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Framing English as a Medium of Instruction Within the Iberian-American Spanish-Speaking Education Contexts

El inglés como medio de instrucción en contextos educativos de habla hispana en Iberoamérica

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Education in Spain and Latin America has been experiencing an ever-increasing use of English as a medium of instruction at all levels and across curricula. Bringing the vast research-literature into a reflective dialogue is paramount to advancing the discipline and to refining English teaching practices. As such, this literature review systematically situates English-as-a-medium-of-instruction literature related to higher education within the Iberian-American school contexts where Spanish was the students' first language. Thus, the paper asserts that while research that addresses methodological approaches, processes, procedures, and their effects in instruction is significant, there is still a pressing need for framing English-as-a-medium-of-instruction research within the reciprocal relationship existing among communication, classroom culture, social values, the classroom climate for learning, and ultimately, the students' learning.

Keywords: bilingual education, English as a foreign language, English as a medium of instruction, learning climate

La educación en España y Latinoamérica ha venido experimentando un aumento en el uso del inglés como medio de instrucción. Así, resulta primordial llevar la investigación existente a un diálogo reflexivo para avanzar y perfeccionar las prácticas de enseñanza del inglés. Este artículo de revisión sitúa sistemáticamente la literatura alrededor de la instrucción en inglés de la educación superior dentro de los contextos escolares iberoamericanos donde el español era el primer idioma de los estudiantes. Se encontró que, si bien la investigación que aborda los enfoques metodológicos, procesos, procedimientos y sus efectos en la instrucción del inglés es significativa, todavía se requiere enmarcar la investigación dentro de la relación recíproca entre comunicación, cultura de aula, valores sociales, el clima del aprendizaje y, por último, el aprendizaje de los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: educación bilingüe, inglés como lengua extranjera, inglés como medio de instrucción, clima de aprendizaje

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Introduction

While the way in which communication is configured influences the degree to which individuals have opportunities to engage in particular aspects of social life and participation, knowledge, in turn, regulates the extent to which an individual or a community can become empowered to actively take part in the construction and reconstruction of the immediate and the broader social systems (de Mejía, 2002). Similarly, knowledge is co-constructed and can only be evidenced through social interaction with others (Fairclough, 2011; Gee, 2011; Kress, 2010, 2011; Norris, 2004, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). In the field of child development, for instance, and in Vygotsky's (1978) words, "human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them" (p. 88). He asserts that children can accomplish far more in collective action or through the guidance of others than by themselves, locating "learning" more in the social realm than in people's individual, isolated, and internal psyche.

Accordingly, the literature review sheds light on two broad aspects relevant to English as a medium of instruction (EMI). The literature examines research on academic instruction via English in the Spanish-speaking higher education (HE) classroom contexts. More specifically, it discusses the ways in which scholarship has addressed the relationship between the multimodal nature of communication and the English language teaching practice in the EMI classroom in pursuit of learning. As such, it supports two main arguments. First, it reveals that the design and evaluation of interactive environments in the EMI classroom represent a significant gap in the literature. Second, it corroborates that comprehending more profoundly the transformative power that interactive, reflexive, participative, collaborative, and productive social environments have on learning is paramount to improving adult linguistic development and their learning of contents (Booker, 2008; McMahon et al., 2009; Mercer, 2004).

The organization of this literature review is mainly guided by geographical considerations taking as a point of departure those Spanish-speaking contexts which are farther away (Spain) and progressively moving inward into the Colombian context, passing through EMI literature from Latin America and the Caribbean. That is, a geographical area that Cabrera-Albert and Castro-González (1997) called the Iberian-American EMI context. They contend that since Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Iberian Peninsula in Europe share significant social, cultural, and linguistic characteristics, they should be discussed in light of one another and referred to as one context when it comes to EMI. As such, they acknowledged the need that the Iberian-American context has for a coherent, articulated, and better-defined English language teaching project carried out in cooperation with the countries therein using research as a basis for EMI designs and implementations.

