



## Pre-service Teacher Training in Bilingual Education: Analysing Teaching Syllabi in the Degrees of Primary Education

Noelia M<sup>a</sup> Galán-Rodríguez   
Universidade da Coruña (UDC), Spain, [noelia.galan@udc.es](mailto:noelia.galan@udc.es)

In these last decades, the educational realm has been shaped by new realities, such as the ever-growing bilingual (and plurilingual) contexts, which needs to be accounted in teacher education. Considering that successful initial teacher training is one of the factors which influence students' language learning experience, this study analyses the teaching syllabi related to Bilingual Education (BE) of the degrees of Primary Education of Italian universities in order to describe the training future Primary Education teachers receive in terms of competences and contents. The sample of documents (N=257) are analysed using the SPSS software for the quantitative analysis and MAXQDA for the qualitative analysis. Results show a predominance toward language proficiency, particularly in English, in both the competences and contents Primary Education pre-service teachers acquire during their university training. Educational competences are not frequently found in the analysed syllabi. As for the contents, apart from the linguistic elements, knowledge of different FLT methods is also present on a modest scale. In conclusion, the analysis of the teaching syllabi emphasises teacher training based on language proficiency concerning the FL in contrast to more pedagogical or didactic-focused competences related to BE.

Keywords: bilingual education (BE), BE, FLT, pre-service teachers, primary education, teacher training

### INTRODUCTION

According to the Eurydice report (European Commission, 2017), several factors such as “high quality initial teacher education and continuing professional development” (p. 11) play a key role in making students' language learning experience successful. In fact, the quality of ITE programmes in primary teacher training and the role of teacher trainers have been thrown into question by authors such as Bokdam et al. (2014), who state that “[i]n many Member States teacher educators have an orientation which is more academic than didactic” (p. 21). On these lines, the 2023 Eurydice report (European Commission, 2023) calls attention to the fact that only 24.5% of teachers at EU level state having been trained to teach in multilingual classes in their initial teacher education and 20.1% during their continuing professional development (2023, p. 25).

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In Italy, these last decades have seen to a change in the teaching programmes considering that “the new plurilingual context in which schools now operate, consisting of comparisons with other languages and cultures as well as exchanges and relations with other European and non-European countries, [makes it] necessary to broaden the perspective and develop the plurilingual and intercultural competence of all school staff [own translation]” (MIUR, 2016, p. 35). As for the educational school system, it was in 1985 when the New Teaching Programmes officially introduced foreign languages in the primary school curriculum (Calabrese & Dawes, 2008, p. 35). However, issues such as the shortage of teachers with the necessary language competences made the implementation of the FL difficult.

Primary pre-service teacher training in Italy entails the completion of a five-year master’s programme in which English language workshops (scientific area: L-LIN/12) comprise 10 ECTS credits: the *Decreto 10 settembre 2010* (MIUR, 2010) establishes the subdivision of these workshops in these five years. Furthermore, future teachers need to achieve a B2 English language level by the end of the programme, which is to be accounted through a language certification test (Prova/Idoneità di lingua inglese di livello B2, 2 ECTS). In fact, the linguistic competence in English equivalent to a B2 is mandatory for teachers at all levels in Italy (European Commission, n.d.) as well as the digital competence and competence related to the school integration of pupils with disabilities. This focus on English language proficiency is a clear result on the implementation of English as a compulsory language in Primary Education in the academic year 2003-2004 (Calabrese & Dawes, 2008, p. 37), but some challenges such as low language level by pre-service teachers entering university and lack of language knowledge by university teachers have been addressed by authors such as Bokdam et al. (2014, p. 41).

Taking into account that (1) quality teacher training based on “the content of the language and methodology syllabuses - which need to be anchored firmly to the professional profile of the primary language teacher according to current theory” (Calabrese & Dawes, 2008, p. 37) and (2) early exposure to subjects taught in a FL during pre-service training (García-Núñez et al., 2024) are significant factors in the success of bilingual and FL programmes, the aim of this study is to analyse the teaching syllabi related to Bilingual Education and Foreign Language Teaching (hereafter BE and FLT respectively) in the degree of Primary Education from Italian universities. The reason behind why both BE and FLT syllabi are analysed relies on the fact that these are naturally intertwined concepts which pre-service teachers need to understand in their capacity as bilingual and/or FL teachers; hence, resonating with the idea of plurilingualism established by the Council of Europe in their *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Companion Volume* (from now on CEFRCV; Council of Europe, 2020). Although there is a growing interest in pre-service teacher training in regard to BE and FLT, there is a lack of systematic analysis of the actual curricular elements underpinning such training. This study addresses that gap by conducting a comprehensive study of the aforementioned teaching syllabi. To date (and to the author’s knowledge), no research of this nature has been carried out in the Italian educational context. By offering a detailed overview of such issues, this study endeavours to provide empirical evidence to identify possible weaknesses and inform

improvements in current pre-service teacher training concerning BE and FLT. In order to achieve the main aim of the study, an exploratory and descriptive analysis of the syllabi is carried out in terms of the competences and/or learning outcomes as well as the subject contents following a mixed-methods approach.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In regard to teacher competence development, the *Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge* (TPACK) model provides a robust conceptual framework for understanding the types of knowledge required by teachers. This model builds upon Shulman's (1987) concept of "Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK)", which suggests that effective teaching arises not merely from mastery of subject matter (Content Knowledge, CK) or general pedagogical strategies (Pedagogical Knowledge, PK), but from the dynamic integration of both. PCK refers to "the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners" (Shulman, 1987, p. 8).

