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What do students expect from the English Medium Instruction in Physical Activity and Sport Sciences?

Anna Szczesniak[1] · https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0504-3355
University of Málaga

Elvira Barrios · https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9419-4031
University of Málaga

ABSTRACT

The rising popularity of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in higher education has become a notable global trend. However, there is limited information on what students expect from these programmes. Therefore, this study aims to explore students' expectations of EMI within a Physical Activity and Sport Sciences degree at a Spanish public university, the first such programme in Spain. It also examines the relationship between EMI expectations and students' profile variables such as gender, accredited and perceived English proficiency, and prior experience in bilingual education. Data was collected from a sample of 109 students using the English Medium Instruction Expectations Scale, which has been validated for reliability and validity. Results showed high expectations for improved job opportunities and linguistic competence, particularly in technical vocabulary and comprehension skills, with lower expectations for written expression. However, students anticipated their academic achievement to be less effective compared to instruction in Spanish. Additionally, female students and those with higher accredited English levels had significantly higher expectations regarding job prospects. In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of understanding students' expectations of EMI programmes to identify gaps between anticipated and actual experiences, as these mismatches can impact satisfaction and perceptions of the programme effectiveness.

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[1] **Corresponding author** – Despacho 2.30. Edificio Facultad de Ciencias de la Educación, c/Blvr. Louis Pasteur, 25, 29010, Málaga (Spain).

E-mail: annaszczesniak@uma.es

1. Introduction

Defined 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, p. 19), English Medium Instruction (EMI) has become a growing global trend across various educational stages, with a particular emphasis on higher education institutions (Macaro et al. 2018). In recent decades, these insitutions have focused more on strategically internationalising post-secondary education through the implementation of English-taught programmes (Coleman, 2006). Although EMI has been "situated within the spectrum of forms for the integration of content and language" (Pecorari & Malmström, 2018, p. 498), it distinguishes itself from other programmes by its exclusive focus on content acquisition. While approaches such as English for General Purposes (EGP), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) emphasize primarily the development of language skills, EMI lies on the opposite side on the continuum as it prioritises content delivery (Chang, 2023). Consequently, language acquisition is regarded merely as "a by-product of content learning" (Pun & Macaro, 2019, p.64). In contrast to topics covered in language-focused classrooms, whose aim is to improve students' language skills, "the content in EMI is not a vehicle for language learning but an end in itself" (Chang, 2023, p.164). Nevertheless, despite language development not being the primary objective in EMI settings, there appears to be an implicit expectation that students will acquire proficiency in English alongside the subject matter (Kaya et al., 2023). Indeed, language learning in EMI programmes is related to the assumption that extensive exposure to authentic verbal input and a lot of opportunities for meaningful interactions can foster the development of language proficiency (Coleman et al., 2018)

In addition to its widespread adoption, a substantial body of research on EMI in higher education contexts has emerged (Macaro, 2018). Numerous studies have mainly aimed to explore teachers and students' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions towards the English-taught programmes (Xie & Curle, 2022) as well as assess students' learning outcomes, including the development of language skills (Yuksel et al., 2021). Despite this, there's still a noticeable lack of research on factors that may influence academic success in EMI settings, with students' expectations being one of them (Muttaqin & Chuang, 2022). As a matter of fact, a significant link between students' expectations and their academic success has been observed in prior research among secondary school students (Khattab, 2015). High expectations were

also found to motivate primary school students and influence their behaviours and choices, which consequently led to better learning outcomes (Putwain et al., 2019). Yet, given that these studies were conducted in general education, including both primary and secondary levels, there is a need to examine students' expectations in EMI settings within higher education. It is important to investigate students' expectations of EMI programmes to identify potential gaps between anticipated outcomes and actual experiences. Mismatched expectations in EMI may affect students' satisfaction and lead to negative perceptions of English-taught programmes and their effectiveness. Furthermore, it is of the utmost importance to employ reliable and valid tools to collect data on students' expectations. As Curle and Derakhshan (2021) noted, researchers often neglect the basic principles of questionnaire design, which can result in inaccuracies in the data collected. In light of these considerations, the present study attempted to fill this gap in the literature and measure students' expectations of an EMI programme with a reliable and valid tool (Szczesniak, 2024). Furthermore, it aims to examine the relationship between various variables and students' expectations in order to identify other factors that may impact students' learning experience. Specifically, the research questions addressed are:

A. What are the students' expectations of the learning process and academic success in an EMI Physical Activity and Sports Degree programme at a Spanish public university?

B. What is the relationship between students' expectations of EMI and the following variables: grade, gender, at least one legal tutor with a higher education degree, mode of entry to the degree programme, accredited and perceived level of English, and previous experience in bilingual education?

While the study does not directly analyse the impact of mismatched expectations on student satisfaction or perceptions at this stage, the findings serve as a basis for future research, whose aim is to collect data at the end of the programme to determine if these expectations have been met and to examine any differences between students' initial expectations and their actual experiences.

2. Literature review

While expectations play a crucial role in EMI programmes, the existing research on this topic is still limited (Muttaqin & Chuang, 2022). Consequently, our review will broaden its scope by exploring the motivations and reasons which lie behind students' participation in English-taught degree programmes. Exploring these

factors might as well provide insights into students' anticipated outcomes regarding such programmes.

One of the studies whose aim was to explore, among other factors, students' expectations of EMI was carried out by Mira et al. (2021). The data was collected via an online close-ended questionnaire distributed to students at the School of Agricultural Engineering at the Technical University of Madrid (Spain). With respect to the findings, the study revealed that while students anticipated a positive impact on their future careers, they were concerned about their academic performance. This finding reflects a significant tension within EMI programmes: on the one hand, students are motivated by the potential for improved career opportunities, while on the other hand, they feel anxious about a potential negative impact on their academic performance. This raises an important question for our study, as we aim to investigate whether students in the field of physical education and sport experience the same tension.

Another study which aimed to collect data on students' expectations in EMI programmes was conducted by Muttaqin and Chuang (2022) at the Faculty of Economics of a University in Indonesia. The participants, enrolled in three programmes—Accounting, Management and Economics, Finance and Banking—were administered an open-ended questionnaire that gathered information on students' expectations through a single qualitative question. The authors identified three main groups of EMI students based on their prior learning and language backgrounds. The first group consisted of students who attended regular classes in Indonesian while also taking English learning courses. Taking these additional classes in English, which ranged from general to specialised courses, helped them improve their communication skills. The second group attended regular classes in Indonesian with an English subject twice a week but without additional English courses. Still, the group showed high motivation and positive attitudes towards English as they reported having engaged in various activities such as English competitions, trips, self-learning, and learning from films and games to enhance their English proficiency. The third group identified in the study attended bilingual or international schools with English courses, English clubs, and participation in English competitions. Their consistent exposure to English education since junior or senior high school provided them with a solid foundation for EMI learning at the university level.