EMI Literature From the Spanish Context

Spanish literature on EMI concurs that teaching approaches which combine the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) and the teaching of subject areas in HE is spreading rapidly throughout European countries (Julius & Madrid-Fernández, 2017; Malicka et al., 2019; Muñoz-Luna, 2014; Otero de Juan & García-Laborda, 2014; Vidal & Jarvis, 2020). One explanation for this proliferation is commonly associated with educational policy demands which, in turn, seek to respond to the economic micro and macro environments (Muñoz-Luna, 2014; Otero de Juan & García-Laborda, 2014; Vidal & Jarvis, 2020). The scholars conclude that access to participation in academic communities and in the broader socioeconomic environment largely depends on the extent to which one has a high command of the English language.

Scholars have traced the evolutionary trajectory of EFL teaching that resulted in the use of EMI. Muñoz-Luna (2014), for instance, explained that this approach

to teaching emerged because of a paradigm shift in terms of the way both the target language and teaching of contents were traditionally conceived. Muñoz-Luna claims that, initially, language teaching favored structuralist approaches where language could be broken down into smaller units for the purpose of teaching and learning. As such, this approach heavily relied on language modeling and sentence drilling. Progressively, pragmatics made their way into the field, highlighting context as an essential consideration in EFL teaching and learning. Finally, more sociocultural and constructivist explanations of learning framed the initiative of EMI as an approach that would focus on communication and social interaction rather than on language accuracy. As such, Muñoz-Luna identified the need for specialized training that would enable educators to create communicative environments conducive to learning. Most importantly, she advocates for research on affective, motivational, and social aspects of EMI designs and implementations for HE.

Despite the popularity that EMI has gained on the continent and echoing the existing global literature (Brutt-Griffler, 2017; Macaro et al., 2018), Spanish research attests to the scarcity of literature on this educational phenomenon, particularly in regard to HE (Julius & Madrid-Fernández, 2017; Malicka et al., 2019; Muñoz-Luna, 2014; Otero de Juan & García-Laborda, 2014; Vidal & Jarvis, 2020). More precisely, the Spanish literature exhibited a genuine concern for inquiring into contextual specificities and into ways in which language could be organized and deployed in the classroom in pursuit of the successful teaching and learning of both the target language and the subject area when these two aspects are simultaneously pursued (Julius & Madrid-Fernández, 2017; Malicka et al., 2019; Muñoz-Luna, 2014; Otero de Juan & García-Laborda, 2014; Vidal & Jarvis, 2020).

Consequently, understanding learners' individual traits, contextual specificities, and the role that particular linguistic features play in EMI is paramount to creating inclusive EMI classrooms where students can participate, reflect upon their process, and learn in conditions of equality. Julius and Madrid-Fernández (2017), for instance, collected the perceptions that students and professors had about the type of learning taking place in an EMI instructional design. The study proposed that students typically enrolled in an EMI course or program have different English proficiency levels due to the varied experiences that they have had speaking English: some had more opportunities to use English in social and naturally-occurring interactions like stays abroad or summer immersion programs. As a result, the program offered uneven opportunities for students to access contents, to participate, and to learn. The study indicated that serving students with different backgrounds in EFL and EMI can lead to inequalities and marginalization of those who do not enjoy the benefits of extracurricular English exposure. In turn, such disparities affect students' levels of motivation, investment, and engagement in the class which ultimately affects student learning.

I would be remiss if I failed to acknowledge the importance of understanding the perceptions of students and professors. Vidal and Jarvis (2020), however, claimed that the problem does not only reside in the dearth of literature regarding the double task of teaching English and the subject area simultaneously in HE, but that also the existing research has mainly focused on gathering opinions and perceptions about the teaching and learning processes in EMI classrooms. They argue that more empirical research is needed in order to inform and improve the teaching practice within EMI school contexts. Therefore, they conducted an empirical qualitative study that analyzed 195 essays written by students from an undergraduate EMI program at a university in Spain. They discussed the results of three years of schooling via EMI in terms of English writing proficiency, essay quality, and lexical diversity using Oxford's Placement Test. The study reported a significant improvement in the learners' L2 writing proficiency and an increase in essay quality, but the

authors argued that lexical diversity did not show any sign of improvement. In addition, they delineated some of the shortcomings of EMI courses and programs. To begin with, they explained that EMI undermines language identity and language domain. That is, while attention is given to a second language, the first language and culture may be neglected. Additionally, the study calls into question the capacity that Spanish universities have to appropriately and successfully address subject areas in the target language. Finally, the study suggests that English-medium lectures are not necessarily conducive to developing the abilities in the second language or in the subject area. Bearing this in mind, one can see the study underlines the need for rethinking EMI designs and implementations so as to provide opportunities for students to fully participate, collaborate, and interact in class activities in the interest of learning while developing the target language.

