



Role of English teachers within Internationalisation of higher education at non-philological universities

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Abstract.

The internationalisation of higher education triggers many challenges for all stakeholders involved in this process. Acceleration of providing an international education environment across Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have resulted in fostering English as “Lingua franca”, thus the term internationalisation of HE is often replaced by the term Englishisation of HE. This brought up a shift in roles of higher education teachers especially disciplinary teachers are required to develop their English skills to become members of international research teams, projects, and even to be able to run their courses, lectures or at least consultations for foreign students in English. Setting an English Education Environment (EEE) at non-philological HEIs with non-English speaking stakeholders is a demanding challenge for both disciplinary teachers and students. This paper focuses on the university teachers within the process of internationalisation of HE. Specifically, dealing with the role of English teachers in this process based on the findings in the research project conducted at the Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava, Faculty of Materials Science and Technology in Trnava. A questionnaire, an interview and observation methods were used to gain the data for processing to identify the role of English teachers within the internationalisation process. The data were collected during an international Visegrad+ project that aimed at studying the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) as a potentially suitable approach for setting English Education Environment (EEE) at non-philological universities in non-English speaking countries (V4 states and Western Balkan states).

Keywords: ESP teachers, Internationalisation of Higher Education, CLIL approach, Disciplinary Teachers, Cooperation

1. Introduction

Globalisation has reached the higher education area and its most noticeable impact can be observed in the increasing importance attached to the internationalisation process. Universities worldwide understand the significance to bolster the use of English in their institutional activities and start offering study programmes in the English language with the purpose to

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enhance the internationalisation of higher education. The survey released in 2017, “English-taught bachelor’s programmes”, provides a first overview of the emergence and growth of English taught bachelor programmes (hereinafter refers to as ETBs) in Europe in addition to exploring the benefits, challenges and impact of these programmes on the institutional and national levels (Sandström, A. - Neghina, C., 2017, p. 5). The report involves data on ETBs in 19 European Higher Education institutions where a total of 2,900 ETBs are identified. The country with the highest number of ETBs is Turkey (545 ETBs), while Romania, for instance, has 32 ETBs. The distribution of ETBs by disciplines also vary – Business and Management is the most popular, with one-quarter of all ETBs being offered in the field. Social Sciences, as well as Engineering and Technology, are second and third, respectively. Based on qualitative research done within this survey, the main purpose for offering ETBs is to internationalise the institution, become more competitive, attract talent, prepare students for a global world and respond to a demographic shift (2017, p. 23). The biggest challenge for most institutions offering ETBs is the lack of teaching English skills and administrative staff.

The mentioned survey has also revealed the central topic of discussion when looking forward to the future of the Higher Education Area – learning and teaching. Taking into consideration the Bologna Process which first round was focused on structural reforms, collaboration, increasing mobility of teachers and thus enhancing international visibility, now, it is the emphasis on learning and teaching. Since the English language has become the *lingua franca* of international academic and scientific communication and cooperation, the shift of the role of teachers, predominantly the English teachers, at universities is evident. The projects experience confirms that cooperation with other European universities is one of the most important catalysts in enhancing the internationalisation of HE that leads to the development of the quality of education at non-philological universities, too.

1.1 ESP and CLIL in higher education

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is the term that is predominantly linked to the English courses whose aim is to teach the English language in specific situations, mainly in the academic sector (Kovacikova, 2020). Among researchers, ESP is a quite controversial issue, due to different interpretations concerning the exact definition of ESP. The origin of ESP is dated back to the period when the Second World War ended. Subsequently, new scientific, technical and economic demands grew and English became the international language. Requirements for English teachers increased, mainly on communicative aspects of language in specific contexts. According to Wright (1992), ESP is the study of a particular aspect of language to be able to accomplish certain tasks. On the other hand, Smoak (1996) considers ESP as the English instruction based on the actual and immediate needs of learners who have to successfully perform real-life tasks unrelated to merely passing an English class or exam. Celani (2008) declares that ESP means learning for a purpose and learning within a framework that makes reasons for learning not only clear but also meaningful at the outset both for learners and teachers. Taking into consideration mentioned opinions and the purpose of this paper, English for Specific Purposes may be understood as the term related to the English language education offered mainly at non-philological universities to prepare such courses for students to be prepared for professional communication. Moreover, the authors Stojkovic, Chmelikova and Hurajova (2018) declare how important it is for ESP teachers to undergo relevant functional pedagogy and methodology when designing and organising ESP courses to be able to prepare

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suitable content and linguistic issues. Therefore, ESP teachers at universities are mostly the teachers of the English language as they are fully equipped to meet the above-mentioned requirements.

