



Study of Students' Assessment of Academic Staff Proficiency in English as Instruction and Communication Medium at University of Library Studies and Information Technologies, Bulgaria

Vanya Yakova

University of Library Studies and Information Technologies, Bulgaria

Abstract

A pivotal internationalisation strategy for higher education institutions is the provision of programmes taught in English. The success of such initiatives is contingent upon the provision of adequate language support for all parties involved. The evaluation of English language proficiency among academic personnel is a vital component in the pursuit of ensuring the provision of education of a consistently high standard in English. The present paper has two primary objectives. Firstly, it sets out the findings of a survey on the use of English as a medium of information and communication during the learning process as perceived by students at the University of Library Studies and Information Technologies, Sofia, Bulgaria. Secondly, it provides their assessment of the language proficiency of the academic staff. The research study, which was conducted among the students as a component of a broader project investigating attitudes towards the necessity of enhancing the foreign language proficiency of the academic personnel of the institution, yielded notable findings. Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, the report synthesises data derived from a survey administered to students from May to the conclusion of September of the current year. The findings indicate that although the use of English as the medium of instruction in the classroom is not prevalent among educators, there is a segment of undergraduates who express a preference for certain disciplines to be taught in English. In contrast to this, the results of the study also indicate that a significant proportion of the student body exhibits a lack of interest in subjects being taught in English. The conclusions emphasise the necessity of conducting a campaign amongst both academic staff and students to raise awareness of the importance and benefits of including English-taught disciplines in higher education.

Keywords: *English language proficiency; higher education; academic staff; students; evaluation;*

1. Introduction

The English language has emerged as the pre-eminent global lingua franca among non-native speakers, a development that can be attributed to two key factors. Firstly, there has been a notable increase in the number of international students participating in educational exchange programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Secondly, there has been an increasing inclination amongst domestic students to pursue international career opportunities, further contributing to the growth and influence of English as a global language.

The enhancement of the professional competencies of the academic staff at University of Library Studies and Information Technologies (ULSIT) – encompassing language proficiency – is, therefore, congruent with European Union policies pertaining to continuing education and lifelong learning. It is acknowledged that no such study has been conducted at ULSIT to date. A review of relevant publications reveals the scarcity of similar studies concerning academic staff attitudes towards organised courses. The enhancement of pivotal competencies, including language proficiency, within academic disciplines is exclusively the responsibility of each educator's individual motivation, opportunities, and professional advancement.

The expanding implementation of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in higher education has become a distinguishing feature of university internationalisation across Europe. It is understood not solely as a linguistic shift, but as a strategic instrument for the purpose of institutional competitiveness, promoting research cooperation, and facilitating cross-border academic mobility. In contemporary academic education, more and more universities introduce programmes and courses delivered in English. This development is mainly driven not only by the idea of attracting international students, but



also of the encouragement of academic exchange, and the alignment of institutional practices with global research standards.

The connection between EMI and scientific literacy is a particularly significant one. In accordance with the framework proposed by the OECD, scientific literacy is defined as the capacity to interpret evidence, critically assess data, and participate in scientific discourse. In the disciplines, associated with information technologies, digital systems and data management, English is the predominant language for scholarly publications and professional documentation. Consequently, inadequate English proficiency among academic staff may impede students' access to authentic academic materials and constrain their involvement in international scholarly discourse.

The objective of this report is to explore the necessity for the enhancement of foreign language proficiency among the academic staff at ULSIT from the perspective of the students at the university, as part of more extensive research project. This exploration will be informed by two key factors: first, the attitude of students to the use of English as a medium of instruction; and second, the evaluation given by students when the foreign language is used during certain lectures and seminars. This analysis is further prompted by the mounting demand for English-language competencies, which are now a prerequisite for both teacher and student mobility within the Erasmus programme. The analysis specifically addressed ULSIT's role as an institution that accepts foreign students and deploys teachers to deliver courses in partner countries.

2. Methodology

One of the key objectives of the research is to facilitate an evaluation of the language competences in English of the academic staff at ULSIT by the students. Consequently, a survey was conducted among students to examine their perceptions of the issue. The subject of the study is as follows: "Survey of the level of English proficiency in foreign languages amongst academic staff at the University of Library Studies and Information Technologies". The study is anonymous and voluntary. The objective of the questionnaire is twofold: firstly, to ascertain the extent to which lecturers use English in their lectures and seminars as a medium of communication, and secondly, to evaluate their linguistic competence from the perspective of the students' knowledge and experience. The demographic section of the questionnaire aims to collect information about the respondents' form of education, area of specialty, course year, degree and professional field. The survey was conducted from May to September 2025, and the participants were drawn from the student body at ULSIT. The data collection method employed was an online questionnaire, the results of which were collated from a total of 155 responses.

