



BILINGUAL TEACHING IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION: MAIN CHALLENGES AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

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Idioma en el que se va a realizar la defensa: (Marque con una {x})

Español Inglés

Resumen.

La globalización actual requiere el creciente uso del inglés como lengua común en el ámbito económico y empresarial. Así, nace el deseo de internacionalización de la Universidad y de sus estudiantes para mejorar sus expectativas profesionales y personales. En consecuencia, la Facultad de Ciencias de la Empresa de la Universidad Politécnica de Cartagena ha desarrollado un proyecto de enseñanza bilingüe para el Grado en Administración y Dirección de Empresas, dentro del Campus de Excelencia Mare Nostrum.

Este proyecto permite a los estudiantes extranjeros mejorar su conocimiento sobre contenidos de la titulación y del español como segundo idioma, y a los estudiantes españoles avanzar en su conocimiento específico y mejorar su nivel de inglés; generando así profesionales e investigadores con proyección internacional.

Este proyecto de enseñanza bilingüe ha supuesto enfrentarse a una serie de retos que hemos estudiado desde tres perspectivas: institucionales (por ejemplo, la ausencia de reconocimiento del título oficial bilingüe), profesorado (necesidad de formación específica), y alumnado (nivel de inglés exigido y alto compromiso exigido). Igualmente, también ha planteado la necesidad de ofrecer soluciones, que

son analizadas en este trabajo, como la introducción de la metodología CLIL, el apoyo de lingüistas o la elaboración de un manual específico para profesorado y alumnado: “English for Business Administration”.

Palabras Claves.

Proyecto de enseñanza bilingüe, Grado en Administración y Dirección de Empresas, metodología CLIL, manual de apoyo.

Abstract.

Current globalisation requires the increasing use of English as the common language in the economic and business environment. Thus, the desire to internalise the University and its students has appeared to enhance their professional and personal expectations. Consequently, the Facultad de Ciencias de la Empresa at the Universidad Politécnica de Cartagena has developed a bilingual education project for the Degree in Business Administration, within the program of excellence Campus Mare Nostrum.

This project enables foreign students to improve their knowledge about the content of the degree and their Spanish as a second language, and for Spanish students advance their specific knowledge and improve their English skills; generating professionals and researchers with international projection.

This bilingual education project has faced a number of challenges that we have studied from three perspectives: institutional (for example, the absence of recognition of the bilingual official degree), professors (the need of specific training), and students (English level demanded and higher commitment required). Similarly, the project has also required some solutions which have been analysed in this paper, such as the introduction of CLIL methodology, linguists supporting or creating a specific manual for professors and students: “English for Business Administration”.

Keywords.

Bilingual teaching project, Degree in Business Administration, CLIL methodology, supporting material.

1.- The importance of bilingual teaching in the Degree of Business Administration

The current global situation and the society demand from the universities an international education and training, mainly in the business and new technologies subjects. Therefore, the most prestigious universities are doing an effort to attend these needs which have an impact on the employability of their students. In



particular, the high unemployment rates among young people in the south of European Union suppose a new scenario where universities have to offer value-added services and the bilingual teaching is one of the most estimated for the society.

In line with this, since the 2010-2011 academic year, the Facultad de Ciencias de la Empresa of the Universidad Politécnica de Cartagena has been developing a bilingual teaching project.

According to it, the first, second and third year of the Degree in Business Administration are currently delivered about half per cent in English. This means that certain subjects of each year are taught in Spanish, others in English and the rest combining both languages. This bilingual teaching project is a consequence of the internationalisation strategy carried out by the Universidad Politécnica de Cartagena and the Universidad de Murcia within the Campus Mare Nostrum framework. One of the main purposes of the Campus Mare Nostrum is facilitating the mobility of students and professors as a way of developing the teaching and research activities in an International context. For that reason, the Facultad de Ciencias de la Empresa truly believes that the use of English in higher education needs to be reinforced.