Muttaqin and Chuang (2022) concluded that these diverse backgrounds influenced students' expectations about the programme. The first group mostly hoped that the EMI programme would enhance their English proficiency and confidence. They also

expected opportunities to practice English both inside and outside the classroom, such as through English clubs, and to engage in English interactions with lecturers and peers. The second group prioritised establishing an "English speaking zone" in which the only language used by the lecturer was English. The third group also stated that the creation of English-speaking environment, which will provide them with opportunities to actively use English, was among their expectations. As regards intercultural and job-related expectations, the first group highlighted the desire to make international friendships which would, in turn, broaden their minds and consequently prepare them for overseas jobs and studies. Similarly, the second and third groups envisioned the EMI programme fostering communication among students to better equip them for future opportunities abroad. The third group also mentioned the expectation to forming international relationships. This research study illustrates how the diverse educational trajectories might influence students' expectations. Therefore, our study aims to amplify this aspect by investigating more variables (e.g. gender, mode of entry to the degree programme, accredited and perceived level of English, and previous experience in bilingual education) to determine if these factors impact students' expectations in a different academic context.

Sugimoto (2021) also conducted a study which aimed to explore, among other aspects, students' learning expectations in specific EMI courses at a private medical school in Tokyo. He used a questionnaire comprising both closed- and open-ended questions and administered it to undergraduate students who had to select at least one EMI course from diverse areas: photography, cinema, origins of medicine, survey of human culture, health informatics, motivation, and language testing. Regarding the findings, the study indicated that roughly one-third of students expected to improve their listening skills while around a quarter aspired to enhance their speaking abilities. A smaller number expected to improve content knowledge, enhance writing and reading skills, and get ready to study abroad. The study's findings suggest a strong emphasis on improving listening and speaking skills, which might be particularly relevant for students in a medical context. This focus on communication skills may differ from the motivations observed in other fields, indicating that specific academic disciplines can also shape students' expectations. Therefore, our study seeks to explore expectations in the field of physical activity and sports to determine which specific competencies students deem essential for their academic and professional development. Interestingly, although one might expect content knowledge to be a high priority for medical students, it was not among the top expectations in the study conducted by Sugimoto (2021). This discrepancy could be attributed to the nature of the courses selected, which were not directly related to their major discipline.

Insights into the reasons for undertaking EMI courses were also provided by the research study conducted by Zhang and Pladevall-Ballester (2022). The participants, who were enrolled in three different universities in Xian (China), pursued studies in International Trade, Film Production and Project Management. For the purpose of the study, the authors only reported data from section two of the questionnaire, which was related to perceptions, expectations and attitudes of students towards EMI programmes. This section included Likert-scale items and open-ended questions, enabling students to reflect on their reasons for opting for EMI beyond those addressed in the items. As regards the results obtained, the participants stated that the reasons to enrol in English-taught programmes were mainly influenced by the desire to improve their English skills and subject knowledge, as well as to develop the necessary skills for future careers and further studies. Moreover, the study also aimed to observe how students' perceptions, expectations and attitudes toward EMI programme evolved over time. The results revealed a decrease in students' perceptions regarding the advantages of EMI in enhancing both language skills and subject knowledge after completing the programme. In the open-ended question, the participants consistently highlighted reasons such as a strong emphasis on enhancing competitiveness in the future job market and interest in improving their English skills.

The authors subsequently published another article using the same dataset, but focusing on the first and third section of the questionnaire (Zhang & Pladevall-Ballester, 2023). The third part, which included Likert-scale items and aimed to measure students' motivation and anxiety, also sheds light on the students' anticipated outcomes. The study revealed different motivating factors among students enrolled in different degrees. International Trade students mainly aimed to enhance their English proficiency, crucial for their future careers. They also expected to deepen their understanding of previously learned concepts and showed some interest in being taught by international lecturers. For Film Production students, the primary motivation was to gain subject expertise, which is essential for their career and personal development, with less emphasis on improving English proficiency. Project Management students were driven by opportunities for self-development and exposure to foreign cultures. Therefore, this study corroborated our previously stated assumption that students' reasons for undertaking EMI degree programmes may vary across different disciplines. In the study by Zhang and Pladevall-Ballester (2023), it can be observed that three major motivations stand out among students enrolled in these programmes: improving English proficiency or acquiring content knowledge, with both ultimately aimed at improving students' future employability. For this reason, our study will explore these dimensions within the context of

Physical Education and Sport programmes to determine which aspect is more important for students in this field.

In fact, another study conducted by Wu et al. (2023) at a Chinese university in Beijing gathered data on these three dimensions. A close-ended questionnaire collected information on a range of motivational factors, including aspects related to future careers, language proficiency, and academic progress. The participants were enrolled in Science, Engineering, Social Sciences and Humanities degree programmes. The data showed that students who enrolled in EMI courses were not primarily driven by career prospects. It transpired that they mainly desired to improve their English proficiency level. Contrary to these findings, the study by Serna-Bermejo and Lasagabaster (2023) carried out at the University of the Basque Country in Spain with students from various faculties, including Social Science and Communication, Architecture, Education, Economics and Business, Engineering and Computer Sciences, revealed that most students expected EMI to positively impact their academic progress and their future careers.

Based on the trends observed in earlier research regarding students' expectations and reasons for enrolling in EMI programmes, there is a need to extend the study to other disciplines and geographical areas. Since the majority of the aforementioned studies were conducted in Asian countries, our study aims to provide a perspective from a European standpoint. Moreover, the study specifically targets students in a physical activity degree programme, which represents a niche in the existing literature, as most studies have focused on other disciplines. In fact, the programme under scrutiny is the fourth of its kind offered by a public university in Europe and the first in Spain. Additionally, due to insufficient information regarding the validation process of the questionnaires used for data collection in most previous research (Mira et al., 2021; Serna-Bermejo & Lasagabaster, 2023; Sugimoto, 2021; Wu et al., 2023; Zhang & Pladevall-Ballester, 2022), the present study aims to address this gap by employing a validated instrument to ensure the accuracy of the collected data. Finally, since few studies explore factors that may influence students' expectations, such as previous learning experience (Muttaqin and Chuang, 2022), our study seeks to examine additional factors within the context of physical activity and sports that may influence students' anticipated outcomes.