Drawing on the literature that discusses the quest of teaching both language and subject areas in the European context, it could be said that the integration of EFL and specific contents as a teaching approach has experienced rapid growth over the past decade. Such growth calls for empirical research that, beyond gathering people's perceptions and overestimating standardized tests results as a measuring stick for research, inquires profoundly into the social, interactional, affective, motivational, and intellectual conditions EMI creates for the teaching and learning environments.

EMI Literature in the Latin-American Context

The research from the Latin-American context addressing the pedagogical approach of integrating the teaching of EFL and a subject area exhibited some commonalities with the research literature from Spain outlined above. First of all, the Spanish and Latin-American literature mainly addresses EMI in contexts where Spanish is spoken as a first language. The literature from both contexts assigns the popularity that EMI has been gaining as to the desire that institutions and countries have to internationalize education and instill competences in students that would equip them to become competitive professionals globally (Arias de la Cruz et al., 2019; Crawford et al., 2013; de la Barra et al., 2018; Despagne, 2019; Lara-Herrera et al., 2016; López & Puebla, 2014; Navas-Brenes, 2010; Rivera & Mazak, 2017; Vargas-Vásquez et al., 2016). Additionally, the literature from Latin America reiterates the dearth of research on EMI and the need for specialized professional development addressed in the Spanish literature discussed above (Arias de la Cruz et al., 2019; Crawford et al., 2013; de la Barra et al., 2018; Despagne, 2019; Lara-Herrera et al., 2016; López & Puebla, 2014; Navas-Brenes, 2010; Rivera & Mazak, 2017; Vargas-Vásquez et al., 2016). It also exhibited the tendency of researchers to inquire into the perceptions of stakeholders about the implementation of EMI (Despagne, 2019; Lara-Herrera et al., 2016; Rivera & Mazak, 2017; Vargas-Vásquez et al., 2016) rather than conducting empirical studies directly focused on instruction and learning.

Studies on perceptions, however, offer a glimpse into the ways people experience such approaches and provide a point of departure for more empirical research to be conducted in direct observation of the phenomena at hand. Lara-Herrera et al. (2016), for instance, explored the perceptions of English teachers who, as students, went through an EMI program model and who, later in life, became EMI teachers themselves without further training. Particularly, the study gathered and analyzed teachers' perceptions about the implementation of EMI at the university level in Mexico. Despite the fact that, as students, the teachers had been educated through the EMI teaching model, they expressed how they did not feel fully prepared in terms of EMI pedagogical competences to be left in charge of designing and teaching EMI courses. As such, they claimed that EMI implementations require educators to undergo specific and ongoing professional development that facilitates the development of competences for successful instruction.

Not completely unrelated to this issue is that teachers, in Lara-Herrera et al.'s (2016) study, also expressed a heartfelt concern about their level of command of the English language in respect to the level needed to successfully impart subject contents in English. That is, subjects like mathematics or science have specialized discourses and communicative genres with which EFL teachers may not be completely familiar and this could potentially hinder the teaching of subject-specific contents as well as the teaching of the language. The same holds true for the cases where non-language professors of subject areas teach their disciplines via English while lacking the pedagogical competences to teach in the language. Consequently, the implementation of effective EMI courses requires full support from the educational institutions and their leadership. This support may be represented via sponsoring teachers' ongoing professional development, providing appropriate teaching resources, and giving their teachers sufficient class preparation time and the right conditions to do their jobs properly.

In a similar manner, Despagne (2019) examined EFL teachers' perspectives on the role of English in students' education in two private universities in Mexico. Echoing the bulk of the literature, the author found that English was perceived by teachers as the language of international communication essential for international business and commerce, and a gateway to accessing academic and professional opportunities. The study also examined the perceived linguistic superiority implicit in teachers' responses. Despagne argued that when teachers described the English language with adjectives like "easy," "clear," and "straight," they expressed an ideology wherein English enjoyed a higher status than Spanish. The author warned about teachers' responsibility to analyze and be sensitive to the way values are instilled in EMI contexts and exhorted educators to adopt practices and attitudes that foster equality and linguistic ecology in EMI settings.