The English Education Environment (EEE) setting in higher education, mainly at non-philological HEIs with non-English speaking stakeholders is a demanding challenge for both disciplinary teachers and students because it may not sufficiently provide the students' needs to acquire academic skills and subject disciplinary language. Therefore, it is necessary to find out the way how this setting can be made even more valuable to students, and reconsider them so that they are more closely organised with learners' requirements and specialised communication practices.

The recently finished international Visegrad+ Project at the Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava has proved the CLIL the potentially suitable approach for setting EEE. CLIL is generally known as the term for bilingual and content-based education. Moreover, it involves language instruction planned around non-linguistic topics and subject matter rather than firmly linguistic issues, as it has been recognised in research evidence from Krashen (1982), Lightbown & Spada (2006), and Swain (2000). According to these authors, the second language can be acquired more effectively because the focus of instructions is on meaning rather than form and students use the target language through content instruction of their academic subject and thus the target language becomes not only the medium of instructions but also communication (Garcia, 2008). CLIL as an approach to teaching foreign languages has been successfully implemented in many primary and secondary schools across Europe (Euridyce, 2006), in contrast, it “has not yet been widely adopted in higher education” (Kovacicova, 2020, p.33). The possible reason for not adopting the CLIL approach in HEIs might be in its models which are implemented in primary and secondary schools. The CLIL approach applied in HEIs requires a redefinition of teachers' practices and competencies to the linguistic, academic, and professional demands (Kovacicova, 2020). The project team of the recently finished Visegrad+ project implemented their model of the CLIL approach in HEIs and data collected in the project are interpreted in this paper from the perspective of English teachers and their role /-s in setting EEE in HE.

1.2 ESP teachers vs CLIL teachers

The setting of the EEE in non-philological HEIs varies across countries and is even different in the individual universities within one country. The most challenging factor includes the English skills of staff at the faculty. It is also verified by the survey “English-taught bachelor's programmes” (2017) aforementioned in the introduction part of this paper. The findings carried out within the survey indicate the lack of English skills of teaching staff resulting mainly in a negative impact on the education quality. Moreover, the variety of the Faculty administrative staff come into contact with international students during their time at the institution and their English language competence is also at a very low level. Understandably, universities claim their interest in offering EEE, available for domestic and foreign students as it is the starting point to internationalise the institution. The benefits of EEE at universities secure the institution to become more competitive, prepare students for a global world and, on the other hand, the institution can host more international students, and thus increase the credibility of the university. The question is how any university can set up the effective EEE to become a more prestigious institution.

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It has already been mentioned that ESP teachers at HEIs are usually English teachers with university diplomas covering the content from specific disciplines in their classes in the English language but, on the other hand, they usually do not have a sufficient degree of knowledge in any subject that are taught by disciplinary teachers (Hurajová, 2021). On the contrary, disciplinary teachers at universities are experts in the field they teach, some of them have a good command of English, but only a few are aware of the English didactics or even the principles of the CLIL approach. To enhance the process of internationalisation in HEIs, the teachers are pressed to start providing their disciplines in English. The reason why ESP teachers are not able to cover these requirements has been described above. Furthermore, disciplinary teachers have also some obstacles to set an effective EEE without overburdening themselves and their students, too. Moreover, most students declare their natural fear of English and are more diligent to study the courses partially taught in English, even during the ESP classes. Therefore, it is believed, that such a process as implementing the CLIL approach, should be done stepwise and considerably. English can be implemented just in certain parts of lectures, seminars, labs, e-learning forms to allow the students and the teachers to improve and develop their English language skills.