Expanding on this foundation, Mishra and Koehler (2006) introduced the TPACK framework to account for the increasing complexity introduced by digital technologies in educational contexts. The model comprises seven interrelated domains:

1. Content Knowledge (CK): Mastery of the subject matter to be taught, including key concepts, theories, and disciplinary practices.
2. Pedagogical Knowledge (PK): Understanding of teaching methods, learning theories, classroom management, and assessment strategies.
3. Technological Knowledge (TK): Familiarity with digital tools and platforms, and the ability to adapt to emerging technologies.
4. Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK): Knowledge of how to teach specific content effectively, including strategies for addressing learners' misconceptions and prior knowledge.
5. Technological Content Knowledge (TCK): Insight into how technology can represent, transform, or enhance disciplinary content.
6. Technological Pedagogical Knowledge (TPK): Understanding of how technology influences pedagogical decisions and instructional design.
7. Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK): The integrated knowledge required to design and implement meaningful, context-sensitive learning experiences that leverage technology in service of pedagogical and content goals.

This model seeks to provide an overview on the different knowledge topics (or skills) a teacher ought to master. Bearing this in mind, it is important to understand to what extent the content, pedagogical and technological knowledge are present in the aforementioned teaching syllabi. Therefore, this model sets up the base for teacher training and the FL teacher competences which will be discussed in the following lines.

### Pre-service FL teacher training

The 2023 Eurydice report (European Commission, 2023) state three approaches to assign teachers to teach foreign languages in primary education in Europe: (1) specialist teachers (those teaching a limited number of subjects), (2) generalist teachers, (3) and both generalist and specialist teachers (p. 26). In Italy, primary education generalist teachers are in charge of teaching the FL in schools, which led to the abovementioned refashioning of the teacher training programmes to cater to this demand.

At university level, Calabrese & Dawes (2008) mention the following ministerial indications in the creation of the primary FL teacher profile:

- Language proficiency “in daily situations with sufficient fluency, formal accuracy and appropriate vocabulary, regarding audio-oral abilities” (p. 36).
- Cultural knowledge of countries where FL is spoken.
- Ability to decode written language in texts relevant to children’s experiences in life and school.
- Ability to write short passages.
- Knowledge of methods and approaches to FLT with reference to Education.

Taking these lines into account, the authors provide some criteria for syllabus design (2008):

1. Customisation of the global CEFR descriptors in relation to the idiosyncrasies of the training course.
2. Identification of specific topic modules to be used in terms of grammar and lexis complexity without considering any particular chronological or developmental order.
3. Identification of “seven syllabus areas (grammar, lexis, phonology, functions, language skills, CLIL and methodological indications which are strictly related to the topic areas) and their corresponding focus specifications” (p. 38).
4. Creation of tables and grids for evaluation and (self) assessment.
5. Proposal of activities and extra benchmarks to develop an expanded version of the *Performance and Language Integrated Syllabus*.

It is worth mentioning that most of the ministerial indications (and the aforementioned criteria) cater to a language-focused curriculum, which reinforces the idea of FL teacher training based on language proficiency (as seen by the mandatory language certification at the end of the degree). However, it is necessary to understand whether there are other challenges in regard to FL teacher education apart from the linguistic one. Enever’s (2014) study explores the policies and implementation processes for early FLL programmes in Europe. As for the teachers’ language-related challenges, the study indicates that “not all teachers had the necessary FL skills for the types of classroom

interaction needed with this primary age group” (p. 234) and “[i]n three out of the four cases, there was evidence of teacher anxiety in relation to language competency, a concern that may well also relate to fear of losing control of the class” (p. 240). This draws attention to the need for teachers to adapt the language to the classroom context. However, the didactic component of the teacher profile is also accounted; for instance, the study reports teachers’ lack of expertise in structuring interaction tasks “in ways that could maximize FL production in both controlled and free practice events (p. 240).

Overall, FL teacher training seem to evolve around two main elements: language competence and methodological training (Mardešić & Vićević, 2012). Therefore, it is important to understand what these two points entail in pre-service teacher education as to provide future teachers a fully-fledged training experience which will help them in their future career.

### **FL teacher competences**

Across Europe, the teacher training profile may have different components depending on the idiosyncrasies present in the educational systems. Authors such as Rumbo-Arcas & Gómez-Sánchez (2024) argue that the acquisition of teaching competences “depends on universities taking the initiative to offer their staff training opportunities and on the willingness of faculty to participate in them” (p. 638). In fact, pre-service training in universities set in a multilingual context (e.g. Bolzano, Italy) seem to provide future teachers with more explicit training on multilingual education (Raud & Orekhova, 2022).

In order to provide a frame of reference for the language teacher training programmes, Kelly and Grenfell (2004) created *The European Profile for Language Teacher Education – A Frame of Reference* supported by the European Commission. According to the authors, this document may serve as a checklist for European, national and institutional policy makers in regard to language teacher programmes. The profile is divided into four sections: *Structure*, *Knowledge and Understanding*, *Strategies and Skills*, and *Values*:

1. *Structure*: the 13 items on this section describe the constituent parts of language teacher education and its possible organisation (e.g. pre-service teacher mobility, mentorship programmes, etc.).
2. *Knowledge and Understanding*: these items (N=8) deal with *what* trainee language teachers should know and understand in regard to language teaching and learning (e.g. courses on language proficiency, training in ICT for the classroom, etc.).
3. *Strategies and Skills*: this section refers to what trainee language teachers should *know how* to do in language teaching and learning situations. The 13 items deal with issues such as ‘how to adapt the teaching approaches to the educational context’, ‘training in methods of learning to learn’ or ‘the use of the ELP for self-evaluation’ among others.

4. *Values*: it includes the values future teachers should be taught and aim to promote in their language teaching. These are defined in 6 items related to language and cultural diversity, team-working, life-long learning, etc.

