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CRITICAL CULTURAL AWARENESS AND INDEPENDENT PROFESSIONALISM:
A PRE-SESSIONAL CASE STUDY ON ENGAGING WITH DIVERSITY AND MULTILINGUALISM

CONSCIÊNCIA CULTURAL CRÍTICA E PROFISSIONALISMO INDEPENDENTE:
UM ESTUDO DE CASO PRÉ-SESSÃO SOBRE O ENVOLVIMENTO COM A
DIVERSIDADE E O MULTILINGUISMO

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores how learners and educators develop critical cultural awareness as part of their engagement with transcultural communication. We conceptualize this awareness as an understanding of the diversity that exists within and across societies, essential to recognizing and valuing multiple perspectives. Framed within a critical approach to transcultural communication, the paper draws on insights from language and citizenship education as well as broader debates on cultural dynamics. We explore how learners and educators can relate to cultural nuances they encounter during their language learning and professional development journeys. We examine how learners and practitioners develop expertise for effective communication in diverse multilingua-cultural settings. Building on this foundation, the paper re-examines the notion of independent professionalism as it relates to educators' roles in supporting transcultural engagement. We highlight the transformative potential of translanguaging pedagogy and reflexive awareness of multilingualism in Higher Education. Drawing on classroom observations and interviews with EAP tutors on UK university pre-sessional courses, we investigate perceptions and practices surrounding academic support in increasingly diverse settings. The study considers how tutors respond to linguistic and cultural complexity and reflects implications for both EAP and subject specialists. Finally, we consider how professional autonomy is shaped by current higher education policy and practice. We position educators as reflective professionals situated at the interface of research and practice, arguing that fostering independent, critical engagement is key to navigating today's changing academic landscape, including challenges brought about by generative AI.
Keywords: Critical Cultural Awareness; Diversity in Higher Education; English for Academic Purposes (EAP); Professional Autonomy; Multilingualism; Transcultural Communication.

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RESUMO: Este artigo investiga como aprendizes e educadores desenvolvem consciência cultural crítica a partir de seu envolvimento com a comunicação transcultural. Concebemos essa consciência como a compreensão da diversidade existente dentro e entre sociedades, essencial para reconhecer e valorizar múltiplas perspectivas. Ancorado em uma abordagem crítica da comunicação transcultural, o artigo dialoga com reflexões da educação linguística e cidadã, bem como com debates mais amplos sobre dinâmicas culturais. Exploramos como aprendizes e educadores se relacionam com nuances culturais encontradas ao longo de seus percursos de aprendizagem linguística e de desenvolvimento profissional, examinando como constroem expertise para uma comunicação eficaz em contextos multilingues e multiculturais diversos. A partir dessa base, o artigo reexamina a noção de profissionalismo independente no que se refere ao papel dos educadores no apoio ao engajamento transcultural. Destacamos o potencial transformador da pedagogia translíngue e da consciência reflexiva do multilinguismo no Ensino Superior. Com base em observações de sala de aula e entrevistas com docentes de Inglês para Fins Acadêmicos (EAP) em cursos pre-sessional de universidades britânicas, investigamos percepções e práticas relacionadas ao apoio acadêmico em contextos de crescente diversidade. O estudo considera como esses docentes respondem à complexidade linguística e cultural e reflete sobre as implicações tanto para profissionais de EAP quanto para especialistas de área. Por fim, discutimos como a autonomia profissional é moldada pelas atuais políticas e práticas do ensino superior. Posicionamos os educadores como profissionais reflexivos situados na interface entre pesquisa e prática, argumentando que promover um engajamento crítico e independente é fundamental para navegar no cenário acadêmico em transformação, incluindo os desafios trazidos pela inteligência artificial generativa.
Palavras-chave: Consciência Cultural Crítica; Diversidade no Ensino Superior; Inglês para Fins Acadêmicos (EAP); Autonomia Profissional; Multilinguismo; Comunicação Transcultural.

INTRODUCTION

As English-medium instruction (EMI) expands globally across Higher Education (HE) settings, multilingualism has become an increasingly central feature of academic life. Students and tutors now routinely negotiate diverse linguistic repertoires, heterogeneous cultural expectations, and distinct epistemological traditions within the same classroom. In such settings, *critical cultural awareness*—the capacity to recognise, question, and respond to cultural assumptions, sociopolitical values, and disciplinary norms—has emerged as an essential component of effective academic practice. In culturally and linguistically diverse learning environments, learners not only need to be proficient in their language use but also need to have the ability to navigate differing values, epistemic assumptions, and rules of academic engagement. Within this landscape, the ability to interrogate these norms and recognise their implications for teaching and learning has become an essential requirement.

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In our study, we have set out to research how multilingualism is reshaping EMI provision, particularly in relation to intercultural awareness among educators in HE settings. We also explore how the move from recognising cultural complexity to actively engaging with it can be facilitated through a translanguaging pedagogy, which we see as a means of operationalizing critical cultural awareness in classroom practice. Critical cultural awareness and translanguaging perspectives challenge monolithic views of language and culture, instead promoting plurality, critical thinking, and reflexive engagement. Within university-level EMI contexts, we feel that translanguaging offers tangible strategies to deepen academic understanding and foster inclusive participation.

We also propose that both translanguaging and critical cultural awareness can serve as a pathway to *independent professionalism* – a means of framing those components of educators' professional expertise that are characterised by reflective judgment, autonomy, and responsiveness to cultural and linguistic diversity. In this article we report on research initiatives undertaken in collaboration with tutors involved in international academic support programmes, exploring to what extent responses to multilingualism and linguacultural diversity are in evidence in current thinking and practices in HE settings in which English functions as medium of instruction. We begin by looking at the role of critical cultural awareness in EMI and HE, moving on to look at both Translanguaging pedagogy and conceptualizations of professionalism, before then detailing our research methods and reporting on our initial findings from one of our case studies. We end with some further discussion, with concluding remarks and a look towards future empirical research opportunities.

1 CRITICAL CULTURAL AWARENESS AND MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION

Critical Cultural Awareness (CCA) has emerged as a fundamental construct in understanding how learners and teachers navigate increasingly diverse and multilingual educational contexts. Based on Byram's (1997) Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) framework, CCA—defined as *savoir s'engager*—highlights the capacity to critically assess one's own cultural assumptions alongside the practices, values, and perspectives of others. Contemporary conceptions of cultural awareness emphasize the significance of acknowledging the ideological, political, and historical influences that shape cultural representations, in contrast to previous notions that primarily concentrated on understanding cultural differences (Baker, 2022; Holiday, 2018). In this sense, CCA is not merely an attitudinal construct but a reflective and ethical stance towards diversity, power, and communication.

