

ACA 20th Anniversary Conference

Internationalisation and international mobility: Where do we stand, where are we heading? (The Hague, NL, 9-11.6.2013)

Plenary session II: Internationalisation at home

Karen M. Lauridsen: Teaching and learning in English: how to make it work

Good morning, everyone. Allow me to first of all thank ACA and Bernd Wächter for inviting me to contribute to this anniversary conference; it is an honour to be here.

I should also like to take this opportunity to congratulate ACA – and everyone involved in ACA – for what you have been able to achieve in the past 20 years. This conference clearly demonstrates that ACA has come of age and is an important player in the internationalisation of higher education in Europe.

I have been asked to talk about English Medium Instruction and how to make it work. Twenty years ago, I would have considered this an easy question to answer. Now – I am not so sure. Or rather, I think I am not the only one who has come to realise that there is in fact a rather complex answer to what looks like a simple question.

Twenty years ago, those of us who are old enough to go back that far, developed programmes or at least modules of programmes in English in order to ensure reciprocity in student mobility. Especially in the small European countries – with the less widely used and taught languages – we could not attract a sufficient number of exchange students unless we offered modules in a major language, and for many of us that meant English or – as we would say today – English Medium Instruction.

However, while I have been asked to talk about English Medium Instruction – or EMI – most of what I will be saying actually addresses the question of how we make it work when we are teaching and learning through the medium of a language that is not everyone's first language – not necessarily that of the lecturer, and certainly not that of all students. This might be English on the European Continent AND in Britain and Ireland, and it may be German in Germany, or Spanish in Spain, etc. Even British or Irish teachers in Britain and Ireland are confronted with these challenges in EMI because they also have to accommodate students with very diverse backgrounds in their classrooms.

The fact of the matter is that the students – and lecturers – have very diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, which is why we may talk about the multilingual and multicultural learning space. I will come back to that in a moment.

Now, for the rest of my talk, I will take it for granted that EMI is supposed to be synonymous with international, so an EMI programme is supposed to be a truly international programme, not a mere translation of a programme that has – or could have – been run in another language.

Bearing that in mind, we might also say that in the past twenty years, the internationalisation of higher education in Europe has come of age: It is much more than student mobility. Today, we would consider mobility a means to an end, but not internationalisation in itself. Now, instead, we make the distinction between internationalisation at home and internationalisation abroad, and we have a much stronger focus on the quality of internationalisation.

Before I move on, let me therefore just remind you of two seminal definitions widely recognised in recent literature on the internationalisation of higher education.

Knight (2008; 2012) defines internationalisation as

[...] the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of higher education at the institutional and national levels. (Knight 2008:21; 2012).

And when discussing Internationalisation at Home / Internationalisation of the curriculum, Leask (2009) says that

Internationalisation of the Curriculum is the incorporation of an intercultural and international dimension into the content of the curriculum as well as the teaching and learning processes and support services of a programme of study. An internationalised curriculum will engage students with internationally informed research and cultural and linguistic diversity. It will purposefully develop their international and intercultural perspectives as global professionals and citizens. (Leask 2009:209).

I will consider this definition my measuring stick for international or EMI programmes in the following.

Please note that, on purpose, these definitions do not mention international or home students, but talk about students in generic terms – meaning all students.

In other words, I am talking about the WHY, the WHAT and the HOW of what goes on in what I have termed the multilingual and multicultural learning space of the international university. And this – very often – happens to take place with English as the medium of instruction – or the *lingua franca / lingua academica*.

However, English Medium Instruction is not only a question of language and language proficiency. We have come to realise that it is in fact a mixture of linguistic, cultural and educational issues that we need to address in order to make the international classroom – or the multilingual and multicultural learning space – work. Let's look at some examples of these issues in turn:

Linguistic issues

It goes without saying that students – and lecturers – must have the necessary language skills. To this end, we tend to test the international students in order to make sure that they have a sufficient level of language proficiency. However, more often than not, we do not test the language proficiency of the home students, but take their proficiency for granted. The same applies to the lecturers. We assume that they are capable of teaching through the medium of a language other than their own first language. But we do not know.

