Artículo de investigación

Teacher Education in EMI: Effective Practices, Challenges, and Needs

Formación docente en EMI: prácticas efectivas, desafíos y necesidades

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Abstract:

Introduction: Teacher training in EMI may pose certain challenges in countries where rates of English language proficiency are not high. This study examined the perspective of pre-service English teachers and teacher educators on effective English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) teaching practices, the challenges involved, and the immediate needs of teacher education in Ecuador. **Methodology:** In this mixed-method study, the researcher collected data from 123 preservice teachers through a quantitative survey on their preferred teaching practices and conducted in-depth interviews with five teacher educators at a teacher training university to explore challenges, needs, and best practices, as well as to identify points of alignment and areas requiring adaptation. **Results and discussion:** The findings indicate that both groups of participants value lecturing and Active Learning (AL) strategies in EMI teacher training. Specifically, lectures are valued for their time efficiency and for simplifying complex concepts for all participants, and AL is praised for fostering engagement, critical thinking, and knowledge application. However, implementing these practices is not without challenges, as lectures pose challenges to student engagement and knowledge retention, and AL is criticized for uneven participation, time inefficiency, student fatigue, and limitations in addressing complex subjects. Moreover, suitable EMI teaching materials that align with learners' proficiency levels are scarce. **Conclusions:** Effective teaching practices to respond to the challenges identified in this study involve combining lectures and active learning to minimize the obstacles and maximize the benefits of each method of instruction. Immediate needs include developing suitable materials that are easy to read and integrating active learning techniques with traditional lectures.

Keywords:
English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI); teacher education; teacher educators; active learning; lectures

Resumen

Introducción: la formación docente en EMI (English as a Medium of Instruction) puede plantear ciertos desafíos en países donde los niveles de dominio del idioma inglés no son altos. Este estudio examinó la perspectiva de los docentes en formación y de los formadores de docentes sobre las prácticas efectivas de enseñanza en EMI, los desafíos implicados y las necesidades inmediatas de la formación docente en Ecuador. **Metodología**: en este estudio de método mixto, el investigador recopiló datos de 123 docentes en formación a través de una encuesta cuantitativa sobre sus prácticas de enseñanza preferidas y realizó entrevistas en profundidad con cinco formadores de docentes en una universidad de formación docente, con el fin de explorar los desafíos, necesidades y mejores prácticas, así como identificar puntos de alineación y áreas que requieren adaptación. **Resultados y discusión:** los hallazgos indican que ambos grupos de

Keywords:
English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI); teacher education; teacher educators; active learning; lectures

participantes valoran tanto las clases magistrales como las estrategias de Aprendizaje Activo (AA) en la formación docente en EMI. En particular, las clases magistrales se valoran por su eficiencia en el uso del tiempo y por simplificar conceptos complejos para todos los participantes, mientras que el AA es elogiado por fomentar la participación, el pensamiento crítico y la aplicación del conocimiento. Sin embargo, la implementación de estas prácticas no está exenta de dificultades, ya que las clases magistrales presentan problemas en cuanto al compromiso y la retención de conocimiento de los estudiantes, y el AA es criticado por la participación desigual, la ineficiencia en el uso del tiempo, la fatiga estudiantil y las limitaciones para abordar temas complejos. Además, se constató la escasez de materiales adecuados de enseñanza en EMI que se ajusten al nivel de competencia de los estudiantes. **Conclusiones**: las mejores prácticas de enseñanza para responder a los desafíos identificados en este estudio consisten en combinar clases magistrales y aprendizaje activo para minimizar las dificultades y maximizar los beneficios de cada método de instrucción. Las necesidades inmediatas incluyen el desarrollo de materiales adecuados y de fácil lectura, así como la integración de técnicas de aprendizaje activo con las clases magistrales tradicionales.

Introduction

In Ecuador, education is a basic right protected by the constitution, and it is meant to be fair, inclusive, open to everyone, and free from preschool through undergraduate university studies (Echavarría & Orosz, 2021). Hence, this country has heavily invested in teacher training universities to fulfill this promise and to build a better society by preparing capable teachers through free and accessible education (Echavarría & Orosz, 2021). However, many in-service English teachers often struggle with low English proficiency (Cajas et al., 2023), and pre-service English teachers in Ecuador are predominantly educated using English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI). This may pose challenges to the teaching and learning process, as many pre-service teachers may find grasping the content difficult due to their low English language proficiency.

Regarding common EMI teaching practices, educators predominantly use Active Learning (AL) and lecturing to train future English teachers in Ecuador. AL helps make lessons more meaningful and can, therefore, improve teaching across different subjects (Borda et al., 2020; du Rocher, 2020; Freeman et al., 2014; O'Leary et al., 2020). AL practice includes strategies such as contextualizing the content and connecting it to learners' personal lives, promoting critical thinking, supporting independent learning, teamwork, problem-solving tasks, peer learning, and using ideas from educational psychology, such as cognitive load theory and self-determination (Cheng et al., 2019; Koh, 2019; Seery, 2015). Thus, it can boost student motivation and participation (du Rocher, 2020) and is seen as a valuable way to raise the overall quality of education in Ecuador (Orosz et al., 2018; Robles & Torres-Muros, 2017).

Nevertheless, traditional methods, including lectures, still have a place in certain situations, as lectures are considered ideal when there is a need to summarize complex topics, share the latest research, or highlight key

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ideas (McKeachie & Svinicki, 2014). Given the value of lectures, some researchers have recommended integrating them with more student-centered activities instead of abandoning them (Ulimaz, 2021; Nordmann et al., 2022). This idea is especially relevant in undergraduate pre-service English teacher training programs offered at Ecuadorian universities, where many institutions offer theory-based courses such as linguistics, language acquisition, and teaching methodology that require discussing theories in depth; therefore, lectures can be a helpful and effective way to ensure understanding of the content, as McKeachie and Svinicki (2014) suggest. On the other hand, pre-service teachers also study practical topics that include teaching techniques, course planning, and test development. These areas are better taught through collaborative tasks, problem-solving activities, and interactive work. Therefore, AL can be particularly useful since it directly involves and supports hands-on learning (Cheng et al., 2019; Koh, 2019; Seery, 2015).