In the context of EMI, students' perception is widely regarded as a significant indicator of teaching quality. This is due to the fact that students are direct participants in the instructional process, meaning that their perceptions of teaching quality are a valuable source of data. A substantial body of research in the field of European higher education has demonstrated that students' evaluations of lecturers' language proficiency have a significant impact on their motivation and participation in English-medium courses.

3. Analysis of the Results Obtained

When asked: "Do you use English in your university studies?" 67.1% of respondents answered in the affirmative, while 32.9% answered in the negative.

The results indicate that the majority of students utilise English in their academic pursuits, presumably as a medium of communication during lectures or seminars due to their field of study, or as a method of acquiring further information or references. However, one-third of survey respondents provided a negative response, thereby suggesting that the subjects they are studying within their academic courses do not require or necessitate the use of English in their education.

When asked, "To what extent is English used in the context of university studies?", only 11.6% responded that they use English in their studies, while more than half of those surveyed responded that they use it rarely (27.7%) or only sometimes (27.1%). Eighteen point seven percent (18.7%) responded that they often use English during their studies. Unfortunately, the percentage of students who never use English as a means of communication or finding information is relatively high for an academic institution – 14.8%. The data suggests that students themselves do not consider it necessary to seek additional information/materials outside their native language, either because their level of language proficiency is not high enough or because they are not encouraged by their teachers to use English in such a context. (Fig.1)

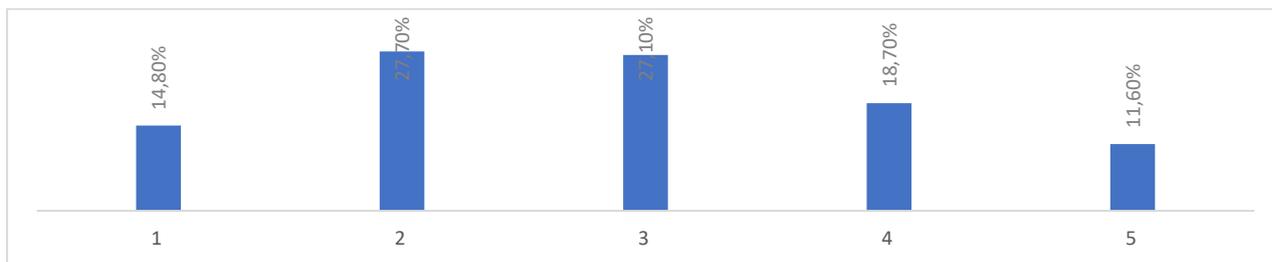


Fig. 1 English used in the context of university studies

The question of whether students have participated in academic activities, such as lectures or seminars in English, outside of the context of their English language classes, was posed. The majority of students – 67.7%, to be precise – answered in the negative, while only 32.3% answered in the positive. As demonstrated in Figure 2, such outcomes are wholly anticipated, given that a little over a third of respondents (34.2%) are students specialising in "Informatics and Computer Sciences," a field in which the utilisation of English is dictated by the intrinsic character of the subject matter pertaining to information technologies and their evolution. The educational profile of nearly half of the respondents (49.1%) does not require the use of English during lectures and seminars, as they primarily utilise sources from Bulgarian authors or those that have been translated into Bulgarian.