CCA has become an important part of the current educational contexts leading us to explore it further in diverse contexts. Porto (2019) and Risager (2023) argue that global mobility,

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transnational communication, and linguistic superdiversity require learners to engage with complex social issues and embrace their roles as proactive global citizens. CCA transcends mere sensitivity toward others; it also equips students with the ability to think critically about the world and to engage responsibly with individuals who differ from themselves. This knowledge involves awareness of environmental sustainability, migration, social justice, and the dynamics of multilingual interaction. It is important to note that these topics are increasingly incorporated into language curricula and teacher education across the world.

Recently, the understanding of the concept of culture has experienced a substantial transformation concerning multilingual education. Holliday (1999, 2018) distinguishes between "large cultures," which include national or ethnic groups, and "small cultures," which encompass classroom communities, peer groups, and families. He also stresses that culture is not fixed but is constantly changing through the interactions of people in their daily lives. This perspective echoes students' lived experiences, linguistic repertoires, identities, and social trajectories, forming an integral part of their learning environment. CCA therefore involves recognizing cultural difference and understanding how learners actively construct meaning and identity within multilingual, multicultural 'small culture' spaces.

Teacher education research further demonstrates that CCA is foundational for informed pedagogical decision-making in multilingual classrooms. As shown in the ENRICH Continuous Professional Development programme (https://enrichproject.eu) (Sifakis et al., 2022), teachers who develop awareness of multilingualism and linguistic diversity can design more inclusive and context-sensitive instructional practices. CCA enables teachers to be aware of critical issues in their teaching and to question opiniated assumptions about language norms, materials, assessment, and classroom interaction. This can be seen as a crucial step in supporting learners' diverse linguistic trajectories. In multilingual classrooms, CCA is therefore blended with pedagogical flexibility and ethical responsibility. This results in the creation of the learning spaces where the students' linguistic and non-linguistic resources are recognized and valued.

Within these perspectives, CCA constitutes a key dimension of multilingual pedagogy. It encompasses the critical understanding of cultural processes, the recognition of learners' complex identities and repertoires, and the commitment to inclusive and reflective practice. The next section explores how these principles converge with recent developments in translanguaging, a pedagogical orientation that operationalizes many of the critical, multilingual, and socially responsive values embedded within CCA.

1.1 FROM CRITICAL CULTURAL AWARENESS TO TRANSLANGUAGING PEDAGOGY: CONCEPTUAL CONTINUITIES

CCA provides an ideological framework for understanding multilingual practices, while translanguaging materializes these principles pedagogically within the classroom context. CCA highlights the dynamic and socially contextualized aspects of cultural and linguistic resources. On the other hand, translanguaging enhances the flexible utilization of these resources by learners during the process of meaning-making. These points indicate that learners do not work in defined cultural or linguistic systems. Instead, they use a mix of different sources that are shaped by their pasts, the way their community works, their identity negotiations, and their educational paths. Translanguaging clarifies these processes by framing bilingual and multilingual practices not as 'interference' or 'deviation,' but as intentional, innovative, and epistemically advantageous actions. In this regard, translanguaging can be perceived as the linguistic equivalent of CCA's cultural perspective: both contest essentialist notions, prioritize learners' experiential realities, and emphasize the necessity of critical examination of standard norms.

Consequently, CCA establishes the conceptual framework for accepting translanguaging as a valid and significant pedagogical method. It encourages educators to interrogate monolingual ideologies, acknowledge the cultural entrenchment of linguistic norms, and comprehend how learners' translanguaging practices articulate identity, agency, and cultural positioning. The next section presents translanguaging pedagogy and how it relates to and expands on CCA in multilingual classrooms.

2. TRANSLANGUAGING

Translanguaging has become a significant concept in the context of the multilingual turn, contesting monolingual ideologies that regard "one language–one speaker" as the standard and evaluate bilinguals against (monolingual) native-speaker criteria. Research reveals a comprehensive perspective on bilingualism, recognizing multilinguals as proficient users of a unified, cohesive linguistic repertoire, in contrast to the notion of their being "two monolinguals in one person" (Grosjean, 1989). We can say that from this point of view, attaining native-like proficiency is not the aim of bilingual/second language education. By contrast, the aim can be to employ semiotic resources that help in conceptual development and knowledge building in meaningful interactions in diverse sociocultural contexts.

Translanguaging, as a pedagogical approach, encourages educators and students to utilize their comprehensive linguistic and semiotic resources—including spoken and written language, gestures, visuals, digital tools, and various other modalities—to facilitate comprehension, engagement, and identity development. Studies conducted in bilingual/multilingual and English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) environments indicate that these practices can enhance cognitive engagement, facilitate content accessibility, and recognize learners' multilingual

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competencies as valuable assets rather than hindrances (Jenkins & Mauranen, 2019). Simultaneously, the implementation of translanguaging pedagogies must be aligned with the local circumstances, learners' ambitions, institutional language policies, and overarching sociopolitical influences. In addition, the persistent prevalence of standard language ideologies and high-stakes monolingual evaluations can also be integrated into this implementation (García & Wei, 2014). These tensions highlight that translanguaging serves as both a descriptive framework for multilingual practices and a normative epistemological position that contests monolingual standards, while also functioning as an educational initiative aimed at redefining acceptable language use in academic contexts.

2.1 TRANSLANGUAGING PEDAGOGY: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Translanguaging pedagogy has emerged as a significant framework within the multilingual turn in education, contesting longstanding monolingual norms that have historically influenced language, content, and assessment practices (Cenoz and Gorter, 2022). Translanguaging pedagogy perceives learners not as mere users of isolated, compartmentalized languages, but as active meaning-makers who adaptively utilize a variety of linguistic, cultural, and multimodal resources. This change has a substantial impact on teaching and learning: instead of seeing multilingual practices problematically, translanguaging pedagogy sees them as important resources for understanding, developing identity, and getting involved.

Although translanguaging originated as a bilingual pedagogical technique in Welsh classrooms—where input and output were deliberately separated across languages (C. Baker, 2001; Lewis, Jones & C. Baker, 2012)—its pedagogical scope expanded considerably in the 2010s, particularly through García and Wei (2014). Early pedagogic formulations highlighted cognitive and academic advantages: translanguaging facilitates content processing across multiple languages, enhances academic registers in both languages, and fosters collaboration among students with varying proficiency levels. These studies comprised the groundwork of translanguaging pedagogy, that is, a framework of instructional approaches that appreciate learners' comprehensive linguistic repertoires and dismiss monolingual limitations in education.