To date, the opinions of pre-service teachers on their preferred AL activities and teaching practices in English as a Medium instruction (EMI) have not been explored. This leads to disregarding the perspectives of participants in teacher training programs when planning lessons. Moreover, no information is available on the merits and demerits of using AL or lecturing practices in Ecuadorian teacher education programs. This leaves teacher educators without enough evidencebased guidance to adjust their teaching to meet the real needs of their students and to provide fair and inclusive education for everyone.

This issue is particularly important in Ecuador, a country with a rich mix of ethnicities, teachers, and students from a wide range of educational, cultural, geographic, and economic backgrounds (Barragán et al., 2023). Additionally, the importance of gauging the participants' opinions and their preferred educational practices holds significance since personalized learning has been a goal in education in the last two hundred years (Tetzlaff et al., 2021). As Dockterman (2018) points out, tailoring instruction to match students' individual needs and strengths can help them learn more effectively. Therefore, this study aims to revisit the effectiveness of EMI, current practices, and identify effective practices, challenges, and needs of EMI teacher training in Ecuador.

1.1 English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI)

EMI can be defined as the use of the English language to teach a curriculum in countries where English is not the main language of communication (Macaro et al., 2018). Recently, EMI has witnessed a significant increase in higher education globally (Soruç & Griffiths, 2018), but its use is more dominant at the primary and secondary levels within the Global South (Sah & Li, 2018). This large-scale dominance is mainly due to a passion for going global and establishing a presence in the international arena (Dearden & Macaro, 2016). In Latin America, studies show a gradual adoption of EMI within the higher education system. For instance, in Chile, Reus (2020) reports that EMI courses in engineering

and finance generally produce academic outcomes comparable to Spanish-medium courses, while also noting that the use of English introduces additional considerations for course design and delivery. In Colombia, Tejada-Sánchez and Molina-Naar (2020) describe how EMI is framed within broader internationalization agendas and emphasize the importance of aligning institutional goals with classroom-level realities. In Mexico, case studies examining bilingual and EMI-oriented programs in polytechnic universities (e.g., Castillo-Nava, 2022) show that EMI implementation remains in early stages, with some challenges, such as English proficiency issues and a lack of teachers' training.

In EMI, the most prominent hindering factor relates to language proficiency (Clegg & Simpson, 2016; Macaro et al., 2018). For example, in the UAE, Belhiah and Elhami (2015) report students struggling to learn various subjects as a result of their low proficiency in English. Moreover, Byun et al. (2011) report that EMI in Korea is enforced without attention to students' proficiency and institutional support; therefore, they recommend the examination of financial and human resources at the institutional level before the implementation of EMI. Across Latin America, a similar pattern is observed. A regional analysis by Aliaga-Salas and Pérez-Andrade (2023) documents increasing institutional interest alongside persistent challenges related to student preparedness, lecturer proficiency, and assessment practices. However, Ecuador is excluded from this report, as studies on EMI in Ecuador are scarce.

In Ecuador specifically, EMI is present both in high schools through the teaching of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) (Mendoza et al., 2020; Sánchez, 2024) and in certain higher education institutions with the aim of improving students' English language proficiency (Terán Molina et al., 2024; Ortega-Auquilla et al., 2021). Moreover, the National University of Education, the only teacher-training university in Ecuador, has adopted an EMI curriculum for its English teacher-training program to ensure pre-service English teachers receive adequate exposure to the English language (Universidad Nacional de Educación, 2023). Nevertheless, the review of literature on the use of EMI in Ecuador reveals only one reflection (Alcivar et al., 2019) and does not cover EMI English teacher education. Given the absence of EMI research studies in Ecuador, and that several studies highlight issues with students' English proficiency (e.g., Barre-Parrales & Villafuerte-Holguín, 2021; Guerrero Rodríguez & Moreira Baquerizo, 2025; Orosz et al., 2021), investigating the challenges of using EMI and potential remedial actions in this field is warranted.

1.2 Active Learning (AL)

Active learning is commonly defined as a student-centered approach to teaching and learning (Lee et al., 2018), where students read, write, discuss, and participate in higher-order thinking tasks such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Felder & Brent, 2009). These activities contribute to the enhancement of learners' higher-order thinking skills, which are deemed crucial 21st-century competencies (Al-Busaidi & Tuzlukova, 2021; Neisler et al., 2016). The underlying principle of AL is rooted in constructivist and social constructivist learning theories, which perceive learning as a socially situated and context-specific process of meaning creation (Patiño et al., 2023). In contrast to traditional approaches focused on knowledge transmission, AL facilitates student learning by viewing learners as active participants in the process of learning rather than passive recipients of the teacher's knowledge (Ertmer & Newby, 2013; Kane, 2004). In this participatory approach, the

teacher serves as a guide and facilitator rather than a transmitter of knowledge (Oros, 2007).

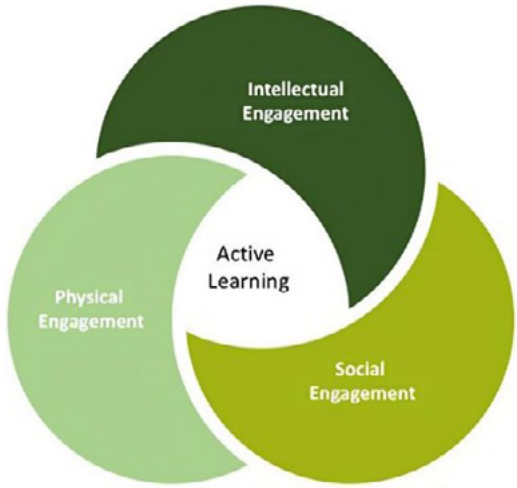
Examples of AL practices include in-class writing as a productive way to engage students and stimulate reflection, class discussions, problem solving, collaborative learning, cooperative learning, project-based learning, case studies, guided design, debates, drama, role-playing, and simulation (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Felder & Brent, 2009; Lee et al., 2018). Hati and Afriazi (2019) note that implementing active learning in the classroom can involve working in groups, which makes students part of the learning process. This approach fosters critical thinking and communication skills and sustains students' interest and focus throughout the course (Ozer, 2020).

