***Equality in the bi-lingual and English Tracks***

**Literary Studies, Utrecht University**

*Utrecht Faculty Education Incentive Fund Project*

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# Introduction

This report includes our conclusions and advice based on a project about the equality in the two tracks of the bachelor’s programme *Literary Studies/Literatuurwetenschap* at Utrecht University. There is a bi-lingual track in which the students have 6 out of 8 courses in their first year in Dutch, as well as an all-English track. The project focuses on the equality in courses which were taught in both languages, with both Dutch as Medium of Instruction (DMI) and English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI).

This report is worth reading for everyone who wants to start working with two equivalent language variants or tracks in a study programme or wants to refine two equivalent tracks that lead to the same diploma.

## Context of the project

Literary Studies started an English track in 2018, in addition to the already existing bi-lingual track. The two tracks of the bachelor Literary Studies share the same Croho-label and hence work towards the same end goals. The students in the bi-lingual track start their programme with four courses in Dutch in their first semester. This facilitates getting used to the academic way of reading, thinking, speaking and writing. In the second semester, two of their courses are DMI and two EMI, providing a gradual transition to the all English teaching in the four specialisation courses in Year 2. Students in the bi-lingual track are always allowed to write papers and do exams in Dutch in the EMI courses, but as they are training to be bi-lingual academic professionals they seldom do so. The total amount of DMI courses taken by these students varies from 45 EC (only the Literary Studies courses in Year 1) to 100 EC (including the Ba-thesis, a DMI minor and so on),

The project goals were to ensure equality (≠ equal), for the chances students have to be successful in their studies. As the start point in both tracks is diverse, students in different tracks may differ in their needs in order to achieve an equal chance at success. Therefore, this report answers the question: W*hich factors are important to ensure students in the bi-lingual and English tracks to have equal chances to be successful in their studies?*

This project took place in academic years 2019/2020 and 2020/2021. During these academic years, education was disturbed due to measures related to the worldwide Covid19 pandemic. This means that less activities could be organised on campus and that some students were not in Utrecht while studying because they had to study online. This may have caused inequalities between Dutch and international students, probably affecting perceptions of the study. It was more difficult to get to know peers during this time, and this may have been even more difficult for international students than for Dutch students. International students who were in Utrecht during these times may have experienced loneliness because they could not meet peers. Dutch students may have stayed at their parents houses more often than during non-Covid times. The results of the project describe the situation until the fall? of 2020.

## Approach

During this project we have used a variety of methods in order to create an overview of both tracks and the important factors that contribute to equality:

* Interviews with students in both tracks, teachers and study advisor;
* Observations in the (online) classroom;
* Desk research regarding course manuals and the website;
* Assessment results.

Data from these methods were taken together and analysed to distil the important themes, described in section 2 of this report. Section 3 then provides some conclusions on important factors to ensure equality for students in two language variants of one study programme.

# Important themes

## Expectations about the study programme

*Expectations about the study programme determine to a great extent whether the start of the study runs smoothly or not. Expectations can be related to the content of the study programme, but also to studying in the Netherlands and the roles of everyone involved in the study programme (students, teachers, mentor, study advisor).*

Observations:

1. Communication about enrolment for the study was similar in both tracks. Similar goals and a similar academic profile were communicated on the Dutch and English website.
2. The study advisor mentioned that the English version of the student website of Literary Studies had previously been filled less than the Dutch version. This difference was tackled and the English version is now as complete. It takes time and effort to keep up both versions.
3. From the website it is unclear that the programme is composed of two tracks. This means that students who apply for the bi-lingual track might be unaware of the English track and hence unaware of the fact that they will interact with this track, formed by mostly international students. Students who have attended the open day or who have attended the matching have been informed about this track.
4. International students who were interviewed about their expectations and experiences of the first year of their studies seemed to have expected that more attention would have been paid to *close reading*, while they expected less attention to have been paid to *literary history*.
5. The language of instruction is not always clear for the bi-lingual track. From the interview, but also from the MS Teams chat during an online seminar, it seems students were very surprised to know that the next year would be taught fully in English. (This concerns only the 4 specialisation courses),
6. The Honours programme was until 2020-21 only available in Dutch but is communicated in both versions of the website as there are students in the English track who are (fluent in) Dutch. The programme management has worked on an English version of the Honours programme and in practice it is already possible for non-Dutch speaking students to participate in this programme, but when the project interviews were conducted this was not communicated to students before the start of the programme. In 2020-21 a number of international students (including Literary Studies students from China and Switzerland) started the honours programme, a trend that has intensified for the following year, with Literary Studies students from Poland, the USA, South Africa, and Bulgaria among those selected for the programme in September 2021.
7. Students who enrol for the two tracks are invited to participate in the same matching activities which is offered in English. Matching is an obligatory activity for Dutch students but not for international students.
8. During an interview with international students, they mentioned that in their track students receive more guidance in presenting and essay writing. The programme coordinator has confirmed that given the diversity within the English group, teachers are more explicit when explaining to students what they expect from a presentation as not all students are familiar with this kind of assessment. Although the international students we spoke had no expectations in regard to this, they considered it an asset to the track, even though they personally had sufficient experience with presenting.