García and Wei (2014) define translanguaging pedagogy as a framework that establishes "translanguaging spaces" wherein learners' varied practices are both valid and essential for the construction of meaning. These spaces promote "epistemic access" by simplifying intricate material and "identity investment" by enabling students to see themselves as informed, active contributors. This dual function aligns translanguaging pedagogy with sociocultural learning

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theories, which stress that knowledge is collaboratively constructed through mediated interaction rather than being internalized in isolation.

Translanguaging pedagogy originates from the idea that the full linguistic repertoires of students—whether home languages, regional varieties, heritage languages, or other semiotic resources—support their learning of languages in a meaningful way. Hence, they are not distractions from a "target language" (Gülle 2023; Paulsrud et al., 2017; Hawkins, 2020). According to translanguaging researchers, meaning-making is inherently multilingual and multimodal. Students naturally draw on different languages and symbols to build and deepen their understanding of concepts across subjects (Wei, 2016). This approach also supports learners' identities by giving them chances to express who they are, claim expertise, navigate classroom hierarchies, and push back against deficit assumptions often reinforced by monolingual norms (Lin, 2013; Simpson, 2020). However, effective translanguaging pedagogy necessitates careful planning, including task design, grouping, multimodal materials, and flexible assessment practices, to guarantee that students' linguistic resources genuinely enhance their learning (García & Lin, 2017).

A growing body of research shows that translanguaging pedagogy has a strong positive impact on students' engagement, understanding, and motivation. Lin (2013) found that when students were encouraged to draw on more than one language as well as visual and embodied resources, they became more active, independent, and willing to participate—particularly those who often remained silent in monolingual classrooms. Simpson (2020) similarly argues that translanguaging challenges long-standing assumptions, such as those embedded in Communicative Language Teaching, that L1 use hinders L2 learning; instead, validating learners' full repertoires supports deeper thinking, richer interaction, and greater confidence. Evidence from writing tasks echoes this trend: Kirkpatrick (2014) shows that students who used their L1 during planning and drafting produced more sophisticated essays than those restricted to English only. These findings align with Cummins' (1979, 1993) interdependence hypothesis, which holds that literacy and conceptual knowledge developed in one language can transfer to another. Translanguaging pedagogy provides a contemporary way of enabling this transfer by allowing learners to mobilize their linguistic knowledge flexibly and purposefully throughout the learning process.

2.2 TRANSLANGUAGING PEDAGOGY IN EMI AND TERTIARY EDUCATION

Building on the principles of Critical Cultural Awareness, translanguaging provides a concrete pedagogical pathway for supporting multilingual learners in higher education. While CCA encourages teachers and students to critically reflect on cultural and linguistic diversity,

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translanguaging operationalizes this stance by recognizing the full range of linguistic and semiotic resources students draw on when making meaning. In multilingual EMI classrooms, where linguistic expectations and students' lived practices often diverge, translanguaging offers a way to bridge this gap by validating learners' repertoires, widening access to disciplinary knowledge, and creating spaces where identity, agency, and learning intersect.

Translanguaging, while originating in bilingual education, has gained significance in English-medium instruction at the tertiary level, where monolingual English standards frequently conflict with students' actual linguistic behaviors. Researchers like Hornberger (2005) observe that encouraging learners to utilize their entire linguistic repertoire enhances both bilingual and EMI classrooms. Restricting students to English alone not only makes comprehension more difficult but also reinforces existing hierarchies and inequities around language. Evidence from higher education further supports this point. Adamson and Fujimoto-Adamson (2021) demonstrate that Japanese EMI instructors who deliberately integrated students' L1—such as permitting reading in Japanese or incorporating Japanese scripts into classroom materials—reported enhanced engagement and a more profound comprehension of disciplinary concepts. Even when translanguaging is not officially encouraged, students still use multilingual resources to help them with EMI tasks. Yüksel et al. (2023) demonstrate that Turkish EMI students routinely use Turkish-language YouTube videos alongside English readings and rely on translation tools to grasp complex content. Taken together, these findings suggest that translanguaging is not an optional "add-on" but a central part of how multilingual students learn in EMI environments.

Recent work also expands translanguaging pedagogy beyond language alone, drawing attention to the range of semiotic resources students use in meaning-making. Scholars such as Hawkins (2020) and Baynham (2020) argue for a broader, more ecological view that includes gesture, visuals, digital tools, embodied actions, and spatial arrangements. This shift toward a "semiotic ecology" reflects the reality of contemporary higher education, where learning increasingly occurs in digitally mediated, visually rich, and interactive spaces. In such contexts, multimodal translanguaging allows students to draw on the full spectrum of communicative tools available to them—resources that are often overlooked or undervalued within traditional monolingual pedagogies. For today's EMI learners, these multimodal practices are not peripheral; they are central to accessing and interpreting disciplinary knowledge.

At the same time, the literature reminds us that translanguaging pedagogy cannot be applied uncritically. Several scholars point to the importance of learner agency and preference. Ruecker (2014) notes that some students may prefer to develop standardized, monolingual academic practices to succeed in high-stakes assessments or to fit into professional communities. Matsuda (2014) also cautions that mandating students to translanguage in writing may disadvantage them if their educators or evaluators fail to comprehend all the linguistic resources

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they elect to employ. Canagarajah (2011) adds an important social dimension by emphasizing that translanguaging is co-constructed through interaction; its success depends on how teachers and students negotiate multilingual practices together. Limited teacher proficiency, monolingual testing regimes, or restrictive institutional ideologies can make it difficult for translanguaging to flourish. These critiques call attention to a context-responsive approach—one that supports multilingual practices without imposing them and recognizes the constraints, aspirations, and power dynamics within each educational setting.

Taken as a whole, the literature positions translanguaging pedagogy as a promising and transformative framework for tertiary EMI education. It offers a way to challenge monolingual assumptions, expand students' access to disciplinary knowledge, and affirm the diverse linguistic and semiotic repertoires they bring to the classroom. At the same time, scholars caution against universalizing or romanticizing translanguaging; its implementation must take into account institutional structures, teaching expertise, learner goals, and assessment expectations. Translanguaging pedagogy, when carefully acknowledged and navigated, provides a robust and flexible foundation for more equitable and responsive multilingual higher education.

The broader implication of this work is that translanguaging pedagogy demands not only methodological flexibility but also a rethinking of teachers' professional identities. Rather than positioning themselves as gatekeepers of monolingual norms, educators in multilingual EMI contexts increasingly act as reflective, adaptive professionals who negotiate classroom realities with sensitivity to students' linguistic trajectories and educational goals. This move toward a more responsive stance aligns with emerging discussions on *independent professionalism*, where teachers exercise informed judgment, draw on research-based understandings of multilingualism, and make contextually grounded decisions about language use. In this sense, translanguaging pedagogy not only enriches learning but also reshapes what it means to teach ethically and professionally in today's diverse higher education landscape.