Also addressing equality-related issues, Rivera and Mazak (2017) examined students' attitudes toward translanguaging in the classroom of an undergraduate psychology program at a university in Puerto Rico. They investigated students' language views on their instructor's translingual pedagogy and found that language choices and language behavior in the classroom are heavily influenced by the broader political environment and by the class members' attitudes towards the languages available to them. Rivera and Mazak assert that English and Spanish have traditionally been treated as separate entities with little opportunity to meet and coexist in interaction and harmony, one with the other, especially bearing in mind the particular characteristics of the Puerto Rican context. The languages that a person speaks, they contended, are a part of one linguistic repertoire. However, negative attitudes can engender prejudice against languages and those who speak them and, in turn, restrict learning possibilities for some while privileging others. As such, the researchers attest to the need of rethinking the concept of education into something that transcends well beyond the simple acquisition of facts or the plain learning of English. Hence, translanguaging represents a way of instilling positive attitudes toward minority languages in the classroom and of getting students involved in class activity. Rivera and Mazak found that students had a positive attitude toward translanguaging pedagogical practices mainly due to the affirmative attitude teachers displayed in the class and the flexibility they offered in terms of language use.

In addition to the attitudes towards languages that teachers value and promote in the classroom, there are specific roles with particular characteristics that teachers are expected to adopt and enact in the EMI classroom. As such, Vargas-Vásquez et al. (2016) inquired about the extent to which three instructors who were going through their student-teaching practice positioned themselves and took on the role of teachers in a task-based undergraduate course. The researchers concluded that these student-teachers played an essential role sequencing the tasks and motivating the learners. Vargas-Vásquez et al. argued that, even when the objective is to

decentralize the role of the teacher, the teacher is still at the core of EMI programs given that it is the teacher who establishes the parameters and sets the tone for the class. In doing so, they recommend ongoing research on the teacher's role within EMI classes and their attitudes toward the languages that students speak. Additionally, this piece highlights the researchers' tendency to focus on the teacher's actions evidenced in the literature thus far. That is, EMI-related research focuses mainly on what the teacher does, what he or she is expected to do, the way he or she does things, or what they could potentially do—instructional procedures (see Arias de la Cruz et al., 2019; de la Barra et al., 2018; López & Puebla, 2014; Navas-Brenes, 2010). However, research aimed at explaining learning as an effect of communication as it pertains to interaction in EMI has been conducted to a much lesser extent.

EMI research in Latin America has also endeavored to increase language awareness and students' self-reflection upon their learning process (de la Barra et al., 2018; Vargas-Vásquez et al., 2016). For example, de la Barra et al. (2018) examined the design and implementation of two rubrics following the principles of content and language integrated learning in second-year students at a university in Chile to assess oral skills in terms of grammar and lexis. The study suggests that through this implementation, students' language awareness increased and fostered the acquisition of grammatical and lexical competences. This implementation also made students aware of class expectations and requirements, which was paramount to their success.

In regard to form-related aspects of language in EMI, Crawford et al. (2013) looked into the writing processes of two university students in an EMI program in Mexico. Initially they sought to examine the development of rhetorical features in the students' writing production. However, their research process drifted to explorations of identity-related aspects evidenced in the analysis. They identified differentiating aspects between Spanish and English writing structures and found that despite the students' identification as English writers, their writing in English exhibited the Spanish writing structure and style at best and the structure of conversations in Spanish at worst. They also observed that, as time passed, such issues decreased. Thus, the researchers concluded that academic writing in EFL is a literacy process which needs to be nurtured long-term before it displays any sign of development.

Similarly, López and Puebla (2014) offered a critical reflection on reading processes in English in HE in Argentina using principles from Vygotsky's work as an analytical lens. The researchers designed and implemented cycles of didactic units about gender and as these didactic units unfolded, they looked into aspects like the zone of proximal development and mediation. The researchers maintained that reading in EFL is a social practice that nurtures the development of higher order thinking skills and the appropriation of discipline-specific knowledge. They claimed that reading relies on semiotic practices where sociocultural referents and the reader engage in an ongoing exchange that mediates interpretation. As such, a pedagogical design for reading that was contextualized, mediated, and collaborative did not only facilitate language development and knowledge construction, but it also instilled in students confidence, responsibility, autonomy, and commitment to one another and their immediate academic community.

