

## **CERTIFICATION MODELS FOR THE ACADEMIC STAFF IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY**

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Internationalization of higher education requires both new skills to develop for the academic staff and new ways to certify professors in English language proficiency. The paper describes different approaches to certify the academia. The author highlights the benefits and drawbacks of the approaches and offers a blended one for the academic staff of South Ural State University.

Keywords: internationalization, EMI (English Medium Instruction), IELTS (International English Language Testing System), TOEPAS (Test of Oral English Proficiency for the Academic Staff).

The internationalization of higher education aims to raise the quality of the education process, to enhance the academic mobility of the faculty, to foster interest to Russian higher education in foreign students, graduates, postgraduates, and renowned researchers [1, 2, 3]. One of the competitive advantages of Rus-

sian university in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the level of English language proficiency of the academic staff. However, the level of English language proficiency of the South Ural State University (SUSU) academic staff is insufficient, which is the main obstacle of educational program implementation for international students at the Master's and Doctoral levels [4, 5].

Searching for the solution of the problem the SUSU administration initiated a module, multi-level programme of additional linguistic training «Lingva» within the 5-100 Initiative projects where the academia are offered to increase the level of proficiency in English and to prepare for international certification. Moreover, the SUSU Project Office of the 5-100 Initiative has introduced the certificate in English proficiency as one of the indicators of department performance. Therefore, one of the KPIs for SUSU departments is the number of employees who have confirmed their level of proficiency in English (B2+ and above) according to CEFR (Common European Framework Reference).

Hence, the university is on the way of creating conditions to improve the English language proficiency. Currently three approaches to the academic staff certification are under study: International English Language Testing System (IELTS), English-medium Instruction (EMI), Test of Oral English Proficiency of Academic Staff (TOEPAS).

### **IELTS**

Preparation for passing IELTS is a new direction for the university. Currently the results of IELTS exam are used to evaluate the proficiency in English for both students and the academic staff. Thus, the training courses to prepare for IELTS are offered for both categories.

IELTS exam enables to determine the level and skills of English language for people whose mother tongue is not English. This evaluation system was developed by three examination chambers: Cambridge English, British Council and IELTS Australia. There are three versions of the test: Academic IELTS, General IELTS and Survival IELTS. At SUSU the students and staff are prepared for the Academic version of the exam as it allows developing the abilities of the foreign-language speech necessary for study at university (understanding of lectures, participation in seminars, critical reading skills) where the instruction is in English.

The results of the test (Overall Score Band) are valid for two years from the date of receipt. The standard 9-point scale for assessing English language skills in the IELTS system is as follows:

9.0 Expert user – fluent in the language, demonstrates absolute understanding in any situation;

8.0 Very good user – fully fluent in the language, except for some inaccuracies, in certain uncharacteristic situations may show a lack of understanding, and is able to argue in detail his position;

7.0 Good user – speaks the language well, despite some inaccuracies and misunderstandings. In general, he demonstrates a good knowledge of the language and a clear detailed understanding;

6.0 Competent user – basically speaks the language well, despite possible inaccuracies, inconsistencies and misunderstandings.

The first group of the academic staff began preparing for the IELTS exam in January 2016 under the guidance of Tony Brian, a teacher from the United Kingdom. In September 2016, another group of teachers, young scientists, and graduate students was offered the course. The first IELTS exam was held on December 3, 2016. 10 teachers of our university passed the test with high results. They received scores within Bands from 6.0. to 8.0.

Though IELTS test has its advantages (it tests 4 skills: speaking, writing listening, reading; it is standardized) it is not tailored for the needs of the academic staff. Academic IELTS is aimed to test the academic study skills of future-to-be international students checking their abilities of notetaking, understanding lectures, reading huge amount of information for critical evaluation but this test does not assess the oral abilities of a lecturer and the sub-skills he has to master to deliver lectures, seminars in Lingua Franca. The sub-skills to be tested differ dramatically from those IELTS offers to check. They are giving definitions and instructions, presenting evidence, managing interaction, influencing audience, managing subjectivity etc. So, IELTS is a temporary decision for the academic staff evaluation and the administration should look for another valid test in the long-term.

