact that he felt students were impeded from speaking in class due to this apprehension, which then had effect on communicating their subject knowledge:

> however for some of them they are handicapped because they know things but they are just afraid of speaking out loud.

Oscar had also identified a similar trait when he spoke about the students' unwillingness to ask him about unknown words, and he also attributed it to the students' anxiety, using the term "afraid", like Dario above, and so this was coded together with the other references to affective problems. Claire was another lecturer that commented on this unwillingness to speak out in class, although she did not directly attribute it to any of the factors the other lecturers had mentioned, when she stated: "Sometimes they will act as if they are struggling with the content but in fact they just don't want to answer in English I think". Willingness to communicate (WTC) in an L2 differs from WTC in a person's native language since the individual's communicative competence in the L2 is a "powerful modifying variable" (Dörnyei, 2003b, p. 12). Studies have found that learners with a lower language proficiency can experience greater anxiety when having to speak out in class and thus they can demonstrate less willingness to communicate (Thompson & Lee, 2013; Thompson & Khawaja, 2016). However, communicative competence and WTC are not the same and it has been noted that learners who are competent

L2 speakers might avoid communicative situations in the L2 and less proficient speakers might actively seek opportunities to engage in L2 interaction (Dörnyei, 2003b). This aspect is clearly visible in the following extract from Claire who stated:

> Some of them answer, some of them are very good and I know they know the answer, they just stand there and wait for me to ask and then, Paolo what do you think and then Paolo gets up with a perfect answer in perfect English

The fact that learners demonstrate anxiety in an EMI context, which then prevents them from speaking, has also been attributed to the settings that characterise EMI. The recently published study by Soruç & Griffiths, which investigated an EMI context in Turkey by administering an open-ended questionnaire to students, found that many difficulties experienced by the students in their speaking were due to affective aspects such as shyness and feeling embarrassed. These affective aspects were often attributed to the way the classes were delivered, which "were conducted along fairly traditional lecture-style lines" (Soruç & Griffiths, 2018, p. 40). Aslan & Thompson (2021) also suggest that anxiety about classroom performance could be due to the typical teacher-fronted nature of the context they studied.

Learner reticence has also been attributed to certain methodological practices that are often used by the teacher or lecturer in class, particularly in traditional teacher-fronted classrooms. These practices include teachers' intolerance of silence and thus a shorter wait time, so that the turn is either reallocated or teachers provide the answer themselves, uneven allocation of turns where the more confident students are more frequently called upon, and incomprehensible input where a lack of responses is attributed to learners not understanding instructions or questions (Tsui, 1996, pp. 151–154). An example of the uneven allocation of turns was provided by Claire when she stated:

> I choose the students I ask. I know about their level and when I see one is struggling, I will not, I will ask for help from somebody else and I try not to ask students that I know will have difficulties

The strategy exemplified in this extract is efficient in advancing through the class, especially when there are time constraints to which Claire also makes a reference when she states "I have so [many] things to do in the class time that I have that I don't have time". However, it has been shown that uneven allocation of turns can make the weaker or shyer students feel neglected and "the more they feel neglected, the less willing they are to contribute" (Tsui, 1996, p. 154). Consequently, the fact that anxiety and shyness are factors that hinder learners' willingness to speak, even if they do not necessarily always derive from a learners' communicative competence, is clearly demonstrated from the data collected from the lecturers in this study.

Apart from speaking, the other skill that was mentioned most frequently by the lecturers as being problematic for the students, and was coded and added to the conceptual framework, was writing. These problems arose mainly in the exams, which, as mentioned, are all conducted as written exams in the Faculty. Oscar, the lecturer for Philosophy stated:

> they write in German or Italian with English words of course. So they don't know what an English sentence is, they don't know how to connect two sentences, many of them… the fact that how a sentence is meant to be connected in order for a English eye to make sense of what is written

This comment focuses on problems that originated from syntax and discourse features rather than lexical problems since he referred to the students' difficulties to create cohesive texts that follow typical English syntactical structures. Claire, however, focused on the assignments the students had to produce for her course, rather than the writing done in the exam, and how she felt students had difficulties expressing their own ideas in English. She stated:

> They are not confident even in their writing because they quote a lot, they copy and paste, in first year much more than in third year because third year they know I can detect it but in first year the report I see a lot of copy and paste but…

In this case, their difficulties resulted in a tendency to resort to copying from other sources, an academic problem that she ascribed to originating from a lack of language proficiency. Another problem for students when writing was

highlighted by Benno, who referred to students' tendency to write too much when answering questions, thus losing coherence in their texts and failing to complete the set task adequately:

> they always try to look competent, knowledgeable by writing long answers and I say, well the first thing is stay on topic because of course that's more important

The comments shown in these extracts, therefore, tended to relate to problems regarding specific academic writing skills especially related to connected discourse and syntax. They also concerned difficulties in producing texts that had not been copied from elsewhere. Although the inability to produce texts that are not copied could stem from a lack of academic skills such as poor referencing or inadequate citations, or indeed, from a deliberate desire to cheat, it could also be due to difficulties with the language, as Claire implied. Indeed, "a growing body of research into L2 students' source-based writing has revealed language-related problems which may lead to inadvertent plagiarism" (Pecorari & Petrić, 2014, p. 275), so it is likely that the students in this study were either lacking writing subskills such as paraphrasing and summarising in certain cases or perhaps were even lacking specific reading skills. The problem for students to produce texts without resorting to plagiarism because of their lack of language proficiency has also been addressed by Hyland, who found that, "After they mentally compare their texts with target 'expert texts', they may feel so overwhelmed by the distance between what they are expected to achieve and what they feel capable of doing, that plagiarism seems the most realistic strategy" (2001, p. 380). Consequently, Claire's assertion that her students' attempts to copy from other sources in their assignments originated from language difficulties rather than from any desire to act dishonestly would seem reasonable.

However, in the interviews, many lecturers did not refer to writing problems, not necessarily because they were no problems, but because their courses did not require a significant amount of writing, if any, due to the subject matter, which was mainly financial or mathematical. Indeed, Fabio stated clearly that writing was not needed as he used multiple choice questions in his exam. Writing was therefore considered to be a language problem for the students especially in the more language-heavy courses, such as Politics and

Accounting, and tended to comprise aspects related to specific academic writing skills, as discussed.

Other problems that were mentioned by the lectures, although the instances of these references were far fewer than for speaking and writing, concerned reading. Ottavio, the lecturer for the Information systems and data management course, referred to students' problems in reading, particularly when confronted with unknown lexical items that had an impact on understanding written texts:

> I have the impression that some of them don't read carefully. Others read but don't understand – they skip some key words in my sentence which completely changes the meaning maybe or which underlines what they must do. So understanding the text is the major English skill concerning my exam.

His comment here concerns the fact that some students had problems with academic reading skills, particularly inference of unknown lexical items, which subsequently led to comprehension problems that had a negative impact on the tasks they had to complete for his exam. Problems concerning listening were also seldom mentioned by the lecturers, but Dario stated that he experienced problems when he brought authentic video material into his class:

> I wanted to watch together with the students some videos from the FT or from the Economist and they were completely lost.

Although he did not explicitly say what he felt caused these problems, he did continue by saying,

> I understood that the only way to get them to understand something was to first show all the footage and then talk about what was told and then show it again – piece by piece discussing what we had just heard

The fact that he had to show the videos in segments and then discuss each section with the class implies that students most definitely experienced comprehension problems, which in lectures can often be due to either decoding

problems, where students typically have difficulties recognising what has been said, or problems with spoken discourse structures. Clearly, these difficulties can be compounded by the accent and speed of speaking of the speaker(s), all of which indicate language problems. However, it has been noted that difficulties in understanding spoken language used in lectures can also be due to learners' "insufficient knowledge of the specialist subject" (Jordan 1997, p. 179). Therefore, although this particular aspect was coded as a problem with the skill of listening for this analysis, it could have equally derived from students' lack of subject knowledge and would have therefore been coded as "content problems".

As has been discussed in this section so far, therefore, although the lecturers recognised that problems were experienced by their students in all four skills, these problems mainly concerned the productive skills; writing and speaking. However, the problems students encountered in the target situation, as has been mentioned previously, not only related to language aspects. Problems also arose from the content of the courses and the conceptual framework depicted in Figure 6.3 shows this category and its main subcategory, "cognitive problems". The cognitive problems mentioned were related to a lack of understanding of the subject matter and aspects linked to attention problems. References to problems concerned with understanding occurred multiple times in the interviews. In the following statement from Dario, he referred to a strategy that he felt would be useful to alleviate students' difficulties in understanding the subject matter of his course: "I think some multimedia device like some video or – some recording of speeches – could improve their understanding of some topics". However, as just discussed, he also recognised that when audio and video support were used in his classes, some students struggled with the comprehension of those videos.

Ottavio, on the other hand, commented on a cognitive problem that also affected the students' ability to undertake the tasks he used in class when he stated:

> Others are attention problems, so they don't pay enough attention to what I write or they don't have any idea that that thing may be important. So I would say language problems only a minority 30% of the cases.

Here, not only did he focus on the fact that the students did not seem to be able to distinguish main ideas from supporting ideas, a common problem reported by students and their teachers in English-language classrooms (Jordan 1997), but also that some seemed to become distracted and so did not pay attention. Becoming distracted in class was also a difficulty that was reported by the students surveyed in the study conducted by Soruç & Griffiths (2018, p. 46), which they suggest might be due to multiple factors including students' inadequate language levels for courses taught in English.

The "Problems encountered in the target situation" conceptual framework also comprised the other main category of problems mentioned by the lecturers, which concerned aspects connected to classroom management. This subcategory included effects of the large class sizes and traditional teaching approach, especially affective factors such as anxiety, as discussed previously. There was also reference to time problems, particularly by Oscar and Claire, who both referred to not having enough time for their classes or course.

From the analysis of the "Problems encountered in the target situation" conceptual framework, therefore, the most useful and relevant findings that helped to answer the first research question were that the students, when they experienced language problems, were most likely to have problems with their speaking, to a lesser extent their writing and also with vocabulary. The speaking problems tended to be influenced by affective factors, such as anxiety and shyness, which prevented many students from engaging in meaningful spoken interaction. These affective factors in turn tended to be influenced by multiple factors, ranging from students' lack of language proficiency to the classroom environment but also most probably by some of the teaching methodology employed by the EMI lecturers. Students' writing problems were generally encountered by the lecturers of the more language-heavy subjects such as Politics and Accounting, and concerned specific academic writing skills such as producing connected discourse, demonstrating cohesion as well as general problems with syntax. Vocabulary problems were also reported by many lecturers and although they tended to be associated with a lack of knowledge of specific terminology, problems with basic or general vocabulary were also reported. Other problems that were not specifically language problems, but which affected the students' learning included content problems, especially

lack of specific subject knowledge, and factors associated with the classroom environment.

6.1.2.3 Findings from the "Lecturers' approach to language difficulties" conceptual framework and implications

The third conceptual framework that emerged from the data analysis of the interviews was entitled "Lecturers' approach to language difficulties". This was described in Section 5.5.3.3 and is reproduced below in Figure 6.4 for ease of reference.