Other studies on FL teacher competences follow these lines to some extent and differentiate between two main competences. For instance, Radišić et al. (2007) mention two basic competence areas for FL teachers: subject-specific competences and educational competences. Likewise, they divide the subject-specific competence into two categories: competences in regard to language and culture (communicative language and intercultural competence) and specific competences concerning the teaching of a FL in terms of “theories of language acquisition, competences related to the application of knowledge of modern foreign language teaching theories and competences related to the evaluation and assessment of the pupils' communicative language competences” (p. xii). However, they also emphasise the need for FL teachers to have educational competence, referring here to competences related to educational science, classifying this into pedagogical-psychological competences (e.g. interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, classroom instruction, etc.) and competences related to lifelong learning (e.g. knowledge of the educational system, development and improvement of language skills and knowledge, etc.).

This partly resonates with the duality of linguistic and methodological training reported in studies such as Mardešić and Vičević (2012), who mention several studies where the communicative competence is the most reported one in terms of importance. However, their study sheds light on the fact that “[n]owadays both student teachers and practicing teachers rank methods, linguistic competence and interaction with pupils as very important” (p. 197). Furthermore, they argue that the existing university programmes for FL teachers differ in the number of methodological courses compared to the earlier programmes so “student teachers have more opportunity to reflect directly or indirectly on teacher competences” (p. 198). Considering that pre-Primary and Primary teacher training in Italy is quite formal and quantitative (e.g. number of credits, types of scientific areas), but does not regulate the content of teaching education (Mincu, 2019, p. 139), more research into FL teacher training in regard to teacher competences is necessary to understand whether future FL teachers are prepared to provide prospective students a fully-fledged language learning experience.

## METHOD

To achieve the main aim of the study, the following research questions are drawn:

RQ 1. What competences are students expected to acquire for their future profession in regard to BE?

RQ 2. What contents are students expected to acquire for their future profession in regard to BE?

## Data Collection

The official website *Universitaly.com* was consulted to find which universities offered the Primary Education degree in Italy (37 Italian universities in total). Then the official

webpages of said universities were revised and the teaching syllabi related to BE were downloaded. It must be pointed out that several universities mention course subjects related to these issues on their study plans, but they do not provide the documents for the teaching syllabi, therefore, these are unaccounted for in the sample of this study.

### Sample

The initial sample of this study contains 330 teaching syllabi from the degree in Primary Education (2023-2024 academic year). After the first analysis, 33 of these were excluded as no curricular elements were found, and other 40 teaching syllabi were for the English B2 language certification test pre-service teachers need to take before getting their diploma, hence, also excluded. Therefore, the final sample consists of 257 teaching syllabi. In order to answer the research questions, the syllabi were analysed in terms of *competences*<sup>1</sup> and *contents* in the results section of this paper.

### Analysis

After compiling the relevant documents, a descriptive exploratory analysis was performed to identify and extract information regarding the primary curricular elements present in these documents. In order to analyse the competences, Radisic et al.'s (2007) classification is used, while the contents are classified based on the classification by Galán-Rodríguez & Costa (n.d.). In order to validate the application of these coding schemes to the current dataset, a pilot coding was conducted on a sample of documents to assess the clarity and relevance of the categories. During the coding process, reflexive notes were kept to document decisions and ensure transparency. Additionally, the coding framework was refined iteratively to enhance consistency and alignment with the data.

A mixed-methods approach was employed to analyse both quantitative and qualitative data, with the following considerations: 1) it offers a more comprehensive and nuanced perspective on the research, and 2) it strengthens the validity of scientific inferences (Hernández Sampieri et al., 2014). Given the aim of this study—to analyse the teaching syllabi related to BE and FLT in the degree of Primary Education from Italian universities—this approach was deemed appropriate to capture both the breadth and depth of curricular representations. The combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the syllabi: on the one hand, quantitative analysis facilitated the identification of patterns and frequencies; on the other hand, qualitative analysis enabled a nuanced interpretation of the competences and contents, drawing on established coding frameworks (Radisic et al., 2007; Galán-Rodríguez & Costa, n.d.). Consequently, *SPSS* software was utilized for analysing the quantitative data while *MAXQDA* was employed for analysing the qualitative data. For further clarification, Figure 1 summarises the stages of the methodological process.

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As some teaching syllabi do not provide a set of competences, the learning outcomes are analysed in these cases.

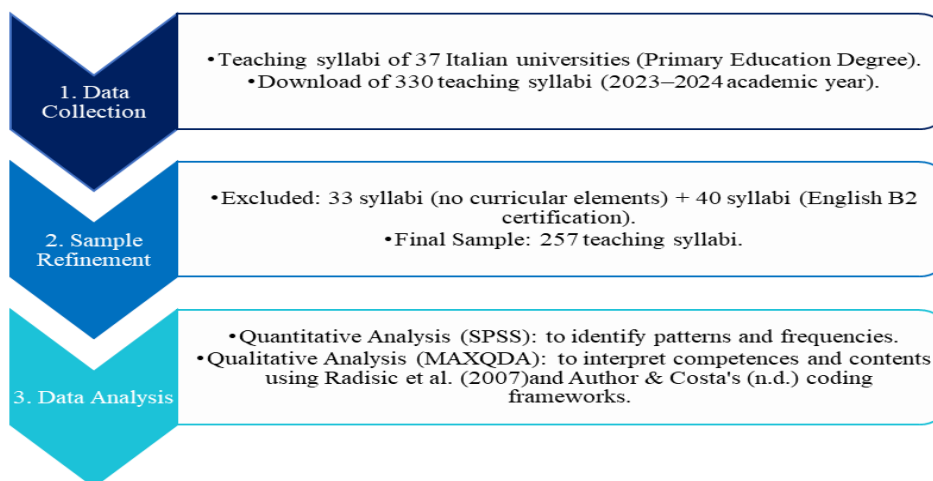


Figure 1  
Methodological Process (Stages)

## FINDINGS

The analysed teaching syllabi belong to public and private Italian universities, being the documents from the public universities the most frequent (79.4%) while the teaching syllabi from the private universities represent 20.6% of the total analysed documents. As for the scientific area these syllabi belong, more than half of these (63%; see Figure 2) are ascribed to L-LIN/12 (*Language and translation–English*), hence, belonging to the English language workshops (*laboratori di lingua inglese*) established in the *Decreto 10 settembre 2010* (MIUR, 2010). However, other scientific areas such as *Methodologies of teaching and special education* (M-PED/03) and *Italian Linguistics* (L-FIL-LET/12) are present in 3.5% of documents. Furthermore, it bears noting that 25.3% of syllabi do not refer to a specific scientific area.