Moreover, studies suggest that innovative methodologies, such as collaborative and responsible learning, flipped classrooms, and gamification, improve academic results and student satisfaction (Da Silva Garcia et al., 2022; Sampedro et al., 2022) as AL tasks engage students intellectually, socially, and physically (See Figure 1). On a different note, studies have shown that there is a positive correlation between movement and learning (Ratey, 2008) and that AL strategies in various subjects are associated with personal and academic gains, enhancing higher-order thinking abilities, and promoting lifelong learning skills (Al-Busaidi & Tuzlukova, 2021; Nelson & Crow, 2014; Neisler et al., 2016). Furthermore, active students are more likely to generate new ideas and establish connections with existing ones because they learn more when actively involved in completing a learning task than when they passively listen to instruction (Ozer, 2020).

Despite the advantages of AL, transitioning from traditional lecture-focused pedagogy to an active learning model has been a slow process, and researchers frequently cite lack of time to prepare for such a transition as the primary reason for this slow rate of adopting active learning (e.g., Brownell & Tanner, 2012; Dancy & Henderson, 2008; Finelli et al., 2014; Henderson, 2008; Henderson et al., 2011; Henderson & Dancy, 2007; Michael, 2007; Morales & Prince, 2019; Shadle et al., 2017; Sturtevant & Wheeler, 2019; Tsang & Harris, 2016). Moreover, Jamison et al. (2014) argue that the process of educational change is not clear and well-defined. Other obstacles that hinder the adoption of active learning include insufficient preparation time, concerns about content coverage, lack of support from colleagues, limited access to professional development opportunities, and misalignment with instructor reward structures (Brownell & Tanner, 2012; Finelli et al., 2014; Henderson, 2008; Shadle et al., 2017; Sturtevant & Wheeler, 2019).

Additionally, Gasmi and Al Nadabi (2023) found that AL poses challenges when there exist insufficiencies in students' critical thinking skills, unfamiliarity with the topics discussed in class, workloads, and student anxiety. They further affirm that for AL to be successful, instructors need to meticulously design their tasks and students need to take

Figure 1. *Dimensions of active learning*



Source: Edwards, 2015, as cited in Vale & Barbosa, 2020

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responsibility and contribute to teamwork. Given that AL may enhance student anxiety and workload, recent research in large public research-intensive institutions has focused on identifying ways to implement these methods without exacerbating student anxiety (Cooper et al., 2018).

1.3 Lecturing

Although lectures have been described as dull, passive, outdated, and doomed to obsolescence (DiPiro, 2009; Lumpkin et al., 2015), some studies show that the traditional lecture-based approach remains a prevalent teaching method in higher education institutions (Abedi et al., 2019; Bligh, 2000; Brown & Race, 2005; Charlton, 2006; Davis & Minife, 2013; Garbin et al., 2022). One argument in favor of lectures is that they are efficient for delivering substantial content knowledge to a large audience (Bligh 2000; Brown & Race 2005; Charlton 2006). The proponents of the lecture method argue that well-executed lectures can be informative, engaging, inspiring, and transformative learning experiences (Charlton, 2006; Penson, 2012). Additionally, lectures may offer a less cognitively demanding experience for students due to well-organized and systematically presented content (Charlton 2006; Kirschner et al. 2006). As French and Kennedy (2017) state, when designed and delivered expertly, one of the most important features of lectures is the capacity to build a sustained and complex argument.

Lectures are thought to be effective since they provide an easy transition of knowledge to students (Abdulbaki et al., 2018), provide clear, structured, and specific content (Kay et al., 2019), and are likely the best way to conceptualize knowledge (Charlton, 2006). Moreover, Bligh (1971) suggests that although lecturers do face psychological limitations concerning the attention span and memory capabilities of students, concentration can be stimulated with enthusiasm from the lecturer, by motivating students through interaction, and by ensuring that the material being communicated is relevant and meaningful to the students. However, the lecturer's skill and commitment have a significant impact on their capacity to motivate students. Therefore, it has been suggested to deliver lectures in conjunction with other tools to compensate for the shortcomings of lectures, such as lack of engagement or critical thinking (Fry et al., 2008).

Other studies show that students find lectures interesting and valuable (Abdulbaki et al., 2018; Charlton, 2006). Gysbers et al. (2011) note that students often indicate that they learn better, engage more, and even enjoy themselves more when attending lectures. Moreover, some research suggests that lectures play an important role in developing skills in listening and note-taking, which are thought to enhance the learning process (Charlton 2006). The capacity for lectures to develop listening skills is often discussed in conjunction with the practice of student note-taking, which some suggest has an important pedagogical function (Charlton, 2006; Hattie, 2015; Mueller & Oppenheimer, 2014). Therefore, instead of completely abandoning lectures (Nordmann et al., 2022), it has

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been recommended that lectures be used in conjunction with student-centered activities (Ulimaz, 2021).

Nevertheless, there is a noticeable gap in the literature about Ecuadorian students' preferred teaching practices, either specific AL activities or lecturing, to be employed in classrooms. Identifying such teaching practices is particularly important to ensure adaptable, reflective, and equitable education. In the context of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), active learning is particularly important, as teacher training is a dynamic process that requires continuous practice and interaction in various forms, such as case studies, problem-solving exercises, and discussions. On the other hand, using lectures may also present advantages since pre-service teachers are exposed to highly complex concepts that a lecturer in a lecture needs to elaborate on, discuss, and summarize to ensure the safe transmission of the information to all participants. Against this backdrop, the following research questions were posed:

1. What are the effective teaching practices in EMI teacher education?
2. What instructional needs do pre-service English teachers have in EMI education in Ecuador?
3. What are the challenges associated with EMI teacher training in Ecuador?