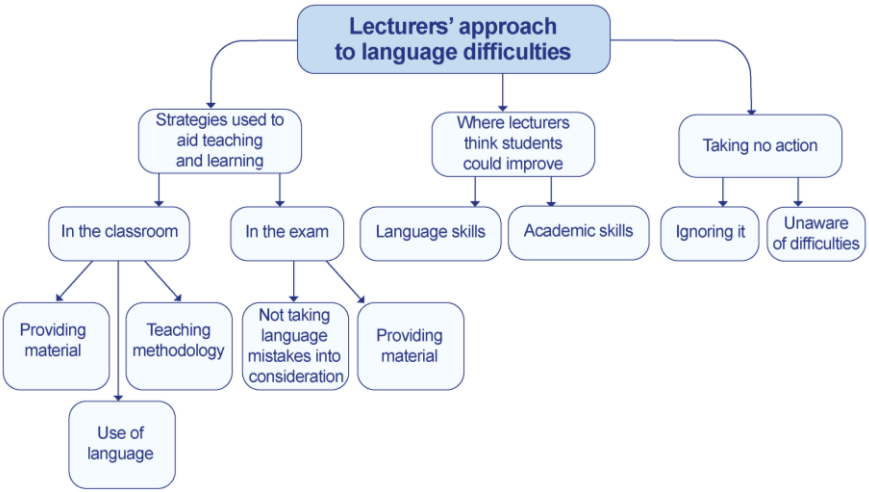

Fig. 6.4 – The "Lecturers' approach to language difficulties" conceptual framework

The data from this superordinate category do not necessarily provide many useful additions in order to answer the first research question of this study, but an interesting finding that did emerge from this conceptual framework was the approach lecturers took when encountering language errors in students' written work. All the lecturers who made a reference to the language mistakes made by their students stated clearly that they did not take these mistakes into consideration when marking their exams. Dario stated quite clearly "Of course I don't take into account language mistakes in the exam", and this sentiment was echoed by Rodion, who declared "The issue is that

even if their English is sometimes terrible it doesn't affect the final mark; I still don't take marks off". Oscar also took a similar position and said:

> I tell them I don't penalize them, I don't take away points from them and that I do my best to understand what the person was trying to say and if it's fine then they get exactly the same mark as somebody who wrote it in Shakespeare English

This fact of not considering the students' English proficiency when marking exams has been noted elsewhere. Evans & Morrison found in their study of an EMI context in Hong Kong that "professors evidently took little or no account of the quality of students' English when assessing written and spoken work" (2011b, p. 207), which in the students' views, questioned the very existence of the EAP course that was also investigated in their study.

However, in my study the fact that the EMI lecturers seemed to ignore the students' English proficiency and even employed various strategies in order to accommodate the deficiencies in the students' English-language output demonstrates their apparent unwillingness to take any responsibility for the students' language development. Their interest seems to focus purely on the students' output from a content perspective. This attitude has been reported in Dearden & Macaro's study, where the majority of the EMI lecturers who responded to their survey felt it was not their responsibility to develop the students' language competence (2016, p. 478). However, Dearden & Macaro also quite correctly question whether content lecturers in EMI contexts should take responsibility for students' language development, and this question so far does not seem to have been answered conclusively. What is clear, though, is that the findings from my study demonstrate that the lecturers who were interviewed and expressed an opinion on this subject did not believe providing language teaching was their duty. Moreover, Claire was the only lecturer who admitted that she penalised the students for language errors stating "if what they write is the contrary of what they wanted to say, I will take off a mark or a grade", but she also abdicated responsibility for the students' mistakes in English, stating "I'm not correcting the English". Dearden & Macaro felt this unwillingness to take any responsibility for the students' language development in EMI contexts that they also documented could have contributed to the low student motivation levels about which those same lecturers

had been complaining (2016, p. 473). Given that in my study many of the lecturers seemed to suggest it was often affective factors such as lack of confidence and shyness that contributed to students' language problems, as was also the case in the Dearden & Macaro study, it would seem reasonable to conclude that some of the language problems experienced by the students in my study might have actually originated from the lecturers' reluctance or inability to engage with the pedagogical aspects of teaching in an L2. Indeed Dearden & Macaro recommend that

> EMI teachers need to know how to modify their input, assure comprehension via student-initiated interactional modifications and create an atmosphere where students operating in an L2 or L3 are not afraid to speak. (Dearden & Macaro, 2016, p. 479)

Clearly, the focus of my study is the ESAP course I was and still am teaching and not the EMI courses offered by the other academic staff at the Faculty. However, in light of the affective problems that seemed to have been caused, at least in part, by some of the pedagogical practices used in the EMI classes, introducing a pedagogical approach in the ESAP classes that would enable students to operate in an environment where anxiety levels were reduced because there were more opportunities for student-initiated interaction thus became a clear aim for this study.

6.1.3 Research Question 2: Discussion of findings from quantitative analysis

The questionnaire not only attempted to collect data that could answer the first research question, but also aimed to investigate whether there was a relationship between how much practice students stated they engaged in and their language proficiency levels, in order to test the hypothesis as to whether there was a relationship between the amount of practice of a skill undertaken and the level of proficiency reported. As discussed in Section 5.3.5 of the previous chapter, Pearson chi-square tests were conducted to test whether there was a relationship between some of the variables that had been coded from the quantitative data collected from the questionnaires to the students

and as discussed in that same section, there were significant relationships between the frequency of practice reported by the students and their self-reported level of difficulty. The data that were reported in that same section referred to all the responses from the three questionnaires with a total of 365 responses and concerned the relationship between frequency of practice and self-reported level of difficulty for the skill of writing.

The data for the first questionnaire that was conducted in AR Cycle 1, however, which counted only 151 responses, had to be manipulated in order to generate meaningful responses given that some of the cells had fewer than five results given the smaller total number of responses. Chi-square cross tabs analyses were then run for each skill to investigate whether there was any relationship between the frequency of practice and self-reported level of difficult for those skills. The *p* values of these analyses can be seen in Table 6.10.

Table 6.10 – Relationship between frequency of practice and self-reported difficulties – all four skills from all three questionnaires

	Questionnaire 1	Questionnaire 2	Questionnaire 3	Aggregated results
	p value	*p* value	*p* value	*p* value
Reading	.603	.113	.000	.084
Listening	.485	.277	.142	.099
Writing	.048	.001	.001	.002
Speaking	.442	.026	.044	.002

As can be seen from the table above, the chi-square test analyses showed overall a significant relationship between the students' amount of practice and their self-reported level of difficulty in that skill only for the productive skills. Apart from the results for speaking in questionnaire 1, all the other results for speaking and writing were $p < .05$, which can indicate there is a significant relationship between the two variables. From these p values, it can also be seen that the aggregated results of the three questionnaires tended to show a more significant relationship than the results from the individual questionnaires, which clearly had far fewer responses. Given the disparity in the results generated by the individual questionnaires in this analysis, it is difficult to state that generally there was a significant relationship between the amount of practice the students stated they undertook and their self-reported levels of difficulty in the skills. However, the aim of these analyses was not to generalise beyond the context under study but to investigate the responses provided by the sample of students who had answered the questionnaire and to draw tentative conclusions from the findings for those students as well as subsequent students. Consequently, from these analyses it can be seen that there does seem to be a relationship between how much the students say they practise a skill and their level of difficulty in that skill, but only for the productive skills.

This relationship can be further observed through analysing the trends in the data. In Table 6.11 below, the data concerning the students' frequency of practice and their self-reported level of difficulty in the skills are reproduced in percentages and refer to the first questionnaire that was administered in AR Cycle 1.

Table 6.11 – Percentages showing relationship between frequency of practice and self-reported difficulties – all four skills questionnaire 1 (n=151)

Reading	very difficult	quite difficult	quite easy	very easy
Once a week or less	0.0%	0.0%	52.4%	47.6%
2–3 times a week	0.0%	4.5%	61.4%	34.1%
Every day	0.0%	4.7%	44.2%	51.2%
Listening	**very difficult**	**quite difficult**	**quite easy**	**very easy**
Once a week or less	0.0%	13.0%	69.6%	17.4%
2–3 times a week	0.0%	17.2%	58.6%	24.1%
Every day	0.0%	10.0%	57.1%	32.9%
Writing	**very difficult**	**quite difficult**	**quite easy**	**very easy**
Once a week or less	5.3%	44.0%	42.7%	8.0%
2–3 times a week	8.3%	27.1%	50.0%	14.6%
Every day	14.3%	50.0%	32.1%	3.6%
Speaking	**very difficult**	**quite difficult**	**quite easy**	**very easy**
Once a week or less	11.1%	27.8%	52.8%	8.3%
2–3 times a week	2.1%	33.3%	45.8%	18.8%
Every day	6.5%	19.4%	25.8%	48.4%

There is an evident general trend that demonstrates that the more students say they practise a skill, the easier they feel that skill is for them and this holds for the two receptive skills and speaking, but not writing. While those who practise writing only once a week or less are almost equally split between considering writing difficult or easy, with 49.3% and 50.7% respectively, the majority of those who practise writing every day still find it difficult (64.3%). However, the trend for speaking shows a different pattern: while just over 60% who practise speaking only once a week or less find it easy, almost three

quarters of those who state they speak English every day find it easy. Consequently, although the data presented in Table 6.11 could not be analysed using the cross tabs due to many cells registering a 0 value (for example all the "very difficult" responses for reading and listening had no value as can be seen in Table 6.11), they still provide useful information concerning the frequency of practice and students' self-reported skills levels.

The questionnaire also sought answers to the second research question by further investigating the self-reported levels of the students. Questions 21–24 were designed to elicit more specific information about what levels the students felt they possessed at the time they took the questionnaire in the four skills and what level was needed to study at the Faculty in each skill. The responses were presented as adapted descriptors from the CEFR in order to extract these data. These questions also aimed to address some of the weaknesses of questionnaires, namely self-deception, where respondents might deceive themselves as to their strengths and weaknesses, and the fact that often respondents will display "a somewhat superficial and relatively brief engagement with the topic" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 105). Indeed, the "I can, I have to" questions were deliberately designed to appear in the second half of the questionnaire in an attempt to address the problem that questionnaire responses can be deemed unreliable precisely due to a lack of engagement with the topic. If the respondents had succeeded in progressing all the way to Questions 21–24, this would imply that they were engaging with the questionnaire on more than just a superficial level. Moreover, the use of more detailed descriptors instead of just requiring one of four responses on a scale, which was required in the previous question concerning level of difficulty, required a greater engagement with the questions and their responses. It was hoped that this greater engagement would lead the students to provide more accurate information about their language proficiency and help to mitigate any desire on their part to underestimate or indeed overestimate their level given that I was fully aware that my dual role as their past, current, or future teacher and the researcher in this study might influence the data being collected.

The cross tab analyses of the data can be observed in Table 6.12, which were generated after data manipulation, again in order to avoid cells with fewer than five values. Consequently, the levels from A1 to B2 were grouped

and then the C1 and C2 levels were grouped so that only two proficiency levels were used in the analysis. The two groups were chosen given the target level of the ESAP course, which was C1, and the fact that students were supposed to have a B2 level to access the course. As can be seen very clearly from the percentages in Table 6.12, there is an obvious trend where the more frequently students say they practise a skill, the higher the level of proficiency they report to have in that skill. The findings for all four skills show that over 60% of those who state they practise the skill every day for all the skills report being at the C1 or C2 level.

Table 6.12 – Percentages showing relationship between frequency of practice and self-reported levels – all four skills

Reading	A1–B2	C1+C2
Once a week or less	51.2%	48.8%
2–3 times a week	38.5%	61.5%
Every day	21.1%	78.9%
Listening		
Once a week or less	51.0%	49.0%
2–3 times a week	36.7%	63.3%
Every day	30.6%	69.4%
Writing		
Once a week or less	59.2%	40.8%
2–3 times a week	45.2%	54.8%
Every day	37.9%	62.1%
Speaking		
Once a week or less	65.1%	34.9%
2–3 times a week	44.8%	55.2%
Every day	30.9%	69.1%

As all the cells contained more than five results, the chi-square tests were able to be run and the p values for all four skills showed that the relationship between frequency of practice and the self-reported proficiency levels of the students based on the CEFR descriptors was much more significant than for the previous analyses that just used the *level of difficulty* four-item scale.

Consequently, from these analyses there is an evident shift towards the higher CEFR levels the more frequently the students state they practise the skill. Moreover, the chi-square tests reveal a significant relationship between

the frequency of practice and the proficiency of the students so that the more they say they practise the skill the higher their proficiency level. Although these findings hold for all the four skills, they are more significant for the productive skills. Therefore, the use of the more detailed descriptors in questions 21–24 provided more significant relationships between language skill proficiency and frequency of practice which corroborated to a degree and enhanced the findings regarding their self-reported difficulties.

6.2 Summary Discussion of Merged Findings From Data Analysis in AR Cycle 1

The findings that were generated in the data analysis and the subsequent merging of the data from the two datasets in order to achieve triangulation were used to help answer the first two research questions of this study. These questions were formed in order to provide a framework for the redesign of the existing syllabus for the ESAP course that is the focus of this volume.

