

*Challenges and achievements of English as a Medium
of Teaching and Learning (EMTL) university
non-native lecturers: the case of an Asian
and a European universities*

Daniela Maria Coelho ✉

Faculty of Arts and Humanities University of Coimbra Portugal

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3372-8623>

danielamjcoelho@gmail.com

Galyna Dubova

Faculty of Education and Culture University of Tampere Finland

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4112-5083>

galyna.dubova@tuni.fi

Hasmik Minasyan

Faculty of Education and Culture University of Tampere Finland

<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-5900-6446>

hasmik.minasyan@tuni.fi

Abstract

The English as a Medium of Teaching and Learning (EMTL) model in higher education (HE) has been expanding in the last decades to respond to the increased internationalization of HE institutions. Despite bringing benefits for the institutions and students alike, the model can present some challenges for students and teachers, especially when these are not native speakers of English. This study examined linguistic, cultural and pedagogical struggles but also achievements of non-native teachers in two HE contexts: a university in Finland and one in the United Arab Emirates. A survey was distributed among teachers in both institutions where they were asked to reflect on their experiences and needs as EMTL teachers. The results indicate that, regardless of the geographical area (Asia or Europe), teachers in both settings faced mainly

linguistic and cultural hurdles. However, both groups of teachers reported actively applying a variety of customized pedagogical strategies to overcome these barriers and agreed on the need for professional development. This response suggests that, given the common challenges, sharing good practices and incorporating the offer of linguistic, pedagogical and cultural training in these institutions' policies may help non-native teachers overcome the obstacles they face and, ultimately, improve the quality of EMTL environments.

Keywords: EMI/EMTL, native speakerism, non-native speakerism, higher education, teacher perspectives

1. Introduction

The increasing internationalization of academic institutions has resulted in an expansion of the English as a Medium of Teaching and Learning (EMTL)¹ model in a variety of non-anglophone countries (Chell et al., 2021; Khan, 2018). This expansion has been more accentuated in the past two decades, primarily due to globalization and economic reasons (Murata & Iino, 2024), impacting a myriad of countries, namely the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Finland. The UAE initiated EMTL delivery in 2003 as the result of a nationwide policy that envisaged teaching through the English language as a means to modernize the country's educational settings (Baker, 2017; Chell et al., 2021). The offer of EMTL in higher education (HE) expanded since then and various new private and public EMTL HE institutions have opened in the country in the past 20 years (Gobert, 2019). In fact, the call for learning through English has been so influential that it impacted even K-12 teaching and learning, with initiatives such as the 'Abu Dhabi School Model' (Pennington, 2015 cited in Gobert, 2019) or 'Emirati School Model' demanding more English presence (both in ESL and EMI models) across the local curricula (Gobert, 2019). Finland introduced EMTL in the early 90s (Bradford, 2013). This change was also due to Finland's initiatives to internationalize its higher education and make its global presence more visible. Striving to attract more international students and promote cross-cultural collaboration, universities increased their programs in English. In the UAE, it can now be said that the great majority of higher education institutions apply an EMTL model for all degrees,

¹ We chose to use English as a Medium of Teaching and Learning (EMTL) instead of the commonly utilized English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) due to our belief in contemporary, participative and active pedagogies which do not coadunate with the traditional meaning of "instruction". However, to respect the term used by the authors quoted in this article, we may at times use EMI as well.

with the exception of Arabic, Islamic and Law degrees, and the emirate of Dubai, for example, has seen an increase in international students' enrollment with these representing one third of the total student population in private universities (Government of Dubai, 2025). Finland, in turn, offers about 600 master's and bachelor's degree programs in English taught in 13 traditional universities and 22 universities of applied sciences that accommodate 20,000 international students across the country (Study in Finland, n.d.).

From a students' perspective, the EMTL model seems promising when domestic and international students desire enhanced academic and career opportunities abroad (Dearden, 2014 cited by Chell et al., 2021), and for universities, instruction offered in English represents more possibilities of gathering revenue that comes from international students as well as moving up in the university rankings for their international status (Chell et al., 2021; Yıldız et al., 2017). In the Finnish case, universities in general have increased the number of degrees taught in English to, besides promoting internationalization, 'level up Finland's competitiveness' in the world in general (The Pie News, 2022). Hence, the Finnish government aims at tripling the number of international degree students by 2030 and also at providing opportunities for them to stay and work in Finland (Finnish Government, 2021).

Despite the advantages of the EMTL model for students and universities alike mentioned above, "many perceived needs and challenges remain unaddressed" (Yıldız et al., 2017, p. 387). One of them is that, as Steele et al. (2024) stated, this neoliberal regime has turned higher education into "a 'product' to be bought and sold, with students positioned as 'consumers'" (p. 77) and dehumanizing mainly international students often described as 'cash cows' in the current HE scenario. Similarly, it appears that the aspiration to internationalize and gain revenue is prioritized and immediate curricular decisions are made based on that, without first examining the feasibility of this model as well as creating the right conditions for the smooth application of EMTL (Moncada-Comas and Block, 2021). Some of the challenges relate to domestic or international students' ability to comprehend the content delivered in a language that they may not master completely (Gitsaki & Zoghbor, 2023; Gobert 2019; Muttaqin & Chuang, 2022); other challenges are associated with teachers' linguistic proficiency and pedagogical readiness to teach content through a language they may not fully master either. This issue becomes particularly relevant when content teachers are non-native speakers of the language of instruction (Gitsaki & Zoghbor, 2023; Yıldız et al., 2017).

While native vs. non-native speakerism has been quite extensively discussed in the literature in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), "it remains relatively under-explored regarding EMI teachers" (Qiu & Fang, 2019, p. 642). For this reason, and considering that many universities around the world appoint teachers internationally in order to meet the hiring needs upon converting some of

their degrees into an EMTL model (as is the case of the authors of this article), the level of linguistic, pedagogical and cultural teacher readiness became the center of this study, which intends to:

- thoroughly explore and critically analyze the linguistic, pedagogical and intercultural experiences, challenges and accomplishments of non-native teachers in two EMTL contexts, i.e., a UAE university and a Finnish university, and
- identify potential training needs, translating the knowledge gained from the study into a professional development framework to support non-native subject teachers.

The choice of these two universities, naturally, lies in the fact that the researchers in this study have taught in these two universities located in two different continents. It was important that the universities chosen for this comparative study were located in different parts of the world, each characterized by differing linguistic and cultural landscapes, so that our analysis could retrieve specific information on whether different universities experience similar or different challenges too. For anonymity reasons, the universities were assigned acronyms which will be used throughout this article: EMU for the Emirati university and FIU for the Finnish university.