The project partners have decided to pilot the CLIL approach into the education in HEIs. The CLIL application into disciplinary courses requires close cooperation with disciplinary teachers in HEIs, as ESP/CLIL experts cannot cover professional fields so deep as disciplinary teachers can. However, the disciplinary teachers can get lost without any didactical and linguistic assistance of ESP/CLIL experts in delivering an English education environment effectively. Using the CLIL approach means having essential knowledge of how to implement its main dual principle – teaching and developing the content and language at the same time. It seems that disciplinary teachers and ESP/CLIL experts are entirely dependent on close cooperation. The outcomes of the pilot project of implementing the CLIL approach in the education in HEIs (particularly at the Faculty of Materials Science and Technology in Trnava – the coordinating partner) are described below.

2 Research Aims and Methods

In the academic year, 2018/2019 the Faculty of Materials Science and Technology in Trnava (STU MTF) offered 45 study programmes in English on all degrees. Over 1,800 studies at the Faculty as it was reported in the Annual Report STU MTF (2019). However, their interest in English taught programmes was low. Moreover, there is also the lack of both inward and outward mobility students. Annually, about a bit more than 10 from each group. The incoming students are taught more or less individually in English by the disciplinary teachers of the courses they selected to study during their mobility stay at the Faculty. Slovak is the mother tongue for most of the teachers and students, although a certain percentage of teachers and students are of Hungarian nationality with their Hungarian mother tongue. The official education language for all is Slovak.

After several mini-surveys, institutional projects on students' and teachers readiness to set an EEE and after participating in international projects, the ESP teachers working at the Faculty initiated a project aimed at supporting the internationalisation of education. CLIL-HET Visegrad+ Project (2019-2021) focused on grouping ESP/CLIL specialists intending to develop

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a professional platform to share good practice, experience, and the latest research findings leading to enhancing the internationalisation process in HEIs in the V4 and Western Balkan region represented by Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Serbia and Albania. Besides developing a platform and building an online professional community the research objectives were included in the project: to study CLIL approach potential at setting EEE in HEIs, to assess the level of English of disciplinary teachers and their readiness/willingness to build EEE within their courses, and to compare the data gained from the project member countries. The research project part presented is the qualitative research in which three methods were employed to collect data: a questionnaire, an interview and an observation. Diverse perspectives can be applied to process the obtained data. This paper introduces the findings from the Slovak project partner related to the ESP teachers and their role/s in the process of internationalisation of HE.

2.1 Participants

Disciplinary teachers (DTs) teaching at the Faculty (STU MTF) were addressed to participate in the project research part. 22 DTs responded to the questionnaire. Two other DTs who were members of the CLIL-HET project were interviewed and their performances within the seminars taught in English were observed to assess their competence to apply CLIL and their English skills deployed. The DTs, both of them being associate professors, one with expertise in Materials Engineering and the other one in Production Technologies.

2.2 Questionnaire

The web-based questionnaire used in the research project part consisted of seven questions. The first question divided the respondents into two groups: DTs with some experience in teaching their disciplinary subjects in English (different form: seminars, lectures, labs, etc.); DTs with no experience in setting an EEE. The questions answered by the respondents are listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Questionnaire questions

N.	Question
1	Have you ever taught (fully or partially) any of your disciplinary subjects in English? What form?
2	What is/was the most difficult part when you teach/taught in English?
3	Could English teachers (ESP teachers) somehow support you to set up EEE? (English Education Environment)
4	Are you willing to teach/to continue teaching in English again?
5	Have you ever heard of or applied the CLIL approach in EEE?
6	Are you willing to teach any of your subjects or just specific parts of them in English?
7	What do you think would be the most difficult part for you, if you taught in English?

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The DTs with some experience in setting an EEE in their classes answered questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and those with no experience the questions 1, 3, 4, 6 and 7. For this paper, the data gained from questions 2 and 7 were processed. To answer the questions, some items were provided for respondents who could evaluate each of them from 1 to 5. The value 5 represents the highest level of difficulty perceived by respondents. The items are listed and valued in Table 2 in the 3.1 section of the paper.