The other approaches introduced into the practice of higher education lately and are under study by leading scientists and practitioners are EMI and TOEPAS.

### **English Medium Instruction**

Two processes, namely, globalization and internationalization, cause the appearance of EMI at universities. As universities are becoming international institutions, EMI in higher education is becoming more common all over the world [6, 7]. Within this internationalization process, universities have become marketable and corporate entities [8, 9].

SUSU has about 1500 international students and it has expanded courses to offer degrees only through the medium of English. There is lack of research about EMI efficiency at Russian universities as EMI is at the initial stage of development, though foreign researchers have studied both the challenges it causes and the factors influencing its efficiency.

Byun et al. [10] conducted research at Korea University and presented findings relevant to EMI in Korean higher education. They concluded that, for the EMI implementation to be a success, three areas need to be addressed:

- 1) the students' and the instructors' language proficiencies;
- 2) the varying demands of different academic subjects;

3) a facilitative body which can support this implementation.

They state that without consideration of the above-mentioned factors, the implementation of EMI can have negative side effects.

The first place in the list is given to the students' and instructors' language proficiencies. There is much evidence that the instructor's language proficiency influences both the academic excellence of students and their attitude to the subject taught [11].

The problem for Russian higher education is that EMI skills are not taught at pedagogical universities and the technical specialists that deliver lectures in English lack these skills, moreover, they do not even realize that there is a number of techniques used to make the content of the lecture more comprehensible for the students to facilitate learning. So, the decision here is to introduce the training course as part of the programme of continuous professional development scheme and find the adequate evaluation procedure to assess the level of proficiency at the end of the course.

Cambridge English Language Assessment Association offers the EMI course for lecturers. It is specifically designed for use by higher education institutions and help improve teaching quality by ensuring faculty are confident working in English. It is aimed to develop teachers' awareness of students' language issues and explore different methodological approaches to instruction in a foreign language.

The content of the EMI course presented in the Table below has been taken from the website of the Association [12]. It covers most of the issues the teachers encounter in the classroom and may serve as a useful tool to equip the teachers with necessary skills and language instruction materials. The only drawback is its price and the university can not afford to train 150 lecturers working at the programmes delivered in English. The option is to train a group of teachers and then disseminate the hands-on experience through seminars and through composing a similar training course for in-house training.

To develop the in-house EMI course is one of the tasks being solved by the teachers working at additional linguistic training programme «Lingva».

Another question arises here is how to assess the results of the course as the tutors are not native speakers and they do not «feel» the language. The answer is a highly formalized procedure developed specifically to evaluate the lecturer's oral proficiency. An assessment procedure that could be used to certify the English language skills of university lecturers teaching at EMI programmes. Currently, the internationally accepted assessment procedure is the test developed by the professors of the University of Copenhagen, called TOEPAS used as a quality management tool that would ensure that the level of English of teaching staff in the EMI programmes would not negatively affect the quality of the teaching.