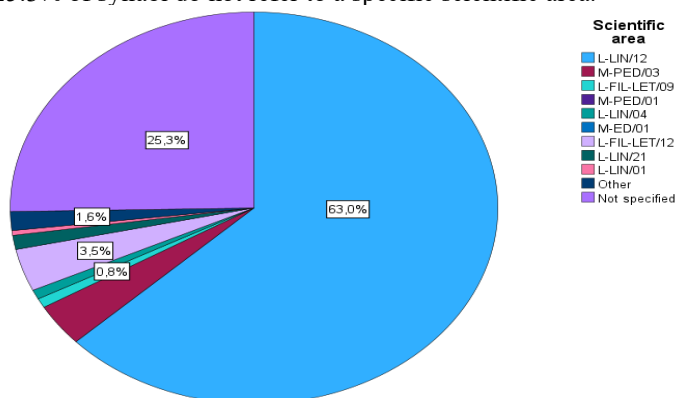


Figure 2  
Scientific Areas

As for the type of subject, 65.8% of the documents fall into the ‘other’ category, which is the nomenclature used for the teaching syllabi from the *laboratori di lingua inglese*, hence, there is a clear relationship between the type of subject and the scientific area (chi square:  $p < 0.001$ ). Similarly to the previous figure, 24.9% of documents do not specify the subject category. Besides, 6.2% of these are optional subjects while only 3.1% of these are mandatory: these data will be accounted in the discussion section of the article.

In terms of academic year, the subjects analysed are present in all five years of the degree of Primary Education in a similar frequency (see Figure 3) with a slight tendency to increase the number of these subjects in the last year of the degree (5<sup>th</sup> year: 21.8%), although without being statistically significant ( $p = 0.163$ ).

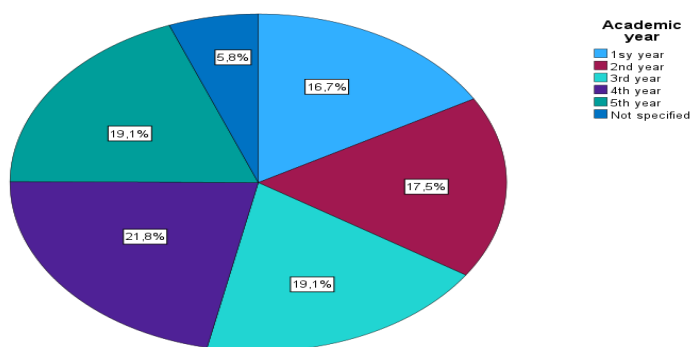


Figure 3  
*Academic Year*

Similarly, there is a clear tendency toward 2-credit subjects (82.8%) within these teaching syllabi, which answers once more to the high number of English language workshops (L-LIN/12) in the study ( $p < 0.001$ ), with other subjects with different number of credits found to a lesser extent.

Seeing as these teaching syllabi deal with BE, it is interesting to see the diverse languages of instruction used in these courses, being English the most common language (57.6%) followed by Italian (32.7%). Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning the linguistic diversity found in these subjects with several languages (see Figure 4) present in the courses of some Italian universities (e.g. German, Friulian, etc.)

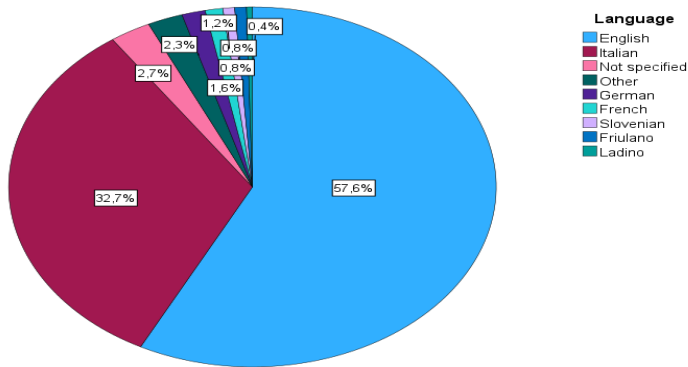


Figure 4  
Languages of instruction

The language level required in these courses falls into the intermediate levels established by the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2020) as 40.1% of these subjects require students to have/achieve a B2 language level and 27.2% demand a B1 (see Figure 5).

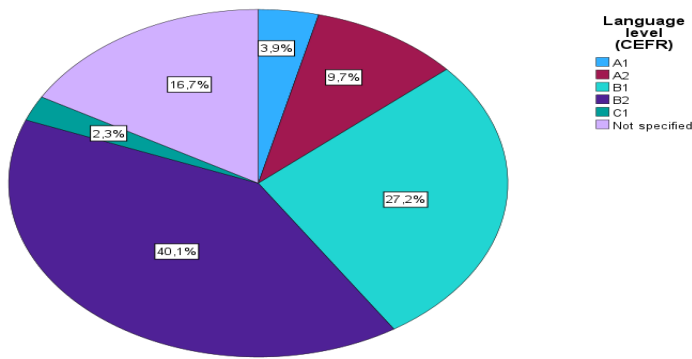


Figure 5  
Language Level (CEFR)

Nevertheless, there is a tendency towards the beginner and B1 levels in English teaching syllabi while other courses whose target languages are French or German require a B2 or C1 level (see Figure 6).