2.3 Interview

The interview was conducted by an ESP teacher involved in the project CLIL-HET. The DTs – the project members were asked four open questions stated below. Most of the questions were oriented on the CLIL approach which the DTs applied to their content subjects. Both chose a seminar form for CLIL lessons.

Interview questions:

1. Is CLIL a suitable way to foster the internationalisation of education at our faculty? Justify your claim.
2. Provide your opinion on how to most effectively prepare CLIL materials for lessons taught in English.
3. How should ESP and Disciplinary teachers cooperate?
4. What do you think is needed to activate students for subjects taught in English?

The answers to question 3 were processed for this paper to get a complex picture of the role/-s of the ESP teachers in setting an EEE in HEIs to enhance the internationalisation process.

2.4 Observations

Observations were conducted by ESP/CLIL experts involved in the CLIL-HET Project aiming at evaluating the DTs' competence to apply CLIL into setting an EEE in their lessons and at the same time to investigate their English skills employment while teaching in English. For this purpose, an Observation Sheet was developed. It consisted of the following sections: *descriptive one* to get basic data such as who teaches, when, what topic was selected for the CLIL lesson and which form; *assessing section* for evaluating the main aim of the lesson, content and language aims set for the lesson, sources used within the lesson, students' difficulties during the lesson, DT's didactic difficulties and language weaknesses. Observations were done in an online environment due to the COVID pandemic. The DTs were fully assisted before delivering CLIL lessons with students and trained to understand the essentials of CLIL, lesson planning and apply basic English didactics.

3 Results and discussion

We studied the data collected using the three above-mentioned methods from the point of view of the ESP teachers and their role in the process of internationalisation of higher education. Nevertheless, the findings are not a summary conclusion or results, as the research was designed

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qualitatively. However, they indicate the domains in which ESP / CLIL teachers should be employed in higher education. Mirhosseini (2020) emphasised the importance of the data collection “qualitative data is gathered through participation in real-life contexts of concern and recording events along with experiencing them“. The data we gained from the observations are lessons recordings so they can be used for further analysis in the future.

3.1 Partial Questionnaire results

The items evaluated by DTs in questions 2 or 7 within the questionnaire showed their perception of each item difficulty. They could use the scope from 1 to 5 representing the value from the least to the most difficult. Eight DTs declared some experience with teaching in English, the other 14 DTs participating in the questionnaire had no experience with the English Education Environment. The average item values are listed in Table 2 below. The DTs with teaching in English perceived *Grammar*, *Fluent Speaking* and *Coping with students' insufficient English skills* the most difficult. The DTs with no experience with teaching in English provide very similar evaluations of the items. They marked *Fluent Speaking*, *Grammar* and *Interaction with students in English* as the most difficult, however, their answers were more about their fears than about the reality as they had no experience with English Education Environment. The results indicated that DTs in an active EEE (English Education Environment) would command a better level of a productive language skill – Speaking and they would need to develop their linguistic competence represented by grammar. They felt also their insufficiency in interacting in English as well.

Table 2: Processed data from the answers to the questionnaire questions 2 and 7

Item / Question	Question 2 (8 respondents)	Question 7 (14respondets)
Grammar	3.625	3.642
Specific register	3.125	2.857
Pronunciation	2.625	3.357
Fluent Speaking	3.375	4.000
Interaction with students in English	3.000	3.357
Materials preparation	3.000	2.500
Coping with students' insufficient English skills	3.25	3.142

The DTs involved in the project CLIL-HET as full members supported the findings presented in Table 2. Both of them are experienced in using English in education, international projects, conference presenting, etc. Nevertheless, *Grammar*, *Pronunciation* and *Fluent Speaking* are still challenges for them.

3.2 Partial Interview results

Mainly answers to question 3 (How should ESP and Disciplinary teachers cooperate?) in the interview were selected to elicit the DTs' perception of ESP teachers role/-s in enhancing

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the internationalization process, specifically their role in setting EEE at our Faculty using CLIL. Their opinions are summarised below. ESP teachers should:

- assist with setting main goals of CLIL lessons (content and language ones),
- provide proofreading/review of study materials prepared by DTs,
- develop students' level of English in ESP classes,
- co-work on content study materials and then use them in ESP classes,
- support DTs didactically and linguistically.