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

To respond to the research questions, the researcher followed a mixed-method approach and adopted the Sequential Explanatory Strategy. According to Mirhosseini (2020), a mixed-method approach provides a more in-depth investigation of research questions as it allows for the integration of positivist knowledge, quantitative research techniques, and contextualized knowledge. Following the Sequential Explanatory Strategy, the data collection process began with the collection of quantitative data to investigate students' preferred activities to be used in the teaching process. Then, the researcher gathered qualitative data from the teacher educators to gauge their perception about the challenges and benefits of those practices and their preferred activities to enrich the findings and provide deeper insights.

2.2 Participants and Context

The focus of this study was to identify effective practices, challenges, and needs of EMI English teacher training in Ecuador. Given this objective, a newly established teacher training university that offers English teacher training in EMI was selected to serve as the context for this research project due to its accessibility and relevance to the aims of this study. The participants consisted of two groups of students (n=123) and university professors (n=5) at this university. The participants' ages ranged from 21 to 27 in the students' group and from 34 to 55 in the teachers' group. The participants' gender was not taken into account as it was not considered an influential factor. The students in this study were enrolled in various academic subjects related to English teacher training from the fifth to ninth semester, and the professors were the instructors of those subjects. The teacher educators were considered experts in English teacher education and their experience in higher education ranged from 8 to 25 years.

2.3 Data Collection and Sampling

The data collection phase of this study involved two stages of quantitative and qualitative data collection. The sampling

method was convenience sampling and based on the participants' availability, as suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2017). However, the professors in this study were selected due to their extensive teaching experience and knowledge of pedagogical practices. Upon agreement, five in-depth interviews were conducted with five instructors, each participating in an approximately two-hour-long interview.

2.4 Quantitative Data Collection

To assess the students' needs regarding their desired teaching practices and activities used in class, a survey questionnaire was designed and administered by the researcher. This questionnaire included 10 items (see Annex A) and was constructed based on the reviewed literature, aiming to identify effective teaching practices in EMI teacher training. In doing so, the questionnaire prompted the students to choose their preferred activities and means of instruction in a particular subject from a list of predetermined activities that included lectures and various AL activities. The participants in this group also ranked the activities on a 7-point ranking scale from 1 (the least desired) to 7 (the most desired). A different part of the questionnaire prompted students to suggest other activities and provide reasons for their choice of activities in an open-ended item. Prior to administration of the questionnaire, the researcher asked two colleagues to verify its validity and then piloted this tool to a separate group of participants (N=20) to test the items for clarity. Upon administration, the responses were collected using Google Forms, and the results were exported into spreadsheets for data analysis.

2.5 Qualitative Data Collection

In addition to the survey, the researcher conducted five in-depth semi-structured interviews with the teacher group of the participants. In this sense, the teachers were asked to categorize the subjects they had taught into two categories: "theoretical" and "practical". This categorization was done to ensure the relevance of activities used in each subject, depending on how much a subject includes theoretical or practical content. Categorizing and analyzing the data collected from the students in the quantitative part of the data collection into two categories of practical and theoretical subjects was also facilitated through this categorization. The participants were then asked a series of questions (see Annex B) related to effective teaching practices, the challenges involved, and the students' needs. Each interview lasted for 1 hour on average.

2.6 Data Analysis

Before data analysis, the researcher categorized the students' preferred activities collected through the questionnaire into two categories of traditional lectures and active learning activities. The researcher then performed reliability analysis and descriptive statistics analysis on the quantitative data using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. To analyze the qualitative data, the recordings obtained from the interviews were transcribed by the researcher using Microsoft Word. The researcher then used inductive coding in the same word processing software to code the qualitative data. Upon coding, the codes were analyzed to identify similar themes. After the analysis, the researcher categorized the discovered information into categories that reflected the purpose of this study. The codes and categories were generated descriptively and constantly refined in a codebook. To ensure validity, code-data consistency checks were conducted to verify that each code accurately represented participants' responses. In addition, negative case analysis was employed to enhance the credibility and robustness of the coding process.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Quantitative Analysis

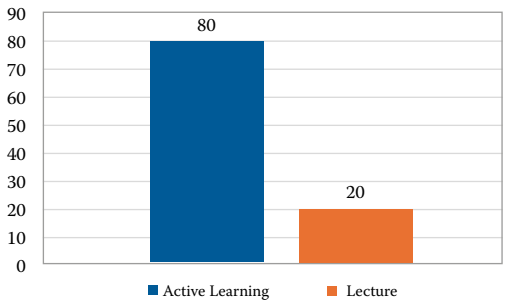
To ensure the reliability of the questionnaire, the researcher conducted a reliability analysis test using Cronbach's Alpha in SPSS. As evident in Table 1, the results indicated a coefficient of .78, which proves acceptable reliability.

To shed light on students' preferences for their favored teaching practices, descriptive statistics analysis was performed. As presented in Figure 2, the students predominantly favored active learning techniques, as only 20% of the participants selected lecturing, and 80% selected other activities that involved active learning practices.

Table 1. *Reliability Statistics*

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.780	8

Figure 2. *Students' preferred teaching method*



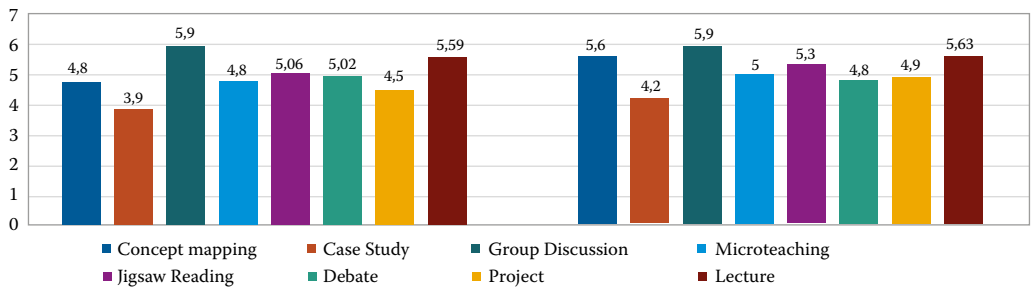
Source: Prepared by the author

As depicted in Figure 3, group discussions and lectures were rated as the most important activities by the students in both practical and theoretical subjects. The third most important activity, as perceived by students, was jigsaw reading in practical subjects and concept mapping in theoretical subjects.

