

CRITICAL FACTORS OF INTEGRATING CONTENT AND LANGUAGE PLATFORM IN UKRAINIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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“Taking charge of your own learning is a part of taking charge of your life, which is “the sine qua non” in becoming an integrated person”

Warren G. Bennis, an American scholar, organizational consultant and author

Advocates of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) have extolled the virtues of this approach to fostering both content and language alike. However, the generalised and varied implementation of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in universities worldwide has led many lecturers to question these claims [1]. This paper presents some considerations concerning a Common European Framework (CEFR) - based model for measuring the impact of EMI at the tertiary level.

Most universities around the globe now offer full or partial degrees taught through a foreign language. English has long been the language of science, but these degrees have made English the language of higher education in Europe. Serving partly as programmatic development, partly as an explicit competition in a wider tertiary environment, English has become the de-facto language for academic discourse [1]. And those refusing to provide English-taught modules endanger their global scientific visibility and professional competitiveness. Particularly in Europe, there is a strong consensus on the methodological approach to be used when a content module or degree is taught through a language other than the students' mother tongue (often in English as the Medium of Instruction). More recently, it has also become a major move towards multilingualism at the university level. It is claimed to foster a flexible, inclusive approach which can be applied through many specific methodologies, since both content and language are integrated. “By integrating language and subject teaching, various forms of educational success can be achieved where classrooms comprise learners with diverse levels of linguistic competence” [2].

After the Bologna reform process [3] carried out in the Ukrainian higher education system, many universities have decided to introduce English as the language of instruction for some studies. The new study programs have been implemented, and there is an urgency to define what is meant by "teaching in English". Some constraints and difficulties of introducing a second or third language of instruction have been investigated and the difficulties content teachers have in recognizing and describing their disciplinary discourse have been shown [1]. Thus, there seems to be a need for a dialogue between language and content teachers, in which they can express their experiences, opinions and fears.

In the higher education system the interest in foreign languages has brought about the introduction of bilingual programs, where students can choose between Ukrainian or English as the language of instruction, or programs exclusively taught in

English. However, the integration of content and language in higher education requires understanding of concepts such as interdisciplinarity and teacher collaboration. Contemporary interpretation of knowledge is not seen in separate chunks, but "within the framework of real life application where solutions are required for complex problems" [1]. An effective resource of the latter could be collaboration between content subjects and ESP teachers. Some authors have reported these collaborations in the past, when relationships were not easy, and ESP teachers took the initiative and gathered information by means of needs analyses techniques from students, content teachers and future employers and applied it to their courses. Today in Europe, there is a reported tendency to introduce English as a second or third language of instruction in European universities, with an effort to try and integrate content and language (ICL). In order to manage this integration in Ukraine it is necessary to consider the kinds of communication tasks and skills that form the core competence profile as well as the intercultural communication conventions in each discipline, the skills that may be transferable between languages, and the academic genres that should be covered from the language point of view in order to use them in the content variety of interpretations about how to implement the new policy. The above-discussed uncertainty could serve to be the main motivation to gather a group of content teachers and English language teachers in order to create a discursive platform to share experiences and points of view at a time to make it possible to reflect on how to introduce a new language of instruction. The locus of interest for such a potential interdisciplinary discussion could cover the following aspects: 1) outlining the number of competencies for each subject, which students should acquire and teachers should adequately assess; 2) distribution of subjects with credits in English; 3) students' needs for courses delivered in English; 4) disciplinary differences in modes of teaching and pedagogical strategies; 5) opinions about a second language of instruction.

Moreover, the involvement and enthusiasm of the university community is also essential for the success of the program. Making discursive spaces available for interdisciplinary collaboration of teachers is a good measure to motivate and involve them in integrating content and language, but new creative spaces and platforms where students and administrative staff can also participate, such as workshops, seminars, or on-line platforms will help to create a corporate image about multilingualism at the university level. Furthermore, other accompanying activities can help to successfully develop a multilingual higher education policy, such as a good communication plan for students, teachers and administrative staff, as well as for the society in which the institution is embedded, which would foster a higher level of its academic competitiveness.

References

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