3. The study design

3.1. Study participants and context

A total of 109 out of a population of 122 students enrolled in the first and second year of the Degree in Physical Activity and Sport Sciences at the University of Málaga (Spain) participated in the study. None of the groups had started classes in English, as all classes in the first year are conducted only in Spanish. English-language instruction begins in the second year. This degree programme, initiated in the 2021-2022 academic year, allows students to obtain the European Bachelor in Physical Activity and Lifestyle.

The participant group comprised 75.2% men and 23.9% women, with ages ranging from 18 to 26 years (average age = 19.2; SD = 1.4). A total of 51.4% were enrolled in the first year and 48.6% in the second year of the programme, and most of the respondents were Spanish (97.2%), with a small percentage (2.8%) coming from countries such as Italy, Portugal, and Venezuela. In terms of the educational background of at least one legal tutor, 62.4% possessed a university degree. With regards to their accredited English level, most students had a B2 (upper-intermediate) CEFR level (50.5%), followed by B1 (intermediate) (42.2%) and C1 (advanced) level (7.3%). A total of 70.6% received their English certification from Cambridge Assessment English, followed by Aptis (16.5%). Despite this, the perceived level of English was higher, as 56% of the respondents reported having a B2 level (Figure 1).
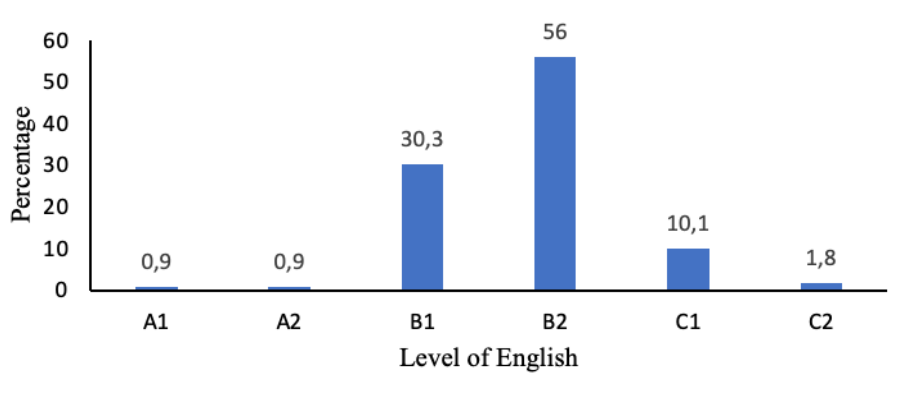

Figure 1. Perceived level of English.

In terms of prior experience in bilingual education, 61.5% of students reported having such experience in primary or secondary school, while 38.5% did not. Of the students entering the programme, 46.8% had completed a Humanities and Social

Sciences Baccalaureate, 30.3% had a Health Sciences Baccalaureate, and the remaining 15.6% had prior vocational training. As regards the main reason for pursuing the degree, a total of 37.6% cited job opportunities, 24.8% mentioned academic reasons, 11.9% stated it was due to an interest in combining the degree with English and 3.7% said it was on the recommendation of others. Interestingly, no students chose improving their English skills as a reason to enrol in this degree programme, which could be attributed to the absence of an equivalent degree offered in Spanish at the university in question. In the open-ended "Other reasons" category, almost all students indicated they loved or were passionate about sports.

Regarding students' level of confidence in their English skills (Figures 2-6), the predominant distribution of responses concerning listening, reading, writing, and interaction abilities, clustered around levels 3, 4, and 5 on a scale ranging from 1 (Not at all confident) to 6 (Very confident). Even though the data showed a significant portion of students at confident levels 4 and 5, level 3 indicates a moderate degree of confidence, which suggests room for improvement. Regarding oral production skills, the distribution is slightly different as there are numerous cases with low to moderate levels of language confidence (levels 2 and 3).
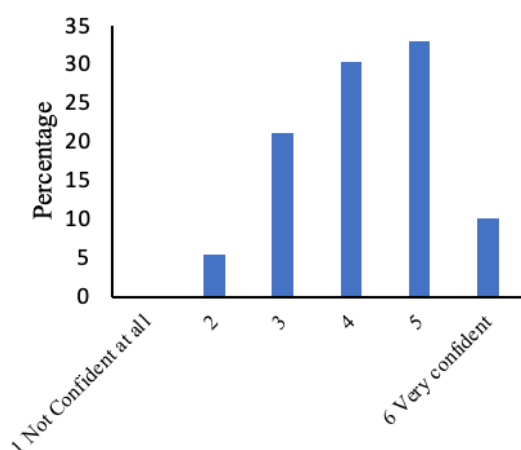
Figure 2. Students' confidence in their listening comprehension skills.
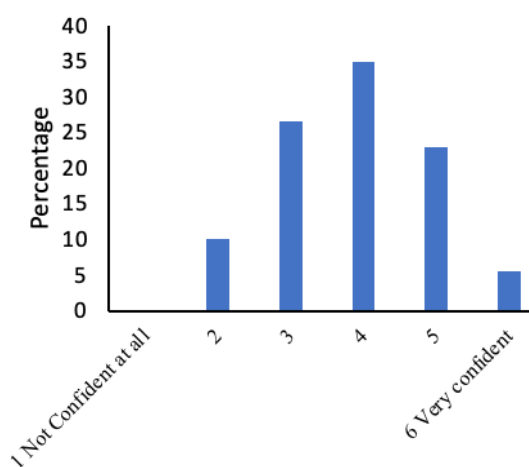
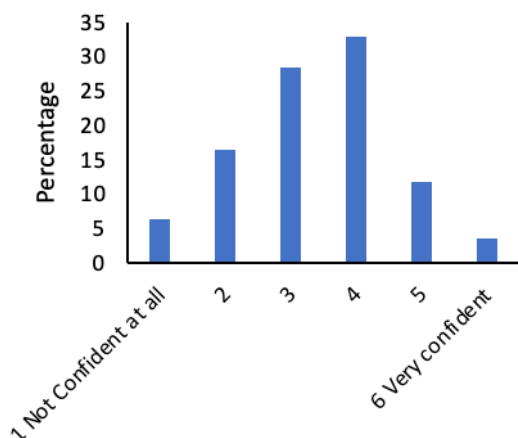*Figure 3. Students' confidence in their oral interaction skills.*