The findings as discussed in this chapter showed that the English-language skills needed by economics students at this trilingual university as perceived by the students themselves were all four of the skills. However, in order to provide as meaningful an answer as possible to this first research question, the word "needed" requires defining. If "needed" is defined as meaning frequency of use, the results from the students demonstrated unequivocally that they had to use all four skills on a regular basis and that the use of these skills was multifaceted and multi-purposed. Although the students reported that they tended to have more frequent contact with the receptive skills, particularly reading, they still had regular contact with writing and speaking, with one in five reporting they had to write or speak English every day. However, the data from the questionnaires did not provide any indication as to how useful this practice was nor, in the case of speaking, how prolonged any interactions were. As such, therefore, students who stated they practised speaking English every day might have only engaged in brief transactional exchanges but they might equally have spent more prolonged periods interacting with their peers in class or their lecturers in class or in office hours.

The data from the students revealed that there were many different purposes for skills use, from reading material provided by the lecturers,

taking notes in lectures to interacting with their lecturers in class and in office hours. In summary, the data showed that all four skills were required to be used in the classroom with differing degrees of importance and regularity, but the exams tended to be dominated by writing, although reading was also required.

If "needed" is understood to refer to proficiency level, however, the students generally felt that their English proficiency levels were at least the B2 level in all the skills, but sometimes quite significantly below the C1 level. The students consistently rated their receptive skills at a higher proficiency level than their productive skills, although there were divergences between whether speaking or writing was the weaker skill depending on the results generated by the various analyses that were run. Consequently, from a proficiency perspective, the productive skills demonstrated more significant deficits than the productive skills and as such were *needed* to be improved more than the receptive skills.

The findings that were extrapolated from the interview data with the ten EMI lecturers corroborated much of what was generated by the questionnaires with the students. The lecturers agreed that the four skills were needed in their EMI courses and from a frequency perspective, the most significant appeared to be speaking. As far as their exams were concerned, however, it was confirmed that writing was the skill that was most frequently required given that the exams are all written exams at the Faculty. The qualitative data from the lecturers provided an added perspective to the frequency of use as it became clear from the data that speaking was the skill that was most often referred to when discussing the use of English in the classroom; a feature that could not be inferred from the questionnaire data. However, these references to the skills also comprised references to the problems that the lecturers felt the students experienced, and very few mentioned problems related to reading and listening, which were the skills the students reported practising the most.

The data from the lecturers also generally confirmed the data from the students regarding for which purposes the skills were used, although there were variances with regard to essay writing and students giving presentations. While not being able to provide information about the actual language

proficiency levels of the students, the lecturers were able to provide information about the problems they felt the students experienced in their classes and exams. Although there were many language problems mentioned, problems also concerned other aspects that had an impact on the teaching and learning, such as affective and cognitive issues as well as issues connected to the specific content of the subjects taught in English. The findings showed that the lecturers felt speaking English in class was the most significant problem for the students, followed by writing problems encountered predominantly in the exams, as well as problems connected to an insufficient command of the technical and sometimes also basic vocabulary needed to study the various subjects in English.

The data from the interviews also produced findings concerning the origin of the students' language problems, and significantly one of the main reasons given for the students' perceived lack of speaking proficiency was not necessarily their overall communicative competence but their unwillingness to speak, especially due to affective aspects related to anxiety. Although the lecturers did not offer any reasons for this general reticence to speak, the findings from the interview data show that all the courses that used English as a medium of instruction were taught as traditional lectures, almost undoubtedly due to the relatively large class numbers, but also very possibly due to the academic traditions of university teaching in Italy where a traditional lecturing style has been reported as being extremely prevalent (Costa & Coleman, 2013). This traditional teacher-fronted lecturing style used in all the classes that were investigated in my study was observed by Costa & Coleman in their study to provide students with few if any meaningful opportunities for interaction, a phenomenon that has been recognised in other studies of EMI classrooms (Zhang & Head, 2010; Wilkinson, 2012; Dearden & Macaro, 2016; Soruç & Griffiths, 2018). As a consequence, although most of the lecturers in my study stated that the students needed to speak in their EMI classes, there were probably generally few opportunities for speaking in those classes and they would almost certainly not have allowed many opportunities for student-initiated interaction or more prolonged student-student interaction given the class sizes and the traditional lecturing styles employed.

In sum, as far as frequency is concerned, both the students and the lecturers agreed that all four skills were used regularly in the classroom with a divergence in the findings concerning which skill was reported to be the most frequently used. Both the students and lecturers, however, agreed that writing was the main skill that was needed for the exams. As far as proficiency in the skills was concerned, the productive skills were rated as being the weaker skills by the students themselves, and the findings from the interviews with the lecturers tended to correspond with this view.

These findings not only provided valuable information to inform the first research question, but they also provided input for the second research question, which concerned what skills practice should be maintained or enhanced in the syllabus. The cross tab analyses of the questionnaire responses concerning frequency of practice and level of difficulty showed that there was a general trend towards fewer difficulties in the skills that were practised more. The cross tab analyses of frequency and proficiency levels as presented in the *I can* statements also showed a trend towards a higher proficiency level the more the skills were practised. The chi-square tests that were run on the same variables showed a significant relationship between the frequency of practice the students stated they undertook and particularly their self-reported levels in the skills so that the more frequently they stated they practised a skill, the higher their proficiency was in that skill. These findings were particularly significant for the productive skills.

7. The Negotiated Syllabus: Implementation, Evaluation and Discussion

7.1 Introduction

This chapter will present how the findings from the data analysis in AR Cycle 1 contributed to the redesign of the ESAP course's syllabus, which was then implemented in AR Cycle 2. The newly adapted syllabus that was used in AR Cycle 3 will be illustrated and a further problem that arose concerning students' lack of regular attendance and the solution adopted will also be discussed.

7.2 Research Question 3: How Can a Predominantly Product Syllabus That Is Skills Based Benefit From the Integration of a Process Approach to Syllabus Design?

The findings that were generated from the merged datasets in AR Cycle 1 provided the focus for the redesigned syllabus and as such contributed in part to answering the third research question. The existing syllabus, which was essentially a product syllabus with skills focus, would therefore maintain a focus on the main skills that were regarded as most needed to be improved by the students and the lecturers from a proficiency perspective, in other words writing and speaking, and there would also be a concurrent focus on reading and to a lesser extent on listening, given their frequency of use and therefore relative importance. Significantly, however, the redesigned syllabus would focus on providing students with more opportunities for engaging in the productive skills; in the case of speaking, there would be more opportunities to engage in spoken interaction, especially student-initiated interaction as well as more prolonged student-student interaction. This aim evolved not only from the reported frequency of use of speaking in the classes and the relationship that was demonstrated between the frequency of practice and self-reported proficiency levels, but also from the findings' clear indication that students were probably not provided with opportunities for much, if any extended speaking time in their EMI classes. As far as writing was concerned, the new syllabus would provide for more individually focused writing activities to provide more relevant writing practice. Moreover, the redesigned syllabus, given my beliefs as a teacher and my desire to adopt an approach that would better foster learner autonomy and be more learner-centred, would also incorporate more opportunities for students to participate in the decision-making aspects of the ESAP course, and would therefore introduce elements that could be negotiated. This process approach to syllabus design, which introduces negotiation into the syllabus, would therefore act as a means to provide opportunities "for authentic language use about matters that are of immediate significance to learners" (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000c, p. 19) and so would provide opportunities for extended speaking time and therefore further opportunities for language and skills improvement as well as allowing

students to participate in some of the decision-making aspects of the course. Consequently, the process approach that used negotiation would directly benefit the skills-based approach to the syllabus as the negotiation would provide concrete opportunities for the students to engage in focused and relevant skills practice (Prior, 2021).

Given the fact that a syllabus that has a skill-based approach is regarded as a product approach to syllabus design, but the negotiated syllabus is considered a process approach to syllabus design, the redesigned syllabus therefore required a blended approach that would be able to integrate aspects of both the product and process approaches to syllabus design. The following section will now present a critical evaluation of the redesigned syllabus that was implemented in AR Cycle 2 that introduced negotiation to provide students with both a greater say in their course as well as opportunities for more skills practice.

7.3 The Redesigned Syllabus Used in AR Cycle 2 (Syllabus 1) – Evaluation and Discussion

This section will firstly provide an overview of the ESAP course and its context within the Faculty and its undergraduate programmes, and will then present the redesigned syllabus, in light of the fourth research question. The section will proceed by detailing the implementation of the redesigned syllabus, and provide a critical evaluation of the implementation, referring also to the fifth research question.

7.3.1 Context of the ESAP course

The ESAP course that is the subject of this volume was, and still is, a 30-hour course incorporated into the Faculty's two undergraduate degree programmes, E&M and PPE, and which I have taught since its inception in 2003/2004. The ESAP course is a compulsory course of each undergraduate programme and is worth 3 credit points (following the European Credit Transfer System – ECTS). As the University is officially trilingual and offers most of its undergraduate degrees in German, Italian and English in varying combinations, all students who do not have English as their official L1 have the ESAP course inserted into their study plan. The course is timetabled in the

first semester of the second year of PPE and in the second semester of the second year of E&M, so the two versions of the ESAP course do not take place concurrently. The ESAP course comprises one group for PPE students and is split into two groups for the E&M students given the larger numbers enrolled for the latter degree course. The classes for the two E&M groups occur in different time slots given that I teach both groups. Attendance is not compulsory at the Faculty so there is no requirement for students to be present in class but all students who have the ESAP course in their study plan must eventually pass the course's final exam in order to complete their undergraduate programme and graduate. The exam for the course, like all the courses at the Faculty, is offered three times a year. First semester courses have exam sessions in January/February, June/July and September. For courses that take place in the second semester, the three exam sessions offered are June/July, September and January/February of the following academic year. The vast majority of students sit the exam in the exam session immediately after the course finishes, but the other sessions are available for students who are unable to sit the exam immediately, often due to being on exchanges, or for those who fail the exam in the first session. However, students are allowed to sit the exam a maximum of twice in an academic year.

The syllabus that was being used for the ESAP course, as mentioned previously in this volume, was a mainly product syllabus based on skills improvement. The course had been designed to provide skills practice in writing and reading particularly, which was reflected in how the exam had been designed. The exam, like all the other exams at the Faculty, was required to contain a written component, but given that the ESAP course is officially classified as a language course rather than a content course, an oral component was also required. These requirements had been established at the inception of the undergraduate programmes and acted as constraints for this context. There had been no indication from the Faculty as to the weighting of the various components of the exam, and so the written exam had been allocated 50% of the final mark and the oral exam 25%. The final 25% of the mark was allocated to a Portfolio, which is work devised at my discretion that the students complete during the semester as coursework and then submit before the official exam session starts. A deadline is set for the Portfolio submission, which is

usually three weeks before the date of the written exam in each exam session, in order to provide enough time to correct all the work completed for the Portfolio before the students have to sit the oral exam. Table 7.1 shows how the marks are allocated to the various components of the ESAP course's exam:

Table 7.1 – Components of ESAP course final exam

Exam component	Value	Points
Written exam	50%	15
Portfolio + oral exam	25%+25%	7.5 + 7.5

The second column in Table 7.1 shows how the points were allotted to each component. Exams at Italian universities are marked out of a total of 30 points with a minimum pass mark of 18. An exceptional performance in an exam can be awarded with the *cum laude* distinction so a mark of 30 con lode (*cum laude* in Italian) is also available. As is common practice in Italian language exams held at university level, the written exam is scheduled before the oral exams and the students must pass the written exam to be admitted to the oral exam. A pass of the written exam is understood to be 60% or more. In my exam, students therefore needed to pass the written exam with at least 60% and then do the oral exam. If the oral and the Portfolio, which were equally weighted, then amounted to at least 60% together, the student would pass the exam.

The written exam was divided into two parts, where Part A was comprised of various language exercises and Part B was a writing task. The Portfolio that was being used until the redesigned syllabus was introduced was based on the book *Freakonomics* by Levitt & Dubner and comprised questions on the contents of the book, language work and a summary of one of the topics available to be chosen for the oral exam. The Oral exam comprised a 5-minute presentation on the topic chosen from the list contained in the Portfolio.

7.3.2 The redesigned syllabus – Negotiated elements (Research Question 4)

The redesigned syllabus was used for the first time with the E&M students in the period from February to July 2015, which corresponds with this study's

AR Cycle 2. Due to there being no compulsory attendance at the Faculty, there is no record of how many students attended the course during that timeframe, but a total of 107 students sat the exams over the three exam sessions. Therefore, it is likely that there were usually at least 35 students present in each group during the course as that was the average number that had been attending around that time.