The students' comments regarding the reasons for choosing the top three activities in part 2 of the questionnaire also reflected the importance of active learning techniques. For example, regarding active learning activities, one student stated, "I chose those three [activities] because they are didactic [dynamic] ways of learning, and we also learn better through interaction". Another student mentioned, "I learn better with those activities [AL], and also I feel more comfortable when I do these activities". The preference for group discussions was echoed by a student who said, "Group discussion because it is easier to help each other when we don't understand something", and another who added, "I prefer group discussion because it helps me exchange ideas with my peers and learn from them. I also feel more confident to speak in a second language when I have a supportive group".

A different student highlighted the social and educational benefits by saying, "Group

Figure 3. *Students' preferences for activities to be used in instruction*



Source: Prepared by the author

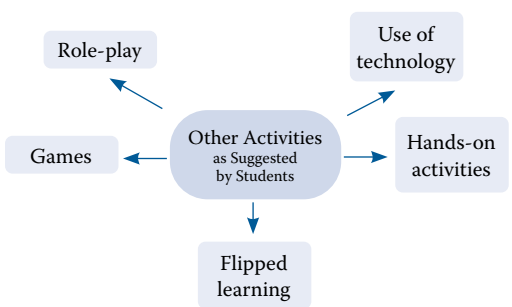
discussion is a great way to learn from each other and have fun. I can practice my speaking skills and interact with my classmates in a friendly environment". On the other hand, the use of concept mapping and jigsaw reading was appreciated for their cognitive benefits. One student noted, "I chose concept mapping because it helps my memory retention about a topic", while another commented on jigsaw reading by stating, "Jigsaw reading is an interaction tool when you are mandatory [forced] to share information that you know or read".

Despite the strong preference for interactive activities, the importance of lectures was also emphasized. A student remarked, "Teacher explanation helps improve understanding. In my view, those subjects have to be well explained due to the fact that they are kind of complicated to understand". Another student noted,

Personally, I don't like to interact too much with my classmates unless it is something related to the class, but I really like [it] when a teacher explains something in a clear way. It's easier to avoid misunderstandings and arguments with classmates due to our views.

The third section of the survey questionnaire prompted students to recommend useful activities to be included in TEFL classes. As depicted in Figure 4, the students mostly recommended games, role-play activities, activities that involve the use of technology, flipped learning activities, and hands-on activities.

Figure 4.
Student's recommendation of activities to be used in class

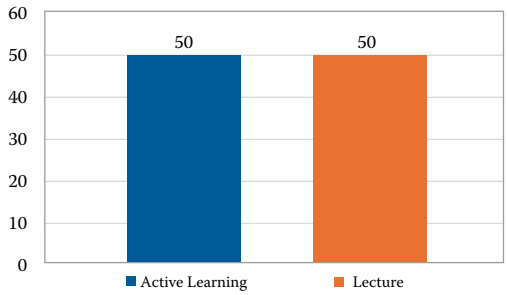


Source: Prepared by the author

3.2 Qualitative analysis

The interview questions prompted instructors to state their preferences regarding teaching practices. As depicted in Figure 5, the group of professors in this study unanimously favored the use of both active learning techniques and traditional lectures in virtually equal proportions, regardless of the nature of the subject (whether practical or theoretical). This preference is also reflected in their teaching practice. Regarding the activities preferred by the professors, nearly all professors presented ideas similar to those of the students.

Figure 5.
Instructors' preference for teaching method

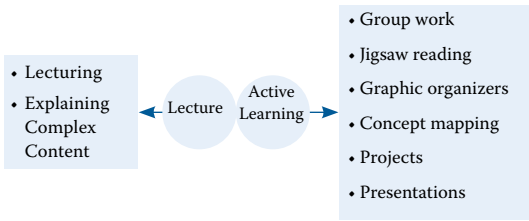


Source: Prepared by the author

3.3 Best practices in EMI teacher training in Ecuador

The data gathered through five in-depth interviews with the instructors of the subjects in TEFL illuminated best practices to be used in EMI teacher training in Ecuador based on the instructors' professional opinions. As presented in Figure 6, the teacher educators in this study mentioned group work, jigsaw reading, graphic organizers, concept mapping, projects, and student presentations. These

Figure 6. *Best practices in EMI teacher training*



Source: Prepared by the author

activities were mentioned for both theoretical and practical subjects, as all instructors expressed a strong desire to use lectures in their classes regardless of the nature of the subject.

Lectures were particularly valued for their ability to efficiently cover essential content, with one participant stating, "There are a lot of topics that need to be covered for [the name of the subject]... lectures help in covering essential content effectively". Another participant highlighted the role of lectures in clarifying complex concepts, noting, "Through these lectures, I can highlight and emphasize concepts and their key associated characteristics that students need to master". Facilitating understanding was another key reason for the use of lectures, with one participant explaining, "I believe lectures facilitate learning because they involve presenting the most relevant insights with the students in class".

Moreover, the instructors attributed various benefits to active learning and tended to incorporate these strategies into their teaching. They reported high engagement, the opportunity to put knowledge into practice, better retention of knowledge, higher motivation, and improved critical thinking skills as key reasons for embracing active learning that could contribute to more equitable education for all participants. One participant remarked, "Students actually like those activities because they will be using the knowledge and skills they have acquired". Another echoed this sentiment by stating: "They do enjoy active learning activities because they actually get to apply what they've learned". Active learning was also praised for its convenience in putting knowledge into practice. An instructor highlighted, "Students will need to apply [the content] through the creation of a project by the end of the semester". Another added, "They learn how to conduct needs analysis and use that as a foundation to create contextualized English courses".