Interpretation and recommendations

The first information students receive about their study programme is in many cases through the bachelor’s website. For the purpose of this project, we analysed the Dutch and the English language version of the site. Our main conclusion is that there are no major differences between the two versions of the site: the two tracks target the same group and create the same expectation among potential students. This was also confirmed in a recent student interview where students of both tracks informed that their expectation was in line with the information they had received beforehand.

We would however suggest that the programme is explicit about the existence of two tracks before the start of the programme, for both groups. We believe that the cooperation between tracks can be an asset to the programme as a whole as it creates a more diverse environment in terms of cultural background. For the bilingual group, knowing that they will regularly cooperate with the English group will also make students aware of the fact that they will be expected to attend classes in English throughout the programme, and hence manage their expectations in that respect. Although this was communicated during the matching, we would like to advise the programme managers to be very cautious when using matching as a means for providing new crucial information. Firstly, because matching is one of the last steps students take when choosing their programme. Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that not all international students will attend these events, and the programme managers need to ensure that these students receive the same amount of information as their Dutch peers.

## Course materials

*Course materials refer to the books and other literature used in both DMI and EMI.*

Observations:

1. Looking at the course manuals, most courses used the same book/materials for both tracks.
2. Sometimes, if a source is not available in English, the EMI group reads a different source than the DMI group. This was the case for example in the poetry analysis part of the course ‘Close reading’. This difference was accentuated by the difference in lecturers during the tutorial. Some students from the EMI group mentioned that the lack of a good text book bothered them during the second part of the close reading course, especially because the lecturers were also different in both groups.
3. Students from the EMI group mentioned that they felt that the teachers in ‘Eurolit 2’ did not fully align the materials that were used in both groups.
4. A student in the DMI group felt that the lack of PowerPoint use in the course ‘Introduction to literary studies’ caused some unclarity about the most important topics during this course, while this was clearer in the EMI group.

Interpretation and recommendations

Students seem to be quite focused on possible differences between the two tracks. On the one hand this can be interpreted as something positive because it means that there is quite some contact between students in the two tracks. On the other hand, this means that it is important to use similar materials in both tracks, and if this is not possible to explain carefully why the materials differ and how this affects or does not affect the content of the course.

## Assessment

*Assessment contains assignments and exams, as well as grading and performance in both groups. We studied the mean grades obtained in the DMI and EMI groups between September 2018 and December 2019 (1,5 year) and asked students about their expectations and experiences regarding assessment.*

Observations:

1. Performance levels do not seem to differ greatly between the DMI and EMI groups in general. For some courses (e.g., Eurolit1, Introduction to Literary Studies), the DMI group performs better, while for other courses, the EMI group does better (e.g Eurolit 2, Close Reading).
2. The course ‘Close Reading’ seems to be the course with the biggest difference in grades obtained between the DMI and EMI group. The exam is similar in both groups and assessed by the same teacher.
3. The combination of moving to the Netherlands, starting a study, finding a place in the city, and with exams caused some stress in the EMI group at the beginning of their first year.
4. Some students in the English group mentioned that they did not feel well prepared for their first writing assignments during the study.
5. The EMI group received some extra information on presenting, as the experience of previous years showed that the EMI group needed some more information about this, considering the diversity in the group. Importantly, some students in this group were actually very experienced in the presenting, even more than the average student coming straight from the VWO. This is the case for instance for IB students who often choose the EMI track. The extra information on giving a presentation was also available for students from the DMI group.
6. A student from the DMI group mentioned that in ‘Introduction to Literary Studies’, she felt somewhat insecure about the content of the exam, as the teacher elaborated quite a bit during the course but another teacher would make the exam for both groups. *‘Dan gingen we ook wel met de Engelse groep overleggen wat er in hun groep was besproken over wat er op het tentamen zou komen. Want we wisten dat één docent beide tentamens zou maken en niet dat onze eigen docent ons tentamen zou maken. Dus we dachten als we weten wat er tegen hen is gezegd dan lijkt dat wel op wat wij krijgen.’*
7. Expectations about assessment (writing a paper, doing a presentation, making a test) were not always clear from the beginning. Students in both groups mentioned that precise information about the test was sometimes received late.

