

Teaching through English: A Challenge for the Non-Native Instructor

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Teaching Through English (TTE) at the University of Helsinki has increased steadily since the mid 1990s. We shall explore the rationale behind this development. Focusing on non-native instructors we aim to show how we have helped them confront the challenges arising in TTE situations.

With Finland's entry into the EU, the university began to emphasize internationalization and globalization, which led to an increase in the volume of exchange programmes for students. To enable Finnish students to go abroad, foreign students had to be enticed to come to Finland: hence an increase in TTE courses. We are not taking a political stand on this development; our involvement is merely a reaction to an existing reality.

To chart the effects of this development, we carried out an extensive needs analysis throughout the university to determine the perceived needs of the students and the instructors in TTE situations. Following the publishing of our results in 1999 (*English or not English: that is the question: Teaching Through English at the University of Helsinki*, by Tuula Lehtonen, Pearl Lönnfors and Anu Virkkunen-Fullenwider), we became involved in several hands-on projects. We were invited to observe and evaluate a 36-ECTS-programme TTE that had been in existence for 8 years. This in turn led to the development of support for students and teachers as a follow-up. We went on to create student support in still another TTE programme. Through these projects we gathered information about the instructors' needs, resulting in the creation of in-service courses for TTE instructors.

Throughout this process, clear trends appeared regarding the instructors' perceived needs for support. Some of the most challenging areas were:

- Speech production: pronunciation, intonation and fluency
- Discussion skills: how to handle heterogeneous groups
- Cultural awareness: what instructors should know about their students and how to make their students aware of essential differences
- Presentation skills: how teaching may differ with English as the communication medium
- Preparing for lectures and seminars: what should be considered in a TTE environment
- Writing: challenges arising for instructors and students related to the evaluation of content versus language and the need for guidelines
- Subject-specific terminology

To approach these challenges, an overview of differences and similarities between "regular" teaching and TTE is a useful tool. The following table has been useful to us in determining how we can support TTE instructors to face these challenges.

**Handout 1:
Differences and Similarities between "Regular" Teaching and TTE**

"Regular" teaching	Teaching through English
Relatively homogeneous groups	Usually more heterogeneous
Instructor and students from the same culture – instructor/student roles clear	Instructor and students often from different cultures – instructor/student roles?
Instructor and students familiar with university practices, e.g. exams, evaluation, task setting	New setting – based on cultural differences
Instructor and students usually native-speakers of the same language	Instructor and students have different native languages
	<p><i>Instructor's language-related challenges:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate level for student comprehension • Appropriate accent for student comprehension • Writing in a foreign language • Comprehending student talk • Comprehending students' written language and evaluating writing tasks • Use of appropriate registers, e.g. small talk, lecturing
	<p><i>Students' language-related challenges:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate level for student and instructor comprehension • Public speaking – often for the first time, unsupported • Appropriate accent for student and instructor comprehension • Writing in a foreign language – often for the first time, unsupported • Comprehending instructor and student talk • Comprehending instructor's and students' written language • Use of appropriate registers, e.g. small talk, lecturing
Instructor expert in subject matter	Instructor expert in subject matter
Student expertise in subject matter and eagerness to learn	Student expertise in subject matter and eagerness to learn, perhaps on a different level?

Using this Table as a guideline, we have experimented with a variety of courses for TTE instructors. As can be seen in the attached tasks, the focus has been on activities which are directly related to the instructors' classroom needs. We can share with you several of the course outcomes, for example:

- Through the peer and course co-ordinator feedback of the activating task, the participants had the opportunity to develop their own skills in giving student feedback and evaluation.
- This was also the case when they had to analyze their own performance in writing.
- Innovative teaching ideas were shared.
- Pronunciation of core vocabulary could be improved.
- The course provided the possibility of meeting colleagues from different disciplines.
- As we work in a team of 2 or 3 teachers, experiencing this teamwork was seen as a positive fringe benefit.

Handout 2

PRE-COURSE PREPARATION

Task 1

Presentation: Think about what makes a good presentation or lesson. Consider both the role of the presenter/teacher/coordinator and of the class participants/audience.

Task 2

Activating the class

One of the goals of this course is to develop presentation and discussion skills. We would like you to create a 15-minute class activity which would involve everyone on the course. Feel free to choose the topic and format of your activity. You might want to plan an activity that you can actually use later on.

<p>We would like you to bring an outline of your planned activity to our first meeting on Monday, August 15.</p>

Please consider:

- what instructions or input the group participants need to successfully complete the activity,
- what handouts are necessary,
- whether you want the group to be divided into opposing teams,
- whether you want to divide the group into subgroups who basically have the same task,
- whether you want the group(s) to discuss freely, or
- whether you want the group(s) to discuss with the help of some prepared questions or demonstrations.

If necessary, prepare a vocabulary list. This should contain all words you think the class might need to know to make your presentation more communicative. If you would like anything language checked before your presentation (e.g. handouts or OH transparencies) please contact a course instructor.

The presentations will be videoed and you will have the opportunity to get immediate feedback from your coursemates and teacher. In addition, you will be asked to view your performance at home and write a written evaluation. You'll get more detailed instructions later.