In fact bilingual teaching can acquire important benefits for students and researchers. Offering subjects, which are going to be taught in English, involves a great advantage for those incoming students whose knowledge of Spanish is not sufficiently broad and detailed to handle specialised contents. Bilingual teaching enables them to widen their academic level while improving their Spanish language skills through subjects specially aimed to that purpose. For Spanish students, on the other hand, bilingual programs represent an important aid to increase their English ability and to prepare their CVs in order not only to study abroad, but also to seek employment in local and foreign companies. Companies represent the context in which our students are going to develop their professional activity and where the trend towards internationalisation and globalisation is clearly revealed. The interconnectedness of the world economy makes necessary the use of a common language, which enables enterprises to perform international business projects. In this sense, the bilingual Degree in Business Administration is going to provide our students with the legal and economic vocabulary, as well as to the most used grammatical structures in oral and written language required in this international context. As for researchers, being involved in bilingual projects enhances the possibility of communicating with other universities, working together and interchanging ideas.

2.- Main purposes to achieve through the bilingual teaching

Despite all the advantages explained above, the implementation of a bilingual degree involves clearly stating the purposes to achieve through the teaching in a foreign language. English is not, in this context, considered as a subject in itself but a vehicle to transmit specialised information. This is principle that should define the way in which the economic and legal contents of the degree are structured, explained and evaluated.

In the process of planning each subject the CLIL (content and language integrated learning) methodology has been taken into account. Therefore a difference between the purposes of the subject itself and the purposes of the bilingual teaching must be made.

The aims and objectives of the subject itself depend on the autonomy of each professor within his/her area of expertise, but in order to deliver it in English the help of a linguistic professional is required. According to the main methodological guidelines of the CLIL (Coyle et al., 2010; Mehisto et al., 2008; MEC, 2006; Coyle, 2006) and the advices of the linguistic professional who supports the bilingual program in the Faculty, three different planning steps have been identified when designing the English teaching of the different lessons of a subject.

The first step is to identify the knowledge, skills and understanding to be transmitted to the students in each lesson and, therefore, learnt by them.

Once the content has been properly defined it is time to think about the best way of communicating it and this step represents the most challenging one for professors enrolled in bilingual teaching. It is expected to identify the language which is required to obtain a clear conceptual understanding of the content (language of learning), the language which is going to be used by students in order to communicate orally and in writing the acquired knowledge (language for learning) and eventually the new language which will emerge at the end of the process (language through learning). This second step requires choosing the language, which helps to move forward the conceptual understanding of the content rather than to make progress in the grammatical awareness. The purpose goes beyond learning key words, phrases and grammatical questions. It involves analysing the type of discourse and language, which is needed in different content subjects or themes.

The last step in the process of planning the English teaching of each unit deals with the need to integrate cultural issues into the classroom. CLIL methodology offers the opportunity of sharing leaning experiences with students of different cultures and different first languages. For this reason, it is important to explore the possibilities of mutual exchanges of experiences and information among all students within the content of each unit.

The final purpose of planning the English teaching of each subject according to these three steps is to improve the oral and written skills of the students enrolled in the bilingual program. This improvement, nevertheless, involves not only providing them with vocabulary and grammatical structures, but also with the ability to choose the most suitable language to be used in specific business contexts.

3.- Current challenges to overcome

Apart from the expected benefits of implementing a bilingual Degree in Business Administration, there are some challenges these programs face. We divide these



challenges depending on the collective that affect: Faculty, professors and students.

The most important challenges for the **Facultad de Ciencias de la Empresa** are two. In the first place, it is necessary an official recognition of the bilingual Degree in Business Administration (BA) different from the one implemented in Spanish. Currently, although the Faculty is working on this issue, the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain (ANECA) does not recognise the existence of an official bilingual Degree in BA. Therefore, the students will not hold the specific degree, but a mention on the back on their certificate explaining that an amount of subjects have been implemented and passed in English. We consider this is a limitation of its success in the long term.

Secondly, a special assessment of professors and students' English level is required. Some efforts need to be implemented in the Faculty in order to evaluate the foreign language skills for professors and students who participate in the bilingual degree. No official requirements are established in this kind of studies in Spain, but an upper intermediate or advanced level for professors is recommended.