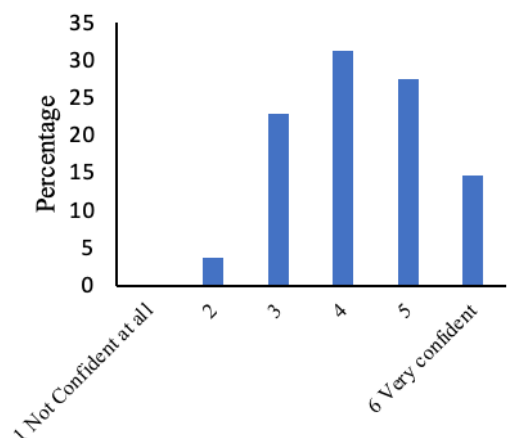*Figure 4. Students' confidence in their oral production skills.*

Figure 5. Students' confidence in their reading comprehension skills.
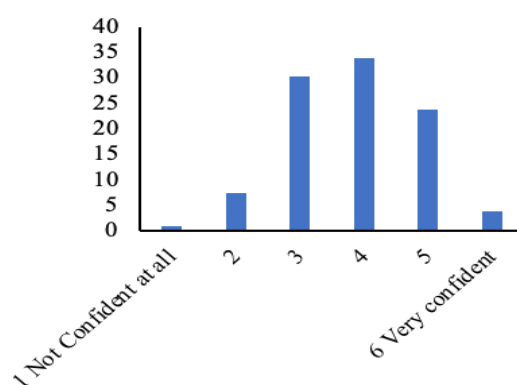

Figure 6. Students' confidence in their written production skills

3.2. Data gathering procedure

The data was collected using the English Medium Instruction Expectations Scale (EMIES) (Szczesniak, 2024) (see the Annex for the original version in Spanish). The instrument's reliability and validity were ensured through validation processes, including exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. The questionnaire consisted of two parts: the first part gathered background information on aspects such as age, gender, nationality, accredited and perceived level of English, prior experience in bilingual classes, the main reason for pursuing the degree or their legal tutors' educational backgrounds. The second part included 12 Likert-scale questions, which were further subdivided into three dimensions: students' expectations concerning their linguistic competence (6 items), content acquisition (3 items) and of future job

opportunities (3 items). The data collection took place at the beginning of the academic year, and the participants completed the online questionnaire voluntarily in class.

3.3. Data analysis procedures

All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 25.0 for Windows (IBM® SPSS® Statistics). A deep explanation of the terminology and methodology approaches described below can be found elsewhere (e.g., Field, 2017). The general introductory questions were analysed using descriptive statistics, including the calculation of the mean to determine the average response, the standard deviation to assess the variability of responses, and the percentages to provide a proportional understanding of categorical responses (Field, 2017). Afterwards, to address the research question of the present study, descriptive statistics were also calculated for both the 12 individual items of the questionnaire and the three dimensions, including the calculation of the mean to evaluate the average response and the standard deviation to analyse the variability of responses (Field, 2017).

Furthermore, in order to address the second research question of the present study, one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were performed to assess differences in the mean scores reported in the three EMIES dimensions (i.e., students' expectations concerning their linguistic competence, content acquisition, and future job opportunities) between two groups (e.g., categorical variables) (Field, 2017). The categorical variables compared were the following: grade (first vs. second graders), gender (men vs. women), legal tutors' educational status (at least one tutor with a higher education degree vs. tutors without a higher education degree), mode of entry to the programme (vocational training vs. Baccalaureate/other degrees), accredited level of English (B1 vs. B2-C1), perceived level of English (A1-B1 vs. B2-C2), and previous experience in bilingual education (yes vs. no). Where applicable, one-way analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) were used instead, incorporating statistically significant covariates to account for their potential influence on the results. This approach helped to control for the effects of potential confounding variables by adjusting the group means to improve the precision of comparisons (Field, 2017). The potential confounding variables considered were the following: grade, gender, at least one legal tutor with a higher education degree, entry to the degree, accredited and perceived level of English and previous experience in bilingual education. Thus, in the one-way ANOVA, mean scores between groups are compared to assess differences, while one-way ANCOVA extends this by adjusting for relevant covariates, and thus enhances the validity of the findings (Field, 2017). The statistical significance level was set at $p < 0.05$, which means that p-values from

the one-way ANOVA/ANCOVA below this threshold indicated statistically significant differences in the EMIES dimensions between the groups (Field, 2017).

Following this, simple linear regression analyses were conducted to examine whether a linear relationship exists between students' confidence in different English skills (i.e., non-categorical variables: students' confidence in their oral production, written production, oral comprehension, written comprehension, and interaction skills) and the three dimensions of the EMIES questionnaire (Field, 2017). Simple linear regression analyses allowed us to determine whether increases in confidence in specific language skills were associated with higher scores (or lower scores) in the EMIES dimensions (Field, 2017). P-values below 0.05 from the simple linear regression analyses indicated statistically significant relationships between students' confidence in different English skills and the EMIES dimensions (Field, 2017).

In the one-way ANOVA/ANCOVA, effect sizes were estimated using the partial eta squared (η^2_p) to indicate the magnitude of the observed effects on the three EMIES dimensions (Field, 2017). η^2_p measures the proportion of variance in the EMIES dimensions that is explained by the groups, after accounting for other variables in the model (Field, 2017). In the simple linear regression analyses, the coefficient of determination (R^2) serves as an indicator of the magnitude of the relationship between the students' confidence in different English skills and the EMIES dimensions (Field, 2017). R^2 indicates the proportion of variance in the EMIES dimensions that is explained by the students' confidence in different English skills. Higher η^2_p or R^2 values suggest stronger effects, and vice versa (Field, 2017).

4. Results

The analysis of the three dimensions from the EMIES (Szczesniak, 2024) revealed participants' optimistic expectations regarding enhanced job opportunities offered by studying the programme in English, with the average mean of 8.8 (on a scale of 0 to 10). Furthermore, the students polled demonstrated high expectations for improvements in their linguistic competence (*M* = 8.2), followed by expectations for improvements in academic performance (*M* = 7.6).