Interpretation and recommendations

Based on the available grades, there seems to be no reason to believe that students in the two tracks do not have equal chances to succeed in their studies. However, these results only show mean grades over quite a short period. It may be worthwhile investigating these performances in more detail on the individual student level or over a longer period of time.

At the beginning of the year, it is important to give extra consideration to the preparation of international students - who come from various educational backgrounds - to the expectations regarding assessment in terms of the content and skills, and the grading system. It is important that this information is also available for Dutch students who want to know more about assessments.

A possible risk lies in a course where one teacher develops the exam, while the course is taught by different teachers in the two languages. A teacher will always stress some aspects more than other aspects, possibly leading to unclarity regarding the most important topics for the examination. A recommendation regarding assessment is that in this situation, the exam is constructed by the two teachers together, so that both know what the exam will contain and can take this into account in their teaching during the course, to make sure that all students have the opportunity to be equally well prepared for the exam.

## Guidance

*Students need guidance during their studies, from their teacher, tutor, peers, and sometimes from the study advisor. We looked at the possible differences in the nature of the required guidance between international and Dutch students.*

Observations

1. It is expected that the diversity is larger in the international group (EMI), because of the various backgrounds of the students and different previous educational experiences. This is however not always confirmed in interviews. A teacher finds the within group differences larger than the in-between groups. On the other hand, international students do feel that that their group is very diverse and that in some respects this might lead to specific needs, such as students who are not used to specific forms of assessment like presentations and papers.
2. The study advisor mentions that students with certain tutors turn to her faster than students with other tutors. International students sometimes go to the study advisor with more practical questions, which Dutch students often turn to their tutor for.
3. The study advisor mentions the deployment of student mentors, who are easily approachable for students who have questions. She mentions that this works well.
4. The study advisor notices that international students tend to think about their study path (e.g. which minor to choose, internships) earlier in their studies than Dutch students. This means that the international students ask questions about this in an earlier stage.
5. The study advisor mentions that she needs to explain her role more for the international students, because in other countries the role of study advisor does not really exist.
6. The study advisor has the idea that she is less visible for students because of the situation with online teaching. She mentions: *‘Ik heb het gevoel dat ik minder een binding heb met het cohort nu. Ik denk dat het komt doordat ik ze niet in een lokaal heb gezien. Normaal probeer ik bij één van de studentactiviteiten aanwezig ben, en dat doe ik bewust vanwege de internationale studenten. Dan kan ik meeluisteren wat er gezegd wordt en wat voor vragen er zijn, en dat ik niet die mevrouw ben die in en uitvliegt, maar dat ze me echt zien in het lokaal. Dat heb ik nu niet gehad.’*

Interpretation and recommendations

The Literary Studies programme attracts a diverse group of students. There is obviously a large number of international students, which already adds a diverse dimension to the group. Within this group we find students from different countries, and different types of secondary schools. The two International Baccalaureate students we spoke with, felt at ease within the Dutch educational system but they recognize that this is not the case for many of their fellow international students. We also found diversity within the DMI group. We have spoken to students who are doing their second study and students who came straight from the secondary school, for instance. We would suggest the programme takes diversity as a start point when planning activities. The staff should feel comfortable working in a diverse setting, and be able to use the international classroom to the benefit of the whole group without avoiding common pitfalls. One such pitfall is to assume that every student is familiar with the Dutch educational system, including for example the role of the study advisor.

We suggest introducing the study advisor to all students at the very beginning of their studies. That can be done during the introduction days, so that students get to know the person behind the function, but also hear about what kind of questions the study advisor can help them with. If necessary, the study advisor could also join a meeting with the tutor group once, to once again introduce herself in a more familiar setting and offer students the opportunities to ask questions which might be useful for the rest of the group (bearing in mind that these questions would be less personal than the ones students usually ask the study advisor). Maybe go through a few questions they could possibly ask during their study and together figure out who the most suitable person would be to ask that question to.