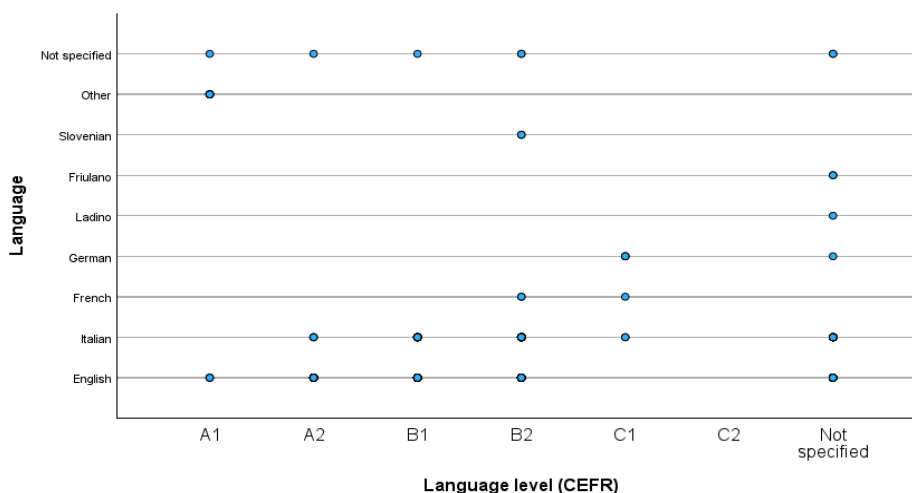


Figure 6  
Language and Language Level Dispersion Graph

As for the nature of these teaching syllabi, Garcés-Manzanares' (2021) classification was followed and the courses are grouped based on whether there are (1) language courses, (2) didactic/pedagogical courses, or (3) combined courses (both language and didactic goals are present). Results show a clear tendency towards language-focused and combined courses in equal frequency (see Table 1), with didactic/pedagogical courses found only 7.4% of teaching syllabi.

Table 1  
Nature of the course

	N	%
Language	119	46.3
Didactic/Pedagogical	19	7.4
Combined	119	46.3
Total	257	100

Despite the fact that these numbers show a clear predisposition towards language-oriented subjects within the degree in Primary Education, it is important to analyse these in terms of teacher competences (see section 2.2).

### Competence Analysis

As mentioned above, the classification of primary school FL teacher competences fall into two main groups: subject-specific competences and educational competences (Radišić et al., 2007). Results show that subject-specific competences are the most frequently found within the analysed documents with 98.4% of teaching syllabi catering to these competences. However, there is a significant decrease in the number of documents which deal with educational competences (50.6%; see Table 2).

Table 2  
Presence of Competences (total percentages).

	Yes	No
Subject-specific competences	98.4%	1.6%
Educational competences	50.6%	49.4%

These data show a clear predisposition towards subject-specific teaching modes which needs to be accounted in terms of subcompetences to provide a clearer overview.

#### *Subject-specific competences*

These are divided into two further categories: (1) competences related to language and culture, and (2) subject-specific teacher competences.

As for the competences related to language and culture, these entail both teacher's communicative language competence as well as their intercultural competence. In fact, the communicative competence is present in 91.8% of documents, which answers to the language-focused nature of many of these courses ( $p < 0.001$ ), as many of these syllabi belong to language workshops where language proficiency is the ultimate goal. This is further evidenced by the analysis of the segments for communicative language competence: words such as 'skills' (f: 206), 'language' (f: 184), 'level' (f: 174) are the most frequently found in terms of students' language competence. It is interesting that the most frequently reported skill (or mode of communication) is reception in contrast to production: 'comprendere' (f: 93) and 'understanding' (f: 78), as opposed to 'produrre' (f: 42) and 'produce' (f: 15). As for interaction and mediation (the other modes of communication), the first one is found in different words from its lexical family (f: 75) while the latter is not present in the codified segments.

The intercultural competence, being understood as the ability to function effectively with other cultures and people of different cultures, is present in 6.6% of syllabi, which may be surprising considering the intrinsic relationship between language and culture. The excerpts from this competence report an understanding of other cultures and the management of different cultural backgrounds in the classroom: 'Anglophone countries' (f: 12), 'sense' (f: 10), 'ability' (f: 10), 'culture' (f: 10) and 'class' (f: 8) are the most frequent terms<sup>2</sup>.

In regard to the subject-specific teacher competences, these deal with competencies a primary school FL teacher should have in regard to their specific FL pedagogical-based training. These are divided into: general theories of language acquisition, application of the knowledge of MFL (Modern Foreign Language) teaching theories, and assessment of students' communicative language competence.

- Competences related to general theories of language acquisition: these are present in 8.2% of analysed documents. This competence is linked to didactic/pedagogical courses as well as combined courses ( $p < 0.001$ ). Overall,

<sup>2</sup> These terms were translated from Italian (all segments for the intercultural competence but one are from teaching syllabi in Italian) to facilitate comprehension and reading pace.

these segments focus on the knowledge of the main theories regarding language acquisition in Primary Education being ‘language’ (f: 15), ‘knowledge’ (f: 11), ‘L2’ (8) and ‘acquisition’ (f: 8) the most frequent terms.