As regards the analysis of the specific items related to English skills, on average, the students surveyed expected to enhance their English proficiency in the field of physical activity and sport (*M* = 8.1). Yet, the highest expectations were observed for the improvement of technical vocabulary in English within this field, with a mean rating of 8.5. Additionally, positive outcomes were anticipated in the improvement of

reading (*M* = 8.3) and listening comprehension abilities (*M* = 8.1). Similarly, participants expected improvement in their oral interaction skills (*M* = 8.2) as a result of their enrolment in the programme. The lowest expectations were noted for the improvement of written expression abilities (*M* = 7.9). As for the specific items related to academic performance, despite the ratings remaining relatively high, the participants expressed lower expectations in this dimension. The data revealed that students expected that participating in the English-taught programme would contribute to the development of their practical skills in the field of physical activity and sport, though they felt it might not be as effective as instruction in Spanish (*M* = 7.6). They also anticipated that the level of interaction between the lecturer and students in English would be less effective than in Spanish (*M* = 7.7). Moreover, the participants were less hopeful that pursuing this degree in English would bring academic benefits similar to those expected from studying in their mother tongue (*M* = 7.4). The results also indicate that students have high expectations regarding job opportunities. The highest average mean, at 8.9, reflects student belief that studying this degree in English will significantly increase their employment opportunities internationally. Following this, students also expect a substantial improvement in job opportunities within the field of physical activity and sport (*M* = 8.8) and enhanced job prospects in Spain (*M* = 8.7).

Regarding the second research question, the results of the one-way ANCOVAs revealed statistically significant differences in two variables (*p* < 0.05). Specifically, as can be seen in Table 1, a statistically significant difference emerged in the dimension related to enhanced job opportunities by gender, indicating that women have higher expectations that pursuing this programme will positively impact their career prospects. Similar results were observed for the cohort with the accredited higher level of English, as they also seem more hopeful that this type of programme will be beneficial in the job market. However, no statistically significant differences were observed in other variables, i.e. educational status of students' legal tutors; mode of entry to the programme; perceived level of English or previous experience of bilingual education, indicating that these factors did not have a measurable impact on students' perceptions of the programme's ability to enhance job opportunities. This suggests that while gender and English proficiency play a role in shaping expectations, other demographic and educational background factors may not significantly influence students' views on the programme's career-related benefits.

			One-way ANOVA/ANCOVA[b]		
Group/item	Mean (SE)	Mean (SE)	*F*	*p*	η^2_p
Gender	*Females (n = 26)*	*Males (n = 82)*			

			One-way ANOVA/ANCOVA[b]		
Group/item	Mean (SE)	Mean (SE)	*F*	*p*	η^2_p
Job opportunities[c]	9.3 (0.2)	8.7 (0.1)	4.414	0.038	0.040
Accredited English level	*B1 (n = 46)*	*B2-C1 (n = 62)*			
Job opportunities[d]	8.5 (0.2)	9.1 (0.2)	6.173	0.015	0.056

Note. SE = Standard error; [a] Due to the extension of the analysis, in the present table only the statistically significant results were reported (i.e., 2 out of 21 comparisons); [b] One-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) or covariance (ANCOVA, i.e., when the covariable/s were statistically significant); Covariables: [c] Accredited English level, and [d] gender.

Table 1. Within-cohort comparison of the questionnaire scores (N = 109)[a]

The results of the simple linear regression showed that the students' confidence in their written production skills had a statistically significant positive relationship with their expectations for improvement in academic performance (β = 0.234; R^2 = 0.055; *p* = 0.014). This indicates that as students' confidence in their written production skills increases, their expectations for better academic performance also tend to improve. However, the analysis of other non-categorical variables (i.e., students' confidence in their oral production, oral comprehension, written comprehension, and interaction skills) in relation to the three types of expectations on the questionnaire showed no statistically significant differences. This means that variations in students' confidence across these language skills do not appear to significantly influence their expectations for improvement in any of the three dimensions assessed by the questionnaire.

5. Discussion

The findings of the present study revealed that students hold high expectations of the EMI programme in physical activity, particularly regarding their future career prospects and the improvement of their English language skills. This suggests that professional growth is an important priority for them and that they see skills acquisition, especially in foreign language, as a means to achieve their career goals. Moreover, the highest average mean for the belief that studying the Degree in Physical Activity and Sport Sciences in English will significantly increase their employment opportunities internationally indicates that students strongly associate English language skills with improved global career prospects. These findings are consistent with the study conducted by Mira et al. (2021) in which a significant

majority of students (98%) also expected a beneficial effect of the EMI programme on their careers. In fact, previous research which examined students' reasons for choosing these degrees frequently found that instrumental factors, such as increased job opportunities, were key motivators for students pursuing English-taught programmes (Uçar & Soruç, 2018)

Iwaniec and Wang (2022) also observed that students are strongly convinced that completing EMI courses will give them a competitive advantage in the job market and position them ahead of non-EMI graduates. Therefore, although many students in the present study also expect that their English proficiency will improve as the result of their participation in EMI, this expectation seems to be closely linked to their career ambitions. Macaro and Akıncıoğlu (2018) documented similar results, highlighting that students strongly believed that studying an English-taught degree would enhance their English proficiency, and this improvement would, in turn, improve their career prospects and enhance their social status. Xie and Curle (2022) also stated that improving English skills while acquiring content knowledge through EMI is closely associated with enhanced career opportunities. Yet, even though the data in our study showed that the primary objective is to improve career prospects, it seems that the improvement of English proficiency does play a crucial role in fulfilling students' aspirations. Hence, these results highlight the importance of institutional support to make sure that students' outcomes correspond with their expectations. Therefore, although improving English language skills is not an explicit objective of these programmes, the institutions should ensure that students make progress in this area. As Dearden (2016) argues, "Future discussion about what the linguistic objectives of EMI programmes are must take place if it is not to remain a sclerotic practice with limited benefits" (p. 30). This could entail implementing language support services, such as hiring language assistants, offering workshops, or providing general and specialised English courses.

Additionally, to ensure that students improve their English skills, professional development opportunities for lecturers should be implemented to familiarise them with pedagogical strategies to effectively integrate language instruction into their content courses. As Álvarez Gil (2021) suggested, instructors should be trained in EMI methodologies to understand that teaching content in English is not simply a matter of translating from Spanish. It is important for them to recognise that teaching specialised subjects in a language that is not the students' native tongue presents different challenges compared to teaching in their mother language.