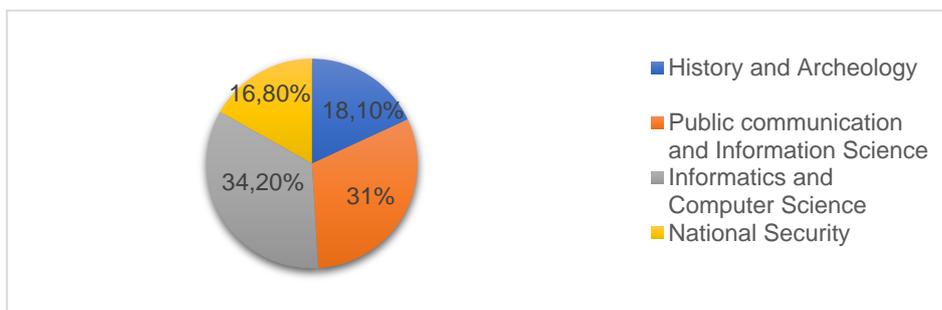


Fig. 2 Respondents' academic disciplines of study

In view of the aforementioned results, it is unsurprising that when respondents were asked: What is the frequency with which educators utilise English during lectures and seminars? a total of 8.4% of respondents answered "always," while those who answered "never" were almost twice as many, with a percentage of 18.1%. Furthermore, 10.3% of respondents indicated that their teachers frequently employ English during seminars and lectures. Approximately one-third (29.7%) of respondents indicated that English is rarely used, while an additional one-third (33.5%) stated that English is employed only on occasion during lectures and seminars. The findings indicate that a negligible proportion of academic staff deliberately utilise English as a medium for communication and knowledge dissemination during the learning process.

A total of 3.9% of respondents to the question: "In the event of English being the language of instruction, to what extent do lecturers speak in a clear and distinct manner?" answered that their lecturers' speech is incomprehensible or difficult to understand. Thirty-six point one percent (36.1%) of respondents noted that their lecturers spoke clearly and distinctly in the foreign language, while 26.5% said that their lecturers' speech was very clear and understandable. Approximately 20% of respondents indicated that their lecturers do not speak English. This observation, however, does not necessarily imply that the lecturers themselves have limited or no proficiency in the foreign language. It is highly probable that their course of study does not necessitate the use of a second language. The fact that more than two-thirds of the students surveyed expressed a positive opinion regarding the English language skills of those teachers who use it during lectures and/or when giving instructions. (Table 1)

Table 1

Incomprehensible	Challenging to comprehend	Understandable, but sometimes difficult	Clear and understandable	Very clear and comprehensible	Do not speak in English
1.3%	2.6%	13.5%	36.1%	26.5%	20%



A resounding 92.3% of respondents expressed their belief that their lecturers use English-language scientific sources in the preparation of their lectures and seminars. The 7.7% of respondents who answered negatively may lack the necessary competence to assess whether foreign-language sources were used, or alternatively, this issue may not be of significant importance to them.

It is noteworthy that a significant proportion of respondents – 69.7% – expressed interest in and read publications by their teachers in English. The remaining 30.3% of the population may be assumed to have either not expressed interest in such publications, or not possessed the necessary proficiency in English to derive benefit from them.

In response to the question, "How would you rate your teachers' level of English proficiency?", a mere 10% of respondents indicated that their teachers' proficiency was unsatisfactory or satisfactory (3.2% and 5.2%, respectively). A quarter of the survey respondents (25.2%) indicated that they were unable to assess their lecturers' proficiency in English language usage, while a little over a third of respondents (34.2%) awarded their teachers an excellent rating. A further third allocated a favourable or very favourable rating (13.5% and 18.7%, respectively) with regard to the degree of proficiency in English demonstrated in the classroom. (Fig. 3)



Fig. 3 Evaluation of English language proficiency of academic staff

Conversely, when queried on their ability to evaluate the proficiency of their teaching staff in elucidating intricate concepts in English, slightly more than one-third (34.2%) of respondents indicated their inability to assess the quality of their teachers' explanations. A mere 5.2% of respondents evaluated their performance as unsatisfactory, with 5.8% categorising it as satisfactory. Furthermore, 20.6% of respondents rated the explanations of complex concepts as very good, while 21.9% thought that the explanations given in English were excellent. It is important to reiterate that the responses provided are founded on the students' personal competencies and proficiencies in English. It is logical to hypothesise that individuals with a lower level of language proficiency experience difficulties when it comes to defining and comprehending complex definitions, ideas, and/or concepts. (Fig. 4)