- Competences related to the application of the knowledge of MFL teaching theories: this subcompetence is the second most frequent (after teachers’ communicative competence) in the analysed documents, being present in 47.9% of these. Key issues such as the application of FL teaching methods, lesson planning and techniques for the FL classroom are some of the most common competencies found in these codes. Within these, words such as ‘technique’ (f: 43), ‘materials’ (f: 34), ‘instruments’ (f: 29) and ‘method/methodologies’ (f: 38) describe the practical issues pre-service teachers need to master in terms of subject-specific pedagogies.
- Competences related to the assessment of students’ communicative language competence: 10.1% teaching syllabi report working on pre-service teachers’ assessment skills in terms of providing students feedback, knowing and reflecting on different assessment techniques, and creating and managing evaluation activities. This is evidenced by the presence of words such as ‘evaluation’ (f: 14), ‘activity’ (f: 10), ‘create’ (f: 10) and ‘manage’ (f: 9).

All in all, there is a clear tendency towards language proficiency in the analysed subject-specific competences, but there is also emphasis on the applicability of FL teaching theories in the didactic/pedagogical and combined teaching syllabi ( $p < 0.001$ ).

#### *Educational competences*

The educational competences analysed refer to (1) pedagogical-psychological competences and (2) competences related to lifelong learning.

According to Radišić et al. (2007), the pedagogical-psychological competences are distributed into four categories: general pedagogical-psychological competences, competences related to classroom instruction, interpersonal and intrapersonal characteristics and skills, and competences related to out-of-class activities. Overall, these subcompetences are not commonly encountered in the data set:

- General pedagogical-psychological competences: found in 14% of analysed documents. These focus on pre-service teachers’ reflection on different learning styles, the use of technologies and selecting different resources according to students’ progress. Therefore, terms such as ‘manage’ (f: 11), ‘progression’ (f: 11), ‘diverse’ (f: 9) and ‘adapting’ (f: 9) stand out in the codified segments.
- Classroom instruction: these are evidenced in 10.1% teaching guides. These competences deal with classroom management in terms of possible problems and their solution within the classroom context, hence, words such as ‘classroom’ (f: 15), ‘sense’ (f: 12), ‘manage’ (f: 9), ‘problems’ (f: 9) and ‘resolution’ (f: 9) are the most employed terms.

- Interpersonal and intrapersonal characteristics and skills: only 4.3% of documents report working on pre-service teachers' interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. It bears noting that these documents focus on developing interpersonal skills rather than intrapersonal ones, oftentimes linked to the teacher's ability to create a comfortable classroom atmosphere. 'use' (f: 6), 'welcoming' (f: 4) and 'environment' (f: 4) are some of the most distinct terms in this category.
- Competences related to out-of-class activities: no teaching syllabus mentions this subcompetence, which may be linked to the fact that out-of-class activities heavily depend on the target group and the school's contextual factors, so it may be difficult to deal with it in an explicit manner.

As for the competences related to lifelong learning, which are crucial for teachers' self-improvement, these appear in the teaching syllabi as follows:

- Knowledge of educational systems: it is surprising that, despite the fact these teaching syllabi belong to the degree of Primary Education, only 2.7% of these deal with this competence. In this regard, knowing and understanding the different documents and language policies which regulate the educational system is the main descriptor of this competence.
- Development and improvement of language teaching skills: 26.1% of syllabi establish in-growth professional development in regard to language teaching skills in issues such as critical thinking and reflection on their own teaching practices, resources and their evolving professional profile. Therefore, words such as 'independent' (f: 52), 'material' (f: 29), 'analyse' (28) and 'critical' (f: 27) are some of the most relevant key concepts found in the segments.
- Improvement of language skills: the ability to reflect on their language skills and to autonomously work on them as a lifelong learning process is found in 24.1% of documents. This is further evidenced by the high frequency of words such as 'independently' (f: 29), 'practise' (f: 29) and 'self-study' (f: 29). Furthermore, there is a strong correlation with the presence of this competence and the previous competence (development and improvement of language teaching skills;  $p < 0.001$ ), which bodes well for the ongoing improvement of pedagogical and language skills.

Overall, the educational competences are present in a modest frequency with the competences related to lifelong learning being the ones which stand out in terms of teachers' ongoing professional development.

### **Content Analysis**

The contents of the teaching syllabi are analysed following Galán-Rodríguez & Costa's (n.d.) classification. It bears noting that 6.6% of the documents do not have contents section, hence, the data from this section represents 93.4% of teaching syllabi. The percentages on the classification of contents are summarised on Table 3.

Table 3  
Classification of Contents.

	No. of segments	Percentage
Linguistic Competence and Language Proficiency	1205	76.5
Methods, Approaches and Theories	172	10.9
Lesson Planning and Resources	146	9.3
Assessment	35	2.2
Technology	18	1.1
Total	1576	100

It is clear that the emphasis on linguistic competence and language proficiency found in the competence analysis (see section 4.1.1) is replicated in the content section of the teaching syllabi (76.5% of segments). This can be further analysed into the following subcategories:

- CEFR and Language Skills: mentions to the CEFR levels and the language skills are found in 33% of segments, being elements such as ‘writing’ (f: 59), ‘skills’ (f: 54), ‘functions’ (f: 52), ‘B1’ (f: 45), ‘B2’ (f: 45), ‘speaking’ (f: 41), ‘listening’ (f: 35) and ‘reading’ (f: 29) the most present in frequency.
- Grammar: On a morph syntactic level, ‘Grammar’ is present in 31% of these segments with a clear predisposition towards learning verb tenses: ‘present’ (f: 181), ‘simple’ (f: 163), ‘continuous’ (f: 127), ‘perfect’ (f: 91), ‘verbs’ (f: 79) and ‘future’ (f: 75) are the most common terms.
- Vocabulary: 24% of the segments analysed in the contents evolve around lexical fields worked on general English courses such as ‘verbs’ (f: 14), ‘numbers’ (f: 13), ‘clothing’ (f: 11) and ‘body’ (f: 10).
- Pronunciation and Phonetics: issues related to the pronunciation and phonology of English are described in 11% of the segments with words such as ‘English’ (f: 12), ‘stress’ (f: 10) and ‘prosody’ (f: 7) being the most frequent.