As discussed in the previous section, due to the findings that had originated and were merged from the analysed data collected from the students and lecturers in AR Cycle 1, the redesign of the syllabus envisaged maintaining the skills focus of the previous syllabus with the added intention to increase the opportunities for practising the productive skills through the introduction of negotiation. However, it was necessary to decide which elements could be negotiated with the students, considering the constraints of the context and experiences in other contexts, thus providing an answer to the fourth research question.

As was discussed in Chapter 2, the literature about process or negotiated syllabuses often tends to stress the negative aspects of negotiation, such as its radical nature (Bloor & Bloor, 1988; Clarke, 1991), resistance from the students themselves (Bloor & Bloor, 1988; Budd & Wright, 1990; Newstetter, 2000; Slembrouck, 2000; Smith, 2000; Sokolik, 2000) and resistance from the institution (Slembrouck, 2000; Breen, 2001). Furthermore, many of the admittedly few accounts of negotiation being used in the classroom in university and other tertiary contexts report total failure, or they had not achieved particularly positive results (e.g. Slembrouck, 2000; Ivanič, 2000). As a consequence, although I was committed to introducing negotiation due to its many positive aspects such as it being a more democratic way to work and its potential to make the learning process more relevant and meaningful for each individual student, I felt that whatever type of negotiation I introduced should be on an optional basis for the students in an attempt to address some of the potential pitfalls of negotiated syllabuses that have been reported. If it were to be optional, therefore, this would imply that negotiation of the content and procedures of classroom work would be precluded, as any negotiation would inevitably have to be applied to all attendees of the class or course. Moreover, as there was no scope to change the assessment methods, insofar as the exam had

to comprise a written and oral component and these had to be the same for all students throughout the academic year in order to comply with the Faculty's examination regulations, the main change to the syllabus would have to involve the Portfolio, the assessment component that I, personally, had introduced to the course. This was the only part of the course that was flexible enough to be able to be negotiated with individual students on an optional basis and so the aim was to provide an opportunity to negotiate the contents and procedures of the Portfolio for any student who chose to do so. If students chose not to take the option of negotiating the Portfolio, they would be able to complete the *Freakonomics* Portfolio, as it became called, which worked to the same model as the one of the previous academic year and was provided by me in parallel with the Negotiated Portfolio, as the new version came to be called.

Consequently, as far as the fourth research question is concerned, "What elements of the syllabus can be negotiated with the learners considering the constraints of this particular context and experiences in other contexts?", the element of the syllabus that was able to be negotiated was all the work contributing to the Portfolio, the coursework element of the final exam. This negotiation would be done on a one-to-one basis with individual students who chose to do the Negotiated Portfolio due to my reluctance to impose the concept on all of the class members given the many negative reports and outcomes of negotiated syllabuses in the literature.

7.3.3 The redesigned syllabus – Implementation and discussion

The procedure to introduce the Negotiated Portfolio was relatively straightforward and followed the basic process as introduced by Breen & Littlejohn (2000c) in their negotiation cycle which was discussed in Section 2.4.2 and visualised in Figure 2.1. The concept of the Negotiated Portfolio was introduced to the students in the introductory class when the course was presented and they were told that the negotiated decisions about the Portfolio concerned the contents, ways of working and evaluation. A document outlining the guidelines was then made available on the course's section in the University's learning platform with the procedure that would need to be followed for students who intended to take up the option of the Negotiated Portfolio. This document

was produced in order to facilitate the negotiated element of the syllabus and "to provide a framework for decision-making during teaching and learning in a classroom setting" (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000c, p. 29). In practical terms due to the skills focus of the syllabus, students were able to select any reading text as a basis for the work for their Portfolio. They then had to write me an email following the guidelines that were provided for them. Once they had written to me, I contacted them and we arranged a meeting to have a follow-up discussion to negotiate the contents, was of working and evaluation means. The intention behind this negotiation was to provide students with initial skills practice in writing the proposal and negotiating the Portfolio with me face-to-face. The focus on selecting a text would ensure opportunities for extensive reading, an activity which has been shown to "[lead] to significant improvements in many language skills: listening, grammar, spelling and writing" (Grabe, 2009, p. 324) and which is an efficient use of time in a context where class time is limited since "no other set of reading activities or reading practice can substitute for reading a longer text with reasonable comfort and without needing to stop constantly, and without feeling fatigued or overwhelmed" (Grabe, 2009, p. 311). Moreover, given the amount of reading the students had identified they needed to do at the Faculty for their EMI courses, and the fact that "people learn to read, and to read better, by reading" (Eskey, 2005, p. 574) extensive reading was deemed the most beneficial and practical approach to reading in this context. Consequently, allowing the students to choose a text which would be of interest and relevance to them, and thus providing them with "course-specific motivational components" (Dörnyei, 1994, p. 277), would lead to greater motivation to read the chosen text and thus acquire the language benefits from the reading. Once the text had been read, further specific writing practice would be provided during the completion of the Portfolio depending on what type of writing tasks had been negotiated between the student and me. Further speaking practice would be provided in the preparation for the oral exam, which would be based on the contents of the Negotiated Portfolio. The form of the oral exam (a presentation or more informal discussion, for example) was also open to negotiation in the meeting.

The intention for this version of the Negotiated Portfolio was therefore to provide students not only with a voice in the decision-making processes of

their course where they had the opportunity to choose an element of the course that would be relevant for them, within the constraints of the context and my reservations as noted above, but also to provide extra skills practice in extensive reading as well as in writing and speaking with feedback from me as the teacher. Consequently, this version of the Negotiated Portfolio complied with Clarke's definition of a negotiated syllabus which "allows full learner participation in selection of content, mode of working, route of working, assessment and so on" (1991, p. 13) and was able to be accommodated within the constraints of the context.

This version of the negotiated syllabus was implemented and was communicated to all the students in the first class and the support material was made available on the University's online learning platform. However, two problems became immediately apparent. The first was that this version of the Negotiated Portfolio, although adhering to many of the precepts that underlie a negotiated syllabus, did not adhere to perhaps the most important of the precepts that is clearly referenced in Breen & Littlejohn's main definition of negotiation, which is "discussion between *all members of the classroom* to decide how learning and teaching are to be organised" (2000b, p. 1, emphasis added). The Negotiated Portfolio in this redesigned syllabus totally disregarded the classroom focus of negotiation since the only envisaged negotiation was between the student and me, the teacher, and did not foresee any useful student-initiated interaction or student-student interaction that had been identified as largely lacking in the EMI classes and whose introduction into the classroom was an aim of this study. Secondly and more prosaically perhaps, but certainly extremely impactful for this study, the Negotiated Portfolio was almost entirely ignored by the students, and in fact only two actually decided to take the opportunity to negotiate their Portfolio with me.

The two students that did opt to undertake the Negotiated Portfolio dutifully contacted me with a written proposal outlining the texts on which they wanted to focus and how they wanted to exploit those texts. I then scheduled a meeting with them and we agreed on the contents and procedure for their individual Portfolios. They worked on their Portfolios and then submitted them for evaluation following the general procedure for Portfolio submission that had been devised for all the students who had chosen to complete the

Freakonomics Portfolio and the presentation that they used for the oral exam was assessed in the same way as the other students' oral exams.

7.3.4 The redesigned syllabus – Evaluation and discussion

Due to the AR cycles that characterised this study, evaluation of the action that had been enacted was conducted at the end of the course in AR Cycle 2. Given the vast majority of students had not chosen to complete the Negotiated Portfolio, it was imperative to understand why there had been such a lack of interest in the alternative to the *Freakonomics* Portfolio and to devise a new plan to overcome this problem.

In order to obtain feedback from all the students who had chosen not to negotiate the contents of their Portfolio, therefore, a paper-based questionnaire was distributed at the beginning of their written exam in order to gain as many responses as possible. The procedure for this analysis and the results were discussed at length in Section 5.6.1.1, and the main findings were that the students generally felt that reading *Freakonomics*, the basis of the alternative to the Negotiated Portfolio, was more interesting and less time-consuming than negotiating their own content. Consequently, it seemed clear that if more students were to participate in the Negotiated Portfolio, and thus benefit from the opportunities to participate in the decision-making processes of the course, how the source material was to be chosen would have to be reassessed.

Although learner autonomy implies students have a choice in their learning (Cotterall, 2000), which can clearly extend to choosing the materials and tasks to be done (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000a; Little, 2009), it seemed that the students had not been ready for such a degree of choice. Indeed, in the evaluation of the failure of the negotiated syllabus recorded by Slembrouck (2000), Breen & Littlejohn suggest that because the amount of freedom those particular students had been given was so much more than what they had been accustomed to, "the 'leap' they were required to make was too great" (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000d, p. 291). As this seemed to be the case also in my study, I decided it would have to be me who made the decision about the source material, whether that was *Freakonomics* or something else. Although this fundamental decision concerning the contents of the Negotiated Portfolio would therefore be taken away from the students, "teacher control" (Illés, 2012,

p. 508) is needed in education, even when the context is learner-centred, which aims to enhance learner autonomy. Moreover, given the constraints of my context, with the short course length and the relatively large number of students that were doing the course, from a pragmatic perspective it seemed reasonable to take that decision myself.

A further aspect that arose while reflecting on the implemented syllabus was that the negotiation used in AR Cycle 2 had not involved classroom-based negotiation, which had been one of the aims of the study in order to provide more student-initiated interaction or more prolonged student-student interaction. Therefore, the modified syllabus to be used in AR Cycle 3 would also have to include a clear intent to include classroom negotiation.

7.4 Discussion of Findings From the Data Analysis in AR Cycle 2 – Questionnaire (2 & 3)

Concurrently with the end of the ESAP course that took place in AR Cycle 2, in May 2015, the second online questionnaire was conducted with the students in order to gather further data from the students so as to compare with the data gathered in AR Cycle 1 in order to provide a fuller picture of the language learning needs of the students at the Faculty of Economics. A questionnaire was also conducted in AR Cycle 3 with the same aim.

The findings from both questionnaires tended to corroborate many of the results from the first questionnaire; all the skills were practised by the students at the Faculty in the second and third year of data gathering, and the skills most needed by the students from a frequency perspective were still reading and listening. However, as the data from the first questionnaire showed, students felt their productive skills were weaker than their receptive skills and writing had the lowest mean, but speaking was the weakest considering the SD. There was no significant relationship between frequency of practice and proficiency level for writing, but there was a significant relationship for the other three skills. These findings therefore confirmed that the revised syllabus's focus on providing more opportunities for speaking and writing practice was appropriate for the next AR cycle and that a focus on reading would still be consistent regarding the amount of reading students stated they undertook at the Faculty.

7.5 The Modified Syllabus Used in AR Cycle 3 (Syllabus 2)

The following section will now evaluate how the syllabus was modified in AR Cycle 3 in light of the lack of student interest in the Negotiated Portfolio that was observed in AR Cycle 2.

7.5.1 Focus of negotiation

Given the problems that had been encountered during the implementation of the redesigned syllabus in AR Cycle 2 relating to the small number of students electing to do the Negotiated Portfolio as well as the unsatisfactory execution of the negotiation, I introduced modifications to the Negotiated Portfolio for the following course, which took place between October 2015 and January 2016 with the PPE students. The intention was that the whole class would participate in the negotiation, which would provide opportunities for student-initiated interaction and more prolonged student-student interaction as well as interaction with me. As the PPE group was smaller than the E&M students, as discussed in Section 6.3.1, I felt the negotiation with the whole class would be less complicated to organise than with the two larger groups of E&M students that would attend their course from February 2016. Consequently, the negotiation with the PPE students would act as a trial run for the second semester's course and any difficulties could then be verified and solutions could be developed before the large E&M classes starting in February 2016.

7.5.2 The modified syllabus – Negotiated elements

For the modified syllabus implemented in AR Cycle 3, therefore, although the contents to be negotiated would remain the same, i.e. the work to be done for the Portfolio, most of this work would this time be based on the book *Freakonomics*, given the findings from the survey conducted with the students at the end of AR Cycle 2 and detailed in Section 7.3.4.