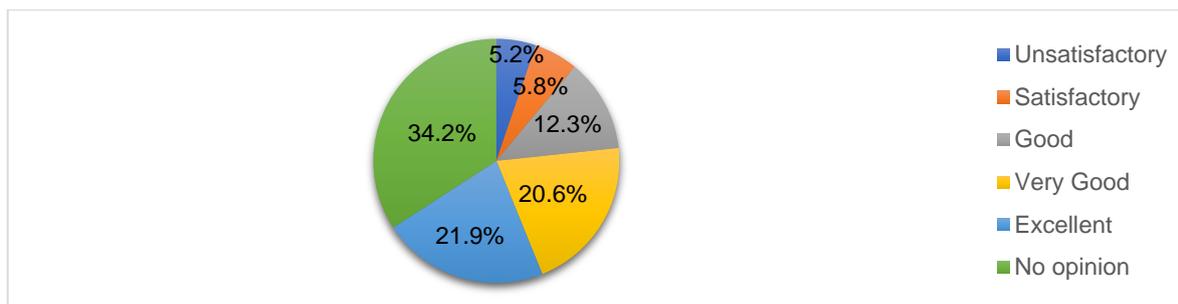


Fig. 4 Effectiveness of explaining complex concepts in English

In consideration of the data pertaining to the proportion of educators who use English as a medium of instruction and communication during lectures and seminar exercises, it is anticipated that when queried: "Is there an opportunity to ask questions in English during lectures/seminar exercises?", 41.3% of respondents indicated that they never have such an opportunity during their studies. In light of this, respondents who selected "rarely" (18.1%) and "sometimes" (17.4%) provided further insights into the use of English as a medium for information and communication during classroom sessions. A mere 15.5% of respondents provided a positive response, while an additional 7.7% responded "often." It is essential to consider whether educators encourage the use of English in an educational environment when used. A noteworthy observation is that respondents who selected "never" and "yes, very actively" exhibited equivalent outcomes, with a percentage of 12.9%. Conversely, approximately



60% of respondents indicated that they were occasionally and moderately encouraged by their teachers to use English as a medium of communication. The remaining 16.1% of respondents indicated that they were rarely encouraged to use a foreign language during lectures. The findings of this study suggest that teachers who use English as a medium of instruction in an educational setting should foster an environment that encourages learners to employ English more frequently for communication with the educator or when posing and responding to questions related to the material under study.

With regard to the question of student participation in the Erasmus Student Mobility Program, the data reveal a clear response: a mere 11.6% of respondents answered in the affirmative, while the vast majority (88.4%) answered negatively. These results could lead to the conclusion that students are not well informed about the opportunities offered by this programme, or that the areas of mobility offered do not meet their desires and ideas for development. It is also indicative that only 7.7% of those who participated in the Erasmus programme give an excellent rating to the mobility they chose, while 77.4% cannot assess and give any rating.

When asked whether they had received support from their teachers for participating in the Erasmus student mobility program, only 18.7% of respondents answered in the affirmative. Meanwhile, 74.8% of respondents indicated that they had not yet participated in such programmes. In light of these findings, it can be hypothesised that the Erasmus programme is not adequately represented or promoted among students, and even when there is interest on their part, the number of those who have received any support is negligible. This finding indicates the necessity for supplementary explanatory seminars or training sessions to be provided to teachers, with the aim of enabling them to support their students in participating in various Erasmus Program mobility opportunities.

The statistics pertaining to the future direction of training in relation to the enhancement of foreign language proficiency among the academic staff at ULSIT, as well as regarding the study of certain subjects in English, are of interest. In response to the question regarding the potential advantages of pursuing a specialised curriculum within the context of an English language course, 35.7% of respondents expressed reservations, while 34.2% expressed a preference for the instruction of select subjects in English. A relatively large percentage of respondents (30.3%) were unable to assess whether such a need existed. It may be hypothesised that this approach to the study of individual subjects in English is influenced by two potential factors. Firstly, it could be that the students' limited proficiency in the language is a contributing element. Secondly, it may be assumed that they do not anticipate the necessity of utilising English in their future professional endeavours. Conversely, it is highly probable that students are concerned that if certain subjects are taught in English, the time required for studying and preparation will increase significantly.

When asked whether they would like their teachers to undergo additional training in English, only 7.7% of respondents answered in the negative, while those who are completely convinced that academic staff need additional training in English are less than a fifth of those surveyed, at 17.4%. The predominant opinion among respondents, constituting 37.4% of the total, is that such training is not necessary. The remaining respondents answered "perhaps" and "I am uncertain" (14.2% and 23.2% of respondents, respectively). This suggests a lack of proficiency to answer the question or a lack of interest in enhancing the qualifications of the university's academic staff.

