

Interactive teaching in an international preparatory language program; promoting some of the 21st century skills

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Abstract

As the globalization has intensified, the future of engineering education may require its students to enhance the 21st century skills such as critical thinking, collaboration and communication skills (Riemer 2007, Gradin and Hirleman, 2009). In harmony with this, preparatory language programs for engineering studies must adopt educational methods that help students to cultivate such key skills. Norwegian Language and Society for Foreign Students (NLSFS) at University of Tromsø (UiT) is a one-year international Norwegian language program qualifying for admission to engineering studies at UiT. The program's curriculum is designed to enhance the above-mentioned skills of the students as well as to promote their satisfactory language ability. The curriculum consists of interdisciplinary components, Norwegian language, society and politics and culture and literature, and it adopts interactive learning activities including collaboration learning, formative peer assessment and project-based learning. The literature shows that these learning activities promote learners' autonomy, critical thinking and collaboration skills (Pettersen, 2005, Lynch et al, 2012, Carnell, 2016). Based on student questionnaires, this study evaluates the impact of the teaching methods adopted in NLSFS on the students' enhancement of the above-mentioned skills. The results of the surveys indicate that students have gained experience in collaboration, and they have developed critical thinking and communication skills. The results also show that the students' perception of the program's educational methods is very positive and suggest that the methods may promote the students' engagement in their learning, which in turn contributes to the enhancement of the skills in question and their Norwegian proficiency.

Keywords: curriculum design, Norwegian language, preparatory language program for engineering studies, second language teaching and learning, student-active learning