Moreover, the Portfolios in previous years had also included a requirement to write a summary of the topic that had been chosen for the presentation that would be given for the oral component of the final exam. I decided to retain this writing task, but the topics would be opened up to negotiation, given that "learners have special rights when it comes to deciding the content

of courses they are to undergo" (Long, 2005c, p. 26). From a pragmatic perspective, moreover, because the students were already in the second year of their studies, they would be familiar with the content of their own study plans and were thus "experienced 'in-service' informants [who] often make excellent sources on the *content* of their job, training course, field of study, etc."(Long, 2005c, p. 27 original italics). Further, as the aim was to have a learner-centred focus to the syllabus, the students would obviously have their own interests regarding the content of these topics. All these considerations indicated that the students were the best sources to provide input concerning the topics that would be useful or relevant for the Portfolio element of their ESAP course.

7.5.3 The modified syllabus – Implementation and discussion

The implementation of the modified syllabus in AR Cycle 3 took place initially in a similar way to the syllabus used in AR Cycle 2. The students were presented with the concept of the Negotiated Portfolio in the first class where the general course contents and assessment means were presented. They were also instructed to obtain a copy of *Freakonomics* and read the contents pages and introduction of the book by Class 4 of the course, which would be dedicated to negotiating the contents and procedures relating to the Negotiated Portfolio. These instructions were also made available in the course's section on the University's learning platform for any non-attending students as required by the Faculty. They were reminded about the Negotiated Portfolio class in all the other classes leading up to Class 4.

On the day of the Negotiated Portfolio class, there were initially 12 students present, as can be noted from the field notes that were written up following the class. The students were provided with the in-class worksheet and the procedure followed using the worksheet was detailed at length in Section 4.7.1.3. The students were initially asked to work individually to complete Section A of the worksheet since it was designed to promote self-reflection about their strengths and weaknesses in English, and then, according to my field notes, they worked in groups of 3 or 4 for 45 minutes discussing the questions contained on the worksheet. These questions provided them with the framework to discuss the contents of the Negotiated Portfolio based on

Freakonomics, i.e. which chapters they wanted to focus on and what kind of writing tasks they felt they would benefit from completing, as well as the procedures connected to the Negotiated Portfolio, especially with a focus on how much work the Portfolio would provide. They had also been given a copy of the Portfolio used the previous academic year to provide a further contextual framework and example that they could use as a stimulus for discussion, although it was made clear to them that it did not have to be used as a model for their own Portfolio. Once they had had an opportunity to discuss the questions on the worksheets in their small groups, they came back as one group, which had increased to 15 people, and together we went through their answers to the questions on the worksheet, thus negotiating the contents and procedures of the Negotiated Portfolio for their course.

From the field notes that I wrote up immediately after the class, it is apparent that the students were given ample opportunities for prolonged student-student interaction during the second phase when they were working in small groups as I noted that "there seems to be quite a lot of discussion". Moreover, I wrote that "most have worked up to the time limit of 11.30" thus showing that they had spoken for the whole time allotted to them with only minimal interaction with me since "I went round once to make sure everything was clear". During the group discussion with me, I noted afterwards that there "was a good discussion involving most of the students" and that "there was prolonged discussion" and some parts "did provoke a certain amount of discussion" so there were clearly also many opportunities for the students to speak during the negotiation together and with me. In the reflective section of the field notes at the end, I noted the following about phase two of the worksheet where the students were engaging in student-student interaction:

> I felt that the two-hour session went very well. The students were clearly ready to talk about the book as most of them had brought their copy with them and had it there on their desks. They started off relatively quietly at the beginning and I was afraid that their preparatory discussion in pairs or threes would fizzle out quite quickly, but in the end most of the groups kept on talking the whole time allotted for that part of the class (from 10.55 to 11.30).

This extract highlights the fear I had that the students would be reticent with their speaking, and in fact it is clear that there was reticence at the start of the student-student interaction. However, the notes reflect that the groups did manage to continue with their discussions for the time allotted, which was just over half an hour, and it is likely this was largely due to the fact that they were prepared for the task: most had a copy of the book and had read the introduction, so they already had an idea as to the contents of the whole book and the worksheet had provided them with a clear framework that aided the structure and contents of the discussion.

The field notes also referred to the whole class discussion phase with me as follows:

> The whole discussion from 11.30 to 12.30 went exceedingly well. All of them seemed motivated to contribute and listen and I didn't sense any boredom or waning attention. Some obviously spoke much more than others but in the end everyone contributed to the discussion. It was good to see that they were all engaged with the topic and that we did manage to negotiate to a decision which I hope they are all happy with (Prior, 2018).

What is interesting to note from this extract is the reference to the fact that all the students contributed to the discussion, which was a specific aim of the task. It is true that there were only 15 students present in this particular class, which clearly provided more opportunities for each individual to participate than if there had been many more present. However, the references to their engagement with both the content of the discussion and the fact that they were negotiating aspects related to the work they themselves would have to complete would suggest that it was these aspects that provided the motivation for them to contribute to the discussion. This assumption was in fact supported by some of their comments in the evaluation of the new syllabus that was effected at the end of the course and which will be discussed in the following section.

The extract from the field notes above also makes reference to the negotiated elements of the Portfolio and the outcome that was achieved. The students had decided they preferred to focus on chapters 1, 2 and 3 of the book

(out of a total of six chapters) given their contents and therefore not to read the entire book. This differed from the previous year's Portfolio, which had required the students to read all the book and answer questions on each chapter. In the field notes, I make a reference to this reduction in the workload, stating:

> They managed to bring down the Portfolio's workload by a good third, which I hope will also contribute to less criticism in the end-of-course evaluation, which has been characterised in previous years with criticism that the course requires them to do too much work for the number of credit points earned.

The issue of workload for the ESAP course had arisen in previous years as many students felt there was too much work required for the 3 credit points allotted to the course. Indeed, in the evaluation undertaken at the end of AR Cycle 2 to investigate why almost all the students had not opted for the Negotiated Portfolio, the second most popular response was number 4, "I thought it would be too much work" (see Section 5.6.1.1 and Table 5.10). It has been suggested that students' perception of workload can be influenced by curriculum choices, and "an approach to teaching which requires active engagement of students" (Kember, 2004, p. 181) can lead to students being more satisfied with their workload. Therefore, allowing the students to make decisions about the amount of work to be undertaken for the Portfolio was a means not only to reduce the criticism directed towards my course, but also to promote greater motivation in the class in general. Reference to this aspect was again noted in the students' end-of-course evaluations.

Regarding the questions on the worksheet about the language tasks for the Portfolio, and therefore the other skills that the Portfolio would foster, the field notes make reference to the students' uncertainty about this part of the task. Although this question "generated a certain amount of debate", this was due to "the difficulty for the students to articulate what types [of writing tasks] they would find useful". Long refers to using learners as sources for making decisions about courses and although he claims they are useful to provide information on the content, they are "inadequate when it comes to intuitions about their language needs" (Long, 2005c, p. 27).

To summarise, the field notes I wrote up immediately after the Negotiated Portfolio class that took place with the PPE students indicated that they had been provided with many more and longer opportunities to practise their speaking. Further, the field notes noted that there was a positive atmosphere in the classroom as the students had engaged fully with the negotiation. The outcomes also seemed positive: the overall workload had been reduced quite significantly, and the students had chosen not only the aspects they wished to focus on in *Freakonomics* but they had also provided input for the topics that could be chosen for the oral exam.

A further aspect that emerged from the analysis of the in-class worksheets that were used with the PPE students, and again with the E&M students in the following semester's class, was the responses to Section A of the worksheet, the analysis of which was described in Section 5.6.2.1. Section A required students to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses in English and the top strengths listed were the receptive skills and grammar, and the main weaknesses were speaking, vocabulary, especially "advanced", "specific" or "formal" vocabulary, as the students had qualified the term, and grammar (see Table 5.13). These responses generally corresponded with the data that had been collected from the questionnaires regarding the strengths, and although speaking was listed as the main weakness, which also corroborated the findings from the questionnaires, the focus on vocabulary was an aspect that had not been rendered explicit in the questionnaires due to their focus on the language skills. However, not only were these responses useful as a further means to verify the findings from the questionnaire data from the students, but they also confirmed some of the findings from the data analysed from the EMI lecturers' interviews. As discussed in Section 5.6.2.1, some responses from this section of the in-class worksheet confirmed that anxiety was a factor in causing problems for students when speaking, and this aspect was mentioned explicitly by two students: "I feel anxious when I have to speak in front of a class" and "anxiety reduces my profitability [sic] in speaking".

The Negotiated Portfolio was therefore prepared and put onto the learning platform for all the students to access throughout the duration of the ESAP course. The course then provided further exercise classes where the aspects of *Freakonomics* chosen to be included in the Portfolio were discussed, thus

providing more focussed student-initiated interaction. These exercise classes were organised so that the groups were smaller than the main lectures in order to provide as many opportunities as possible for students to engage in speaking practice, given the syllabus's focus of providing more opportunities for student-student interaction. The classes focused on the main themes of the chapters that had been chosen to be read for the Portfolio, and various fluency-focused speaking activities were incorporated in order to discuss and explore those themes. These classes also provided practice in some of the specific writing skills that were needed for the completion of the Portfolio. There was a particular focus on practising writing short paragraphs that were required for the completion of question 1 and 2 of the Portfolio whereas in the lectures students were provided with activities and practice in preparation for the longer writing text required for the Portfolio in question 3, as well as for the academic report required for the written exam. Although the specific writing tasks contained in the Portfolio had not been open for negotiation and were designed by me, the content focus was always what had been agreed upon together in the Negotiated Portfolio class.

A further consideration concerning this Negotiated Portfolio is that although only 15 students had been present during the Negotiated Portfolio class, the Portfolio that was produced had to be completed by all students, regardless of whether they had been present that day or not. In total, 25 PPE students sat the exam in that academic year, so at least ten had not been present when the Portfolio was negotiated. Although this may seem to contradict the essence of the learner-centred aspect of being able to contribute to some of the decision-making elements of the course, I had to make this choice for pragmatic reasons. It is a requirement of the Faculty that non-attending students of any course have to sit and pass the same exam that attending students are required to do, which implied that the Portfolio component had to be the same for all students who wished to sit the ESAP course's exam.

7.5.4 The modified syllabus – Initial evaluation (Research Question 5) and discussion

The evaluation process for the modified syllabus that was used in AR Cycle 3 for the PPE students comprised an end-of-course survey that was administered at the end of the course in February 2016. This survey was primarily designed in order to provide information for the study's fifth research question, which was: "What evaluation methods can be devised to ascertain the effectiveness of this proposed syllabus for each individual learner?"

The survey requested feedback on whether the students felt using a Negotiated Syllabus was beneficial and their responses to that question and the analysis undertaken were detailed in Section 5.6.1.2. As only 15 responses were collected from the PPE students given it was such as small group, they were amalgamated with the end-of-course surveys that were conducted with the E&M students in July 2016 and were analysed together at the end of AR Cycle 3 in order to obtain a broader perspective on the syllabus implementation. The findings from this evaluation and the implications concerning the fifth research question will be discussed in Section 7.5.6.

However, the end-of-course survey was also conducted with the PPE students for pragmatic reasons given the fact that another problem had arisen during the course; erratic attendance. As the University does not require compulsory attendance of any course, students were not obliged to attend the classes, but I had noticed a significant degree of irregular attendance during the course. As many students had not been attending regularly, this inevitably had an impact on the effectiveness of the approach used in the syllabus as it affected the amount of classroom language practice with which the students were engaging. In addition to the one class where the Portfolio was negotiated, thus providing the students with many opportunities to engage in student-student interaction, many of the other classes comprised extensive language practice, particularly writing practice given the focus of the course. However, if students had not been present in class, they had not completed the classroom-based activities and thus had not gained any benefit from the practice that these activities provided. The end-of-course survey therefore required students to state to what degree they had attended the course and, if they had attended less than half of the course, to choose an explanation from

the eight provided. Of the 15 people surveyed, seven admitted that they had attended less than half of the course, four had attended between 51–99% of the course and only two stated they had come to all the classes (one did not provide any information). Of the seven who had attended less than 50%, three cited the fact that they had been away from the University for Erasmus or an internship, two stated they had work commitments and two had clashes with other courses. Consequently, only two students had actually completed the course in its entirety, which surprised me greatly as I had assumed that the negotiated elements in the syllabus would have provided greater motivation to come to class for those who could attend.