Language development and the construction and appropriation of knowledge is, unquestionably, a social endeavor shaped by historical, cultural, social, emotional, and intellectual referents. Hence, it is a collective social practice for which mutual collaboration and support are paramount to its success (Vygotsky, 1978). Navas-Brenes (2010), for instance, created a sample lesson for an EMI university course in Costa Rica. This study presented a language lesson using authentic materials based on the principles of content-based instruction. He asserted that teaching content-based courses requires a high level of creativity on behalf of the teacher, collaboration

from colleagues, and support from all the stakeholders, primarily, from the institution.

In short, the EMI-related literature in the Latin-American context generally coincides with the literature from Spain. The EMI research in Latin America also focuses on instructional procedures disregarding research on the learning and communication processes in the EMI classroom. In addition, it introduces an important debate regarding the attitudes towards the languages that students speak and toward classroom practices of language use. In doing so, the scholars promote a reflection on the role that EMI professors play in creating the conditions for equality, collaboration, and participation, which are paramount to student success.

EMI Literature in the Colombian Context

The Colombian literature regarding the use of English for classroom instruction in HE where Spanish is spoken as a first language resembles scholarship from the broader Iberian-American context in four main ways. First, the research agrees that the main reasons for the popular adoption of the EMI approach are associated with educational policies at the micro and macro levels that seek to internationalize HE for academic participation, competences for global economies, and opportunities for students to access international participation (Corrales et al., 2016; García, 2013; Serna-Dimas & Ruíz-Castellanos, 2014). Second, research on perceptions regarding EMI continues to be widespread in the Colombian context (Corrales & Maloof, 2011; Corrales et al., 2016; García, 2013; Sánchez-Solarte et al., 2017). Third, the Colombian literature also exhibits the tendency of researchers to focus on the procedural aspects of instruction by assessing the effect of didactic implementations (Bautista-Barón, 2013; Gualdron & Castillo, 2018; Guapacha-Chamorro & Benavidez-Paz, 2017; Palacio et al., 2016; Rodríguez-Bonces, 2011; Sánchez-Narváez & Chavarro-Vargas, 2017) while disregarding much-needed research on the way learning occurs or fails to occur as a result of the quality of communication in the EMI classroom. Finally, Colombian literature also attests to the lack of research on EMI in HE in Spanish-speaking contexts (Bautista-Barón, 2013; Corrales & Maloof, 2011; Corrales et al., 2016; García, 2013; Gómez-Flórez et al., 2011; Granados-Beltrán, 2018; Gualdron & Castillo, 2018; Guapacha-Chamorro & Benavidez-Paz, 2017; Ortega, 2019; Palacio et al., 2016; Sánchez-Narváez & Chavarro-Vargas, 2017; Sánchez-Solarte et al., 2017; Serna-Dimas & Ruíz-Castellanos, 2014; Uribe-Enciso, 2012; Viáfara-González & López, 2011). Beyond echoing some of the issues present in the broader Iberian-American context, the Colombian literature also engages in debates regarding more abstract themes like the roles that different interaction-related elements play in the development of the target language and the acquisition of contents as well as the shaping of learning environments.

In reference to the research on perceptions and attitudes regarding EMI implementations in Colombia, for instance, García (2013) discusses a literature review that contributed to the longstanding debate regarding the ideologies surrounding native and non-native speakers of English and their place in English language teaching. He discussed students' and teachers' attitudes toward English as an international language and the presence of standard and non-standard varieties of English in school. In his work, the author challenged the notion that the ownership of the English language should be strictly assigned to the native speakers of dominant varieties. Rather, the article advocates for the idea of the legitimate speaker of English regardless of their nationality or whether they are native or non-native speakers of the language. In the literature that García reviewed, he found a tendency in which students and teachers show a higher regard for "standard" English. Such ideologies have direct implications for teaching as they inevitably draw teacher's attention away from communication and toward prescriptivism and form-focused instruction that favor the development of

accuracy over the negotiation of meaning. In doing so, these beliefs also establish unattainable phonology and fluency-related objectives for learners of EFL in HE. Consequently, his work calls for a more profound reflection on EFL and the teaching practices to be held in Colombia considering the specificities of the learners and the bilingual interactional environment they inhabit.