3.3 Specific Observation results

Observations conducted within the CLIL-HET project focused on two domains – didactic and linguistic. The ESP/CLIL teachers recorded their findings into observation sheets. The CLIL lessons in which observations were applied, were recorded. The recorded data can be analysed from various perspectives also in the future. Some findings for both linguistic and didactic domains are summarised in the following Table 3. The items listed in the Table represent the DTs' weaknesses that should be developed to foster their professionalism in the EEE. The DTs delivered CLIL lessons that required more support in the didactic domain than in the linguistic one. Their level of English was sufficient for setting the EEE. They could speak fluently and they managed to interact with students even in the cases the students were not active. They were confident with specific registers in their disciplines, however, their language confidence might be developed by improving the pronunciation and English syntax.

Table 3: DTs' weakness in linguistic and didactic domains

Linguistic domain	English syntax - Pronunciation
Didactic domain	Applying the dual principle of CLIL – Lesson Planning – Education Material Designing

3.4 Discussion

Combining the data obtained within the research part of the project CLIL-HET, we get a picture of what the role of English teachers is in fostering the internationalisation process in higher education. To set up the effective EEE at non-philological universities with the prevalence of non-native English speakers requires both the linguistic readiness of students and DTs. Additionally, DTs should be aware of English Didactic and in case applying the CLIL approach they should be trained in this method. The findings suggest that the English teachers are requested to be active supervisors, facilitators of students' and DTs' language competence to eliminate their natural fears of setting the EEE. Close cooperation between ESP – DTs might enhance the building of the effective EEE, in other words accelerate IoH (Internationalisation of Home). This can lead to a stronger international education environment.

Moreover, the ESP teachers should constantly improve their own language competence as most of them are non-natives. Valmori & Costa (2016) attract our attention to FL (foreign language) teachers anxiety and inferiority complexes triggered by their goal to attain a native-

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speaker level of English. In their study FL teachers declared a lack of community and network of colleagues to master their language competence.

The DTs regardless of with or without experience in teaching in English perceived their weakness in speaking fluent English. However, similar perceptions can be expressed also by FL teachers as in the study (Kuznetsova et al, 2015) in which FL teachers marked the communicative abilities as the least mastered group of their professional abilities.

4 Conclusion

The objects of this research study were mainly the Disciplinary Teachers and their perception of their competencies in setting up the EEE in higher education. The methods selected for collecting the research data were designed by the ESP teachers – members of the international CLIL-HET Project to elicit what the role of the English teachers in the internationalisation process of higher education is. Hurajova et al (2021) indicate that the interdisciplinary cooperation might lead teachers in HEIs to be a part of a common teaching crew if they want to build an active international environment. Teachers in HEIs are experts in diverse disciplines and they should share their expertise to mutually develop themselves.

The findings within the CLIL-HET Project in Slovakia indicate that students and also teachers are willing to establish the English Education Environment (EEE), however, partial teaching in English is preferred by the students. Some areas have been identified that are perceived as the most difficult for the teachers in the EEE – grammar, fluent, and coping with students' not sufficient level of English. CLIL as a potential approach for accelerating the EEE seems to be an efficient tool also in higher education. Not to overload, the Disciplinary Teachers' close cooperation with ESP/CLIL experts is essential primarily in the preparation of CLIL lesson materials, CLIL lesson plans, and scaffolds preparation for CLIL lessons. To eliminate the natural fear of English, to ensure a sufficient level of English, and also language confidence (students' and teachers' ones), a continuous English training programme should be developed for both students and teachers. To master the English competence, the English teachers in higher education should initiate intensive international collaboration specifically with experts in language education.

Considering all findings we think, that the main role of the English teachers in higher education is building, developing, and keeping professional networks/communities to foster interdisciplinary and crossborder cooperation to enhance the internationalisation process at non-philological universities.

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