This problem of erratic attendance was also experienced by Slembrouck (2000) in his study, as although attendance checks were used in his context, he had suspended them since he believed the use of a negotiated syllabus would encourage "students to attend sessions because they feel motivated and involved and not because university regulations stipulate that they must attend classes" (2000, p. 145). The inconsistent attendance experienced in his context was in fact one of the contributing factors to the failure of his course. As the implementation of the syllabus in AR Cycle 2 had not been successful, and the modifications to the syllabus in AR Cycle 3 had rectified the problems experienced, I certainly wanted to avoid any further obstacles that could also make my study result in failure as had occurred in Slembrouck's case. Consequently, it became imperative to devise a way to improve attendance so that the students would be able to benefit from the language and skills practice activities that had been incorporated into the course through the modified syllabus.

Further, as discussed, one of the aims of using the negotiated syllabus was to foster greater learner autonomy. Many of the aspects that typify courses that have this aim, such as specifying objectives and identifying resources, as presented by Cotterall (2000), had been addressed through the implementation of the syllabus following the basic premise of Breen & Littlejohn's negotiation cycle (2000c). However, one aspect that had not been addressed so fully was the aspect of "measuring progress" (Cotterall, 2000, p. 111), which was also fundamental for the study. Although the end-of-course survey had been devised as a means of evaluation in order to address

the fifth research question, it was designed from the perspective of Nunan's definition of programme evaluation, which "assist[s] us in deciding whether a course needs to be modified or altered in any way so that objectives may be achieved more effectively" (1988b, p. 118). From this perspective, the first end-of-course survey had investigated why the students had not opted for the Negotiated Portfolio in AR Cycle 2 and had provided a very clear answer. However, there was no provision in place to ascertain the effectiveness of the proposed syllabus from a language proficiency perspective. Nunan refers to this perspective as a "product-oriented evaluation" (1992b, p. 185), where the outcomes of the learning process are evaluated rather than the process itself. Consequently, an approach was required that could both provide information about the students' progress, so that they and I could monitor their performance throughout the course, and could also provide incentives for attending class more regularly.

7.5.5 The modified syllabus – The use of ECEs: Evaluation and discussion

The second phase of the implementation of the modified syllabus occurred with the E&M students in February 2016. The syllabus that had been used in the previous semester with the PPE students and the procedures used in its implementation would remain the same. The most significant difference was that the E&M course would incorporate extra credit exercises (ECE) to address the problem of the erratic attendance in the previous semester and to provide further data on the students' progress as a means to provide some kind of measure of the effectiveness of the blended approach (see Prior, 2018). The ECEs introduced were based on pop quizzes, whose main aim is to ensure that students are continually prepared for class. Pop quizzes are tests that are generally administered randomly and without warning throughout a course and the uncertainty as to when the tests will take place aims to encourage a more regular study rhythm; often when courses have regularly scheduled tests or exams, students tend to revise just for the test a few days before (Thorne, 2000, p. 204; Graham, 1999, p. 271), which is often ineffective, especially for language learning. Further, pop quizzes tend to penalise students who are not prepared, which "undoubtedly contribute to students' distaste for them"

(Thorne, 2000, p. 204). However, it has been demonstrated that doing these quizzes improves scores on final exams (Landrum, 2007; Padilla-Walker, 2006). As my main aim was to encourage students to attend my classes so that they would benefit from the additional skills practice introduced, I decided that I would avoid the punitive element that typically characterises pop quizzes and so renamed them "extra credit exercises". Although still unannounced and administered at random intervals throughout the course, the students were not penalised if they were not present in class when an ECE was administered since any points given were a bonus. Ten ECEs were administered during the course and if students were present in class, they would receive one point. If they scored more than 60% on the ECE, they would score another point, for a total of twenty points. These points would then be converted into a maximum of 2 marks (out of the final mark of 30 awarded for the final exam). Therefore, these extra marks rewarded both attendance and positive performance in the ECEs. If a student did not attend any classes and therefore had no extra marks, this would not affect their final exam mark as they would simply not have any marks to add on as "extra credit".

The ECEs were designed initially to test language that had already been covered in class, and so comprised matching exercises, short answers to questions and vocabulary tests and they lasted between 10 and 15 minutes. As the course progressed, however, the ECEs became more complex and involved longer written answers and practice in the specific written texts required by the course, and these activities could take up to an hour to complete. This increase in complexity and length of the ECEs provided valuable insight into the students' progress through the course and allowed me to provide focused feedback as well as intervene more effectively when problems arose. The students were able to benefit from this feedback as they were able to see exactly where they were experiencing problems and take action to rectify aspects before the final exam. This can be demonstrated by some of their comments from the end-of-course survey that was distributed at the end of the course in the evaluation stage of AR Cycle 3, where they were asked to comment on the introduction of the ECEs. One stated, "students can see if they have understood the topics covered during the last lesson" and "it is a good way to review the contents discussed in class".

Further and most importantly for this study, the ECEs did seem to have a positive impact on class attendance. Over the course of the semester there was a mean attendance of 57.3%, compared to the previous year's 48.5%. Even though it is impossible to state definitively whether the introduction of the ECEs was the direct cause, when the students responded to the end-of-course survey on the Negotiated Portfolio, which also included a question on the introduction of the ECEs, an overwhelming majority of students, almost 90%, stated that the use of ECEs was "a good idea". Many appreciated the fact that the ECEs were a way to encourage attendance and comments included, "it encourages the students to come to the lessons and to repeat the content at home" and "it is a good idea because it incentivises participation and attention in class". Another focussed on the fact that the use of ECEs helped to enhance the distribution of study: "it is a good idea because it pushes students to study grammar from the beginning and not only before the exam" whereas another saw them as a means to provide extra practice opportunities: "you can exercise during classes and improve". Some, as I did, also appreciated the fact that they provided useful feedback on their progress: "I think this represents a good feedback for our work during the course".

Although the use of the extra credit exercises seemed to boost attendance, unlike others who have used similar methods in the past (Graham, 1999; Landrum, 2007; Wickline & Spektor, 2011), the students' grades did not improve overall. The E&M course that used the ECEs had a mean grade of 22.6 (out of a total of 30) whereas the same course the year before when ECEs were not used had a mean of 23.2. However, what was significant was that considerably more students passed the exam after attending the course with the extra credit exercises (76% as opposed to 67% the previous year), which may be an indication that the ECEs can be seen as being particularly beneficial to those students who would have otherwise struggled to pass. This outcome was also noted by Graham (1999, p. 272), who found that in his study, it was the mid-range students who tended to benefit from ECEs rather than the top students.

Consequently, the E&M course that took place in AR Cycle 3 and that used the modified syllabus used with the PPE students in the first semester tended to have fewer problems regarding erratic attendance and more students passed the final exam than the previous year. Although it is not possible

to claim these outcomes were a direct result of the introduction of ECEs into the course, the students expressed an overwhelmingly positive attitude towards the use of ECEs and their use also allowed me to monitor the students' progress more closely.

7.5.6 The modified syllabus – Final evaluation (Research Question 5) and discussion

In order to evaluate the measures put into place using the modified syllabus in AR Cycle 3, as discussed previously, an end-of-course survey was conducted with the PPE students in February 2016 and again with the E&M students in July 2016. The end-of-course survey for the E&M students was identical to that for the PPE students but with the addition of question 3 which asked for feedback on the use of the ECEs. The responses from the two end-of-course surveys were amalgamated and analysed, as detailed in Section 5.6.1.2, and a conceptual framework evolved based on the responses to question 2 of the surveys. This conceptual framework has been reproduced below in Figure 7.1 for ease of reference.

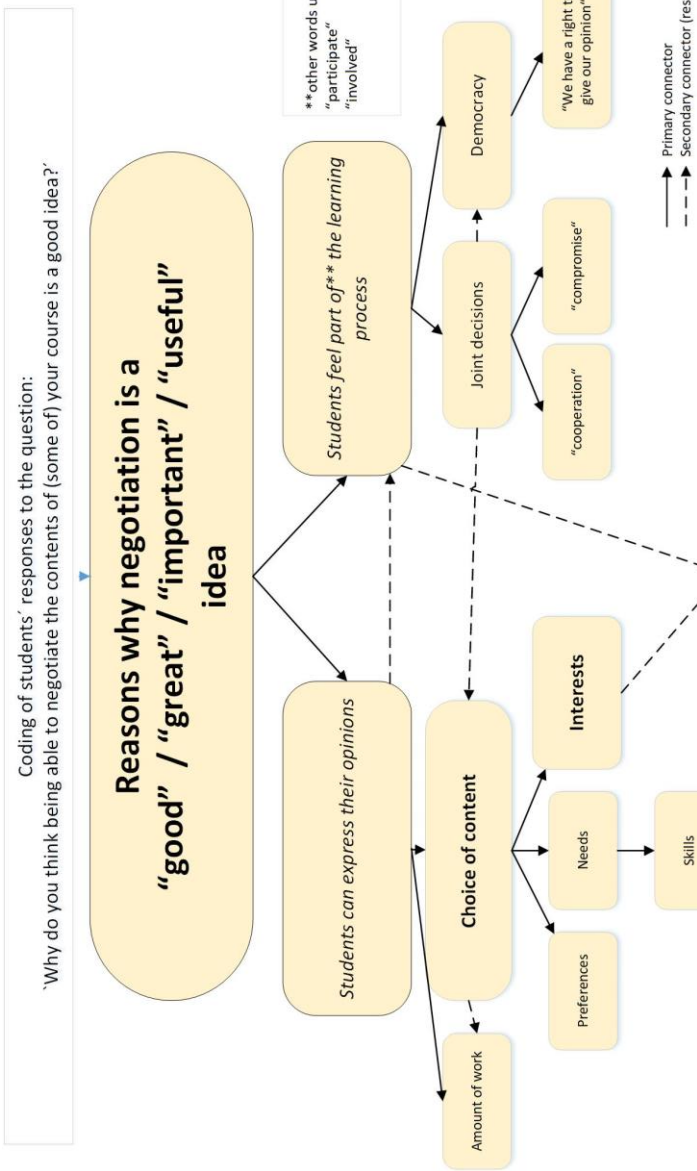

Fig. 7.1 – Conceptual framework of students' responses in the survey. From *Innovative ESAP Syllabus Design: A Means to Address English-Language Problems in EMI Programmes*, by J. Prior (p. 46), 2021, bu,press (https://doi.org/10.13124/9788860461827_02). CC BY-SA 4.0.

The analysis of the responses to question 2 in the end-of-course surveys showed that there were two reasons why students felt negotiation was a "good" idea. The first was it provided them with an opportunity to express their opinion (the category on the left in the conceptual framework) and the second was that it made them feel part of the learning process. The ability to express their opinion concerned various aspects of their course, from the amount of work to be done to the content. As the students in the previous years' courses had complained about the amount of work required for the ESAP course, and through the negotiation they had managed to reduce the workload of the Portfolio by more than a third, the occurrence of this category is unsurprising. Although there is not an extensive literature regarding designing a syllabus to reduce workload, it has been suggested that in order to produce a syllabus that students perceive has an acceptable workload, various approaches can be adopted including "an approach to teaching which requires active engagement of students [and] teachers accepting responsibility for motivating students and stimulating interest" (Kember, 2004, p. 182). The findings from the conceptual framework reflect these two approaches clearly since the visualisation in Figure 7.1 demonstrates that the ability to influence the amount of work resulted from being engaged in the learning process. Moreover, it can be seen that students' increased motivation was a consequence of being able to express their opinions about the workload and the course contents, which in turn allowed them to choose content that was of interest to them.

The fact of being able to participate in the decision-making process concerning content was the main subcategory in this section of the conceptual framework, hence its larger size than the "amount of work" subcategory. As presented in Section 5.6.1.2, being able to choose content was mentioned by a significant number of students in the survey, which corresponds with Newstetter's (2000, p. 184) account of using negotiation in the classroom where the favourable reactions from her students tended to focus on the ability to exercise choice over the texts they had to write. Furthermore, the conceptual framework shows that the students appreciated choosing the content particularly because it could reflect their interests, which was also clearly evidenced in Serrano-Sampedro's (2000) account of using negotiation in her context. She

remarks that due to her learners' being able to influence the choice of content based on their interests, "their sense of progress and achievement increases and so does their motivation" (Serrano-Sampedro, 2000, p. 125), thus linking exercising choice with higher motivation. In fact one of the strategies suggested to increase motivation is to "increase students' interest and involvement in the tasks by … adapting tasks to the students' interests" (Dörnyei, 1994, p. 281). The conceptual framework in Figure 7.1 therefore reflects this relationship between interests and motivation with the secondary connector and represents comments from students such as "If students find [the course] more interesting, they will have more motivation to do it".