The main challenges facing by **professors** are several. First, the need for specific training and continuous support because taking part in a bilingual degree requires some new skills for professors involved in it. For instance, specific and technical English knowledge on the subject they teach regarding content, scientific vocabulary, producing texts, together with specific awareness of the students difficulties of taking part in a bilingual course and giving them specific support for the foreign language learning. However, the sole motivation of the professors is not enough to make this possible. A financial support from the university is essential.

Secondly, English materials for subjects need to be developed (e.g. translations) or bought for students. The Faculty suggests professors to buy original American or British books for their subjects, instead of using translation of Spanish materials in order to guarantee high quality texts directly developed in English mother tongue. However, this generates the disadvantage that materials for subjects taught in Spanish and subjects taught in English may differ between them (practices, content, articles, etc.).

Regarding subject assessment, again there are several challenges to mention. On the one hand, students need to be assessed in the content area of the subject as if they were in a non-bilingual degree (e.g. professors need to assess their knowledge on law, economics, accounting, human resources, etc.). However, the inclusion of the English language in the subject creates the need for English evaluation and professors in the Faculty have no experience (nor skills) for doing it.

On the other hand, professors have the opportunity to decide to what extent their subjects are going to be taught in English. For instance, whereas some professors decide to teach the whole subject in English, others may choose to teach in Spanish but prepare some practices or readings in English. In case of teaching the subject totally in the foreign language, it seems clear that students will be examined in the English language (100% teaching, 100% of English in the practices and final assessment exam). But, what about the mix or partial teaching? Could students have

the choice of language selection? Should evaluation be in accordance of the percentage implemented in English? (e.g. 20% of the final exam or practices in English).

Together with that, there are not many experiences in the development and implementation of bilingual degrees in Spain. Bilingual teaching in higher education is something new and innovative and no close or previous experiences can be observed nearby.

Finally, the recognition of professors' workload is pending. While some efforts from the University are taking place for recognising the great effort that implies participating in the bilingual degree, professors consider that time and resources needed to participate in it, are still not entirely recognised.

As for the challenges for **students**, we have detected some related to the English level and the higher commitment required. English skills may differ among students and they need specific vocabulary on business subjects. That is why they often find it difficult to follow the lessons. Under these circumstances, this is a disadvantage as students might experience problems to understand the contents and pass their exams. As a consequence of that, being part of a bilingual degree requires a higher commitment from students. Despite all the advantages already commented, they soon take into account that passing the subjects requires greater effort than the counterparts involved in the Spanish degree.

The last challenge to face by students is the possible loss of Spanish technical vocabulary and content understanding. It is necessary to highlight that there is a general fear among academics that subjects implemented completely in English might imply for students a lack of the content acquisition or of Spanish technical vocabulary.

4.- Possible solutions

As we have seen previously, there are different challenges in the introduction of our bilingual studies in business. To address these, the Facultad de Ciencias de la Empresa has developed some solutions.

From the perspective of the **Faculty**, it is working on the formal request of a specific bilingual degree to the ANECA in order to overcome the lack of a specific degree for the students who finish their bilingual studies. The support of other faculties that offer similar studies may be critical.

The Faculty also tries to foster the reception of international undergraduates and the offer of English subjects is a strategy to get it. Foreign students may help to have an international environment where different cultures and ideas are shared. To encourage the implementation of bilingual studies the Faculty provides bilingual students to have preference in the requirement of certain scholarships to complete their studies abroad.



From the perspective of **professors**, the first action is to offer weekly support lessons to the lecturers involved in the bilingual degree (they teach subjects in the Degree of Business Administration). These lessons are developed by linguist teachers specialised in English and their aim is to improve the communicative skills and learning strategies of the professors. Therefore, a forum has been developed where professors of distinct disciplines (Economic Theory, Law, Mathematics, Business Organisation, Accounting...) express their doubts and share their problems in the development of their own lessons (specific vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar structures...) and discuss the most suitable resolutions.

