

From Theory to Practice: An Iterative Design Process in Implementing English Medium Instruction in Higher Education

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Abstract : While few institutions of higher education in Israel offer international programs taught entirely in English, many Israeli students today can study at least one content course taught in English during their degree program. In particular, with the growth of international partnerships and opportunities for student mobility, English medium instruction is a growing phenomenon. There are however no official guidelines in Israel for how to develop and implement content courses in English and no training to help lecturers prepare for teaching their materials in a foreign language. Furthermore, the implications for the students and the nature of the courses themselves have not been sufficiently considered. In addition, the institution must have lecturers who are able to teach these courses effectively in English. An international project funded by the European Union addresses these issues and a set of guidelines which provide guidance for lecturers in adapting their courses for delivery in English have been developed. A train-the-trainer approach is adopted in order to cascade knowledge and experience in English medium instruction from experts to language teachers and on to content teachers thus maximizing the scope of professional development. To accompany training, a model English medium course has been created which serves the dual purpose of highlighting alternatives to the frontal lecture while integrating language learning objectives with content goals. This course can also be used as a standalone content course. The development of the guidelines and of the course utilized backwards, forwards and central design in an iterative process. The goals for combined language and content outcomes were identified first after which a suitable framework for achieving these goals was constructed. The assessment procedures evolved through collaboration between content and language specialists and subsequently were put into action during a piloting phase. Feedback from the piloting teachers and from the students highlight the need for clear channels of communication to encourage frank and honest discussion of expectations versus reality. While much of what goes on in the English medium classroom requires no better teaching skills than are required in any classroom, the understanding of students' abilities in achieving reasonable learning outcomes in a foreign language must be rationalized and accommodated within the course design. Concomitantly, preparatory language classes for students must be able to adapt to prepare students for specific language and cognitive skills and activities that courses conducted in English require. This paper presents findings from the implementation of a purpose-designed English medium instruction course arrived at through an iterative backwards, forwards and central design process utilizing feedback from students and lecturers alike leading to suggested guidelines for English medium instruction in higher education.

Keywords : English medium instruction, higher education, iterative design process, train-the-trainer

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