The students also expressed appreciation about choosing the content as it could be tailored to their needs, which was another frequent reason cited by the students but was less frequent than *interests*, thus its smaller size in the visualisation. This aspect has also been reported in another study conducted in a school of nursing with qualified nursing staff where using a negotiated syllabus "enhanced their motivation by its focus on their professional needs" (Martyn, 2000, p. 161). As there were no comments from the students directly linking needs with motivation issues, there is no connector between the two categories in the conceptual framework, although this does not imply that there was not a link between meeting needs and motivational issues in this study.

The second main reason why students felt negotiation was a "good" idea was that it made them feel part of the learning process. This aspect, which was also coded with the terms i*nvolved* and *participate*, has been reported in another account of using negotiation in the classroom. In the evaluation of her study, Linder (2000, p. 102) states that one of the positive outcomes was that "pupils have reported their appreciation of their greater involvement in and with the programme", which led to increased participation in the learning process. This feeling of involvement was also observed in a case study where a process syllabus was implemented which "revealed that the students were 100 per cent in favour of the opportunity to get involved in their course management" (Simmons & Wheeler, 1995, p. 63). Although Linder's study involved secondary school pupils, Simmons & Wheeler's case study involved professionals, as did Martyn's study (2000). It has been suggested that the positive outcomes of

using negotiation in the latter two studies were mainly due to the maturity and the relatively high language proficiency of the participants involved (Martyn, 2000; Benson, 2001), as well as the fact that the negotiation focussed on their tangible professional needs. Similarly, in my study, because they were university students, it is most likely that they were more mature than school pupils and their overall language proficiency was relatively high. However, although they did not have professional needs *per se* since they were second-year undergraduate students, they did have clear academic needs. ESP "is an approach to language learning, which is based on learner need" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 19), but "needs" should not be understood as purely the objective necessities that are determined by a target situation; they can also be what Hutchinson & Waters refer to as learners' "wants", i.e. what they feel they need or want from a course (1987, pp. 55–56). As the in-class worksheet used in the Negotiated Portfolio class had been designed to elicit the students "wants" to a certain degree (see Section 4.7.1.2), the findings from the end-of-course survey visualised in the conceptual framework indicate that the use of the in-class worksheet was generally effective in eliciting these wants.

The conceptual framework in Figure 7.1 shows that the "Feel part of the learning process" subcategory was further divided into the two categories of "Joint decisions" and "Democracy". The idea of joint decisions being taken in a classroom using negotiation either amongst the learners themselves or between the learners and the teacher is in fact the essence of process syllabuses; Breen & Littlejohn (2000b, p. 2) state clearly that "process syllabuses have therefore evolved as a means of planning, implementing and evaluating negotiation in the classroom, and the decisions to which teachers and students may jointly arrive". Taking joint decisions implies that the responsibility for learning is therefore being shared, an aspect that was evaluated positively in the study conducted by Smith (2000) who felt that both the students and the teachers benefitted from this aspect. Sharing responsibility also contributed to an increase in mutual understanding and "the learners' views are expressed and taken seriously" (Smith, 2000, p. 62).

The fact that the students' views were considered to have been taken seriously can also be observed in the conceptual framework in the other subcategory emanating from the "Joint decisions" category which covers

aspects relating to "respect" and "recognition". There were several comments from the students that were included in this category including "interests of the students are recognised and respected" and "it gives us the impression that the professor is interested in our opinions and takes into account our interests and skills". Given the fact that my ontological perspective is that all relevant voices involved in a context have the right to be heard, it is gratifying for me as a teacher that this aspect was recognised and appreciated by some of the students.

As discussed in this volume, it has been broadly accepted that learner autonomy requires learners to take charge of their learning and take responsibility for their learning process (Little, 1995; Cotterall, 2000; Benson, 2001). Moreover syllabus approaches to learner autonomy have focussed on transferring responsibility for aspects of the language learning process from the teacher to the learner (Cotterall, 2000, pp. 109-110). From the findings that are represented in the conceptual framework, therefore, it is clear that the students felt that being able to negotiate aspects of their course had allowed them to contribute to the decision-making processes, and thus provided them with more control over their learning. Having more control therefore enables them to take more responsibility for their learning, which in turn, according to the literature, would lead to increased learner autonomy. It was beyond the scope of this study to make any provision to measure attainment of autonomy, which has been noted is a generally problematic issue since "autonomy is clearly a multidimensional construct" (Benson, 2001, p. 51) and involves a variety of behaviours that show that learners are exercising control over their learning. Even if those types of behaviour are present in a learner, there is "little evidence to suggest that autonomy consists of any particular combination of those behaviours" (Benson, 2001, p. 51) and in fact "the learner who displays a high degree of autonomy in one area may be non-autonomous in another" (Little, 1991, p. 5). However, the end-of-course survey in answer to question 2 did contain comments that alluded to students' taking greater responsibility for their learning, such as "we can give our input and evaluate how much time the course is "worth" for us. It reduces the number of people who constantly complain" and this other succinct remark: "Nobody can complain afterwards about the content!"

The fact of feeling part of the learning process also produced the other subcategory in the conceptual framework, which was "democracy" and is exemplified with the statement "we have a right to give our opinion". This sentiment was echoed by several students when giving reasons why using negotiation was a good idea. One stated "a person should always be able to participate in a discussion and negotiate for desired aims" whereas another remarked "because students are able to give their opinion whether they agree on [sic] [the course contents] and the result is based on a democratic fairness". Given that using negotiation in the classroom has been shown to be a highly democratic way of working (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000c; Linder, 2000; Slembrouck, 2000), and given my beliefs that the learning process should be organised using democratic principles where the main stakeholders should have a voice in their own learning process, the acknowledgement from some of the students that this indeed had occurred during the course is certainly an extremely positive outcome of this project.

In summary, the end-of-course survey that was conducted with the two student cohorts after the modified syllabus was introduced provided a comprehensive evaluation of using negotiation in the course (Prior, 2021). The students were overwhelmingly positive about using negotiation, and of the 105 completed surveys, only three respondents did not believe using negotiation was beneficial. Of these three, only one gave a reason, stating, "I think that the professor should decide about the content of the course". This comment demonstrates how traditional educational practices with a clear division between the learners and the teacher can still be regarded as the preferred approach by the students concerned, which reflects perhaps the greatest opposition to negotiated syllabuses and which has been reported in other studies (Bloor & Bloor, 1988; Budd & Wright, 1990; Newstetter, 2000; Slembrouck, 2000; Smith, 2000; Sokolik, 2000). However, since the vast majority of the students surveyed in my study were positive about using negotiation in the course and the additional use of ECEs with the E&M students had seemed to have had a positive impact on both the attendance and the exam performance of those students, I believe that the approach used where negotiation was blended with a greater focus on skills development was essentially successful.

8. Final Discussion and Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This final chapter will now seek to answer the five research questions that were posed in the Introduction to this volume. It will also examine the limitations of the study, reflect on the learning experiences for me as a researcher and will provide an update on the currently evolving version of the ESAP syllabus.

8.2 The Research Questions

There were five research questions that informed this study and as presented in Section 1.3, they evolved in order to reflect both the AR tradition and the convergent parallel mixed methods research design that characterised the study. The five question were:

1. What are the English-language skills needed by economics students at this trilingual university as perceived by the main "actors", i.e. students and lecturers?

2. What skills practice should be maintained or enhanced in the syllabus?

3. How can a predominantly product syllabus that is skills based benefit from the integration of a process approach to syllabus design?

4. What elements of the syllabus can be negotiated with the learners considering the constraints of this particular context and experiences in other contexts?

5. What evaluation methods can be devised to ascertain the effectiveness of this proposed syllabus for each individual learner?

The first two research questions were mixed methods questions given that two different data sources were used, the students and the EMI lecturers, and two different approaches to data collection were used. The choice of using multiple sources and methods was motivated by my ontological view that the main stakeholders in a course should be given the opportunity to contribute actively to the design of that course, a view shared by Auerbach (1995) and Long

(2000c). This data collection and analysis functioned as the needs assessment and analysis that was required to be undertaken in order to redesign the ESAP syllabus since the distinguishing feature of ESP "is not the *existence* of a need as such but rather an *awareness* of the need" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 53 original italics). Through the questionnaires conducted with the students and the semi-structured interviews with the EMI lecturers, two comprehensive pictures of the target situation were gained and, following the recommendations of Long (2000c), these sources and methods were triangulated to help validate the data and to investigate the similarities and differences. As discussed at length in Sections 6.1.2 and 6.1.3, the findings from the data analysis showed that the students and lecturers were in broad agreement that the students' productive skills were in most need of improvement. These findings led to the design of the revised syllabus in AR Cycle 2, which then did not work as planned, yet the findings and further modifications informed the focus of the modified syllabus used in AR Cycle 3. This was designed in an attempt to enhance the opportunities for student-student interaction and student-initiated interaction in the classroom as well as increasing the number of writing activities to be done during classroom activities and outside of class in the preparation of the Portfolio and provide extensive reading opportunities with the use of *Freakonomics*. The increased opportunities for skills practice were introduced due to the findings from the quantitative data analysis that showed a significant relationship between the amount of practice students declared they undertook in each skill and their self-reported levels of difficulty in the skills; the more they stated they practised the skill the fewer difficulties they felt they experienced in this skill. A positive relationship was also observed between the amount of practice they stated they undertook and their proficiency levels in the skills although this relationship was mainly observed in the productive skills.

The third research question focused on the desire to use negotiation in the classroom due to my beliefs as a teacher that students should be given opportunities to engage in the decision-making processes of their course, not just in an initial needs analysis phase, but also throughout the course. Moreover, as pragmatism was the worldview informing this study, using negotiation would not only allow me to consult the students on the course contents, since

the limited number of teaching hours available for the course (30 hours) would imply "any choice of curricular contents would be arbitrary" (Slembrouck, 2000, p. 139), but the negotiation itself would also provide opportunities for authentic language practice. Therefore, the choice to use negotiation originated from a desire to give the students a greater stake in their learning process and to optimise the relatively limited time available for the course. Moreover, the fact of providing students with opportunities to use negotiation would provide them with more control over their learning process and therefore take more responsibility for their learning, which in turn would enhance their learner autonomy. As discussed, measuring learner autonomy is a problematic concern but some of the findings from the end-of-course surveys suggested that some students appeared to have achieved greater autonomy.

The use of negotiation also provided the students with more opportunities to engage in meaningful tasks which provided authentic target language practice using student-student interaction, which has been observed to be beneficial in skills acquisition (Ortega, 2007). In this study, however, the use of negotiation occurred mainly in the Negotiated Portfolio class.

The fourth research question concerned the elements of the syllabus that were negotiated with regard to the context and other accounts. Given the constraints of the context, the contents of and the procedures for the Portfolio were negotiated with the students. As discussed in Chapter 6, the first version of the Negotiated Portfolio did not work satisfactorily due to the students' unwillingness to choose the Negotiated Portfolio over the *Freakonomics* Portfolio. The end-of-course survey conducted with the students to investigate this lack of interest revealed that they were disinclined to engage with the Negotiated Portfolio due to the work involved and their interest in the alternative *Freakonomics.* However, Breen & Littlejohn (2000d, p. 291) suggest that using negotiation can provide a degree of freedom that can be too much for some students as it is so unusual in standard educational practices, which is a reasonable explanation for the lack of engagement in AR Cycle 2. As a consequence, the choice of source material was imposed upon the students in the successive AR cycle although the decisions as to how much and which parts of the book would be studied was negotiated.

In action research, reflection is one of the four main elements in a cycle, and evaluation comprises step 3 in Breen & Littlejohn's negotiation cycle (see Figure 2.1) since "the most important characteristic of a process syllabus is that it pivots upon the evaluation of an agreed action or set of actions" (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000c, p. 33). The fifth research question was therefore designed to incorporate these elements in the study. The main evaluation tool comprised the end-of-course surveys that were administered to the students on paper and were designed to evaluate "the appropriateness or otherwise of the actual process" (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000c, p. 33). The conceptual framework that was discussed and illustrated in Figure 7.1 was developed to display the findings from the analysis of the responses on the surveys and as discussed in Section 7.5.6, the responses from the students were overwhelmingly positive concerning the use of negotiation. Moreover, the introduction of the ECEs in the E&M course in the second semester of AR Cycle 3 seemed to have a positive impact on class attendance and on the overall number of students passing the course's final exam. Consequently, although the evaluation was conducted with all the group and the responses were aggregated to create the conceptual framework, each individual student still had been provided with the opportunity to contribute to the contents of the Portfolio through the negotiation that occurred in Class 4 (if they attended the class that day), and were also provided with a choice of questions to answer in the Negotiated Portfolio itself. There was also a choice of topics for the summary that had to be written in preparation for the presentation to be given in the oral exam so each Portfolio completed was always an individual piece of work.