Hornberger (2005) contends that EMI environments are enhanced when pedagogic approaches encourage students to utilize their entire repertoires. Limiting students to only English not only makes it harder for them to understand, but it also keeps language hierarchies and unfairness alive. Recent research from higher education corroborates this perspective. Adamson and Fujimoto-Adamson (2021) demonstrate that Japanese EMI instructors who strategically integrated students' L1s—facilitating reading in Japanese and writing in English or incorporating Japanese scripts—observed enhancements in student engagement and comprehension of content. Even in situations where translanguaging is not officially used, multilingual practices continue. Yüksel et al. (2021) discovered that Turkish EMI students consistently utilized YouTube videos in Turkish in conjunction with materials in English and depended on translation technologies to comprehend disciplinary content.

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This shows that translanguaging is not only an optional teaching method; it is a necessary part of how multilingual students learn EMI. Acknowledging and institutionalizing these practices can enhance epistemic access and mitigate inequities. EMI literature considers translanguaging pedagogy as a transformative framework that competes with monolingual ideologies, facilitates deep learning, and validates the identities of multilingual learners. Translanguaging improves epistemic access, cognitive engagement, and learner agency in bilingual education, L2 classrooms, and EMI in HE.

2.3 POSITIONING TRANSLANGUAGING AS A BRIDGE TO 'INDEPENDENT PROFESSIONALISM'

Translanguaging pedagogy requires teachers to make informed, context-sensitive, and ethically grounded decisions about language use in the classroom — decisions that cannot be scripted or standardized. This aligns closely with emerging understandings of *independent professionalism* (as elaborated on below) involving for instance reflective judgment, pedagogic autonomy, and principled responsiveness to learners' needs.

Teachers who enact translanguaging must continually navigate questions such as:

1. Which linguistic and semiotic resources are most supportive for learning?

2. How can learners' identities and cultural trajectories be respected and validated?

3. How should classroom norms evolve in response to multilingual interactions?

These are not merely technical questions; they are ethical, cultural, and professional questions that require the teacher to exercise independent, critically informed agency. Thus, translanguaging pedagogy provides a natural conceptual bridge to independent professionalism, foregrounding the teacher's role as an autonomous, reflective, and socially responsive practitioner. The subsequent section develops this connection further by examining how teacher agency and professionalism unfold within the specific pre-sessional context of this study.

3 INDEPENDENT PROFESSIONALISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Underpinning our work on investigating knowledge construction from the perspective of lecturers and tutors, is the realisation that educators' knowledge base and expertise can be categorised into different knowledge types and sources of experience. We take as our starting point an understanding that professional knowledge and expertise entail a complex interplay of established norms and practices together with personally derived and contextually shaped experiences of learning and teaching. Since publication of their seminal article, in which Freeman & Johnson (1998) call for a radical overhaul of the way in which we conceptualize the knowledge base for language teacher education, we have seen extensive discussion of this complexity. For reasons of scope and focus, we will not provide an in-depth review of the many developments to have taken place in the almost three decades that have passed since its publication (see Johnson

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& Golombek 2018 for an account of trends in language teacher education pedagogy since 1998). We will instead limit our consideration of professionalism to a particular aspect of its conceptualization that provides us with a theoretical lens through which we have been able to make valuable sense of our research context and findings. We see as especially relevant the concepts of *Sponsored* and *independent Professionalism* as proposed by Leung (2009, 2022).

Sponsored professionalism concerns those aspects of a teacher's professional repertoire that are institutionally endorsed and publicly supported. These comprise the components of professional knowledge and skills as outlined by education authorities, curriculum bodies, and professional organisations, who to various degrees in different educational settings will oversee guidance on what is deemed necessary for teachers to know and do. These authorities may set performance standards and accredit teaching qualifications, which can be reinforced through formal institutional procedures or even legal requirements. Together, these expectations and standards will significantly shape teachers' employability and career trajectories. Sponsored professionalism offers a stable frame of reference for practice, defining the parameters of teaching principles and practices and providing the criteria for evaluating teachers' work. This can give teachers the confidence to know they are acting appropriately. The mechanisms of sponsored professionalism can entail considerable authority in education systems, especially in contexts where public accountability is mandated and reinforced through official oversight. Leung (2009) also notes, however, that sponsored professionalism is of course not fixed; it changes over time and varies across different settings (we consider the nature of this process of change below).

Leung defines *independent professionalism as a* "propensity and a disposition to examine the assumptions and the practices associated with sponsored professionalism with reference to disciplinary knowledge and one's own social values and world views, and to take steps to bring about change in one's own practice (and beyond) where appropriate and possible." (2022: 184). In other words, teachers do not simply develop their knowledge and expertise by being exposed to the theoretical, methodological and practice-base principles they encounter during their education, formal training, or in-service interventions at a "sponsored level". Expertise is derived from the way in which teachers reflect on their own beliefs and values in situ in a continuous process of restructuring experience and knowledge as they make sense of classroom realities and the wider sociocultural environment and school settings.

Differentiating between a sponsored and independent professionalism is a valuable way of understanding how practitioners can navigate their way through a changing educational landscape. In our study we assume that our participating tutors may not make this distinction explicitly but will have a sense that there are differences and tensions between those aspects of their beliefs and practices that are more 'inherited' through professionally formalised learning and those aspects that are more individual to them – that is, those which they themselves have

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arrived at through their own reflective and experiential learning pathways. We see a move towards greater internationalization in HE, along with the consequential increase in linguacultural diversity (among student populations and university staff), as giving rise to a need to critically re-evaluate the impact this move may have/ought to have on policy, the curriculum and pedagogy (including teaching and assessment). From our perspective, we see changes in Sponsored Professionalism as far more gradual and slow moving than those that can take place in practitioners' independent professionalism, as the institutionalized status of established norms will tend to involve a high degree of inertia.

Jónasson (2016) explores the underlying causes of this, identifying multiple types of inertia, organized according to the following themes: "general conservativism, system stability, standards, fuzziness of new ideas, the strength of old ideas, vested interests, teacher education, lack of space and motivation for initiative, and lack of consequence of no change." (2016: 1). Jónasson comments that forms of knowledge once considered essential for understanding the world may now need to be replaced with newer forms of knowledge, often emerging from beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries. In addition, a wide range of new skills may be increasingly relevant for future societal demands. Yet numerous barriers impede such transformation, with institutional and contextual constraints inhibiting change and complicating efforts toward reform. Jónasson argues that substantial shifts in educational content are unlikely to occur unless these forms of inertia are explicitly recognised and addressed. We see as fundamental the investigation of individual practitioners' experiences and their ongoing (less inert) and developing independent professionalism. To this end, we turn now to our own study.