Similarly, Sánchez-Solarte et al. (2017) surveyed 130 students from 10 different undergraduate programs, inquiring about their positions on the English courses they had to take as a part of their program course load. Upholding the view that a balance between communication and academic success needs to be achieved in English language teaching, the authors endorsed a post-method approach where three basic elements were at the core—particularity, practicality, and possibility. Particularity referred to the need of bringing into consideration the specific traits that characterize the students, the context, and the situations into the instructional designs and implementations. Practicality was concerned with the extent to which theory informs the teaching practice. Finally, possibility had to do with the opportunities a class affords students to bring their knowledge, culture, and identities into the teaching and learning processes so as to enrich their experience. The aforementioned principles, however, pose great challenges for the type of education that promotes standard English, linguistic accuracy, or lectures, since they leave little room for individuality, negotiation, participation, and the co-construction of knowledge.

Furthermore, in the quest for understanding the extent to which EMI supports language development and the acquisition of subject-specific knowledge, Corrales and Maloof (2011) conducted a qualitative study on a university course in medicine taught in English, finding that the use of authentic materials, the implementation of highly-contextualized activities, and ample possibilities for students to bring their knowledge into the teaching and learning processes nurtured the development of language and content knowledge in the class. Additionally, this EMI course offered students the opportunity to perform—rather than only to acquire informational facts—the knowledge they acquired through their interactions in class. However, Corrales and Maloof argued that while these methodology-related factors fostered learning, it really came down to the type of social environment educators could create for the class regardless of the classroom methodology used. That is, while EMI classrooms can have designs that favor communication, thus positively shaping the learning environment, there are other EMI designs, like lectures, that leave little room for teachers to create a communicative classroom environment. Thus, educators need to make it their main objective to create a communicative classroom environment where students feel safe, welcome, valued, challenged, and included.

Even more directly related to matters of interaction and collaboration among EMI students as aspects that drive learning, Serna-Dimas and Ruíz-Castellanos (2014) designed activities aimed to develop language competences in a course from the physical therapy undergraduate program. The research accounted for the collaboration among two professors in the design and implementation of the activities and the interaction patterns that the students exhibited as they carried out the class tasks. Despite the fact that the researchers' interest was mainly concerned with interaction, the theory that framed the study pivoted around second language acquisition, Krashen's (1982) input and Swain's (1985) output hypothesis, and the English for specific purposes model. More peripherally, the theory framing the study also included cooperative learning and differentiated instruction. Unfortunately, theory regarding interaction or communication was not included or operationalized to a great extent. Serna-Dimas and Ruíz-Castellanos discovered that interaction and participation can be promoted to the extent to which these aspects will be considered in the design process of EMI classes. In the case of this particular group, the professors exhibited a flexible approach that allowed students to ask questions,

make comments, and monitor their own language use. As such, the researchers recommended that instructional designs be constantly evaluated, reflected upon, and adjusted to meet students' needs and to continuously improve learning outcomes. Similarly, they advised that special attention should be paid to social dynamics as the class should offer equal opportunity for participation and high-quality activities that result in the type of interaction that leads to learning.

Also addressing issues of equality and social justice, Ortega (2019) reported on a classroom experience where the professor used translanguaging for instruction. Framed between theories of plurilingualism and translanguaging, the researcher examined the way students' linguistic and cultural knowledge was valued and involved in class activity. In regard to plurilingualism, he asserted that education in Colombia still needs to come to appreciate the linguistic and sociocultural diversity in the classroom. It needs to create instructional designs that set students' backgrounds, cultures, knowledge, and identities as the stage for teaching focusing on developing the competences that would equip students to understand and transform their social realities. As for translanguaging, the author explained that instructional design should aim at presenting and interacting with material in ways that foster the learning of languages and concepts. Additionally, these designs should also seek to strengthen the target language through social collaboration.

