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FOSTERING ENGLISH-TAUGHT HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN A SPANISH UNIVERSITY: THE 'TECHENGLISH' INNOVATIVE PROJECT

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In recent years, coinciding with adjustments to the Bologna process, many universities in non-Anglophone European countries have attempted to improve their international profile by increasing course offerings in English. According to the Institute of International Education (IIE), Spain has notably increased its provision of English-taught higher education programs, ranking fifth in the list of European countries by number of English-taught Master's programs in 2013. This article presents the goals and preliminary results of an on-going innovative education project (TechEnglish) that aims to promote course offerings in English at the Technical University of Madrid (Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, UPM). The UPM is the oldest and largest of all Technical Universities in Spain. It offers graduate and postgraduate programs that cover all the engineering disciplines as well as architecture. Currently, the UPM has no specific bilingual/multilingual program to promote teaching in English, although there is an Educational Model Whitepaper (with a focus on undergraduate degrees) that promotes the development of activities like the International Semester or the unique shared curriculum. The TechEnglish project tries to advance in the implementation of courses taught in English at the UPM by collaborating with 7 UPM Technical Schools, students and 80 faculty members. Four tasks were identified to achieve the project's goals: (1) to design a university wide program to increase course offerings, (2) to identify administrative difficulties, (3) to increase visibility of course offerings, and (4) to disseminate the results of the project. First, to design a program we analyzed existing programs at other Spanish universities, and other projects and efforts already under way at the UPM. A total of 20 plans were analyzed and classified according to their relation with students (learning), professors (teaching), administration, course offerings, other actors/institutions within the university (e.g., language departments), funds and projects, dissemination activities, mobility plans and quality control. Second, to begin to identify administrative and organizational difficulties in the implementation of teaching in English, we first estimated the current and potential course offerings at the undergraduate level at the UPM using a survey (student, teacher and administrative demand, level of English and willingness to work in English). Third, to make the course offerings more attractive for both Spanish and international students we examined the way the most prestigious universities in Spain and in Europe make visible their academic offerings in English. Finally, to disseminate the results of the project we created a web page and a workspace on the Moodle education platform and prepared conferences and workshops within the UPM. Preliminary results show that increasing course offerings in English is an important step to promote the internationalization of the University. The main difficulties identified at the UPM were related to how to acknowledge/credit the departments, teachers or students involved in English courses, how students should register for the courses, how departments should split and schedule the courses (Spanish and English), and the lack of qualified personnel. Particular efforts should be done to increase the visibility of English-taught programs on the Internet.