## Teacher and in-class interaction

*The teacher of a course determines which topics are discussed to what extent and in what way. Therefore, the involved teachers have an important role in the equality of the content of courses in the DMI and EMI variants. Additionally, the in-class interaction is of great influence on how learning works and therefore important to include in this theme.*

Observations

1. In the interviews with the students the enthusiasm of several teachers was mentioned explicitly. Also, the students experience the teachers to be very open and supportive if the students have questions or need help.
2. The course where students experienced most differences between the DMI and EMI classes was a course with different teachers for both languages. After discussing the course with students from the other group, students found differences in content in the courses. This had not only to do with expertise of the specific teacher, but also with the different materials used in the course.
3. The class observation of an online seminar showed that the DMI group used the chat function more (100 messages) than the EMI group (50 messages) for interaction. The DMI students answered each other’s questions in the chat.
4. During the lesson we observed that the teacher encouraged discussion. Both DMI and EMI students actively participated by asking questions.
5. The lessons we observed were offered in a hybrid setting where some of the students were present and the others were remotely connected. This is a new experience for both teachers and students but overall, the teacher was successful in encouraging active participation. We noticed that the teacher specifically directed the word towards the home students taking into account that these students were less prone to take the word.
6. The interviewed teacher mentioned that he expects students to be active during the seminars. He prepares students for this through specific preparation questions for the seminars. Only if students hand in questions there will be a seminar. The teacher does not notice differences in how the Dutch and international students go about this.
7. The teacher mentioned that he uses international examples in both DMI and EMI assuming none of the students to know the examples.
8. The teacher mentioned that he treats both groups in the same way, but that sometimes in one of the groups a situation for some extra examples presents itself. He cited: *“What happens sometimes is that I add something extra in the DMI group. For example, when it comes to colonialism, I may tell something extra about Suriname because I know that the students know this.”*
9. The interviewed teacher mentioned that he does not experience differences between the groups in participation in classroom discussions. He notices very active and less active students in both groups.
10. The bachelor coordinator mentioned at the beginning of the academic year that the group of students and teachers was quite diverse and that everyone would have their own accents when speaking English. One student from the DMI group mentioned that she remembered this when she had to discuss in English and that this helped her to just do it.
11. Students mentioned that teachers were open and willing to help. They would listen to the students and help with the assessments. One student mentioned: *‘Sometimes they did not treat us as adults so sometimes it felt like we were still high school and middle school but yeah, well... the interaction with professors was really good.’*

Interpretation and recommendations

The teacher has an important role in a course, and determines which topics are important to discuss and which are less important. This also affects the focus of the exams included in the courses. To stimulate the equality between the tracks, we would advise to have one teacher teach both the course in the DMI and EMI classes, or, if this is not possible, to have the two teachers prepare the course and meetings in consultation. Additionally, using similar examples, or examples that have the same effect (i.e. all students know this example or none of the students know this example), may stimulate the equality in both variants.

By taking discussion points, examples or even interpretation from one group into the other, the teachers promote interactions between the groups and makes optimal uses of the diversity in each track to the advantage of the whole programme.

## International classroom

*Studying in an international classroom offers a diverse context, with students from various backgrounds and with various experiences and perspectives. Here we report some observations regarding the possibilities the international classroom offers.*

Observations

1. In year 1 students in the bi-lingual and Englsih track are combined in one group during two courses: 1 course in block 3 and 1 course in block 4.
2. A student from the English group mentioned in one of the interviews: *'So there was something similar there as in the cultural criticism course. It gave a nice overview and included books you won’t naturally read because they come from such a very different cultures, time periods or continents so I think it was really good that it was in the first year.'*
3. The interviewed teacher mentioned: ‘*It is such an added value; I am so glad we have this that all students come from all over the world. I think it is really a relief, it is very pleasant. I prefer to do everything in English, internationally.’*
4. The teacher mentioned that the international students positively surprised him time and again with knowledge neither he nor the Dutch students had.
5. The teacher mentioned that the international classroom makes him select texts that connect to students interests or backgrounds. He mentions that students who feel related to the selected texts often tell something in response to these texts by themselves.

Interpretation and recommendations

The international classroom obviously brings an advantage to teaching in terms of its diversity and students’ backgrounds. Taking advantage from this diversity by connecting to students’ backgrounds, using various examples and teaching materials from all parts of the world, makes the international classroom a rich learning context. The Dutch group may also benefit from the international classroom through experiences of teachers in the international group who also implement these in the Dutch group, but also through collaboration between the DMI and EMI groups.