Interaction-related EMI literature in HE in Colombia has also discussed, incidentally, ways in which learning can be well-served by multimodal approaches to teaching. Although not explicitly framed within multimodality, Gualdron and Castillo (2018), for instance, explored the outcomes of an EMI methodology based on theatrical plays implemented in an undergraduate course at a public university. As a result, they proposed that this methodology lowered students' inhibitions stimulating the use of the target language and cognitive processing. The theoretical underpinnings established comprehensible connections between the communicative properties of language and those involved in theater. Both practices, they asserted, rely on culture referents for meaning negotiation. They argued that using theater in EMI empowered and motived students and facilitated cooperative and collaborative work among them. Additionally, theater required students to practice the four language skills that are usually evaluated in tests. As such, they laid the theoretical platform on four main theories. Namely, (a) Krashen's five-part hypothesis focusing particularly on the input hypothesis and the affective filter hypothesis; (b) constructivism which puts interaction at the core of the learning process; (c) motivation which determines levels of engagement and investment; and (d) authentic environments referring to the extent to which the class can resemble actual social contexts and realities.

While these theories framed the study in a comprehensible manner, theories within the field of social semiotics and multimodal communication would substantiate the explanations on "performance" as an integrated mode of communication which plays a central role in interaction and cognition (Kress, 2010; Norris, 2004, 2014). Alternatively, theories regarding the role of movement in cognitive mediation and knowledge construction could also provide solid bases upon which this approach can be grounded and its outcomes explained (Boyd et al., 2018; Franks & Jewitt, 2001; Goldin-Meadow, 2000; Hostetter & Alibali, 2008; Roth, 2001).

Adding a new way in which multimodal communication was indirectly addressed in the EMI literature in the Colombian context, Viáfara-González and López (2011) discussed a longitudinal qualitative study that collected data on the teaching experience of two professors who used portfolios in their EMI university courses. The use of portfolios was initially intended to enhance the development of communicative competence, and theory was used to explain and discuss portfolios as a pedagogical tool. This approach, integrating portfolios

into the EMI classroom, promoted the debate about learning-assessment from both perspectives: process and product. As for the process, the use of portfolios invited students' creativity, culture, identities, and discipline-specific knowledge into the construction of an artefact (the product) which, to an extent, served to provide evidence for students' learning. The professors were mainly concerned with encouraging self-reflection among the students about what they learned, how they learned it, and the factors that contributed to such learning. The researchers found that the use of portfolios diversified the ways in which students were assessed and increased student involvement and autonomy. The construction of portfolios opened up a world of opportunities for students to resort to additional modes of communication like images, color, design, writing, drawing, and so forth, thus promoting collaborative work among them. Framing studies of this sort within social semiotics and multimodal communication would contribute to the discussion about the relationship between multimodal communication and learning in collaborative endeavors.

The multimodal nature of communication has also been contemplated in EMI literature in terms of verbal and nonverbal communication. Such is the case of Uribe-Enciso (2012), who stressed the importance that verbal and nonverbal discursive mechanisms play in interaction and learning. She investigated the way students in an EMI class used clues and strategies for turn taking and turn yielding and incorporated backchannels to maintain the flow of discussions. The researcher made distinctions regarding the transactional and interactional skills involved in class communication and argued that, in both cases, verbal and nonverbal communicative actions served to construct empathy and to convey friendliness. Initially, student discussions exhibited a lack of command of the pragmatic use of such verbal and nonverbal mechanisms. However, after eight three-hour sessions, the students began to become aware of these elements and to incorporate them into their discussion practices. Uribe-Enciso concluded that students with higher levels of proficiency in English acquired the pragmatic use of backchannels more quickly. The researcher assigned this effect to the fact that more proficient English speakers have more linguistic and paralinguistic resources to draw on when resolving such communicative situations. She also asserted that promoting discussion in the classroom fosters the development of linguistic as well as pragmatic abilities and that learning to use the language is more valuable than learning about the language.