4 METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, multi-site design to investigate how disciplinary knowledge is constructed and mediated in English-medium instruction (EMI) settings characterized by increasing multilingualism. The empirical basis for the analysis draws on an ongoing collaborative research project conducted at Boğaziçi University (Türkiye) and King's College London (UK), both of which host large international student populations and rely on English as a (dominant) medium of instruction. These institutions provide rich contexts for examining how multilingual students and instructors navigate disciplinary literacies, translanguaging, and multimodal meaning-making in higher education. The research design, data sources, and analytic procedures described below are reconstructed from the project documentation and presentation materials.

4.1 PARTICIPANTS AND CONTEXTS

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The participant group[3] includes five academic tutors and two administrators from various departments and academic roles in the UK context, all of whom work with linguistically diverse student groups in pre-sessional, foundation, and disciplinary courses. Parallel data were also collected in Türkiye, where EMI has expanded rapidly in recent years and international student numbers are steadily increasing (Gülle et al., 2024). Participants come from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds, including nursing, physics, chemistry, molecular biology, mathematics, electrical engineering, accounting, and informatics. This disciplinary spread enables the analysis of how different fields conceptualize and operationalize disciplinary literacies, including the linguistic, multimodal, and epistemic demands placed on learners.

4.2 DATA COLLECTION

Data were collected across multiple academic terms (Spring, Summer, and Autumn 2024; Spring 2025) through three sources:

1.   **Pre- and post-observation interviews** with tutors and administrators, designed to elicit perspectives on multilingual classrooms, translanguaging, cultural sensitivity, assessment practices, and pedagogical challenges. Interview excerpts reveal emerging themes such as tensions around monolingual norms, concerns about fairness in translanguaging practices, disciplinary specificity, and the pressure of high-stakes assessments.

2.   **Classroom observations** (both face-to-face and online), aimed at capturing authentic instances of knowledge construction, language alternation, multimodal scaffolding, and interactional dynamics. Recordings and field notes document instructional sequences, materials used (e.g., graphs, formulas, models, visuals), and students' translanguaging and trans-semiotic practices.

3.   **Supplementary project documents**, adopting survey instruments from other EMI projects conducted by the researchers.

These data help triangulate how CCA and independent professionalism are connected to language/discipline specific teaching beyond the immediate case study.

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[3] For the purpose of reporting our findings in this article, we refer to our research participants with actual names rather than pseudonyms. We do this in line with ethical guidelines at both institutions, and with the informed written consent of all those involved in the data collection. Our main motive for doing so is that as our project progressed, it became evermore apparent that everyone involved in the interviews and observations was mutually engaged in an exploration of practice, to the extent that it made more sense to see interviewees and observees more as research partners and collaborators than 'participants'. By naming these partners here we also feel we are giving more voice to their experience. It is our plan that in future publications to report on this data, these collaborator-participants will be our co-authors.

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4.3 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Our analysis follows a combination of thematic and interactional analysis grounded in translanguaging theory and disciplinary literacy frameworks. First, interview transcripts were coded thematically to identify recurring issues in EMI teaching: students' struggles with disciplinary terminology, conceptual complexity, genre expectations, multimodal reasoning, and identity negotiation. Codes were also applied to tutors' self-perceptions of linguistic proficiency, their pedagogical strategies, and their collaboration (or lack thereof) with language specialists. Second, classroom observation data were examined using an interactional lens to trace how lecturers and students co-construct disciplinary knowledge through talk, gesture, visuals, modelling, digital tools, and language alternation. This aligns with recent conceptualizations of knowledge construction in EMI as a multimodal, multilingual process (e.g., Wei, 2018) and with CLILNetLE's multi-semiotic and bi/multilingual dimensions of disciplinary literacies. Third, triangulation across interviews, observations, and COST survey data allowed the researchers to identify convergences between what teachers report, what they do in practice, and what disciplinary experts consider essential for students' bi/multilingual disciplinary literacy development. This multi-layered analytical approach foregrounds both the affordances and constraints of translanguaging within EMI, including tensions arising from assessment regimes, institutional policies, and diverse learner goals.

4.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection. Identifying details were anonymized in interview transcripts and observation field notes. Due to the cross-institutional nature of the study, ethical approval was granted separately by Boğaziçi University and King's College London. Participation was voluntary, and participants were free to withdraw at any stage.

5. CASE STUDY: EMI IN 'ANGLOPHONE' CONTEXTS

In our study, the primary aim is to understand how academic tutors and lecturers approach their discipline and subject knowledge from a learning perspective, particularly in light of the multilingual environments of internationalized Higher Education (HE) settings. More specifically, the purpose of the project reported on in this article is to bring a fresh perspective on English medium instruction (EMI) by exploring current practices in Anglophone contexts (e.g. US, UK, etc.). In our research we investigate the increasing multilingualism of these spaces (notwithstanding recent pressures on immigration and linguistic/cultural diversity, with for instance the recent anti-immigration rhetoric in the US and UK), thereby extending the focus of EMI research beyond conventionally named 'non-Anglophone' settings.

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EMI has up to now been predominantly defined in relation to settings in which English is not the primary language of education nor the majority language of the wider context, as in the following customary definition in Macaro (2018), in which EMI is explained as:

> the use of the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English.
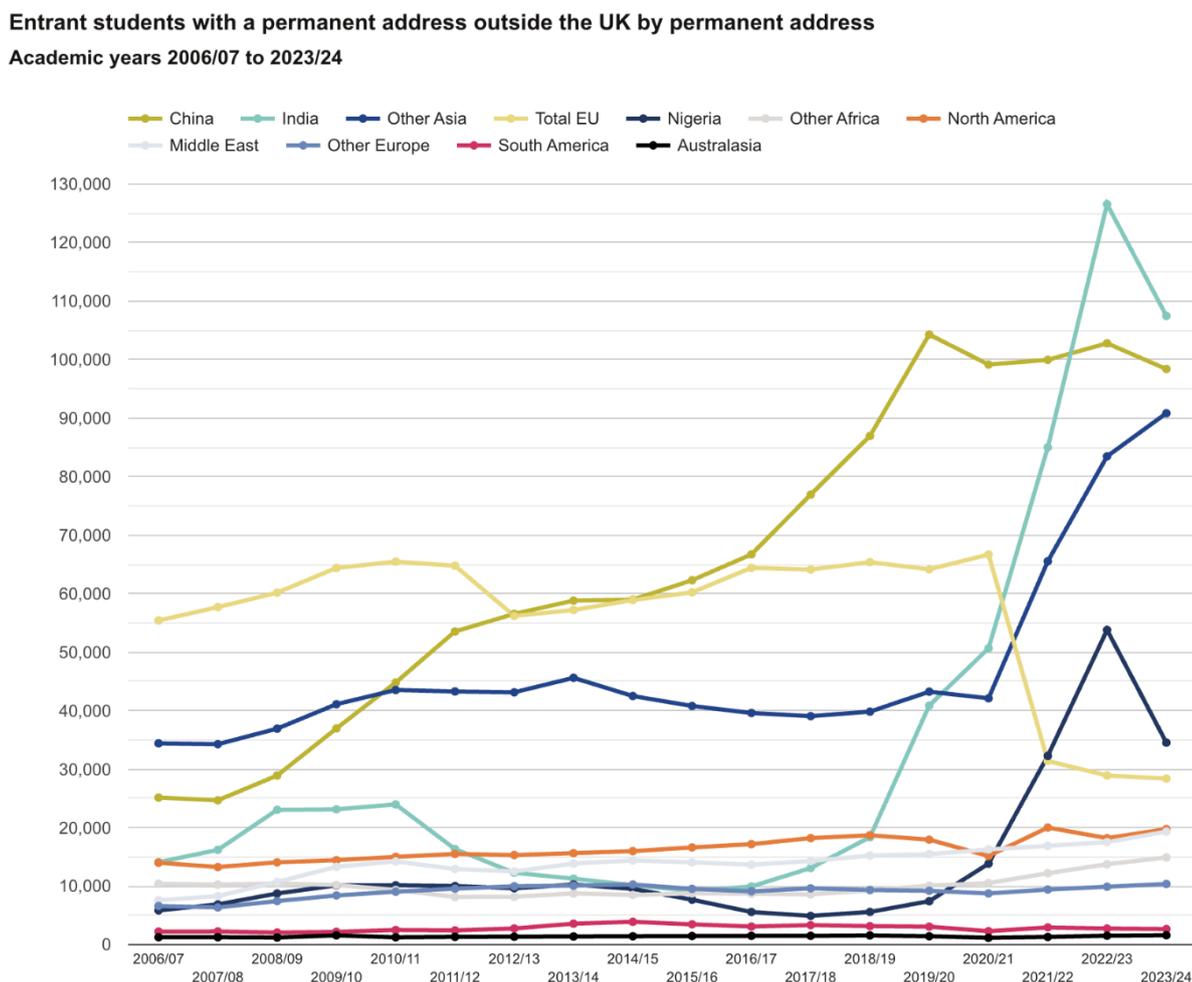
> (Macaro 2018: 37).

This framing of EMI as English medium provision in 'non-Anglophone' settings continues to be influential. However, as Smit (2023) makes clear in her *Key Concepts* article on EMI, this has become a complex phenomenon with all manner of local realizations, particularly when we take into account the globalized role of English and continued moves towards internationalization in so many HE contexts worldwide. In short, EMI can involve different varieties of English, with all manner of diverse linguistic practices, and may in fact be only one out of several instructional languages, while both students and teachers may bring diverse linguistic backgrounds and varying levels of proficiency across their repertoires. Smit (2023:499) identifies "six *flexible* criteria that allow for a more detailed description of individual EMI instances" (our italics for emphasis), which she lists as: *Educational level; Degree of Coverage; Location; Language Policies; Optionality;* and *Relation to English language education.* It is in connection with the third criterion, *location*, that we move away from the more established conceptualizations of EMI, which, as Macaro (2018) does above, exclude English language majority settings (i.e. US, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Republic of Ireland), adopting a more inclusive approach.

In our approach, we extend our framing of EMI to include any context (thus not defining EMI locations geographically) in which English essentially functions as a lingua franca in an educational setting as a consequence of large numbers of international students. We do this in line with a growing number of scholars who adopt a similarly expanded definition of what qualifies as EMI, extending this to 'internationalised, multilingual HE sites in Anglophone countries' (Hüttner & Baker 2023: 37). We therefore consider the academic contexts of both authors of our article to be EMI settings at the time of our data collection. The primary research site for our study (KCL) has a large number of international students, increasing substantially as a percentage of overall student numbers in recent years (particularly at postgraduate levels). At the time of writing, the KCL student body comprises 52% international students - out of a total of 33,410 (according to Times Higher Education, University World Rankings data for 2026; https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/kings-college-london). This can be seen in the context of broader trends across the UK HE sector. The following chart (fig. 1)

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shows increases in international student numbers by country of permanent residence in the years leading up to the academic year 2023-24 (the most recent data available) as presented by HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency).

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Figure 1. International student enrolments from 2006-07 to 2023-24)

Entrant students with a permanent address outside the UK by permanent address
Academic years 2006/07 to 2023/24

(https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/where-from.) (Accessed 26/11/2025)

The most notable trends illustrated here are: 1) China, which shows a consistent dramatic increase in numbers from around 2008-09 on, levelling out at approximately 100,000 students by 2019-20; 2) India, which shows a very dramatic increase from 50,000 to 120,000+ between 2019-20 to 2022-23; and 3) The EU, whose numbers fall dramatically in 2020-21 following Brexit[4].

In June and July 2024, we jointly interviewed all the research participants with a view to exploring their experiences and perceptions regarding the impact of internationalization in the university In this article we present findings from our preliminary round of interviews, which were carried out in advance of our classroom observation research. Due to the scope of our

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[4] Although the EU referendum took place in the UK in June 2016, the UK only officially exited the EU on January 31st 2020.

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discussion, and as this is our first publication to emerge from the project, we have chosen to present data from the initial interviews only. These illustrate key findings that then informed how we approached subsequent classroom observations and post-observation interviews, which we will pick up on in future publications. (We also do not focus on observation data yet, as the project is ongoing and we have a further round of observations planned for later in this academic cycle).

The following extract is taken from the first interview we carried out with Saul (Foundation Programme Co-ordinator at the time), who is responding here to questions about the size of the Foundation Programme and the increased levels of linguistic and cultural diversity the expansion in student numbers has brought about.

EXTRACT 1

MD>	So I wonder how much you feel that the landscape has changed (,) is changing in terms of level of diversity (,) and the kind of challenges that that might present to students and tutors
SJ>	I mean, this is an area where I'm aware of: changing attitudes, and aware of a change in my own attitudes (.) so obviously, we've got the kind of key drive towards decolonialization (,) we're trying to decolonize our curriculum er: I think some of the curricula that I set up earlier in my career as a foundation coordinator, were actually **quite** colonialised. Erm so when we're decolonial-decolonizing, the syllabus, it's often my syllabuses that we're decolonizing (.) You know, but that's– I think that's, that's part of the natural kind of change in the way I should be seeing things (,) so I'm kind of fully on board with that. I think that absolutely, we need to kind of decolonize curricula where we can, and er we are trying to do that with– it's a direction rather than a destination and we're definitely doing that on the program. I think the key extra new element, which is very, very significant, is the drive to decolonize pedagogy.