Contrasting results were reported in the study conducted by Wu et al. (2023) at a Chinese university in Beijing, though. The findings showed that students enrolled in

EMI courses primarily to enhance their English proficiency rather than focusing on career prospects. As the sample comprised students from a prestigious university in China's capital, where job opportunities abound, they believed they could achieve career goals without having to pursue an English-taught programme. In contrast, the sample in our study consisted of students from a public university in Spain, where the job market is highly competitive, and proficiency in English seems to be perceived as an essential tool for career advancement both nationally and internationally. This variation emphasises the necessity for EMI programmes to be contextually relevant, as motivations can differ based on the socio-economic realities of the students involved. Therefore, in spite of the need for general guidelines to make EMI more standardised, there is also a need to adapt the programmes to reflect the local labour market demands.

The analysis of the specific items related to English skills also revealed that enhancing English proficiency in the field of physical activity and sport is crucial for the respondents, with particular emphasis placed on improving technical vocabulary. These results corroborate those obtained by Iwaniec and Wang (2022), who found that students prioritised acquiring specialised linguistic skills over general English proficiency. They reported that mastering specific content and discipline-related language was more relevant to students than general goals related to overall proficiency improvement. This emphasis on subject-specific language further reinforces the notion that the students surveyed are goal-driven, and primarily expect to enhance their job prospects, a finding consistent with our own study.

Moreover, apart from the high expectations to improve technical vocabulary, the present study revealed that the participants anticipated positive outcomes in reading, listening comprehension, and oral interaction skills. However, the lowest expectations were noted for the improvement of written expression abilities. This difference could be attributed to the lesser importance of written skills in the discipline of physical activity and sports, where practical and performance-based skills are often prioritised over written communication. As a result, in the present research, students' expectations to improve this skill are slightly lower. This assumption is supported by Sugimoto's (2021) study, which concluded that expectations regarding language skills in EMI programmes vary based on the disciplinary focus. The author noted that in medical settings students are more likely to prioritise skills for interacting with patients and colleagues and, consequently, have higher expectations for their improvement. Rose et al. (2020) also highlighted that institutional and disciplinary contexts can influence students' motivations to engage in EMI programmes. They stated that "as each EMI context is unique, other subject areas and universities may yield different profiles of students, and reveal

other issues at the nexus of language, motivation and success" (p. 14). ̶Zhang and Pladevall-Ballester (2023) reported similar findings and concluded that the main motivation to pursue an English-taught degree programme varied across various academic fields. Therefore, these findings, along with the results of our study, underscore the necessity to ensure that the language skills taught are relevant and applicable to specific professional contexts.

Regarding the dimension related to students' expectations of their academic performance, the participants anticipated that instruction in English would improve their practical skills in physical activity and sports, though perhaps not as effectively as Spanish instruction. They also felt that interactions with lecturers and peers in English might be slightly less effective compared to those conducted in their native language. Additionally, they expected that pursuing a degree in English would provide academic benefits that might be slightly lower than those obtained from studying in their mother tongue. Therefore, as this dimension along with the specific items within it received lower ratings compared to other afore-mentioned dimensions evaluated in the study, this suggests that the cohort under scrutiny was most significantly influenced by the perceived value of English proficiency in improving job opportunities. These results are congruent with the findings by Sugimoto (2021) whose study revealed that most expectations were related to improving students' language skills while only a few students expected increased expertise in their field. Yet, the authors suggest that this limited interest in acquiring subject knowledge might be attributed to the wide range of course options available, which are not necessarily related to medicine, their primary field of study. Furthermore, they claim that the need to take the TOEFL exam at the end of the academic year might have raised students' expectations to improve language skills. Zhang and Pladevall-Ballester' (2023) study also illustrated how the type of discipline may also influence the extent to which students expect EMI to help them acquire specialised knowledge. By way of illustration, the authors observed that while students in International Trade degrees were motivated to improve their English proficiency, those in Film Production cited gaining subject expertise as their primary reason for pursuing the programme. The authors attributed this difference to the nature of these disciplines, as in fields like International Trade, a strong command of English is crucial for job market competitiveness. Therefore, the students in our study might also have higher expectations to improve their language skills due to the global nature of the sports industry in which effective communication may improve their professional growth.

Yet, apart from different expectations related to the type of discipline and educational context, these slightly lower ratings in the dimension related to

expectations of enhanced academic performance as a result of participating in an English-taught programme might also reflect students' uncertainties about how effective EMI might be as compared to studying in their native language. In fact, previous research has already revealed that students often have concerns about the effectiveness of EMI in achieving the same level of academic performance and comprehension as instruction in their mother tongue. For instance, in the study conducted by Mira et al. (2021), students voiced concern over their educational outcomes with 50% of respondents anticipating lower grades and 30% stating that EMI might adversely affect their understanding of the content. Therefore, whether the results stem from the nature of the discipline or uncertainties regarding the efficacy of EMI, it is vital that EMI does not negatively impact content acquisition, which is the primary objective of the programme. As Macaro et al. (2018) concluded, the impact of EMI on content learning is limited, and many conclusions remain unclear. For this reason, regardless of the socio-economic context or academic domain, higher education institutions have to make sure that EMI programmes, by no means, diminish the quality of the content delivered.

Regarding the second objective of the study, the statistically significant difference in job opportunity expectations by gender indicates that women are more optimistic about the career benefits of studying a degree in English. Wu et al. (2023) also observed that women demonstrated higher levels of motivation, but not only towards improved job prospects but also towards academic and language-related aspects. Although Macaro and Akincioglu (2018) also observed differences in expectations between women and men, their study revealed differences in the categories assessed. In general, female students were also more hopeful that studying in EMI programme would be advantageous to them, but they were more convinced that English-taught degree would improve their English level and facilitate their transition to the next level of education. Yet, two aspects where they showed no significant difference from males were related to their career opportunities. Wu et al. (2023) suggest that these differences between males and females might be attributed to the fact that women tend to be more motivated to learn English and often demonstrate higher language proficiency compared to their male counterparts. Similarly, Serna-Bermejo and Lasagabaster (2023) observed that women generally exhibit higher levels of motivation to engage in EMI courses, attributing this likely to their greater interest in learning foreign languages. Macaro and Akincioglu (2018) also noted that in certain cultural contexts, where women face more societal challenges, they may perceive the integration of content and language learning as a way to advance their career goals. Furthermore, Hengsadeekul et al. (2014) also reported that females had significantly higher instrumental goals compared to males in English-taught programmes. Thus, they concluded that

"gender differences in motivational goals and social support for English language learning may be understood to reflect career aspirations and social expectations" (p. 43).