2. Theoretical background

The distinction between native and non-native speakers in ELT positions the native speaker as someone coming from Kachru's (1985) inner circle of English (e.g. the USA, Canada, the UK, Australia, etc.) (Alqahtani, 2021) and who represents a model of knowledge about 'their' language and has exceptional control over that language (Davies, 2003). The non-native speaker is, hence, someone coming from outside that inner circle, but who may have excellent command and mastery of the language too and most likely will have studied it exhaustively and rigorously if they are teachers of English. This dichotomy, however, has long gathered professional and academic attention and discussion, with native-speakerism in ELT being challenged for many decades now (Alqahtani, 2021; Qiu & Fang, 2019), in the assumption that such "distinctions are merely constructed ideologies and thus have no technical linguistic grounds" (Holliday, 2017 cited in Alqahtani, 2021, p. 121). In fact, literature on Global Englishes (Galloway, 2024; Jenkins, 2015) has called for the acceptance of all (post-colonial) varieties of English and for a reflection on how "its majority speakers [are] those for whom [English] is not a first language" (Jenkins, 2015, p. 2).

Nevertheless, the distinction still prevails in ELT and has been said to still “serve as the blueprint for defining qualities, qualifications, competencies, effectiveness, and legitimacy of ELT professionals around the world” (Selvi et al., 2024, p. 26). While studies in the field on (non-)native-speakerism in ELT have been prolific, in the EMTL context, the native-non-native debate has not been abundant (Qiu & Fang, 2019; Dang & Vu, 2019), especially the ones focusing on teachers’ lived experiences (Selvi et al., 2024). In this regard, some studies report that EMTL teachers in general (non- and native alike) mostly face challenges when having to address content that is difficult to understand by students who do not master the English language. In fact, in the UAE alone, the level of English proficiency of Emiratis has often been described as inadequate for enrolling in higher education (Gobert, 2019), justifying the challenges mentioned by teachers above.

As for non-native EMTL teachers in particular, they expressed concern with having to teach, evaluate and interact with students in a language that is not their native language either (Gitsaki & Zoghbor, 2023). Some of these latter teachers experience ‘inferiority complex’ (Medgyes, 1994 cited in Gitsaki & Zoghbor, 2023) as they constantly judge their professional legitimacy and self-esteem, their teaching performance and even their educational qualifications, struggling to “recognize themselves as experts” (Zuaro et al., 2024, p. 33).

Previous studies around the world examining students’ perspectives on challenges faced when taught by non-native EMTL teachers have highlighted issues related to intelligibility, (in)effectiveness of language used, content organization and limited ability to compensate for language deficiencies (see Dang & Vu, 2019). In the UAE in specific, in a recent study developed in a local university, 41% of the students surveyed on their teachers’ English proficiency denounced that their instructors’ English is “not well-developed” (Wanphet & Tantawy, 2018: 160), which may hinder student academic success. In Finland, similar feedback was gathered from some students in a research study conducted in 2016-2018, in which the respondents questioned the adequacy of the English language skills of their instructors, pointing at their poor pronunciation, limited vocabulary and grammar mistakes which hindered students’ understanding (Niva, 2019). According to them, teachers’ inability to communicate the ideas, to clearly define tasks and to structure the lessons led to contradictions, misunderstandings and lower grades. The educators, in turn, felt that compared to the delivery of the material in their native language, the instructions given in the EMTL context were less precise, with no real-life examples and experiential narratives (Niva, 2019). A similar study developed in EMTL subject teacher education in one of the universities in Finland suggests that teachers whose language of instruction was English and not their native experienced problems with transferring subject knowledge in a comprehensive way, specifically stressing the lack of field-oriented vocabulary

and fluency. Timing was also mentioned among other constraints because teachers felt that their English skills had slowed down the sessions and prevented them from elaborating on each topic (Hahl et al., 2016).

In fact, if we focus only on EMTL teachers' linguistic proficiency, language requirements are clearly identified by the UAE government for school teachers, especially in the emirate of Dubai, as being an IELTS band 6 minimum (Government of Dubai, 2021). However, to the best of our knowledge, these requirements are not well established for higher education teachers. In Finland, on the other hand, the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture (2009) calls for universities to "require teachers to demonstrate their language proficiency in a foreign language to ensure high-quality education" (Hahl et al., 2016, p. 292). However, proper language proficiency evaluation for university teachers is largely missing, and therefore, it is not known to what extent this policy is implemented.

In addition, besides linguistic hurdles, there are also pedagogical, identity and cultural challenges that non-native speakers may encounter as instructors in an EMTL model (Dang & Vu, 2019; Steele et al., 2024). If not addressed, these challenges may compromise the quality of teaching, leading to student dissatisfaction and, possibly, poor academic performance and deficient future career readiness, which in turn impacts the university's prestige as an international institution, jeopardizing student intake, university revenue and continued internationalization.

In terms of the support offered, students in EMTL universities usually receive support and training on academic English, whereas it has been reported that "there is inadequate support for instructors' linguistic academic needs" (Yildiz et al., 2017, p. 395 based on a study by Williams, 2015), even in universities running EMTL programs for decades. In Finland, for example, even though some university language centers offer specialized language courses for EMTL teachers, teachers' participation in them is voluntary and their ability to teach in English remains unknown (Hahl et al., 2016). Also, it has been said that, on the rare occasions when such courses to support EMTL teachers do exist, they usually offer academic language-related training, neglecting the pedagogical and cultural elements inherent to teaching in EMTL contexts (Lanvers et al., 2019). In addition, many university lecturers also mention their lack of knowledge, skills and even time to linguistically support their students' English as an additional language learning needs (Steele et al., 2024) because they see themselves as content and not language teachers. This situation prompted a call for more institutional support in the form of teacher preparation for EMTL professional development initiatives (Macaro et al., 2018) and clearer pedagogical guidelines that assist EMTL teachers (Farrell, 2020).

In the two universities where this study was developed, the one in the UAE has a Centre for Faculty Development and Learning Innovation, which aims at

supporting faculty in developing a variety of pedagogical skills that will enhance teaching and learning at the university; however, in their mission and goals, we did not find a mention to supporting faculty linguistically and culturally. At the university in Finland, on the other hand, the university strategy highlights teachers' professional development, well-being and professional identity (FIU Strategy, 2030); nevertheless, there is not much about language support for teaching staff, something that is directly impacting well-being and professional identity. As mentioned before, there is only one course that lecturers can voluntarily take to improve their English. It is provided by a 1-month free license for the *English First* virtual training platform, where they need to study at least one course unit, which means 5 hours of workload (FIU Intranet, 2022).