The collaborative nature of active learning was another key benefit, as students often worked together on projects. One instructor mentioned, "Students work in groups of three or four to create a micro-curricular project," while another noted, "We do a lot of sharing inside the class... in small groups about these essential questions and then share their viewpoints as a whole class". Active learning was also attributed to fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills. One instructor explained, "The students need to present the project and receive feedback to improve... this process helps them develop their critical thinking skills".

Active learning is also considered highly effective in terms of knowledge retention. An instructor commented, "I believe that active learning facilitates learning because it involves students in the process, making them more likely to remember key ideas". Finally, instructors noted that active learning increased student motivation and interest. One participant stated, "I think that students become more aware of how the things they learn are actually helpful for them... it keeps them motivated".

3.4 Challenges of lectures and active learning strategies

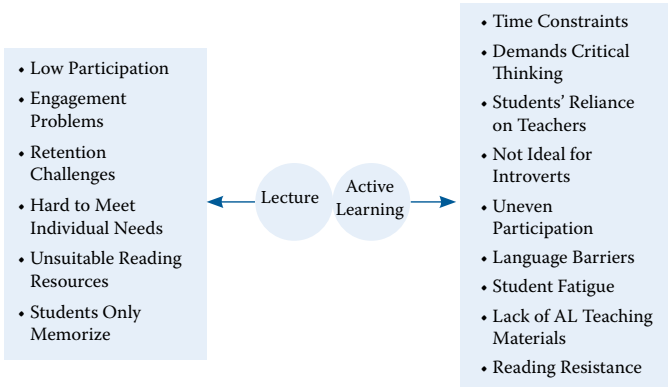
The instructor group of participants in this study identified various challenges associated with lectures. As demonstrated in

Figure 7 below, the participants highlighted student engagement difficulties, limited student participation, retention challenges, addressing individual learning needs, and unsuitable reading resources.

Regarding the issues of maintaining engagement, the instructors cited various reasons, including the difficulty of the concepts presented in lectures, students' tendency toward active learning rather than passive learning, and students questioning the usefulness of lectures for their future professional endeavors. For instance, an instructor noted, "Students sometimes find the concepts discussed during lectures challenging to understand, especially if their English proficiency is not strong". A different participant asserted, "they [the students] question a lot the point of those lectures ….. they think as teachers they should only learn how to teach". The limited interaction inherent in lectures was also a concern for the professors. A professor stated, "It would not be a good idea to spend an entire class only lecturing... there's limited interaction, which can lead to passive learning". Another teacher added, "They [students] only pay attention for a couple of minutes, then they start using their phones".

In terms of retention, instructors expressed concerns that students might struggle to retain information from lectures as they do not deem theoretical knowledge useful in their future careers. One remarked, "If students are just listening and not actively engaged, they will very likely forget what was discussed". Additionally, nearly all educators complained about students memorizing the content only to pass the subject. One professor stated, "It's like they don't care, they just memorize to pass the subject". Regarding the reasons, one instructor remarked, "Sadly, it's cultural, it all starts from school [high school]". Another teacher mentioned, "The subject is very abstract; you don't really see how it applies". Regarding real-life application

Figure 7. *Challenges of lectures and active learning*



Source: Prepared by the author

of the contents, a participant highlighted, "Students are not aware that teaching and research are connected…. They only think they need to teach".

Another challenge of lectures highlighted by the professors was the availability of suitable materials to be used in classrooms. One instructor stated, "The language [of the books used as resources] is too academic …… I make my own materials, I make word banks for definition". Another person asserted, "There is no book for the subject I teach ….. I had to come to the library [to read and find books], make slides, get materials from other teachers". Lectures were also seen as challenging in terms of meeting individual learning needs. An instructor explained, "Some students find it challenging to understand some concepts... this can make it difficult to address each student's individual learning needs during a lecture."

Regarding the challenges of active learning, the participants in this group highlighted several issues, including, a lack of responsibility in some students, time constraints, students' resistance toward reading, and students' low level of proficiency in English, which is the predominant language of instruction at the university where this study was undertaken, issues related to preparation of teaching



materials, students' subpar critical thinking skills, fatigue, and students dependence on teacher explanation.

One of the main challenges mentioned was the pressure to cover the syllabus. Teachers frequently mentioned challenges related to finishing the syllabus in the given time. For instance, a teacher noted, "Sometimes I will need to rush to try to finish a topic earlier than I expected. So, time is always an issue". Another significant challenge was the varying levels of student engagement and participation. An instructor observed, "Some students, they are kind of laid back... probably they don't care that much". Another added, "I have faced challenges where some students don't cooperate with their group members or don't put in the work as much as necessary". In the same vein, some participants considered shyness a prominent challenge when engaging students through active learning techniques. A teacher notes, "Students are very timid and shy in this region, but they're not in [city] and [city]". Another added, "Some speak with a very low volume …. Have a lot of problems producing [speaking] …. Only speaking in short sentences".

The preparation of materials for active learning activities was also highlighted as a time-consuming process, especially when custom resources are needed to better benefit the students. One participant mentioned, "The challenge would be related to material preparation. Sometimes I feel like if I create my own materials, they will be more beneficial to the students". Another participant added, "This semester I spent most of my time in the library trying to find resources for the subject I'm teaching," reflecting on the time-consuming nature of developing teaching materials. On a different note, the issue of limited resources was further intensified by students' dependence on the teachers. As a professor mentioned, "Students expect me to read a book and give them a summary …. they expect the teacher to do everything".