## Interaction outside of the classroom

*Interaction outside of the classroom, especially with peers, is an important part of studying. These interactions help to feel socially connected to one another and to feel part of the academic community. In times of Covid19, interaction and social contact is a point of concern, specifically for international students who have moved to Utrecht for their studies.*

Observations

1. Study association Euphorion made an app group with all international and Dutch students together, and also second year bachelor students. One student from the DMI group mentioned that this app group was used to ask questions to the other group. This stimulated the contact between the two groups.
2. The students mentioned that they did not know everyone in their peer group yet (in November). This was due to the partly online education they took.
3. Students from the EMI group mentioned that they liked to work in smaller groups because everyone gets to talk to everyone. This facilitated interaction between the students.
4. The study advisor mentioned that during the period of online teaching, the tone in the common whatsapp group was somewhat more negative than in previous years and possibly even somewhat hostile. *‘Normaal kon je na college even mopperen en dat gebeurt nu misschien in de appgroep.’* The study advisor worried about this.
5. The online situation made the interaction and the social cohesion to go slower than normally. The study advisor mentioned: *‘Het begint wel te komen vertelde een docent. in de colleges blijven ze in de pauze wel wat hangen om met elkaar te praten dus dat is wel leuk om te zien.’*

Interpretation and recommendations

We noticed that the social interaction between students was limited for those who had started studying in times of online teaching. Some students were still living at home and international students were abroad. The physical distance between students was large, both between the EMI and DMI groups, but also within the groups. For the social connection and the process of becoming part of the academic community, the study association plays an important role. Activities that are open to both Dutch and international students can contribute to these social connections. Also, having both Dutch and international students in the board of the study association may help to make sure that all students are involved. Additionally, classes on location in Utrecht will help the students to get to know each other better and to feel at home and connected.

# Conclusions and advice for other programmes

Our conclusion in this project is that the EMI and DMI classes of Literary Studies have overall achieved the equality they strive for. For a large part of the first year, the EMI and DMI groups are separate as to the language of instruction, yet equal as to course content and assessment. Some courses are taught in English and Dutch by one teacher, in other courses multiple teachers are involved. Looking at the results of the students, we do not see disturbing differences between the groups. Remote teaching around the Covid19 crisis has complicated the situation for international students somewhat more than for Dutch students, as the latter group is either literally further away from Utrecht than the Dutch students, or is in Utrecht without much real-life contact with peers.

To answer the central question, paragraph 3.1 provides an overview of important factors ensuring students in the DMI and EMI classes have equal chances to be successful in their studies.

## Factors that positively contribute to equality of the two tracksI

If you are working with two variants (bilingual and English) of the same program, resulting in the same diploma, the following list of factors may contribute to equality between the two tracks. Undeniably this list is not exhaustive.

* Share the same information with students who are orientating for their studies. Make sure Dutch and English communication are in line with each other and contain as much information.
* Make sure that students know of the existence of two variants/tracks when they are orientating for their studies.
* Make sure to pay attention to settling in a new country for international students at the beginning of the first year.
* Involve the study association with both the DMI and EMI groups and make sure that collective events are organized.
* One teacher for a DMI and EMI course increases the chance of equal courses. If this is not possible, regular consultation between the various involved teachers in the same course in the DMI and EMI class is advised to stimulate comparable content of the courses.
* We noticed that extra information about presentation skills was experienced as useful by both the EMI and DMI groups. It may be worthwhile to investigate the already existing programs about these skills in the faculty, to see whether it is possible to join in these skills programmes, which may be available in the form of online modules.
* It is advisable to make the honours programme accessible for students from both tracks, also the students who do not speak Dutch.
* Preparing students in the DMI group for listening to and speaking in English in courses the DMI and EMI groups take together may be beneficial, as the DMI group might experience a disadvantage to the EMI group that takes all course in English.
* A study programme that consists of both an EMI and a DMI variant has an advantage for Dutch students, as they can also take advantage of the possible extra instruction or expectation management that international students need because of their different educational backgrounds.
* Taking advantage of the diversity by connecting to students’ backgrounds, using various examples and teaching materials from all parts of the world, makes the international classroom a rich learning context. The Dutch group may also benefit from the international classroom through experiences of teachers in the international group who also implement these in the Dutch group, but also through collaboration between the DMI and EMI groups.