Given that there are very few studies on non-native university lecturers teaching in EMTL models (Inbar-Lourie and Donitsa-Schmidt, 2019), turning it into an “underdeveloped area” (Airey, 2020, p. 340) in EMTL, Siegel (2020) stated that this topic is of paramount importance in higher education globally nowadays. This is because it is essential to focus on the effectiveness and quality of degrees and/or courses delivered in an EMTL model so that they adequately prepare students to be successful academically and professionally. Therefore, this comparative research study between a UAE university and a Finnish university aims to thoroughly and critically examine the linguistic, pedagogical and intercultural experiences, challenges and accomplishments of non-native (in the traditional sense) EMTL teachers in both settings. It also seeks to identify potential training needs and translate the knowledge gained from the study into a professional development framework to support non-native subject teachers and create a community of practice where pedagogical and methodological approaches can be exchanged across the two continents. This was done by gathering the perspectives and experiences of teachers through surveys and interviews in both educational institutions. The next section explains the methodological procedures.

3. Methodology

This comparative study aimed to reveal non-native English-speaking lecturers' perceptions on their linguistic, pedagogical, and cultural challenges at the two universities. Creswell (2012) states that surveys are the best data collection method for gathering large opinions economically and efficiently; thus, in order to better collect teachers' perspectives at a large scale, we chose to survey them. This resulted in the creation of a questionnaire with both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected, making it a mixed-methods research study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2025). Therefore, 10

questions were created for the questionnaire (see Appendix 1). The teachers at both universities were given the choice to either answer the questionnaire in writing or participate in individual face-to-face or online interviews. Besides the usual introduction and consent form sections, the questionnaire had three main parts:

1. Individual teacher profiling.
2. Teachers' linguistic, pedagogical, and cultural experiences in teaching their subjects through English in the EMTL context.
3. Inquiries about training needs in EMTL (see Appendix 1).

Altogether, four FIU lecturers were interviewed, and 25 answered the survey in writing. At the UAE university, 7 teachers were surveyed, with five answering the questions in in-person recorded interviews and two in writing. We acknowledge there is a significant difference between the number of respondents in one university and the other; however, despite prolonging the data collection period, the level of participation of one of the universities remained low. Limitations related to this will be discussed at the end of the article.

A total of 36 responses from EMTL teachers were collected from both institutions. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed by a research assistant. Anonymity was ensured during the process of data collection. The survey was sent to all the faculties/colleges in both universities, and the data collection took place during fall 2023 and spring 2024. At the Finnish university, the survey was distributed to the lecturers via email and posted on the university's intranet, while at the UAE university, the survey was sent to the respondents via email only. The purpose of the survey was explained in a brief introduction, and the participants were asked to give their consent for participation (see Appendix 1), referring to the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) for the Finnish university and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the UAE university, which provided a sense of credibility and "a full disclosure of potential risks to participants" (Creswell & Guetterman, 2025, p.241) as ethically required.

The next section will present the results of the research.

4. Results

This section presents non-native teachers' perspectives and experiences on teaching EMTL classes. First, their English language abilities and competences are introduced as well as their experiences teaching EMTL classes in terms of pedagogical and cultural approaches and challenges. This is followed by these teachers'

recommendations regarding possible support mechanisms required for successful teaching practices in EMTL classes.

4.1. Participant profiles

This section of the results refers to the first questions of the teacher survey with the aim of highlighting the surveyed teachers' profiles regarding their qualifications, duties at the university, the field of teaching, as well as their knowledge of languages.

4.1.1. Positions and qualifications of the respondents

The results showed that almost 80% of FIU respondents were university lecturers/instructors and professors/associate professors, while the rest of the respondents were researchers, project researchers, and research managers (see Figure 1). Their qualifications ranged between a master's degree (48%), a doctoral degree (44%), and a licentiate/bachelor's degree (8%).

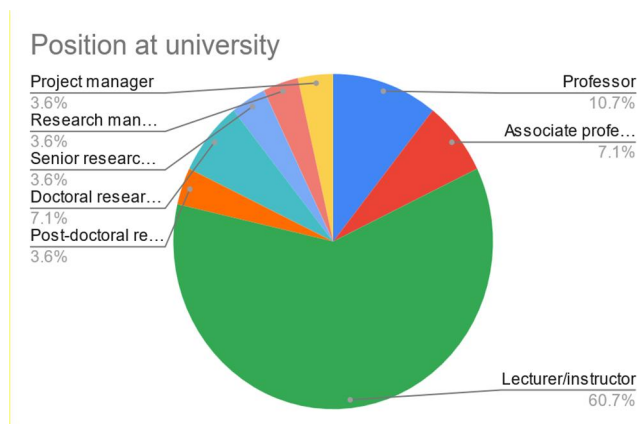


Figure 1 Position at university (FIU)

In the case of EMU, almost 60% of the respondents were senior instructors and instructors, 28.6% were assistant professors, and 14.3% were associate professors (see Figure 2). Their qualifications ranged between a doctoral degree (71.4%) and a master's degree (28.6%).

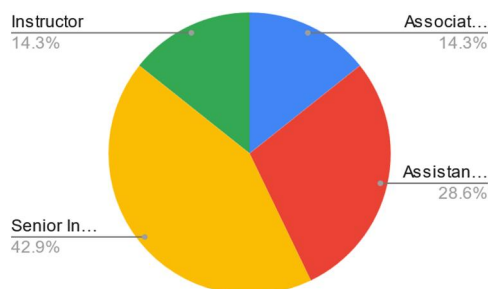


Figure 2 Position at university (EMU)

4.1.2. Subjects taught by the respondents

Among FIU respondents, 46.9% were language teachers, more than 20% taught Sciences and Information Technology, while the remaining ones were from the fields of Engineering, Humanities, Robotics, and Physics (see Figure 3). In the case of EMU, 37.5% of the participants taught English, 25% taught in the Education field, and the rest of the respondents were teachers of Physics, Research Methods, and subjects in the Humanities (see Figure 4).