8.3 The Contribution of the Study

This study and the previous publications that have summarised aspects of it (Prior, 2020; Prior, 2021), have detailed a rigorous classroom-based investigation into the use of a negotiated syllabus in a tertiary setting and as such make more recent contributions to the work of other researchers who undertook classroom-based research on practical implementations of negotiated syllabuses in university settings such as Martyn (2000), Newstetter (2000) and Sokolik (2000), among others. Given that most of these studies were completed

more than two decades ago, a more recent investigation can certainly be considered timely.

Further, this research contributes to the knowledge on how using a negotiated syllabus can be associated with providing learners with greater autonomy in their learning, as was reported by Bloor & Bloor (1988) and Cotterall (2000), and how this can be connected to motivation issues, especially relating to "course-specific motivational components" (Dörnyei, 1994, p. 277), which can contribute to more effective language learning. It has also been suggested that using negotiation in the classroom provides more opportunities for skills practice and therefore language learning (Serrano-Sampedro, 2000). The research conducted for this volume has demonstrated that engaging in negotiation did provide increased opportunities for practice in the target language and it is likely this was beneficial for improvement in the skills.

This study contributes to teaching English in ESP classrooms since although the context was very specific, the approach used can be replicated in many secondary or tertiary classrooms, particularly in "low-constraint" contexts (Wette, 2011, p. 137) where teachers have greater autonomy in decisions related to syllabus design and content. Using negotiation in the classroom does not imply having to negotiate all decisions concerning the syllabus, which has been found to be impracticable (Markee, 1997; Breen & Littlejohn, 2000c; Wette, 2011). As negotiation can be pitched at many different levels, as illustrated in Breen & Littlejohn's curriculum pyramid (2000c, p. 35), it would therefore be perfectly feasible for many teachers to initially introduce negotiation with their learners through a focus on a task or a series of tasks, the first levels of the curriculum pyramid. It is highly likely this would provide learners with a greater stake in the course, which would mean taking more responsibility for their own learning and which would consequently bestow a greater sense of ownership over their learning process (see Cotterall & Crabbe, 1999). Once learners have understood that taking ownership of part of their course can be beneficial for their learning, teachers could explore providing them with further opportunities to negotiate other aspects of their course, provided their contexts provide them with this freedom.

Given the fact that there still seems to be opposition from some learners to using negotiation in the classroom because it can be regarded as being divergent from standard educational practices, which implies therefore that learners are not accustomed to being involved in the decision-making processes of their course(s), if more teachers were to use negotiation in their classrooms, even for relatively minor aspects concerning content or procedures, there would certainly be more acceptance of it. In my study, most students regarded negotiation favourably, which was also observed by Breen & Littlejohn (2000d) regarding the accounts of classroom-based negotiation in their volume (2000a). Indeed, they state that "process syllabuses and shared classroom decision-making represent one of the most significant practical and theoretical developments in language teaching in recent years" (2000d, p. 295) although since their volume, there have been few accounts of or investigations into negotiated syllabuses. The study that is the subject of this volume, therefore, has contributed to the literature on practical classroom-based research in ELT as it has demonstrated that using negotiation in the classroom was beneficial to my students as it provided them with greater ownership of their course, which contributed to greater responsibility for their learning. It also provided increased opportunities for skills practice in the target language, particularly in a context where these opportunities were generally lacking. As a consequence, there is no reason why this study could not be replicated in other similar contexts.

8.4 Limitations of the Study

One of the main limitations of the study is that although the aim was to create a more learner-centred syllabus, it was impossible to track individual learners in the data collection phase as the questionnaires were anonymous, nor was it possible in the end-of-course surveys in the evaluation phases. However, this was mitigated in the E&M course in AR Cycle 3 with the institution of the ECEs, the results of which were recorded so that the progress of each individual student could be tracked. Then I could intervene and provide individually focused feedback after each ECE completed. This strategy, however, was only effective for the students attending the course. If students

chose not to attend the course, or were unable to attend, there was no provision in place to compensate for this.

Another limitation to the study was in fact the seemingly radical nature of using negotiation. One of the aims of using negotiation was to provide students with a greater stake in the course and therefore to become more autonomous but as witnessed in AR Cycle 2, only two students took the opportunity to negotiate their Portfolio. Moreover, in AR Cycle 3, although most students expressed a positive attitude to the use of negotiation, there were a couple of dissenting voices, one of which focussed on the fact that they felt I, as the teacher should be the one to choose the course contents. This attitude reflected a lack of readiness to embrace the greater levels of decision-making that the negotiation process afforded them as well as a refusal to accept any methodology that would appear to oppose the prevailing orthodoxy in educational practices where the teacher teaches, and the students learn. Successful negotiation needs the basic premise that there are two willing parties in the negotiations process. In the case of this study, there were these obvious instances when the students were unwilling to participate, which resulted in the negotiation failing before it had even begun.

A further limitation is related to the physical and practical context in which the ESAP course occurs. In the two Negotiated Portfolio classes with the E&M students there were 42 and 34 students present. The lecture halls in which the negotiation took place are large halls with fixed tiered rows of desks and chairs which makes monitoring problematic. Consequently, although many students did speak English in the Negotiated Portfolio class, it was impossible for me to ascertain whether they all used the occasion to speak English all the time and therefore to benefit from the opportunity to engage in prolonged interaction. In the meantime, however, this situation has been addressed by my requesting a room with movable furniture for Class 4. This has allowed the students to sit in circles and has allowed me to monitor them much more effectively even if the number of students has increased since the classes in AR Cycle 3.

8.5 The Transformative Value of the Study

Action research has been described as being "transformative" (Borg 2010) and even "self-transformative" (Kemmis 2009) and this action research study has afforded me with a significant number of opportunities to develop as a researcher and shape my professional identity as a teacher-researcher. From a practical perspective, this study has allowed me to gain numerous research skills such as learning how to explore data using various software programmes such as NVivo, SPSS and Excel. I have also learnt how to conduct interviews and transcribe them and then follow a rigorous coding procedure to produce extremely effective conceptual frameworks. I have gained experience in writing academic articles through the writing and publishing of articles based on this study (Prior 2018; Prior, 2020; Prior, 2021; Prior, 2023) and greatly appreciated the learning opportunities provided by the feedback and responses that characterised the reviewing process. I have given various presentations on aspects of this research and have been gratified that many people have shown great interest in the classroom-based research conducted.

Moreover, by engaging in this research-based study, I have been provided with numerous opportunities for developing my professional identity as a teacher-researcher. Professional identity concerns "the notion of agency, or the active pursuit of professional development and learning in accordance with a teacher's goals" (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009, p. 177) and it has been argued that "teachers undergo shifts in identity through teacher education programmes" (Dikilitaş & Yaγli, 2018, p. 415). There is broad agreement that action research encourages reflective practice (Burns, 1999; Levin & Greenwood, 2001; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; Burgess et al., 2006; Costello, 2011) and is even "self-reflective practice" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 220), which are key qualities in professional development. This reflection can then lead to new knowledge, new roles and new ways of engaging in practice, which can be transformative. Dikilitaş & Yaγli state:

> As a truly autonomous professional development activity, action research provides potential opportunities for teachers to develop deeper insights, not only into practices, but also their existing knowledge through systematic enquiry into the class-

> room and teaching. In other words, the process of problematizing pedagogical issues creates a sense of transformation in roles and professional identity. (Dikilitaş & Yaŋli, 2018, p. 415).

Engaging in this action research study has certainly been transformative for me and has allowed me to develop deeper insights into my practice but also into my professional identity as a teacher-researcher. I have long believed that educational practices should be placed within a democratic framework but prior to this study it was often problematic to devise a focused, research-based strategy to promote democratic values in the classroom. However, through the research undertaken for this study that resulted in the use of negotiation in the classroom, I have developed a much more democratic way of working, and I can now accommodate the views of the students more easily and more frequently into my teaching.

Moreover, I have developed a greater engagement with the students, which was noted as a positive outcome of using action research in Dikilitaş & Yaŋli's study and which they term "developing sensitivity to students" (2018, p. 418). Edwards & Burns (2016, p. 11) had also identified this feature of AR in their study, claiming it had "led the teachers to establish more open, collaborative approaches to their teaching". This engagement leads to a greater awareness of how students feel about their learning and if problems occur, a greater desire to assist them. As prior to this study their complaints about the ESAP course's workload were persistent and frustrating for me, I wanted to address the issue but could not envisage how. The introduction of negotiation allowed the students to reduce their workload for the Portfolio to a degree but more significantly, they no longer tended to complain about it as much as they had taken responsibility for the amount of work they had to do as well as the contents and procedures.

8.6 The Current ESAP Course

At the time of writing, the ESAP course is still running and I am still teaching both the PPE students and the E&M students. The syllabus that is currently in use is very similar to the one that was used in AR Cycle 3 although certain content changes have been made. The Portfolio for the E&M students is still

based on *Freakonomics* but the set book for the PPE students has changed to Katrine Marçal's 2021 book *Mother of Invention: How Good Ideas Get Ignored in an Economy Built for Men* in order to provide more recent input. However, both Portfolios are still negotiated with the whole class (or the two groups in the case of E&M) in Class 4 or 5, and the contents differ each course depending on the group's interests, which influence which topics or chapters are chosen. The writing tasks tend to be similar to the syllabus in AR Cycle 3, with a balanced mix of shorter paragraphs and a longer piece of writing, reflecting the texts that were identified as being needed in the EMI courses. The topics used for the oral exam, and therefore the summary that needs to be written on that topic for the Portfolio, are also still being negotiated with the students and the negotiations have contributed to a greater number and variety of topics used, which change every year. The ECEs are still being used but the number was reduced to seven or eight instead of ten, due to time constraints caused particularly by the shift to online learning in the 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 academic years. The focus of the ECEs has shifted slightly and tends to be on writing longer texts. This implies there is now more feedback needed to be given, and together with the ever-increasing student numbers, it is likely that the ECEs will have to be modified still further in the future.

Dikilitaş and Yaγli (2018) found that "engagement in action research was also found to influence teacher's teaching practice" (p. 418), which has certainly been the case for me since not only am I continuing to negotiate the contents and procedures of the Portfolio with my Economics students, but I now do the same with the students of my ESAP course for Design and I started this year to do the same for my Computer Science students. I also use ECEs with the same Design students, where it has been observed that attendance has improved and the exam pass rate has increased noticeably.

8.7 Conclusion

This study has documented a classroom-based application of an intentionally blended process-product approach to syllabus design where negotiation was used to provide more opportunities for target language skills practice. It has demonstrated that this approach can be enacted in a tertiary context successfully and that despite some opposition, it can still be accepted by the vast majority of learners. Furthermore, given that in syllabus design, "no one approach can be fully responsive to learners' needs" (Graves, 2008, p. 161), a blended approach that aims to draw on and develop some of the strengths that characterise process and product approaches to syllabus design can be regarded as an effective and efficient approach. Graves states that "the challenge is how to identify an organizational structure as a basis for making principled decisions about what and how to teach" (2008, pp. 161–162), and refers to the issues with which course developers are confronted, which were identified by Snow & Kamhi-Stein (2006):

> This is not a simple or a clean task because it requires synthesizing the massive amounts of information gathered through needs assessments, meetings with program administrators and colleagues, review of policy documents and other activities. At the same time, in identifying the organizational structure of the course, course developers have to take into account logistical constraints, the expectations of the educational system in which the course will be offered, explicit and implicit teaching policies, the course developers' own beliefs about teaching and learning, and their degree of professional experience. (p. 9)

This study has shown that using a multicycle action research project to develop a blended approach to syllabus design, where the course developer is the teacher of the course, has been an effective organisational structure to manage the numerous challenges that syllabus design and course development inevitably present.

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