

The impact of language on teaching content: views from the content teacher

Survey studies (e.g. Tella, Räsänen, & Vähäpassi, 1999; Hellekjaer & Westergaard, 2001) suggest that the effectiveness of English-medium content teaching is influenced by language problems, in that the language seems to constrain teaching and instructional methods. In contrast, both staff and students often rate English-medium content teaching as 'good' or 'very good' (Hellekjaer & Westergaard, 2002). Hence, there is an apparent contradiction between the linguistic deficiencies of programmes and their overall rating.

This paper reports findings from a qualitative survey of 29 highly experienced content teachers from 3 Dutch universities (across 11 disciplines) in how language affected the teaching of content in English-medium programmes. None of the respondents was a native speaker of English. Results show that adaptations to programmes due to language are constantly necessary and that more time is required both for staff and students, compared to teaching in the mother tongue. Content teachers make changes to instructional methods, allowing in some cases code-switching. However, they view English-medium education as helping to develop 'global citizens'. In conclusion, the findings are broadly in line with earlier results from a study of content teachers in three disciplines by Vinke (1995).

Hellekjaer, G.O. & Westergaard, M.R. (2002). An exploratory survey of content learning through English at Scandinavian universities. In: Simensen, A.M. (ed.). *Acta Didactica* 3. Oslo: Unipub. 47-61.

Tella, S., Räsänen, A., & Vähäpassi, A., (eds.). (1999). *Teaching through a Foreign Language-From Tool to Empowering Mediator*. Helsinki: Publications of Higher Education Evaluation Council 5.

Vinke, A.A. (1995). *English as the medium of instruction in Dutch engineering education*. Diss. Delft: Delft University of Technology.