As for the contents found in ‘Methods, Approaches and Theories’ (10.9%), these cover different teaching ‘methods/methodologies’ (f: 63) such as ‘CLIL’ (f: 32) and ‘TPR’ (f: 15) as well as ‘techniques’ (f: 21) like ‘storytelling’ (f: 27). Some examples of these codified segments are:

Excerpt 1: “Topics relating to the teaching of the English language in primary school will also be covered, such as the different teaching methodologies, the communicative approach, CLIL, Story Telling.”

Excerpt 2: “The principles of language teaching which facilitate the approaching and learning of English by learners aged 3 to 10 (theories, approaches, methods and techniques).”

‘Lesson Planning and Resources’ (9.3%) comprise elements related to the didactic planning of the lessons and the activities (as well as materials) used to create it. In this regard, words such as ‘activity/activities’ (f: 50), ‘materials’ (f: 24), ‘illustrated’ (f: 21), ‘albums’ (f: 20), ‘classroom’ (f: 18) and ‘planning’ (f: 16) are some of the most

common concepts in these segments. Furthermore, it bears noting the oral nature of the proposed resources/materials as seen on Excerpt 3, as well as the close connection between the lesson planning found in the contents (see Excerpt 4) and the lesson planning found on the subject-specific teacher competences (see section 4.1.1):

Excerpt 3: “[U]sing rhymes, chants, songs, raps, poems, stories, and games in English Language Teaching (ELT) with YLs and VYLs.”

Excerpt 4: “Planning teaching and learning activities.”

In regard to ‘Assessment’, a modest number of segments (2.2% of the total) mention student/language assessment as well as textbook assessment (e.g. validity of the resource). Although some segments (7 out of 35) only mention the term ‘assessment’ with no further explanation, there are some which specify and deal with issues such as:

Excerpt 5: “Language proficiency for EFL teaching: error treatment strategies; peer work management”

Excerpt 6: “Importance of textbook choice and creation of an evaluation grid in order to make it a useful tool for learning [own translation].”

The use of ‘Technology’ is relegated to 1.1% of the segments (and 18 teaching syllabi). Among these, the introduction and use of eTwinning is the most common content as it is present in 10 documents (out of 18):

Excerpt 7: “eTwinning [...] to learn about the tools and operational potential that the eTwinning project and platform offer teachers.”

All in all, the contents of these syllabi back up the results on the competences: there is a clear predominance towards language proficiency focused on the language skills and grammar points while the didactic component (in a more modest frequency) encompasses FLT methods as well as lesson planning. Some of the most relevant data can be consulted on Table 4.

Table 4  
Summary of Key Findings (Quantitative and Qualitative Data)

Quantitative Results	Qualitative Results	Metainference
Language-specific courses (46.3%) and competences related to language and culture (91.8%).	Contents based on linguistic competence and language proficiency (.e.g. CEFR and Language Skills, grammar, etc.).	Both strands confirm great emphasis on pre-service teachers' linguistic competence.
Competences related to the application of the knowledge of MFL teaching theories (47.9%).	"Methods, Approaches and Theories" and "Lesson Planning and Resources" codes in the content section.	Methodological training related to FLT methods and with a strong focus on resources/lesson planning in both trends.
Technology use included in the general pedagogical-psychological competences (14%).	"Technology" scarcely present in the content section.	Technological competence and contents are not much worked on by pre-service teachers.
Competences related to the development and improvement of language teaching skills (26.1%).	Not found in the codification.	Possible divergence between theory and practice: these competences may be considered important, but not explicitly accounted for in the content section.

## DISCUSSION

As established in the *Decreto 10 settembre 2010* (MIUR, 2010), the linguistic competence of English of teachers needs to be accounted for in initial teacher training. In fact, the analysed teaching syllabi cater to this reality, being 63% of these from the L-LIN/12 (*Language and translation-English*) scientific area. Therefore, English is the main target language of most syllabi regarding BE in the *Scienze della Formazione Primaria* degrees, which resonates with other studies (Galán-Rodríguez et al., 2024; Galán-Rodríguez & Costa, n.d.). However, it is important to highlight that, apart from the English language workshops (categorised as 'other' subjects), a small percentage of these syllabi are mandatory (3.1%), which seem surprising considering the growing importance of BE across Europe (European Commission, 2017, 2023) and teacher training in Italy (MIUR, 2016).

In regard to teacher competences (RQ1), there is a clear predominance of subject-specific competences related to the domain of 'Content Knowledge' (Mishra & Koehler, 2006), particularly the language competence as the main skill concerning BE. However, the intercultural competence is not present in many teaching syllabi (only 6.6%), which is striking considering the integrated nature of language and culture as established by the *CEFR CV* (Council of Europe, 2020) and the importance of intercultural education training for pre-service teachers (Gómez-Sánchez & Bobadilla-Pérez, 2024). Likewise, the subject-specific teacher competences, that is, those related to didactic knowledge for the FL class, are present to some extent, being the

competence related to the application of the knowledge of MFL teaching theories the most commonly found (52.1%), hence, emphasising the presence of ‘Pedagogical Content Knowledge’ (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) within these documents and resonating with the European Commission (n.d.) which specifies that graduates in primary education sciences should have the skills to adapt timing and methods to pupils’ levels of progression.