Another example of how multimodality is indirectly addressed in the EMI literature is found in the work by Sánchez-Narváez and Chavarro-Vargas (2017), who looked into communicative behavior in a blended course offered to EFL teachers as a component of their professional development. The objective was to assess the extent to which information and communication technologies shaped the communicative behavior of the content-subject teachers who participated in the course. The researchers declared that blended learning increased the learners' oral production. Additionally, communicative behavior exhibited an enormous amount of body language, self-monitoring, lexical diversity, and communication in language chunks. Despite the fact that this study is not rooted in theories of multimodality, it can be argued that blended courses draw on a wealth of semiotic resources, an array of appealing layouts, and a vast scope of opportunities to use multiple modes of communication. Such characteristics, when efficiently deployed, contribute to the teaching and learning processes in the blended environment. Indirectly, the researchers acknowledged the multimodal, culturally-governed, and yet emergent nature of communication and its relationship to learning.

In addition to acknowledging the multimodal properties of communication, the EMI-related literature from the Colombian context was also concerned with creating learning environments that promote natural interaction. Gómez-Flórez et al. (2011), for instance, inquired

about the effect that content-based instruction could potentially have on the development of language skills. To such an end, they designed a study for a molecular microbiology class at a public university. They concluded that content-based instruction improved the students' speaking and oral comprehension skills. As such, the researchers highly recommended the implementation of content-based instruction as it helps students to use language for communicative purposes and creates environments that resemble naturally-occurring communication more closely.

Assessing the learning outcomes from such particular learning environments through standardized testing would fall short in accounting for the context-specific learning that took place. In that regard, Palacio et al. (2016) account for the experience that a group of professors underwent for the design, validation, and application of a language test to be implemented in their specific EMI classroom. The study discussed the test item by item providing descriptive statistics, correlational analysis, validity analysis, and reliability estimates. Making comprehensible differentiations between standard testing and classroom testing, the researchers found that designing and validating a tailor-made test for the group of students they were working with enhanced the teaching practice and motivated reflection among professors regarding actions they can take to contextualize their evaluation procedures. Palacio et al. argued that exams should require answers that are relevant and context-dependent.

However, designing context-specific exams, and creating the type of collaborative and productive environments that the EMI literature promotes demands a wealth of resources and support from the institution that grants access to such resources. Bautista-Barón (2013), for instance, conducted action research at a police training institute in Colombia. She designed reading workshops based on the cognitive language learning approach (CALLA) intended to increase reading proficiency in English and learners' autonomy. The study was concerned with identifying the extent to which a productive learning environment could potentially be created in the EMI class. As a result of her investigation, Bautista-Barón claimed that one of the greatest obstacles for teaching an EMI course successfully was not having access to the appropriate resources like audiovisual materials and web pages with access to listening, reading, grammar, lexis, online dictionaries, and online pedagogical games. The author found that by investing in the creation of these reading workshops, she was able to familiarize students with new reading strategies and instill in them abilities to self-monitor and self-evaluate their process which, in turn, increased students' reading comprehension.

Similarly, Guapacha-Chamorro and Benavidez-Paz (2017) designed workshops to develop learning strategies among students based on CALLA and task-based language teaching (TBLT). This was implemented in a group of 33 preservice teachers at a university. Implicit instruction on language learning strategies increased the students' ability to reflect upon and manage their own learning. This study reports that students strengthened their speaking skill and diversified their vocabulary.

To sum up, the EMI-related literature also showed a general concern for instilling autonomy in students so that they would be capable of self-managing their own learning. It also stressed the importance of creating environments that are productive, interactive, and safe as well as which provide equal opportunities for all students to learn. Scholars maintain that these objectives can be achieved to the extent that all stakeholders support the cause and offer professional development and resources. Additionally, the EMI-related literature emphasizes the dearth of pertinent research on teaching and learning processes in the EMI classroom. While EMI-related research has been conducted to an extent, it exhibits researchers' tendency to focus on instructional procedures. Research on the learning processes in EMI environments has been conducted to a much lesser degree. Even more scarce, but equally needed is research addressing the relationship

between interaction and learning in the EMI framed within a social semiotics perspective.

With this in mind, and considering the scarcity of research on EMI in the Colombian as well as in the broader Iberian-American contexts (Macaro et al., 2018; McDougald, 2015), the pressing need for research on EMI is clearly evidenced in national and international contexts. Such research should broadly inquire into whether instruction in English promotes or inhibits full participation and the type of communication that leads to the development of proficiencies in both the subject areas and EFL (Anderson et al., 2015; Fandiño-Parra, 2013; McDougald, 2015).

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