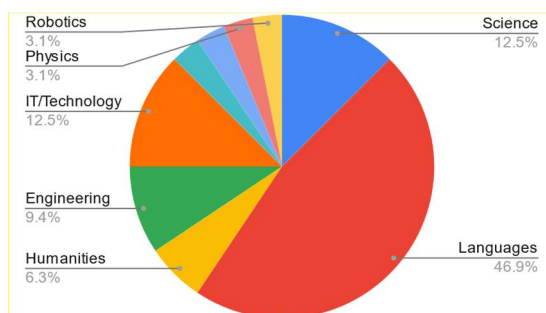


Figure 3 Field of teaching (FIU)

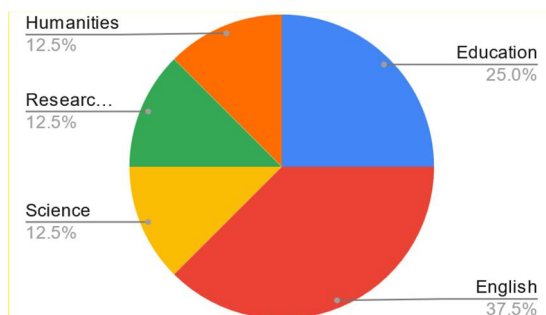


Figure 4 Field of teaching (EMU)

4.1.3. Native languages spoken by the respondents

Regarding the teachers' mother tongue profiles, about 46% of FIU participants spoke Finnish as their mother tongue, more than 15% considered Italian as their mother tongue, and the rest were native speakers of Russian, German, Spanish, Dutch, and English (see Figure 5).

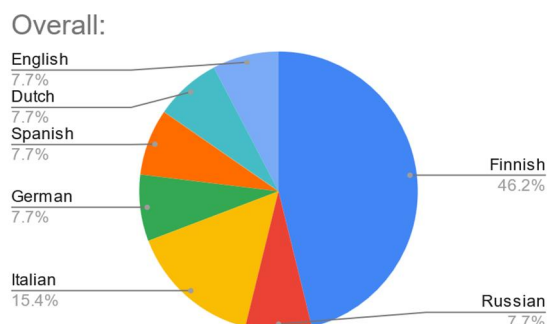


Figure 5 Mother tongues spoken by FIU respondents

EMU respondents reported speaking Arabic (57.1%), Hindi (28.6%) and Modern Greek (14.3%) as their mother tongues (see Figure 6).

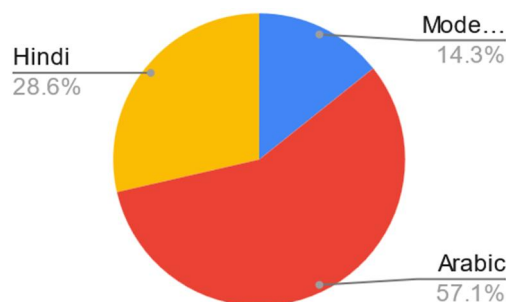


Figure 6 Mother tongues spoken by EMU respondents

4.1.4. Other languages spoken by the respondents

As for other languages spoken by the respondents, the majority of FIU participants reported speaking English (31%), Swedish (21.4%), German (16.7%), French (7.1%), Spanish and Finnish (6% each), with the remaining teachers speaking Japanese, Russian, Estonian and Italian (see Figure 7).

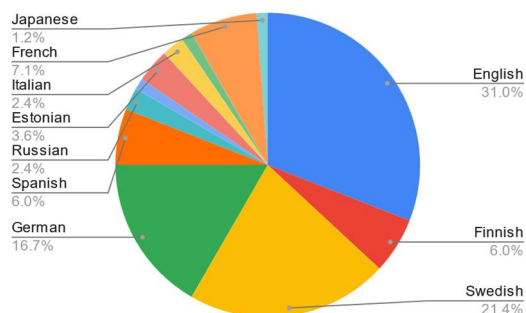


Figure 7 Other languages spoken by FIU respondents

As for other languages spoken by EMU teachers, 50% spoke English, while French was spoken by 14.3%, and some respondents also reported they spoke Spanish (7.1%), German (7.1%), Swahili (7.1%), Nepali (7.1%), and Bengali (7.1%) (see Figure 8).

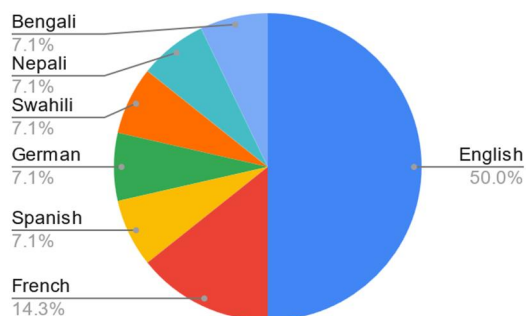


Figure 8 Other languages spoken by EMU respondents

4.1.5. Self-evaluation of English language proficiency

The respondents were asked to assess their level of English as native-like, advanced, intermediate or beginner. While 65.5% of FIU teachers reported their skills in English as being advanced, 34.5% identified their proficiency as native-like. In the case of EMU teachers, 71.4% reported their English language proficiency as being advanced, while 28.6% indicated their skills in English as native-like.

To sum up, the first questions of the survey referred to the teachers' professional profiles, language abilities and competences, as well as their fields of teaching and academic qualifications. As revealed by the responses, at both universities the teachers spoke a vast variety of languages, including English that some teachers spoke as their mother tongue and others as a foreign language.

4.2. Teaching EMTL classes, experiences and recommendations

This part of the results summarizes the information collected from the remaining questions of the teacher survey. As mentioned before, these questions referred to teachers' experiences of teaching EMTL classes, considering both pedagogical, linguistic, and cultural approaches and challenges. In addition, the questions invited the teachers to propose practical content for training that could help them progress in their teaching.

4.2.1. Experience in teaching EMTL classes

As seen in Figures 9 and 10, the average experience in teaching EMTL classes in years is more than 10 for the respondents from both universities.

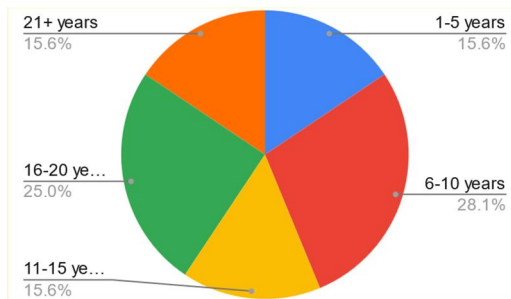


Figure 9 Number of years teaching EMTL classes (FIU)

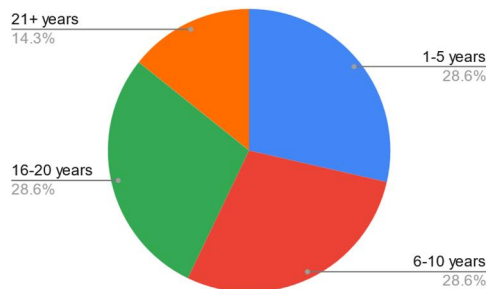


Figure 10 Number of years teaching EMTL classes (EMU)

4.2.2. Non-native teachers' advantages and disadvantages in teaching EMTL classes

The participants were then enquired on their opinions on whether non-native English-speaking teachers had advantages or disadvantages when teaching their subjects in English at their universities (see Figure 11 and Figure 12).