The responses provided by students when questioned about potential areas for development in the teaching of certain subjects in English by their lecturers are also of interest. A substantial proportion of the respondents indicated that they do not have an opinion on the matter, or that they are unable to judge, and furthermore, they have no recommendations to offer. It is also noteworthy that some of the respondents have furnished comprehensive well-argued responses to the posed question. In the following section, a selection of students' responses is presented:

- *"It is challenging for me to provide such an evaluation, as the subjects I am currently studying do not use English, with the exception of a limited portion of the terminology."*
- *"It is imperative that subjects are taught in English to a sufficient extent in order to adequately prepare students for the real job market."*
- *"The correct articulation and orthography of the language is paramount."*
- *"It is imperative that specific terminology is taught in English with the most accurate translation into Bulgarian."*
- *"In the context of Bulgaria, it is my conviction that the teaching of any subject in English is to be avoided. It is important to note that proficiency in the language is not universal. !! My position is that the preference should not be for all content to be in English. !"* (original punctuation preserved)



- *“I myself do not possess a strong command of English, and therefore I am not in a position to offer advice or recommendations to my teachers.”*
- *“I am unable to provide definitive response to this question, as my academic pursuits are not focused on English-language studies.”*
- *“On a personal level, I am content; however, I would prefer more assertive communication skills from certain members of the teaching staff when delivering English language instructions.”*
- *“The necessity of teaching English is somewhat overestimated. It is evident that the language in question is used extensively; nevertheless, it is my contention that the existence of our own national language should be given due consideration. The recurrent employment of a foreign language among students born and raised in Bulgaria is a matter that I find to be suboptimal.”*

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

- Professional development of educators: Despite the relatively high level of English proficiency exhibited by a number of the academic staff, there are still lecturers for whom there is a clear need for further improvement in terms of the presentation of information and the elucidation of specific terminology. Consequently, there is a necessity to undertake specialised courses to enhance the language and communication skills of a select group of the academic staff.
- Resource and Material Development: In light of the respondents' assertions regarding the heterogeneity in English proficiency levels exhibited by academic staff members, it is imperative to implement integrated courses that encompass both general and academic English. This indicates that the implementation of a specific teaching system alone is inadequate to ensure the attainment of the desired outcomes. Consequently, the preparation of customised materials tailored to the course in question becomes imperative to address the individual needs of learners.
- Erasmus Mobility Programme: In relation to the Erasmus programme, it became evident that a significant percentage of students were not in possession of the necessary information from their instructors. It is imperative, therefore, to provide supplementary elucidations to both teaching staff and students regarding the advantages inherent in this program. Furthermore, the promotion of awareness amongst teaching staff regarding the advantages of student participation in this particular mobility programme is imperative, with the aim of fostering a future generation of professionals equipped with the necessary skills and experience for success within their respective fields.

5. Conclusion

The survey results suggest that the use of English as a medium of instruction at ULSIT remains limited and depends lecturers. While students recognise the importance of English, structural and motivational factors limit its consistent use in the classroom. These findings highlight the need for a more organised approach to developing staff language proficiency.

The implications of the study are more extensive than institutional improvement. English-Medium Instruction is a strategic instrument for the European Higher Education Area. It strengthens internationalisation, enhances academic competitiveness and fosters participation in transnational educational and research networks. In information technology and knowledge management, lecturer proficiency impacts students' exposure to current research, specialised terminology and global professional standards.

Scientific literacy, as defined by OECD educational policy, hinges on access to quality academic sources, which in turn affects a student's readiness for postgraduate study, research collaboration, and participation in international scholarships.

The Erasmus+ programme is dependent on the possession of adequate English language proficiency by lecturers and students. In instances where English is not used in the teaching process, achieving mobility can present significant challenges. Consequently, it is imperative that staff members enhance their English proficiency, not solely for personal development purposes, but also to facilitate their involvement in international exchanges. At ULSIT, English for staff should be regarded as a means of both integration and adaptation. The initiative constitutes an investment in scientific literacy, student mobility and institutional development in Europe. The implementation of a comprehensive policy framework encompassing training, EMI integration, and support mechanisms, is imperative to facilitate the realisation of our objectives.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This publication is implemented under the project: "Survey of the attitudes towards the necessity enhancing the foreign language competence of academic staff at University of Library Studies and Information Technologies" with Contract No. NIP-2025-01 of 23.04.2025, headed by Associate Professor Teodora Guenova, PhD. The survey is in accordance with "Policies of the Rector of ULSIT for improving the professional competences of academic staff", funded by ULSIT in regard with Competition Session 2025 - "Internal competition in the context of the development of scientific projects under the Ordinance of the Ministry of Education and Science on the conditions and procedures for the assessment, planning, allocation, and expenditure of funds from the state budget for the financing of scientific or artistic activities inherent to state higher education institutions."

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