Nevertheless, it bears noting the scarcity of educational competences (Radišić et al. 2007), related to the ‘Pedagogical Knowledge’, within the analysed teaching syllabi (see section 4.1.2.). Therefore, issues such as interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, competences related to classroom instruction and knowledge of the educational system are not explicitly present in most of the competence sections of these documents. This contrasts with the initial education teachers working in primary education ought to receive (European Commission, n.d.) as competences related to the integration of pupils with disabilities or digital competences are not worked on in these syllabi in an explicit manner, that is to say, ‘Technological Knowledge’ and ‘Pedagogical Technological Knowledge’ (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) are not identified within the competences of the teaching syllabi. Furthermore, the frequency of competences related to teachers’ continuous professional development in terms of (1) language teaching skills and (2) their own language improvement falls in line with the results from the Eurydice 2023 report (European Commission, 2023), which stated that only 20.1% of teachers received training on continuous professional development. Overall, pre-service teachers’ competences focus on language proficiency (and knowledge of MFL methods to a lesser extent), which resonates with Mardešić & Vičević’s (2012) mention to dual training: linguistic and methodological.

As for the RQ2, the contents of these teaching syllabi show a clear predisposition towards language elements in terms of linguistic competence and language proficiency. In fact, the language skills (*read, write, listen* and *speak*) and the grammar points are the most present items within this subcategory. It is worth noting that, despite the mentions to the CEFR reference levels (e.g. ‘B2’) and the language skills, no mention to the updated CEFR CV’s (2020) modes of communication, particularly, interaction and mediation, are found within the analysed contents. This could answer to the fact that the teaching syllabi have not been recently updated (despite being teaching syllabi from the 2023-2024 academic year). Furthermore, cultural knowledge is not explicitly present in a significant frequency, which contrasts with the ministerial indications which establishes that primary FL teachers should gain “knowledge of culture of countries where FL is spoken” (Calabrese & Dawes, 2008, p. 36). This reinforces again the lack of interculturality and the intercultural competence found in the analysed competences.

Additionally, contents related to FLT methods and approaches are found on a modest frequency (10.9%) which seeks to follow the ministerial indication mentioned in Calabrese & Dawes (2008): primary FL teachers ought to “[be] informed about methods and approaches to FLT with reference to Education” (p. 37). The CLIL approach stands out in this subclassification, which follows (to some extent) Galán-Rodríguez & Costa’s (n.d.) study, which establishes the presence of this approach within the *Scienze della Formazione Primaria* Italian degrees. However, further specification on which methods

and approaches (apart from CLIL) are worked on is needed to provide a clearer picture of the methodological training future primary FL teachers are receiving.

All in all, both the competences and contents of these teaching syllabi further emphasises a duality of 'Content Knowledge' (in terms of language) and 'Pedagogical Content Knowledge' (FLT methods and resources).

### CONCLUSIONS AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Overall, pre-service teacher training for BE in Italy is mostly represented by the *English language workshop* courses future teachers need to pass in order to get their B2 English language certification at the end of their five-year programme. Therefore, most of these could be categorised under FL teacher training due to the specification of these courses. Apart from these courses, subjects whose main topic evolve around BE are not present, which seems to open up a major concern: taking into account the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of Primary Education students across all European countries in these last years, the lack of specific teacher training in such topics could potentially be a significant drawback in their training.

As for the analysed teaching syllabi, these show a clear predisposition towards linguistic training, that is, language proficiency, particularly, providing pre-service Primary school teachers with an intermediate level of English. It goes without saying the Italian legislation cater to the acquisition of linguistic competences for teachers (MUIR, 2010) and Bokdam et al. (2014) also report Italian teachers' FL skills as one of the challenges to overcome. However, pedagogical/didactic training in regard to BE/FL as well as lifelong learning-skills training are necessary competences teachers need to acquire (Kelly & Grenfell, 2004; Radišić et al., 2007; Mardešić & Vičević, 2012), which are scarcely present in the analysed teaching syllabi. This poses a lacuna concerning teacher training: although these competences may be worked transversally in other courses, further specification of these in relation to BE and FLT are needed:

the need for a substantial increase in both the provision and consistency of quality for courses and frequent workshops at a local level is evident. With a view to overcoming the existing weaknesses in the system in the longer term, there is also a need to strengthen the quality of pre-service provision, catering particularly for generalist teachers in addition to specialist primary FL teachers [...] it is evident that questions of course design for generalist teachers of primary FLs should be addressed at both national and European levels (Enever, 2014, pp. 240-241).

As it is, pre-service teacher training programmes may need to address in an explicit manner the educational competences needed for teaching, bearing in mind the idiosyncrasies of their own subject content (in this case, BE and FLT). This calls for greater collaboration and continuous teacher development within university departments and professors, which would lead to a decompartmentalisation of subject categories and promote interdisciplinary in terms of competences and contents.

It bears noting that some limitations have been found: diversity in terms of curricular elements (and their nomenclature) is found among different universities, which hindered the classification of the analysis. Additionally, some teaching syllabi do not provide some of the analysed elements (see section 3) or some of the sections are incomplete (e.g. no contents, see section 4.2.). As for the documents/teaching syllabi, it should be noted that these provide theoretical information on what the course entails, but it does not mean these describe the actual teaching and learning practice: contrasting these with the actual teaching practice through direct observation could provide a broader overview of the matter at hand; however, due to contextual and time constraints (e.g. number of courses and diverse locations), this would be difficult to handle.

Further research on teaching syllabi could provide a broader picture of the state of the art in regard to university training for pre-service teachers. Considering the importance of early teacher training, research on Primary Education teacher training in Italy should be carried out. In this regard, analysing other teaching syllabi from different courses may shed light on the presence of transferable skills, which might answer to the competences mentioned in the previous literature. Additionally, replication studies in Secondary Education teacher training would provide extensive data on this issue. Finally, research on teacher trainers (in this case, university professors) and their teaching practices would bring information about the practical application of the teaching syllabi, which would add to the results of the present study.

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