Nevertheless, the study by Araújo et al. (2019) found that men are more frequently in high-expectations profiles, while women are more often in low-expectations profiles. It was observed that despite higher academic engagement and success among women, they generally have lower career self-efficacy and outcome expectations compared to men, particularly in fields like engineering and science. The authors suggested that women's lower expectations may stem from personal factors, such as low self-efficacy, and environmental barriers, like gender stereotypes and a lack of role models, which also might hinder their career advancement. The study also highlighted that male students generally show greater motivation when it comes to employment opportunities. However, it is important to note that the sample included students from various disciplines taught in their native language. Therefore, since the study was not conducted in an EMI setting, these contrasting results might be influenced by the language of instruction. This would further support our idea that women may be more motivated to learn English and thus have higher expectations for the career benefits of studying in an English-taught programme. Yet, since only a limited number of studies have addressed the role of gender in EMI (Macaro & Akincioglu, 2018), there is a clear need for further research to explore how gender influences students' expectations and experiences in EMI settings. Fortunately, our study shows a positive outlook, as female students in our sample do not fit the low-expectations profile. This positive attitude is especially significant considering that most participants in this degree programme were men.

The accredited higher level of English is also associated with higher expectations of improved job prospects in the present study. Although, to the best of our knowledge, no specific study directly investigated how English proficiency affects students' expectations in EMI programmes, it is clear that English proficiency impacts various aspects of students' academic and professional experiences, given that it is the primary language of instruction and communication in these programmes. In fact, Thomson et al. (2019) found that students' English proficiency and academic English skills are key predictors of success in EMI programmes, noting that "evidence shows that L2 proficiency can, and does, contribute to EMI success" (p. 3). Similarly, Zhang and Pladevall-Ballester (2023) discovered that English proficiency significantly influences students' motivation in EMI settings, as higher proficiency levels correlate with greater motivation. Consequently, the authors emphasize the necessity of ensuring "that students reach a certain English threshold

before entering EMI courses" (p. 12). Sugimoto (2021) also stressed that research into the experiences of Japanese EMI students regularly indicates difficulties caused by inadequate English proficiency, and therefore, highlights a clear demand for further linguistic support. Given these findings, it is evident that English proficiency is not merely a language requirement but a fundamental component that can influence not only students' expectations but their overall success in EMI programmes. Therefore, institutions offering EMI programmes need to ensure that students possess adequate mastery of English to succeed.

However, since no statistically significant differences were observed in other variables, such as the educational status of students' legal tutors, mode of entry to the programme, perceived level of English, or previous experience in bilingual education, it suggests that these factors may not significantly impact the outcomes being studied in the present research study. The lack of differences might be due to the potentially unrealistic expectations of first-year students. Pinquart and Ebeling (2020) cited various sources indicating that many students, particularly those who struggle academically, often display uninformed optimism about their future achievements. This unrealistic outlook can result from an overestimation of their own abilities and the demands of their courses, as well as from student immaturity and an inability to differentiate between ideal goals and attainable outcomes. In fact, it was observed that students often expect to graduate from college at much higher rates than they actually do, with many low-achieving students hoping to get a degree even though they do not succeed (Jerrim, 2014). Pinquart and Ebeling (2020) also studied how different variables influence expectations. The meta-analysis observed that success expectations and actual academic achievement were more closely related to students from middle-class than for those from lower-class or ethnic minority backgrounds, suggesting that students from more privileged backgrounds often have better resources and a clearer understanding for setting realistic educational goals.

In line with the study by Pinquart and Ebeling (2020). Araúj et al. (2019) also stated that "despite the positive relation found between expectations and educational attainment, prior research has shown that first-year students' expectations for college tend to be unrealistic" (p.58)", which could lead to frustration and doubts about students' abilities and motivations, often resulting in academic failure and dropout rates. Moreover, the authors also argued that socioeconomic background influenced students' expectations as those from lower socioeconomic groups often receive less support and information about the academic and social challenges of higher education, leading to unrealistic expectations. Therefore, the lack of differences between socioeconomic status and expectations in our study might not

be due to their inexistence but rather the presence of some unrealistic expectations set by students with lower proficiency levels and socioeconomic status. To bridge the gap between students' unrealistic expectations and reality, institutions should inform all incoming students about the complexities and challenges they may encounter in EMI programmes. By providing guidance beforehand on the academic demands and potential obstacles, institutions can help students set more realistic expectations. However, the data should be interpreted with caution, as the lack of differences in these variables might be due to other, potentially more influential factors that were not considered in this study.

Furthermore, the data of the present research study revealed that students' confidence in their written production skills had a statistically significant positive relationship with the expectation of enhanced academic performance as a result of enrolling in the EMI programme. This indicates that as students' confidence in their written production skills increases, their expectation for better academic performance also tends to improve. Curiously enough, this finding concerning students' expectations seems to align with recent studies on the role of writing proficiency in students' academic success and cognitive development. According to Curtis (2019), writing skills contribute to cognitive skill improvement, which indicates that students who are proficient in English tend to experience greater academic growth. Komba's et al. (2012) study further revealed a statistically significant relationship between students' overall academic performance and their written English language skills. Kim et al. (2021) found similar results. The authors asserted that integrating writing into the curriculum can bring educational benefits, as writing not only enhances learning but also promotes higher-order thinking skills. However, it is important to note that the studies by Kim et al. (2021) and Komba's et al. (2012) were not conducted in EMI settings. Curtis's study (2019), however, did involve international students and thus provides a context similar to EMI environments, as these students were instructed in a language that was not their native tongue. Nonetheless, further research is needed to explore how these factors are specifically affected in EMI environments. Although students in this study initially did not have high expectations for developing writing skills, potentially due to the discipline's focus on other competencies, the findings of prior research suggest that writing proficiency offers considerable benefits to students' intellectual development and academic progress. Therefore, these educational advantages demonstrate the value of incorporating writing communication abilities into EMI curricula, even when the primary emphasis is on other skills. Moreover, given that written exams often serve as a primary method of assessment in academic settings, this finding suggests that students who feel more confident in their writing abilities may also anticipate performing better on these assessments.