Table

English Medium Instruction (EMI) Course content

1. Language for lectures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different lecture styles</li> <li>• Introducing a lecture</li> <li>• Signposting and cohesion in lectures</li> <li>• Concluding a lecture.</li> </ul>
2. Language for seminars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structuring seminars</li> <li>• Giving step-by-step guidance</li> <li>• Using questions to guide students</li> <li>• Answering students' questions.</li> </ul>
3. 3. Language for small groups and practical sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explaining procedures</li> <li>• Setting up groups</li> <li>• Monitoring groups and practical sessions</li> <li>• Ending a group discussion or practical session.</li> </ul>
4. Language for tutorials and supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Setting goals and expectations</li> <li>• Advising students on strengths and weaknesses</li> <li>• Problems and solutions</li> <li>• Focusing on the individual student.</li> </ul>
5. Language for online communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online communication skills</li> <li>• Writing emails</li> <li>• Managing group communication</li> <li>• Responding to online communication.</li> </ul>
6. Language for evaluation and feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Giving constructive feedback</li> <li>• Giving targeted feedback</li> <li>• Distinguishing between necessity and suggestion</li> <li>• Organisation of feedback.</li> </ul>
7. Language for developing and extending professional roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparing for academic interviews</li> <li>• Writing a conference proposal</li> <li>• Engaging in peer mentoring</li> <li>• Networking in social situations.</li> </ul>
8. Language for fulfilling professional responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different students' characteristics and needs</li> <li>• Institutional conventions</li> <li>• Institutional differences</li> <li>• Relationships within university settings.</li> </ul>

**TOEPAS**

Language testing for both academic and administrative staff in non-Anglophone countries is presently on the rise. The overall purpose of the test is to certify the lecturers' English language skills by assessing whether they have the necessary skills to cope with the communicative demands of teaching at the EMI programmes. More specifically, the test aims to assess whether the teachers have an adequate level of oral proficiency for lecturing and interacting with graduate students in a university setting. Moreover, when teachers do not have

sufficient English language skills to pass the certification, the test provides some diagnostic information about the kind of language training they need to be able to teach at these programmes [13].

The test results can assist the heads of study boards, heads of departments and deans in determining who can and cannot teach on the EMI programmes. In addition, the test results provide information for the administration about the type of language training or support teachers need to be able to teach on the EMI programmes. The test results also provide the test takers themselves with a tool for getting specific feedback on their speaking skills for teaching in English.

The test takers are primarily associate professors and full professors who are experts in their field of expertise and they have a wide variety of different EFL learning backgrounds.

Much research has been done to develop the test and validate. Nowadays, the TOEPAS procedure includes:

- 1) lecturing to students on the basis of visual aids without a manuscript;
- 2) interacting with students in the classroom about the content;
- 3) answering the questions on the lecture's materials.

During each certification session, three lecturers are assessed. First, the lecturers engage in a brief warming-up discussion about their professional background and interests. Following this discussion, each lecturer delivers a 20 minutes mini-lecture/presentation pertaining to his or her own field of research. The mini-lecture should be planned in advance, and visual aids (e.g. white board, PowerPoint) may be used during the mini-lecture. Following the mini-lecture, the speaker is asked to answer questions from the other participants about the lecture [14].

As part of the certification process, in addition to an overall result on the test, TOEPAS examinees receive extensive oral and written feedback, as well as a digital video copy of their performance. This detailed feedback linked to the video recording provides a solid description of lecturers' oral English competence, which can serve as the basis for further competence development.

In Copenhagen researchers continue to refine the TOEPAS and investigate how to best utilize this linguistic proficiency assessment tool to meet the needs of the universities internationalization process.

TOEPAS suits perfectly to test the professor's skills and abilities to lecture in English as it is developed specifically for this purpose.

### **Conclusion**

The need to certify the lecturers' English language proficiency is objective reality caused by the processes of globalization and the necessity to market education services worldwide as the international students want to follow the best education practices and study conditions.

To ensure the high quality of EMI programmes both the training and highly formalized procedure of certification is needed. Besides, to enter the EMI

course the academic staff should have fluent English to meet the requirements and to comprehend the course content.

So, to meet the international standards of higher education the authors offer to use all three practices in preparing SUSU staff for teaching international students and delivering classes in English. As the entrance level to the EMI course the professors should pass IELTS for 6.5 Band and above which is equal to the Upper-Intermediate/Advanced levels. Then they take the EMI course and follow the mock TOEPAS procedure to get assessed and to receive feedback for further professional development.

Further research is needed to realize the idea and make it true. We need to study the professors' specific needs to make the course tailored; to conduct an attitudinal study to the concept of EMI at SUSU university; to develop the EMI course and evaluate the results.

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