The answers from FIU suggested that 29% of the surveyed teachers thought non-native English-speaking teachers had advantages while teaching their subjects in English, whereas 32.3% reported they had disadvantages. In terms of advantages, teachers mentioned that non-native teachers used a simpler language and a slower pace, they had a good understanding of student struggles, they could use other languages in the classes for better comprehension, and they were better materials writers. As for disadvantages, the teachers mentioned that insufficient English language skills could lead to misunderstandings, and teachers could face difficulties in explaining certain terms which were typical of the Finnish language/culture. They also stated that the native language came more naturally impacting teaching quality, and that teachers would need more time to grade assignments in English. Also, teachers reported that one of the disadvantages was the overall belief that native speakers were viewed as the “experts”.

The rest of the answers showed that 19.4% of FIU teachers thought they had both advantages and disadvantages, while 12.9% said that it depended on several factors such, as teachers’ own language proficiency, and 6.5% were of the opinion that non-native-speakerism had neither advantages nor disadvantages (see Figure 11).

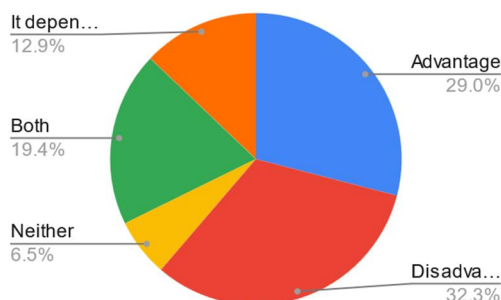


Figure 11 Advantages and disadvantages of non-native English-speaking teachers while teaching their subjects in English (FIU)

Regarding the same question, 50% of EMU teachers thought that non-native teachers had advantages as they had been English learners themselves and understood students’ struggles better. As for disadvantages, 16.7% of EMU teachers mentioned that native speakers offered more fluency and intuition. 33.3% of the teachers stated that they had neither advantages nor disadvantages, justifying that experience counted more than language proficiency (see Figure 12).

In summary, the answers to this question by both FIU and EMU teachers showed that at both universities, teachers had slightly different experiences and opinions about their advantages and disadvantages as non-native English speakers. For example, while 50% of EMU teachers claimed they had advantages in teaching in English as non-native English speakers, only 29% of FIU teachers shared that

opinion. In the case of the disadvantages, while 32.3% of FIU teachers reported that they had disadvantages in teaching as non-native English speakers, only 16.7% of EMU teachers were of that opinion.

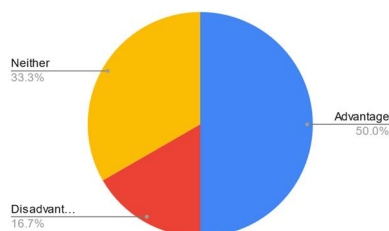


Figure 12 Advantages and disadvantages of non-native English-speaking teachers while teaching their subjects in English (EMU)

4.2.3. Linguistic and cultural challenges in teaching EMTL classes

In question 8, EMU and FIU teachers detailed the linguistic and cultural struggles they faced in their teaching. It can be seen that 44.6% of FIU respondents faced cultural challenges, while 28.6% reported having had linguistic struggles. A considerably small percentage of the participants (3.6%) reported they faced both linguistic and cultural issues, whereas 23.2% answered they had not faced any problems (see Figure 13).

Amongst the main cultural issues, FIU teachers particularly mentioned the differences in the students' learning styles, educational backgrounds, their perceptions of responsibilities in higher education, and assessment expectations. In addition, the respondents highlighted some cultural differences in the communication and interaction styles of the teachers that they needed to consider in their own interactions.

In terms of linguistic struggles, teachers identified vocabulary deficiency, inability to use good academic language, difficulty explaining certain topics in English, longer time for materials preparation, and insufficient proficiency in English from students.

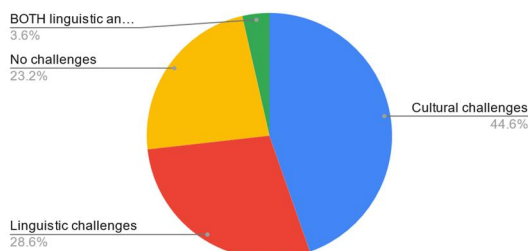


Figure 13 Linguistic and cultural challenges (FIU)

Regarding the same question, the answers by EMU teachers showed slightly different results. While 28.6% experienced cultural struggles and 14.3% encountered linguistic issues, 57.1% reported not having any linguistic or cultural challenges (see Figure 14).

The cultural challenges that the teachers faced were mainly regarding the need to be trained on how to teach in a way that respects the Muslim culture and their unpreparedness to cope with a rather grade-oriented culture. In terms of linguistic issues, the teachers mainly emphasized the inability or difficulty to explain certain topics in English.

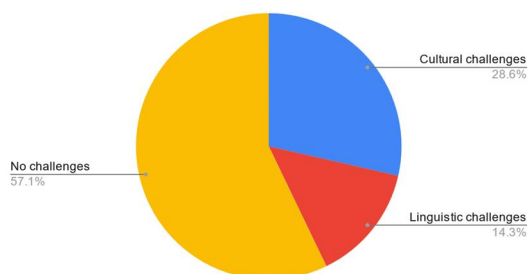


Figure 14 Linguistic and cultural challenges (EMU)

In summary, as for cultural challenges, while the EMU-based teachers referred to a need to respect the local culture, the FIU teachers mentioned a need to adapt to international students, their learning styles or communication/interaction styles. Regarding linguistic matters, teachers from both universities expressed difficulty in explaining certain topics. The FIU teachers also reported challenges such as a lack of vocabulary and academic language for providing good quality lectures, longer preparation time required in preparing lecture material in English, and the need to respond to non-English speaking students' own language struggles.

4.2.4. Pedagogical strategies used by EMTL teachers

Question 9 gave the respondents an opportunity to elaborate on the various pedagogical strategies they used in their EMTL classrooms to ensure understanding of content regardless of the linguistic and cultural issues.