In addressing the question of diversity Saul very quickly turns to the notion of 'decolonizing the curriculum' – a movement that has gained currency in recent years to challenge the dominance

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of European-Centric academic knowledge, dismantle asymmetric power structures and promote an anti-racism agenda. (For a recent case study in an HE setting in the UK see Tamimi et al 2024). It is clear that this agenda has begun to have impact on how Saul conceptualises curriculum content. It is not though immediately clear what Saul means at the end of this turn when mentioning "the drive to decolonize pedagogy", which he sees as an additional element to the decolonizing turn in the curriculum.

The notion of a decolonized pedagogy becomes clearer a little later in the interview during subsequent turns, in which Saul first refers to a change in attitude towards international students among Foundation programme colleagues, and then later in reference to pedagogic materials and methods. In the following extract he comments on what he sees as recent changes in attitude and approach.

EXTRACT 2

SJ>	So the idea was that there was a kind of Western seminar that we had these people who were just not very good at it for cultural reasons. We either have to kind of change their culture or to auto kind of weed them out. And I think we definitely within King's foundations, we are very impatient with that attitude now, we would say that these people learn in different ways. They contribute in different ways– they, they engage in different ways (,) And that, we need to: understand that, and we need to be able to appreciate that (,) and we need to find other ways of measuring their engagement (,) if that's what we're doing we have other ways of encouraging their contribution.

In the extract Saul is commenting on the ways in which the programme has needed to adjust specifically to working with large numbers of students from China. This can be seen as a move away from a more normative mindset, in which rather than – as had previously been the case – imposing dominant cultural expectations on engagement with learning, the onus has shifted somewhat, with the presumption that tutors are now required to alter their stance and presuppositions.

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The impact this has on pedagogy is elaborated on further in the following extract, which occurs a little later in the conversation. Here Saul is commenting on curriculum content and use of resources in the *Liberal Arts* strand of the Foundation Programme.

EXTRACT 3

SJ>	But one of the things we early on we do is landscape painting. So that used to be quite Western. But of course we've got people from China, who've got one of the great traditions of landscape painting in the world, it made no sense to talk about landscape painting, without reference to that, where they've got their own kind of their own cultural awareness. So we have now brought that in. So we now contrast, landscape painting, and we have the essay question about it, where they can use Chinese landscape painting. But of course, that raises the question of sources, because we did have a rule whereby you had to use English language sources only. So we were saying, yes, you could talk about Chinese landscape painting, but you can't actually use any Chinese thinkers on this. And obviously, that was kind of a colonial thing that only you can see. And I guess it was kind of there, because we wanted to be able to evaluate how they use sources. We want to evaluate the sources they've chosen. But of course, now we've got Google Translate, that's all gone. And, and we can do those things, even when it's originally in Chinese. So we have just said, absolutely use those, use those sources, try and use some Western sources, just so you get the kind of broader understanding of the issue. But you know, that's– that's just one. That's just one instance of how we've gone from a very heavily Western centric to a much more open one.

Here we see a move towards a less monocentric, and eventually more multilingual approach to the curriculum. This is clearly a gradual shift in mindset, initially involving an extension in content and focus, before then also involving a move towards accepting the multilingualism of the setting by allowing students to draw on resources in Chinese. To what extent this level of

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acceptance extends to all tutors in all subject areas remains to be seen - especially beyond the Foundation programme in each faculty and department (a question we partially take up below in the extracts with Lucy).

This causes us to return to the differentiation between sponsored and independent professionalism. To some extent we can see independence in Saul's stance, in which he acknowledges the need to move away from a monolithic version of curriculum content and pedagogic approach and engage with diversity, in relation to both types of professionalism. First, Saul appears throughout our interactions with him to be reflecting on his own beliefs and practices, signalling how his views have developed critically, stating that he is "aware of a change in my own attitudes" and that "when we're decolonial-decolonizing, the syllabus, it's often my syllabuses that we're decolonizing" (Extract 1). In addition, given Saul's status as Foundation Programme Co-ordinator, we can also see the potential impact of this stance on the practices of EAP tutors across the Foundation Programme, such that a more multilingual perspective may eventually become part of the sponsored notions of expertise in the department.

We turn now to examine our interview with Lucy, who at the time of data collection was Pre-sessional and Short Course co-ordinator. Key themes to emerge from our initial conversation with Lucy were as follows: high-stakes assessment and limitations of available time; the value of formative assessment; tasks to support student learning; recent changes in EAP teaching, including online provision; the need to provide subject-specific content for postgraduates; the relative lack of subject specialists; differences in respective levels of cultural awareness among EAP tutors and subject specialists; and finally, the need for greater collaboration between Foundations and academic tutors across faculties. Several of these themes relate to ongoing wider challenges that have long characterised pre-sessional provision, including very notably the assessment-oriented focus of these courses, particularly in relation to their short intensive nature and the impact this has on their structure and content. For reasons of scope, we will not concern ourselves in this paper with these aspects of the interview with Lucy. Instead, we will concentrate on how Lucy sees the key differences between the knowledge and expertise of subject specialists and tutors on the pre-sessional courses and Foundation Programme, and the challenges this can present in terms of meeting the learning requirements of international students.

In the following extract, Lucy is commenting on levels of interaction between Foundation tutors – especially on pre-sessional courses - and subject specialists, particularly in relation to attempting to provide more targeted, embedded support.

EXTRACT 4

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LP>	and one of my roles, actually, part of the remit of the pre-sessional team, in the past has been to liaise with departments to provide embedded erm sessions (.) so that's kind of another part of my role, which I didn't mention before, we actually have a whole new team looking after that now, but for a number of years, you know, I, I would– ONE of the things I might do would be to liaise with, erm you know, liaise with another faculty to, you know, they will come to us and request a series of academic writing workshops, for example, or some dissertation workshops, and we would then provide those, er and you would obviously want to get as much information as possible about what the students needed. Erm And sometimes you'd be able to speak you know, a lot of the times, you WOULDN'T be able to speak to, you know, an ACADEMIC member of staff, you'd be speaking to a programs officer who had been given some instructions.