In conclusion, while the current research does not establish a direct link between expectations and students' development or academic success, it raises critical questions for future investigation. Since previous studies have indeed highlighted the relationship between student expectations and academic development in various contexts, demonstrating that unmet expectations can lead to dissatisfaction and disengagement, our study highlights a gap in EMI settings that future research should address. Furthermore, the study emphasises the unique aspects of the discipline under consideration. By focusing on Physical Education and Sport Sciences, this research differs from earlier studies, which have examined other fields. Given the practical and skill-oriented nature of the programme, students' expectations may centre on hands-on skills essential for their careers. Therefore, caution should be taken when comparing studies from other fields, as the expectations inherent in the practical and skill-oriented nature of Physical Education and Sport Sciences may not translate to more theoretical disciplines. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the study is situated within a specific cultural and academic framework, its implications may extend beyond that setting, as it highlights the importance of understanding student expectations in EMI contexts.

6. Conclusions

The present study found that students enrolled in the newly established English-taught Degree in Physical Activity and Sport Sciences at a Spanish university hold high expectations, particularly regarding career prospects and English language improvement. They see English proficiency as an important tool for improving their job opportunities both globally and nationally. The study also highlights that these expectations are shaped by socio-cultural contexts and the specific nature of the discipline. Additionally, differences were observed in relation to variables such as gender, accredited English proficiency, and confidence in writing skills, indicating that these factors may influence individuals' expectations within the discipline in question. However, no significant differences were observed concerning other variables such as socioeconomic status or previous bilingual education, which may suggest that students' expectations might be somewhat unrealistic. The findings point to the necessity of considering the context, students' profiles and diversity when designing and implementing EMI programmes. Additionally, the institutions should incorporate feedback mechanism to evaluate students' expectations and whether they have been met to use the data to identify critical points for intervention to support students more effectively.

It is noteworthy that a significant strength of this study is the reliability of the data which was achieved through the use of a validated questionnaire. The use of such

tools ensures that the findings are accurate and consistent, which consequently add credibility to the results. Balter at al. (2023) affirmed that lack of conclusive answers related to fundamental questions to English-taught programmes "has led to calls for increased rigor in EMI research" (p. 2). Similarly, in their systematic review on evidence supporting quality indicators associated with higher education bilingual, plurilingual, or multilingual practices and programmes, including EMI, Rubio-Alcalá et al. (2019) also observed that "it cannot be stated that the majority of the evidence found is reliable from a purely scientific point of view. On the contrary, only a small percentage meets the technical requirements for evidence" (p. 199). Therefore, our study addressed these calls for employing validated instruments.

Several limitations need to be acknowledged. Since this is the only English-taught Physical Activity and Sport Sciences degree in Spain at a public university, the sample lacks diversity and is geographically constrained. Moreover, the sample size is relatively small given the recent establishment of the programme. For these two reasons, future research should aim to include a larger and more geographical and educational diverse sample. Another limitation is that the expectations of students before starting English instruction may be unrealistic, potentially due to their limited experience with the programme and its demands, which could affect the accuracy of their anticipations. Furthermore, longitudinal studies could also be conducted to explore associations between students' expectations and their actual academic performance, linguistic improvement, and satisfaction with the programme.

Notwithstanding these limitations, our study contributes to the limited research on students' expectations of EMI programmes by providing new perspectives on the topic through the use of a validated instrument. Furthermore, it specifically focuses on a discipline that has been scarcely explored, providing insights into the expectations of students in this field. Additionally, the findings serve as a basis for future research, whose aim is to collect data at the end of the programme to determine if these expectations have been met and to examine any discrepancies between students' initial expectations and their actual experiences.

About the authors

Anna Szczesniak holds dual BA degrees in English Philology from the College of Modern Languages, Poznan, Poland, and the University of Seville. She earned an MA in Compulsory Secondary Education, Vocational Training, and Language Teaching from the University of Malaga, along with a Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics.

Currently pursuing a second Ph.D. in Education, she focuses on English Medium Instruction. Active in the Department of English Didactics at the University of Malaga, Anna's research centres on teaching English to children and enhancing teacher training.

Elvira Barrios Espinosa is Senior Lecturer at the Language and Literature Teaching Department at the Faculty of Education (University of Málaga). She holds a Bachelor's Degree in English Philology (University of Málaga, Spain), a Master's Degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (University of Reading, UK), and a Ph.D. Degree in English Philology (University of Granada, Spain).

Authorship and contribution policy

Authorship
Conceptualization: Anna Szczesniak – Elvira Barrios
Methodology: Anna Szczesniak – Elvira Barrios
Software: Anna Szczesniak
Validation: Anna Szczesniak – Elvira Barrios
Writing – original draft: Anna Szczesniak
Writing – review & editing: Elvira Barrios

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Not applicable.

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The author declares no conflict of interest.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the correspon-ding author upon request.

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Appendix. 12-item model of EMIES in Spanish

Expectativas sobre la experiencia en el Grado en Ciencias de la Actividad Física y del Deporte

A) Expectativas en cuanto a mi competencia lingüística

Indica hasta qué punto estás de acuerdo con las siguientes frases (0-Totalmente en desacuerdo; 10- Totalmente de acuerdo)

Espero que mi competencia en inglés en el ámbito de la actividad física y del deporte mejore como consecuencia de mi matriculación en este Grado.

Espero que mi habilidad de comprensión auditiva (entender el inglés hablado) mejore como consecuencia de mi matriculación en este Grado.

Espero que mi habilidad de compresión lectora (entender textos escritos en inglés) mejore como consecuencia de mi matriculación en este Grado.

Espero mi habilidad de expresión escrita (escribir textos en inglés) mejore como consecuencia de mi matriculación en este Grado.

Espero que mi habilidad de interactuar oralmente (conversar) en inglés mejore como consecuencia de mi matriculación en este Grado.

Espero que mi vocabulario técnico en inglés en el contexto específico de la actividad física y del deporte mejore como consecuencia de mi matriculación en este Grado.

B) Expectativas en cuanto al rendimiento académico

Confío en que estudiar este Grado en inglés sea tan beneficioso para mi formación académica como lo sería hacerlo en español.

Confío en que la enseñanza en inglés contribuya al desarrollo de mis competencias prácticas en el ámbito de la actividad física y del deporte de la misma manera en la que lo haría la enseñanza en español.

Confío en que la cantidad de interacción entre el docente y el alumnado en inglés sea equivalente a la interacción que podría producirse en español.

D) Expectativas en cuanto a las oportunidades laborales

Espero que el Grado en inglés aumente mis oportunidades de empleo en el territorio español.

Espero que el Grado en inglés aumente mis oportunidades de empleo a nivel internacional.

Espero que el Grado en inglés aumente mi atractivo para empleadores potenciales en el campo de la actividad física y del deporte.