Active learning often requires students to come to class prepared, which usually involves reading about the topic of that lesson. Nevertheless, the participants reported resistance toward reading from the students' side. As one instructor noted, "Students don't like to read... For each topic, they will need to do some reading in advance... I think, like for them sometimes it's like a burden". Another participant noted, "They don't even read in their first language, let alone in English …. This is sadly a cultural issue". Moreover, it was reported that students' critical thinking skills were underdeveloped. One instructor noted, "The ability to understand critical thinking, that's a problem". Another added, "Students have very low-level cognitive skills".

Notably, the participants attribute the shortcomings in students' ability to think critically to their prior experiences during their formative years and a mismatch between the environmental stimuli they receive at and outside the university. As one participant asserted, "It's about formation at school, they are not exposed to critical thinking". Another stated, "they are exposed to totally different ideas in their personal life. They only use social media like TikTok to watch videos and have fun, but when they come to the university, they suddenly have to learn about

theories of language teaching and research, which are cognitively demanding and quite the opposite of what they are used to".

Another challenge uncovered by the qualitative data relates to students' proficiency in English, which is the language of instruction at the university where the study took place. Nearly all participants complained about students' language proficiency and highlighted this issue as a main factor that hinders students' understanding and affects their participation in active learning activities. As one participant remarked, "They come to the university with zero English". Another participant added, "This subject is very challenging for 4th-semester students because their language proficiency is not developed enough".

Moreover, the instructors frequently cited fatigue when implementing active learning in their classrooms. One participant noted, "I don't really understand why they are tired because our class is in the morning". Another participant reflects, "Students do a lot, and they have to think and analyze'. Finally, a different participant concludes, "Thinking is a luxury they can't afford … thinking is tiring".

3.5 Discussion

This study aimed to identify the preferred teaching practices of students and teachers and the challenges of incorporating AL and lectures in teaching. Both students and professors in this study favored eclectic use of AL and lecturing as optimal practices to be used in teacher training through EMI. Specifically, the participants selected group discussions, lectures, and jigsaw reading activities as their favored means of instruction, citing the interactional aspects of group work and jigsaw reading, and praising lectures for their role in facilitating understanding of complex and abstract concepts.

Additionally, students suggested incorporating games, role-play activities, exercises that involve the use of technology, flipped learning, and hands-on activities, indicating a desire for diverse and engaging methods that cater to different learning styles and preferences. While the overwhelming majority (80%) of the student group in this study stated their preference for active learning, they predominantly rated lectures in the top three preferred ways of instruction. Moreover, all professors in this study recommended using lectures in conjunction with AL activities to ensure that theoretical topics under discussion are adequately explained, clear, and understandable to students.

As highlighted by the data, both active learning and lectures provide unrivaled benefits. The benefits of AL in the context of pre-service TEFL teacher training include higher student engagement, improved knowledge retention, enhanced critical thinking skills, increased motivation, and putting knowledge into practice. This is in line with the study by Al-Busaidi and Tuzlukova (2021). Moreover, active learning allows students to apply their knowledge in practical situations, engage in meaningful discussions, analyze and criticize matters related to language learning, and

Nearly all participants complained about students' language proficiency and highlighted this issue as a main factor that hinders students' understanding and affects their participation in active learning activities.

construct their own knowledge. This is especially beneficial for the participants of this study since their personal life involves minimal critical thinking, serious discussions, and reading. By the use of AL strategies, TEFL students can engage with the theory and practice of teaching and learning and actively build knowledge that aids their future professional growth.

On the other hand, the results of this study indicate that traditional lectures remain a relevant tool in the TEFL instructors' toolbox. This is in line with various previous studies that highlight the importance of lectures in present times (Abedi et al., 2019; Bligh, 2000; Brown & Race, 2005; Charlton, 2006; Davis & Minife, 2013). Lecturing is particularly useful in teaching academic subjects in TEFL since it facilitates the understanding of complex concepts, offers clear and structured explanations, is time-effective, and provides opportunities for instant feedback when combined with question-and-answer sessions. This is in stark contrast with the description of lectures as boring, ancient, and ineffective in some studies (DiPiro, 2009; Lumpkin et al., 2015), and reaffirms that lectures remain relevant when used along with active learning (Ulimaz, 2021). Moreover, this study identified that many pre-service teachers are not interested in reading textbooks and depend on teacher explanations to learn, which further attests to the importance of lectures to be used in classrooms.



Nevertheless, implementing lectures and AL techniques in EMI classrooms poses some challenges that require institutional support, which are similar to previous studies (Byun et al., 2011). The challenges include students' uneven participation in group activities, shy students who avoid interaction, time constraints, resistance toward reading, limited resources and teaching materials, fatigue, and low levels of proficiency. As revealed by the literature review, time constraints and preparing materials are common challenges of AL (Brownell & Tanner, 2012; Finelli et al., 2014; Henderson, 2008; Shadle et al., 2017; Sturtevant & Wheeler, 2019). Moreover, the use of EMI presented a persistent problem due to students' low level of English language proficiency, which aligns with the reviewed literature (Belhiah & Elhami, 2015; Clegg & Simpson, 2016; Macaro et al., 2018). However, shyness, low levels of English proficiency, limited teaching materials that include overly academic and difficult-to-read passages, and students' resistance toward reading were identified by this study. The main challenges for traditional lectures include maintaining student attention, engagement, and retention.

Lastly, the data from the study emphasize the importance of interaction, peer collaboration, and practical engagement in the learning process; however, the continued benefits and relevance of lectures along with the high valuation of this method by both students and instructors suggest that while active learning should be the predominant approach, EMI classrooms should still involve lectures to provide clarity on complex topics and to efficiently cover essential content.