This forum was initiated by the teaching innovation project and is now attended by the current multidisciplinary teaching team that is introducing CLIL practice. Feedback obtained from the students and professors enable some specific support areas to be identified to integrate the subject content and English objectives of each discipline. For this work to proceed successfully a language of learning (that is a specific economic vocabulary) and a language for learning (the necessary grammatical structures to explain ideas and concepts in written and oral form) must be absorbed and used correctly.

Thus, the teaching team has developed supporting materials that facilitate the integration of content and language learning, taking into account the advices of authors such as Dale and Tanner (2012) and Dalton-Puffer et al. (2010). General lines that those materials must follow were established and applied to subjects that are taught throughout the first quarter of the first year of the bilingual degree.

The first volume of our supporting materials was published under the title “English for Business Administration” (Cobacho et al., 2013), in which we have applied the general model of contents to the subjects: Mathematics for Business I, Microeconomics and Business Economy, including an Introduction about Business English as first topic. Each topic is divided into 6 sections:

- Reading comprehension: a specific text along with exercises of finding synonyms and antonyms, matching concepts and their definitions, word families and how to differentiate between British and American spelling are usually included in this section.
- Listening comprehension: includes exercises with gaps (the students have to listen the recording and fill the gaps of a given text) and exercises related to phonetics so that students learn how to pronounce certain specific words of each area.
- Use of English: where the use of certain problematic terms related to the subjects (vocabulary, expressions and grammar structures) are explained to avoid confusion.
- Grammar: although it is a part of the use of English, we decided to include this section as a review of grammatical structures that students should know previously. For that reason, students are asked to search by themselves for the general rules of the following topic, and to state their conclusions before doing the exercises.



- Speaking: certain situations are given to the students in order to enhance their oral communication and fluency in English using the specific vocabulary of each topic.
- Writing: tries to give to the students some tips about how to improve their essays using certain linking words, phrases and specific vocabulary related to the topic studied.

Although this demands a lot of extra work, we think that this effort promotes very advantageous inter-disciplinary work among professors, helps them to organise ideas for their subjects, and enhances general and specific language as well as teaching skills in English.

From the perspective of **students**, different measures have been implemented to overcome the challenges of a bilingual education. First of all, students are required to prove an intermediate level of English (B1 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) in order to ensure proper development of the classes taught in English. It is also a measure to ensure an equal level of linguistic skills among the students to achieve a more homogeneous learning in the class. If students cannot prove their level with an official certification, they need to pass an exam with at least a score of B1 to enrol in the bilingual degree. An upper intermediated level or advanced is required to the students when they finish their degree.

Secondly, they also receive weekly English lessons as a way to improve their performance in the subjects that are taught in English. These lessons are developed by the same English philologists that give professor lessons. In particular, supporting materials developed by the teaching team are used in the student lessons because although it is easier to find exercises related to business studies, it is more complicated in the case of Microeconomics or Mathematics for business, for instance. Thus, the first volume of supporting materials tries to be a reference guide book for students and, why not, for professors, expecting feedback from them this year.

These lessons are also completed with the organisation of scientific and educational activities such as conferences and lectures related to the subjects in order to improve listening skills in terms of understanding different pronunciations of native and non-native speakers. As these activities are organised by the subject professors, the proper content of them (according to the subjects) is ensured.

A course of business English is also offered by the Faculty of Business Studies, with the preferential admission of bilingual undergraduates and the recognition of credits for students who participate in it. This is another way to introduce economic English to students who are interested.

Finally, each professor develops his/her own CLIL practices in his/her subjects in order to facilitate the learning process and avoid the loss of Spanish language skills, such as providing specific vocabulary, testing it in English and in Spanish; using



educational videos in English to explain better certain contents or show examples, asking the opinions of the students about current and controversial news related to the subjects (and respecting points of view)...

To sum up, we think it is important to continue with all the work that has been described previously in order to enhance our performance at the bilingual degree year by year. The support of philologists to both professors and students is essential to further develop of the bilingual teaching at universities. Also, efforts to provide re-training courses of English skills and CLIL practices to professors should be maintained. Another measure to take into account is that professors' motivation to improve teaching practices should have an impact on their teaching and research career, something that is not always well recognised. However, the development of all the activities explained needs an important financial support that should be maintained by the authorities.

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