A few universities have started to ascertain this by means of different forms of tests. But there is certainly still room for improvement. Faculty is hired based on research merits, and maybe a teaching portfolio. However, most universities still shy away from requiring documentation of their linguistic and intercultural communication skills and competences.

Please note that this is not only a question of sufficiently high scores in an IELTS, TOEFL or any other language test. In IntlUni, an Erasmus Academic Network that I have the pleasure of coordinating, the results of a survey among partner institutions across Europe show that while students meet the linguistic entrance requirements, only some of them are in fact sufficiently prepared for operating in a learning space where the medium of instruction is not their own first language, a situation that results in language and communication barriers – or even breakdown.

Moreover, though used as such, the internationally recognised tests are not necessarily appropriate gatekeeping tools, and we may need to consider how these may be improved in future, or whether there are other more appropriate ways of testing students' aptitude for operating in the multilingual and multicultural learning space.

The success and the quality of EMI programmes very much hinges on the lecturers' and the students' awareness of what it takes to learn through the medium of a language other than one's own first language. There is a heavier cognitive load, which tends to slow down the students' reading and their processing of new information. It also tends to slow down lecturers when they prepare for class.

This state of affairs has a range of negative implications:

While international students have already accepted additional challenges by transgressing geographical, cultural and linguistic borders and choosing to study abroad, home students are often in a different situation. In many cases, especially in the northern part of Europe, they can only complete their programme if they complete it – or at least part of it – in English. If there is not a parallel programme in their own first language, they often feel that they have been forced into an EMI programme and blame their international peers for just about anything – *It takes longer to do this in English, I could have performed better and got better grades in my own language, etc.*

Add to this issues related to students' academic literacy and academic writing skills – or lack thereof, and we have a pile of crucial linguistic and communicative issues to deal with.

Just like the students, home lecturers also blame the international students for the situation in which they find themselves. After having been successful teachers of their disciplines in their own language for years, they may find that they are not quite so successful and spend more time preparing themselves when – all of a sudden – they have to teach the same disciplines in English.

Cultural and educational issues

In addition to the linguistic issues, there is the WHAT and the HOW. Let me just dwell for a moment on the HOW. The teaching and learning processes in the multilingual and multicultural learning space are a challenge for lecturers and students who come from a different educational background and are not familiar with the academic and disciplinary cultures of the HEI in question. This applies, for instance, to modes of delivery and modes of cooperation among students: In the northern part of Europe, for instance, more often than not, students are expected to work with their peers and independent of their lecturers; moreover, they are encouraged to challenge what the lecturer says. This is completely unknown to students used to other academic cultures. And, likewise, students from northern Europe find it difficult to adapt to an academic culture not familiar to them when they go abroad.

What I have just said, is all closely linked to the roles of lecturers and students. These roles have very different characteristics in different academic cultures. The flat hierarchical culture in my own country, for instance, where students address the professors by their first names, are difficult to grasp for students from other ethnic or academic cultures, and they very often misinterpret the informality as something completely different from how it is interpreted in the local culture.

Finally, let me just mention the ubiquitous question of how we make students work together on assignments and in project groups, etc. in a meaningful way.

I have now given you examples of some of the linguistic, educational and cultural issues that we have come to realise are closely connected to teaching and learning in the multilingual and multicultural learning space of the international university. Much of this is not new. But we need to bring it together in an effort to systematise and make sense of what we keep observing, and then subsequently find solutions to the issues we encounter.

As I have already mentioned, in the IntlUni Academic Network we are currently working on identifying these challenges based on literature in the field, on our own focus group interviews in partner institutions and other relevant sources. In the next phase of our three-year project, we will seek to identify examples of successful practice and use these examples to define quality criteria for teaching and learning in the multilingual and multicultural learning space. You may want to follow our work on this website.