4. Conclusions

In light of the findings of this study, some recommendations can be made. First and foremost, this study emphasizes the salience of using lectures in conjunction with AL activities, especially in theoretical subjects that involve abstract concepts. Therefore, it is recommended that instructors integrate lectures and AL techniques such as games, group discussions, jigsaw reading activities, and role-plays into their lesson plans to boost learning, retention, and classroom engagement. Moreover, given the significance of delivering effective and engaging lectures, the researcher recommends putting lectures in familiar contexts by introducing the contents of the lectures through real-life examples. By doing so, the instructors can ensure their classroom practice involves the engagement benefits of active learning while facilitating understanding of the introduced content through contextualized lectures that leverage relatable real-life examples and experiences. Moreover, since shyness, resistance toward reading, and overreliance on teachers were identified as persistent challenges, the researcher recommends implementing interactive activities such as reading circles and reading clubs through level-appropriate textbooks to address such problems. It is worth noting that the issue of shyness in Ecuador goes beyond EMI and has been identified in various other studies (e.g., Sahranavard Kalantar, 2024)

Secondly, integrating lectures with AL strategies is not a small feat. To achieve this, the results of this study indicate that there is a pressing need for contextualized, localized, less academic, and easier-to-read resources to be used as course materials and for intensive and extensive reading. This is particularly important since Ecuadorian students tend to avoid reading. Hence, developing pertinent resources for teaching, studying, and classroom use that leverage simple explanations and include AL activities seems to be vital. Developing and promoting context-driven materials is particularly in line with a new initiative called "decentering," proposed by Hornby Trust that calls for creating and disseminating ideas based on the context and needs of relatively low-income countries (Padwad & Smith, 2023).

Another matter that demands attention is the retention challenges of lectures. To address this issue, many institutions use lecture capture technologies to record lectures in classrooms and store them on a database to provide easy lifetime access to all students, and in many cases, the general public. Since the use of lecture capture is common practice among academia, it is recommended to leverage this technology in Ecuador to provide students with on-demand access to the lectures presented in university classes. Lastly, it is worth noting that the present study was not conducted without some limitations. One significant limitation of this study lies in the limited number of recent studies reviewed regarding the effectiveness of lectures and their challenges. This may have influenced the depth of the literature review done in this study. Another limitation may relate to the nature of qualitative data collection, which poses limited generalizability of results to a broader audience. Therefore, caution must be exercised when extending the results of this study to other contexts. Hence, more studies are needed to gain a better understanding of teacher training practices in EMI in Ecuador. Nevertheless, by identifying effective practices, challenges, and areas of improvement in EMI English teacher education, this study provides a substantial contribution to the available literature on EMI and invites more studies to be conducted in Ecuador in the future. Finally, since this study points to overreliance of students on teacher explanation and resistance toward reading that

may have cultural roots, future studies may investigate the interplay between culture as defined by the 6D model (Hofstede, 2011) and students' studying approach and autonomy. Specifically, since teachers can be considered an authority figure in the classroom, the Power Distance dimension of the 6D model can potentially be linked to students' desire for a top-down approach in learning that prevents autonomous reading or learning. The Uncertainty Avoidance dimension can also be linked to students' shyness and limited appetite for discoverybased learning, as discovery breeds uncertain outcomes.

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Conflict of interests

The author declares that he does not have a conflict of interest.

Ethical implications

The institution where this study was conducted does not require approval of an ethics committee; however, informed consent of the participants involved in the study was obtained before conducting this study.

Authors' contribution

I hereby declare that I, Omid Kalantar, am the sole author of and contributor to this manuscript.

Declaration of generative AI-assisted

The author, Omid Kalantar, hereby declares that no AI tool has been consulted or used in any of the stages of conducting this study, nor in its writing.

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Annex A. Student Preference Questionnaire

Part 1.

In this part, you will read about some practices and activities that teachers use in their classes. Please read each activity carefully because you will be asked to rate them according to your preference as the recipient of those activities.

Lecture/Teacher presentation and explanation

Definition: The teacher explains the concept orally, and students listen.

Debate

Definition: The class is divided into groups, and each group is assigned to research a concept, discuss it in their group, and then defend their arguments in a debate.

Group Discussions

Definition: The class is divided into groups, and each group is assigned to research a concept and discuss it in their group. Then, share the results with the class.

Jigsaw reading

Definition: Students are divided into groups, where each group reads about a concept. Then, the groups share their knowledge and insights with each other.

Microteaching

Definition: Students prepare and deliver short teaching sessions to peers, incorporating specific concepts and principles taught in class.

Case Studies

Definition: The teacher presents real or hypothetical scenarios for students to analyze, discuss, and propose suitable solutions or strategies based on the concepts introduced in class.

Mind Mapping

Definition: Students create visual mind maps by drawing or writing on paper to illustrate connections between different concepts.

Part 2.

1. Which do you prefer?

Select

Lecture

Other activities mentioned above

2. Rate each activity according to your preference from 7 (you love to have in your class) to 1 (you dislike to have in your class).

Mind Mapping

Case Studies

Group Discussion

Microteaching

Jigsaw reading

Debate

Lecture/teacher explanation

Mind Mapping

Case Studies

Group Discussion

Microteaching

Jigsaw reading

Debate

Lecture/teacher explanation

Part 3.

Explain why you have chosen the top three activities.

Annex B. Interview Guide

Warm-up and the Subjects Taught

- Can you describe the subject you teach? Are these subjects mainly theoretical, practical, or a combination of both?
- Does the nature of the subject influence the way you teach?

Teaching Methods Used

- What teaching methods do you usually use in this subject, lectures, active learning activities, or both?
- Can you give examples of the specific activities or strategies you use, and why you chose them?

Experience With Lectures in EMI

- What are the benefits of delivering lectures in EMI?
- What challenges do students face when learning through lectures?

Experience With Active Learning in EMI

- How do students respond to active learning activities when the instruction is in English?
- What benefits and challenges have you observed when using active learning in EMI?

Context-Specific Challenges

- Are there any contextual factors (student proficiency, classroom culture, resources, class size, materials, etc.) that affect your ability to use lectures or active learning in EMI?

Overall Comparison and Reflection

- In your experience, which approach, lectures or active learning, is more effective for your EMI subject, and why?
- Is there anything else about your context that affects how you balance lectures and active learning?