The "embedded sessions" Lucy refers to reflect a move towards greater acknowledgement of the enhanced value in providing subject specific academic literacy support, in contrast to adopting a more generic approach. Wingate (2018), for instance, emphasises the shortcomings of generic academic tuition, commenting that difficulties with literacy tend to surface most clearly in students' writing, with the consequence that the majority of teaching and support efforts concentrate solely on writing, even though writing is actually just "the end product of a complex literacy process" (2018: 352). Wingate explains how this process includes locating appropriate sources, assessing these for relevant information, integrating this information into a coherent argument, and finally expressing that in written form. She argues that most writing instruction overlooks these initial stages, focusing only on the final step, the written product. When academic support is generic, i.e. not embedded in the discipline, it cannot address these essential reading stages, since the skills of selecting and evaluating evidence can only be developed through engagement with discipline-specific knowledge and within the context of a particular assignment; consequently, meaningful support must come from the subject specialists.

In Extract 4 above, Lucy alludes to the frustration she felt when assigned the role of liaising with subject specialists for the purpose of setting up academic support sessions that are directly

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linked with the students' discipline area. Lucy reports that it wasn't always possible to communicate directly with relevant subject specialist academics, and that information on students and their subject related needs could be quite limited. These limitations become apparent still further a little later in the interview, as can be seen in Extract 5 below.

EXTRACT 5

LP>	And we'd share, you know, suggestions, I've even, erm I've even delivered a, you know, a TEAMS session with one faculty member from informatics. Yeah, that was a, that was a really nice experience, I'd like to be able to do that a lot more. And then you get, you know get some who will give very sort of sparse details, and you have to really dig a bit to find out exactly er what students need. And I, you know, I think it's coming down from, you know, just not having had, you know, the same level of training in in working with international students, er specifically, and perhaps not knowing, not being able to pinpoint quite so easily what their needs are, and also just not knowing the students as well, as you know, they're not necessarily getting the chance to– you know a lot of these students, you know they'll never interact with one on one, they might, you know, come to their lectures or seminars, they might mark their work, but they're not necessarily their personal tutor, and the students don't necessarily go into their office hour. So, you know, a lot of these students are probably quite anonymous to them.

In this extract, Lucy is initially commenting on what she saw as a very valuable experience of participating in a collaborative academic support session via TEAMS in which she was working together with a subject specialist to provide targeted, in discipline academic literacy support. However, she then goes on to lament that this level of collaboration is not especially typical in current practices, adding that it can be difficult to liaise with subject specialists and gather relevant information on learner needs, with only very "sparse details". Lucy also then comments on the comparative experiences – and by extension her perceptions of relative expertise – of EAP

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tutors and subject specialists. Lucy sees EAP tutors as better equipped to understand and respond to the needs of international students than subject specialists, who have not received specialist training in working with students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

This raises all manner of questions about the professional development of subject specialists and the level of support and training provided by the institution that an ongoing internationalization requires. This is an issue we will return to below in our discussion and concluding remarks.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Overall, our research illustrates that critical cultural awareness, multilingual perspectives, and translanguaging pedagogies, when engaged with through independent professionalism, can be mutually reinforcing. Advancing these practices requires sustained collaboration across faculties and academic departments, reflective engagement with diversity, and a willingness to rethink established norms in EMI and HE.

In EMI for HE, translanguaging practices can offer strategies for supporting academic understanding, strengthening participation, and enhancing intercultural dialogue. Yet our research suggests a certain amount of ambivalence among tutors and subject specialists: while many appreciate the pedagogical value of allowing students to use multiple languages, concerns persist regarding fairness, assessment validity, and cultural appropriation. These tensions highlight the need for institutionally informed guidance and professional reflection on how multilingual resources can be harnessed ethically and effectively within EMI contexts.

Tutors who actively engage with students' multilingual practices demonstrate not only inclusive pedagogy but also an emergent professionalism grounded in critical awareness, intercultural engagement, and adaptability. Independent professionalism, however, exists in tension with forms of *sponsored professionalism*—institutionally prescribed expectations about what teachers should know and do. Our findings indicate that while EAP tutors often exhibit high levels of cultural awareness and openness to multilingual practices, subject specialists may be constrained by disciplinary norms, institutional standards, or limited training in working with international cohorts. These dynamics shape classroom practices, cross-faculty collaboration, and the success of programmes. Navigating cultural sensitivity, differing sociopolitical values, and decolonising agendas is highly complex. Limited interaction between faculties and support units further complicates coherent EMI provision, highlighting the need for more integrated institutional structures.

Our preliminary findings also indicate, however, that current provision for academic support among international students is not especially well aligned with the disciplinary setting

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of students' academic needs. Materials and curricula tend to be fairly generic (a factor which also became apparent during our observations), signalling a need for more subject-specific adaptation. While linguistic and cultural diversity is generally well understood and accommodated within pre-sessional and foundation programmes, and has clearly become a consideration when planning syllabus content and approach to pedagogy, this awareness may be less evident among subject-specialists more broadly across faculties. Limited embedded support and minimal liaison between EAP practitioners and faculty may further exacerbate these gaps.

Nonetheless, EAP tutors demonstrate strong professional commitment, a high level of research engagement, and a clear willingness to collaborate more closely with academic departments and students on foundation courses. Taken together, these insights highlight the significant work that still lies ahead. Strengthening collaboration between EAP specialists, subject lecturers, and students will be essential to developing more context-responsive and discipline-informed provision. Central to this endeavour is the cultivation of critical cultural awareness and a deeper appreciation of multilingualism, both of which are key to advancing genuinely independent professionalism in diverse academic settings. Furthermore, translanguaging offers a promising pedagogical approach for fostering intercultural competence and supporting learners' engagement with complex disciplinary content.

Looking forward, several avenues for research merit sustained attention. These include:

- examining how critical cultural awareness can shape pedagogical decision-making across different disciplines;

- investigating the role of multilingual practices—including translanguaging—in supporting academic literacy development;

- exploring effective models of collaboration between EAP tutors and subject specialists; and

- identifying the institutional conditions that enable reflexive, adaptive, and culturally responsive professional practices.

As higher education becomes increasingly multilingual and multicultural, embracing linguistic and cultural diversity will continue to pose challenges. Understanding how best to address these challenges remains an open empirical question and calls for sustained, collaborative research engagement.

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We also wish to acknowledge here the continued engagement and support of the collaborator-participants involved in this project. We are hugely appreciative of the engagement of all 7 of the professionals we have interviewed and observed. Finally, we would like to honour the memory of Saul Jones, who sadly passed away very unexpectedly during the writing of this article. As Deputy Head of King's International Foundation Programme, Saul was especially important in this study. The experiences he shared with us in our meetings with him were influential in shaping our approach to this project and our thinking about this subject area more broadly. Colleagues at King's College London pay tribute to Saul here: https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/remembering-saul-jones.

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