The responses from FIU showed several pedagogical strategies and approaches used by the teachers to help their students better grasp the content areas of the subject. Among the top strategies that were mentioned by the majority of participants were extra explanations and repetitions, as well as comprehension checks, questioning, and scaffolding. The second most mentioned strategies

were adaptation or simplification of English, individual teaching or differentiated approaches, as well as the use of complementary resources. Out of 29 respondents, 4 mentioned that they did not use any specific strategies (see Figure 15).

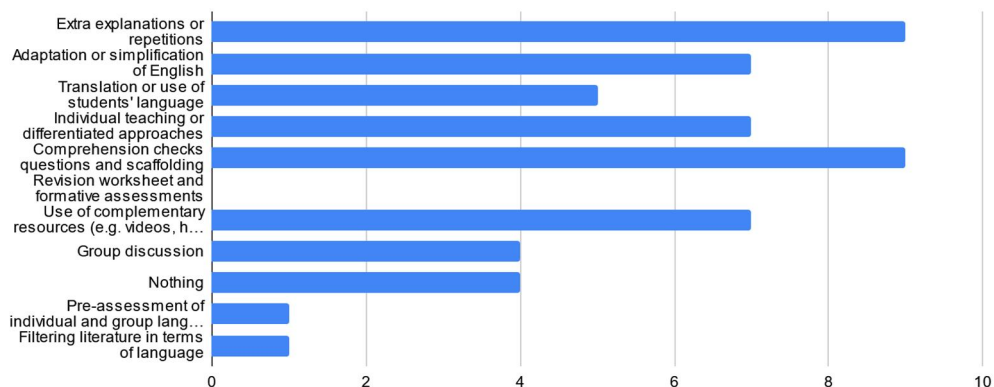


Figure 15 Pedagogical strategies used in EMTL classrooms (FIU)

In EMU, most participants mentioned translation or the use of students' languages as a pedagogical strategy they used in their EMTL classes, while 3 of the participants underlined comprehension checks, questioning, and scaffolding. In addition, the use of extra explanations and repetitions as a strategy in their classes was also mentioned (see Figure 16).

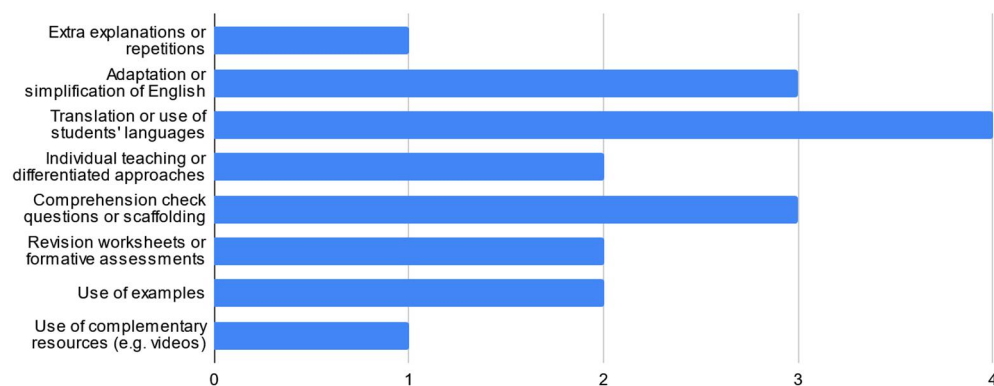


Figure 16 Pedagogical strategies used in EMTL classrooms (EMU)

Thus, the top four main groups of strategies used by EMU teachers were translation and use of students' languages, simplification of language, regular comprehension check questions, and scaffolding. The main three strategies for FIU teachers were the use of complementary resources, extra explanations and repetitions, regular comprehension check questions, and scaffolding.

4.2.5. A need for training on teaching and learning strategies for EMTL teachers

In the last question of the survey, the respondents were asked whether or not they needed training on teaching and learning strategies for non-natives who taught their subjects using English. As a follow-up question, the teachers were asked to justify their choice by providing some details on what they thought the training would include.

The majority of FIU respondents said they would benefit from training for EMTL teachers. While 5 participants clearly answered they would not need any training, 2 teachers still thought it depended on the subjects they taught. From the seven EMU participants, five confirmed they would benefit from training for non-native English-speaking teachers teaching in EMTL contexts, while 2 responded they would not need one.

When considering the content of the EMTL teacher training, FIU teachers suggested a wide variety of topics, particularly, those related to cultural differences, multicultural teaching, intercultural communication, general teaching approaches for current students, general English, and group discussions to practice English. The remaining suggestions emphasized assessment design, peer learning, lesson preparation, emotional intelligence, AI language models, and presentation skills (see Figure 17).

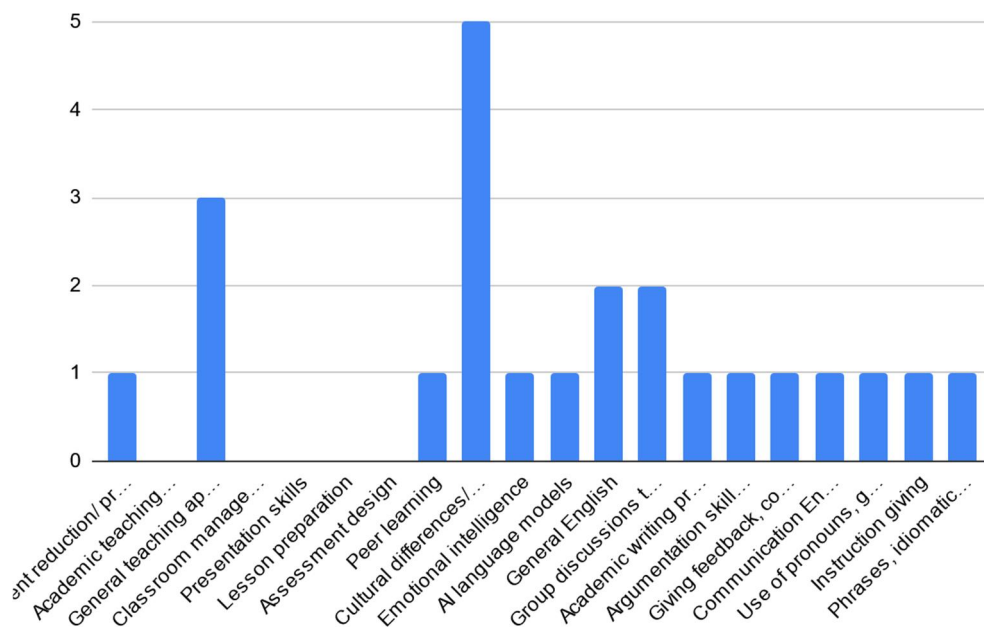


Figure 17 The content of EMTL teacher training (FIU)

As seen from the replies regarding the content of EMTL teacher training, EMU respondents also mentioned general teaching approaches for current students, as

well as lesson preparation and accent reduction/pronunciation skills (see Figure 18). In addition, the EMU teachers identified topics such as academic teaching methodologies, classroom management, presentation skills, and assessment design as useful for their professional development in teaching EMTL classes.