There are already concrete solutions to some of the problems identified; however, there are also issues to which we need to find good or better solutions. Right now, I would like to make some fundamental observations:

On several occasions in recent years, Hans de Wit (e.g. 2012) has talked about nine misconceptions in international education that some of you may already be familiar with. Some of these misconceptions are also covered by what I have just said. EMI, mobility, study abroad opportunities, and partner agreements – just to mention some of de Wit’s points – should not be considered internationalisation *per se*. They are means to an end, and should be considered instruments that may lead to internationalisation in the sense defined by Knight. They are not the end goal in themselves.

However, university management tends to focus on what can be measured – how many EMI programmes, how many double, joint or ERASMUS MUNDUS degrees, how many international faculty and students, how many partnership agreements, how much international research funding, and how many visiting scholars, etc.

A couple of months ago, the EUA published its 2013 membership consultation – *Internationalisation in European Higher Education: European policies, institutional strategies and EUA support*. This report shows that creating an international environment for our students / “internationalisation at home” is only a first priority for six per cent of respondents in the survey, and number six of nine first priorities.

And when the top three priorities are combined, internationalisation at home is the 8th of eleven top three priorities in the EUA survey (EUA 2013; p.10f). To me, these are very revealing figures. In very general terms, university management tends to focus on factors that can be measured to demonstrate success, and the softer factors of what goes on in the students’ learning space does not attract the attention of the university hierarchy to the same extent.

In addition to that, the academic staff on the shop floor – in the lecture halls and classrooms –often feel that they have been left alone with the problems that have appeared as a result of strategic decisions at management level without academic staff having any influence on these decisions themselves. More often than not, these problems are rooted in the growing diversity of student audiences, and the fact that lecturers have to teach and facilitate learning in a language that is not necessarily their own first language and in an academic culture they do not easily recognise.

So how can we make it work?

Coming back to the EUA Survey, it goes without saying that the top of the university hierarchy needs to revisit the reasons why they are promoting higher numbers of international programmes, faculty and students. Is it as a means to achieve high quality in the internationalisation of their education and research because they want to see their graduates grow into competent global professionals and citizens, or are there perhaps other motives behind their goals of higher numbers?

If university leaders really want to develop international campuses functioning as global contact zones for all students and all faculty, they need to set aside resources (human and otherwise) to develop truly international curricula, and empower academic staff to facilitate student learning in the multilingual and multicultural learning space of the global contact zone.

It is often mentioned that especially local academic staff are reluctant to involve themselves in EMI or international programmes. I have already mentioned some of the reasons. Academic staff do not automatically know what to do, and that makes them uncomfortable. Instead, they need to be empowered to deal with the WHATs and the HOWs. This might be in in-service training, in joint development projects or via other measures. But they must have the opportunity to develop the knowledge, skills and competences necessary to teach in the multilingual and multicultural learning space.

And there are some promising developments to be observed, some of them actually stemming from this country:

- NVAO, the Dutch / Flemish accreditation agency has developed *Frameworks for the Assessment of Internationalisation*. While the assessment criteria are very general, it could lead to promising developments that there are in fact reference points that define the quality of internationalisation in higher education.

- ECA – a European consortium for accreditation – is developing a *Certificate for Quality in Internationalisation* based on the NVAO criteria.
- There is a growing body of research – and a growing quality in relevant research into this field.
- And based on this, there are development projects devoted to the quality of internationalisation:
 - For instance, some HEIs are developing *International Classroom* projects, some of them again using the NVAO quality criteria as their point of departure in university-internal development projects.
 - The overarching aim of the IntlUni Academic Network is to identify quality criteria that should characterise teaching and learning in the Multilingual and Multicultural Learning Space (MMLS); and to develop recommendations for how HEIs may implement and ensure the sustainability of quality teaching and learning in the MMLS.

These examples are obviously just a sample of what is happening already. One way or another, these initiatives address the essential WHY, WHAT and HOW questions.

But please remember: There is no quick fix. It is internationalisation 2.0 of the European Higher Education Area. It will take time, it is not easy; but it can be done!

Thank you for your attention!

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