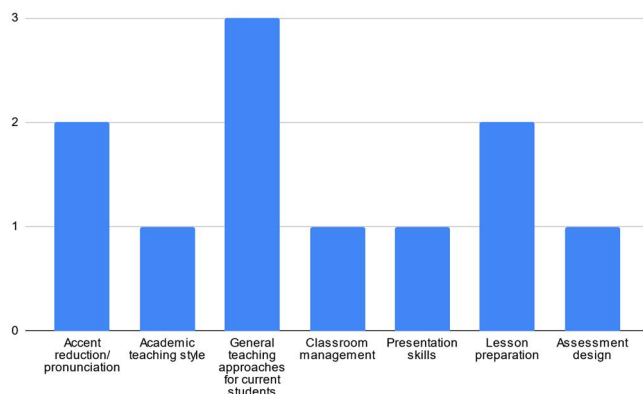


Figure 18 The content of EMTL teacher training (EMU)

The next section of the article will provide a detailed discussion and analysis of the research results presented above.

5. Discussion

This study examined non-native teachers' pedagogical, linguistic and cultural experiences, difficulties and achievements when teaching in the EMTL contexts of two universities: a university in Finland and one in the UAE. Moreover, this study aimed to identify some needs for teacher training and translate the results into a collaborative professional development framework to assist non-native subject teachers. It is grounded on previous research into EMTL, which demonstrated the expansion and advantages of EMTL pedagogy for students and universities alike across the globe (Bradford, 2013; Chell et al., 2021; Gobert, 2019; Khan, 2018; Murata & Iino, 2024) as well as the challenges associated with such an approach (Gitsaki & Zoghbor, 2023; Gobert, 2019; Muttaqin & Chuang, 2022; Qiu & Fang, 2019; Yıldız et al., 2017). To provide a thorough examination of the problem, a mixed-methods research design was used in this analysis. The participants were university teachers from all the faculties in both institutions. Ten questions included in the teacher survey allowed this study to analyze teachers' perceptions of teaching in their EMTL context and to define the needs for additional training in areas such as pedagogy, intercultural communication, and language.

Starting from the participants' mother tongue profiles, the results show that there is more variety in the FIU teachers' mother tongues than in the case of EMU, showing a more European linguistic background at FIU, while at EMU most of the respondents speak Arabic as their native language (and the official language of the country), with some speaking Hindi (a language also very present in the country).

As for other languages spoken by these teachers, variety is present in both settings, but at FIU there are, again, more European languages spoken by these teachers, whereas, at EMU, respondents report knowing more Asian and African languages. This may be explained by the fact that the universities seem to hire teachers according to their geographical location: more European teachers at FIU and more Asian teachers at EMU. What is undeniable is the multilingual repertoires of the teachers in both settings, even though the most spoken foreign/second language reported by respondents in both contexts is English.

The results concerning the teachers' self-evaluation of their English language proficiency demonstrate a general belief in teachers having an advanced or native-like level of English. However, EMU instructors rated themselves slightly higher as native-like users of English compared to FIU teachers. Despite the results showing a solid knowledge of English by the teachers at both universities, their experiences of challenges, discussed further, prove to be significant and multi-ranged.

Regarding the participants' experiences in EMTL contexts, both settings had similar years of experience at around an average of 10 years.

The findings concerning non-native teachers' advantages and disadvantages in teaching in the EMTL context reveal some notable institutional differences. At EMU, 50% of teachers perceived their non-nativeness as a benefit, compared to only 29% at FIU. This variation may suggest a more inclusive educational environment at EMU, where diversity and multilingualism in the classroom are more appreciated. A slightly different situation seems to be the case at FIU where teachers had experienced more disadvantages or worries about their legitimacy and bias when compared to native speakers. For example, they reported some difficulty in explaining certain terms in English, spending more time on grading assignments, and having an insufficient English level, which may lead to misunderstanding of the material. These experiences adhere to several previous studies that pointed to the challenges related to teachers' language competence and pedagogical preparedness to teach in a language that is not their native (Gitsaki & Zoghbor, 2023; Gobert 2019; Muttaqin & Chuang, 2022; Yıldız et al., 2017). In addition, the idea of presenting native English speakers as "the experts," as some FIU respondents have put it, raises the possibility that at FIU global linguistic hierarchies might be an ongoing practice, where native speakers are placed at an advantage.

As to advantages, both EMU and FIU teachers stressed multilingualism and clarity in contrast to the results regarding disadvantages, which were more

expressed by FIU teachers. This distinction may indicate a high degree of awareness of FIU teachers' language obstacles or a larger gap between their self-confidence and pedagogical proficiency. These results adhere to earlier studies on EMTL teachers' self-esteem and struggles resulting in what Medgyev in his earlier study called an 'inferiority complex' (1994 cited in Gitsaki & Zoghbor, 2023) where such teachers should work hard to be recognized as experts (Zuaro et al., 2024). On the other hand, 33% of EMU teachers adopted a more pragmatic view on teaching, stressing the dominating role of experience over linguistic expertise. This perspective reinforces the idea that effective teaching cannot only be determined by language fluency but also by pedagogical experience. Therefore, it is crucial to emphasize the need to evaluate the non-native English-speaking teachers' perceptions of advantages and disadvantages not only based on their linguistic competence but also to consider a larger spectrum of institutional, cultural and ideological factors that may have an impact on teachers' identity.

Regarding the challenges in teaching EMTL classes, the results from both universities demonstrate some similar and distinct cultural and linguistic problems. At FIU, teachers highlighted some major cultural difficulties, such as students' various educational experiences, expectations, assessment methods, and learning style preferences. In addition, FIU instructors also reported problems with academic English vocabulary, difficulty in covering complicated subjects in English, extra time required for preparation and addressing the issues related to students' insufficient competence in English. The results conform to previous studies that reported on teachers' difficulties with subject knowledge transfer, fluency, timing, and vocabulary when teaching in English (Hahl et al., 2016; Niva, 2019; Steele et al., 2024). Together, these findings point to the urgency of specialized assistance and training, especially in culturally diverse classrooms. On the contrary, the great majority of EMU teachers experienced almost no significant challenges. Those teachers, however, who expressed their concerns mentioned mainly cultural sensitivity in a Muslim-dominated setting and a seemingly prevalent grade-based mindset. As to linguistic challenges, they were related to a difficulty in communicating subject matters in English. In other words, while EMU teachers seem to have experienced more cultural challenges tied to their specific cultural context, FIU instructors faced a broader range of both cultural and linguistic difficulties.

To deal with the above-mentioned challenges in their EMTL classrooms, teachers at both universities used a number of pedagogical strategies tailored to their specific contexts. FIU teachers reported using diverse pedagogical resources, scaffolding and individualized instruction, which reflects their commitment to making EMTL content more accessible and a learning environment more inclusive. Their emphasis on adapting the teaching and clarifying the guidance demonstrates a deliberate effort to meet varied learner needs. While EMU instructors also

used scaffolding, additional material and clarifications, they largely relied on translation and the use of learners' native languages. The latter strategy may indicate that they are dealing with more homogenous groups of learners and that teachers prefer saving class time on giving instructions in their native language to ensure full understanding of the material. Using a native language in the English-medium classroom could also be a sign of a more flexible language policy of the institution. Such different pedagogical strategies might be shaped not only by individual teaching styles but also by broader institutional, linguistic, and cultural contexts.

Given the linguistic and cultural challenges discussed above, the need for training on teaching and learning strategies in the EMTL context seems to be evident. Despite some teachers demonstrating confidence in their present competence, the majority of participants from both EMU and FIU universities expressed their interest in receiving training for improving their EMTL teaching. Teachers agreed that training and support could address pedagogical and linguistic challenges. The most common areas for improvement expressed by the majority of teachers included intercultural competence, pronunciation, and academic vocabulary. In addition, participants also mentioned some training that could go beyond solely language education, namely classroom management, the use of AI tools, and modern assessment techniques. These results highlight non-native English teachers' understanding of the changing needs of multicultural, multilingual classrooms and their commitment to improving through focused training.

6. Conclusion

Overall, this study demonstrates the complexity of the linguistic, pedagogical and cultural experiences of non-native English-speaking instructors teaching in EMTL contexts at two universities in Finland and the UAE.

The results identify some differences and commonalities between the two settings. To begin with, FIU seems to be more culturally and linguistically diverse, while EMU teachers have lower linguistic variation and a more homogenous environment. Although it is still international, the range of languages is narrower. These differences had a significant impact on the problems that the teachers encountered and the pedagogical approaches that they used in the classroom. Despite all the respondents reporting on having linguistic and cultural barriers in their EMTL practices, FIU teachers' struggles seem to have been more evident. Similar differences were found in perceptions of advantages and disadvantages. FIU instructors expressed more concerns about institutional support, self-confidence, and acceptability, while EMU respondents claimed better institutional support and confidence. Despite these differences, several similar pedagogical methods

used by both groups of participants were identified. Among those were scaffolding, clarifications in a native language, and verbal simplicity, which, they believed, helped to increase students' engagement with the subject and ensure a more inclusive learning environment.

The findings point to the strong need for professional development and an understanding of the changes and challenges associated with teaching in an EMTL context. The suggestions of training varied from linguistic support, such as pronunciation and verbal fluency, to classroom management and evaluation methods. Moreover, the results suggest that teaching in EMTL contexts is a process of adaptation and transformation. It is determined by a number of interrelated elements, including the subject being taught, learner performance, organizational policies, and individual teaching preferences. Therefore, there is a need for more responsive support systems that could develop non-native English-speaking teacher competency. The findings of this study could help in shaping future policies and practices targeted at enabling non-native English-speaking teachers and promoting the quality of EMTL in varied educational environments, by offering linguistic, pedagogical and cultural training.

7. Limitations of the study

While this study offers insightful data about the linguistic, pedagogical and cultural experiences of non-native English-speaking teachers teaching in two contrasting settings, it presents some limitations. First of all, the discrepancy in the number of respondents between universities may not offer a fully consistent equivalence; however, we consider that contextual factors dictated this difference and data collected remains valid, sound and important for discussions on the topic. General findings should, nevertheless, be interpreted with caution. Secondly, because this study focused only on two universities, the results cannot be broadly applicable to other institutions and faculties alike since the chosen university settings might not fully reflect the complexity of EMTL teaching across the globe. In addition, the findings represent individual viewpoints without taking into account the overall institutional policy as well as students' perceptions on this matter. Students' perspective in the successful implementation of EMTL teaching should not be underestimated since it might be critical for entirely understanding EMTL. Finally, cultural presumptions and educational norms may well have influenced teachers' responses. Thus, further research should be conducted to analyze how non-native English-speaking teachers at other universities in the world perceive their experiences.

8. Pedagogical implications and recommendations

Despite the many common perspectives in both settings, a single unified framework for teacher support could not be created, as proposed in our goals for this study, due to the cultural and contextual differences between these two universities. For example, EMU instructors require culturally sensitive sessions while FIU teachers, who expressed more concerns with linguistic insecurity, seem to be more in need of academic English improvement and training. Teachers' self-perception of their EMTL competence is largely influenced by their teaching identity and confidence, which are, in turn, shaped by organizational culture that either promotes linguistic hierarchies or encourages diversity. Therefore, it is clear that universities should try to foster inclusive environments, avoiding negative assumptions about non-native English-speaking teachers. The leadership should be trained to employ such practices and policies that target teachers' competency and experience rather than nativeness.

To support teachers in improving their EMTL strategies, it would be crucial to promote some reflective practices among teachers where peers could collaborate and exchange their pedagogical strategies and experiences in EMTL teaching. Offering accessible spaces for reflection workshops and peer collaboration can provide teachers with an opportunity to share practices and address the challenges of EMTL teaching. To keep teachers engaged in the process and to minimize linguistic and cultural barriers, universities could encourage pedagogical experiments and the use of digital tools and AI.

To conclude, this study highlights a complex interplay between language, culture, and pedagogy for non-native teachers in EMTL contexts. Providing support to non-native English-speaking teachers entails more than simply helping with linguistic challenges. It also requires developing their professional identities, self-confidence, and ability to function efficiently in a multicultural and multilingual learning environment.

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