

Review research paper

**IMPROVING EMI THROUGH THE VISEGRAD
CLIL-HET PROJECT**

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Abstract. *In line with the global education tendency, Higher Education Institutions in Albania are making attempts to successfully implement a competitive English Medium Instruction (EMI) University model. This chapter sheds light on a case study analysis of EPOKA University - an International University in Tirana using English language instruction for its disciplinary programs. Specifically, the chapter illuminates the contributory findings of the CLIL- HET project into the English didactic competence of the international and local non-native English-speaking academic staff of EPOKA University. This university comprises a ESP/EMI practice par excellence in Albania, however, no such theoretical training has ever been prioritized at the regional and EU level project consortium in this narrow didactic dimension. The project diagnosed the need to improve English teaching didactic for disciplinary lecturers specifically to place language goals on the same equal importance to the content goals. Moreover, the English teaching needs assessment and its standardization in compatibility with recent EMI/CLIL/ESP principles, is perceived as the most relevant educational approach to further boost the international teaching profile of this young institution aspiring top-quality international academic recognition. The inductive results on the necessity to equip disciplinary scholars with EMI/CLIL/ESP sufficient theoretical tools will be a first model to be followed in the higher educational arena in Albania.*

Key words: *EMI, Albania, Visegrad project, English didactic, needs assessment*

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper comprises a qualitative case study research featuring the CLIL/EMI practice at EPOKA University, an internationally oriented university in Tirana, Albania. The research gives an evaluative analysis prior, and after the implementation of the *CLIL-HET Visegrad +* project where Epoka University participated as a partner institution during 2019–2021. This project had the goal to build up collaboration between ESP and CLIL experts via a networking platform within V4 and Western Balkan countries to support disciplinary lecturers to create an English education environment (CLIL-HET, 2021). One of the expected contributions of such functional English medium university instruction will lead to academic staff and students' higher mobility within EU thus sharing knowledge and best practices through effective professional communication in English. The CLIL-HET Visegrad funded project was comprised of five project partners

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with the leading grantee the Faculty of Materials Science and Technology in Trnava at Slovak Institute of Technology; University of Szeged in Hungary, The Institute of Technology and Business of Technology and Business in České Budejovice, the Czech Republic; the University of Applied Sciences in Tarnow, Poland; Pristina's Faculty of Philosophy in Kosovska Mitrovica, Serbia; EPOKA University, Albania. The project was originally designed to be completed during the period 2019-2020 but due to COVID-19 pandemic challenges it was eventually realized by mid-2021.

This project was the first one of its types to be carried out at EPOKA university in Tirana within the Visegrad scheme of regional partnership. This case study chapter utilizes two research tools: textual analysis and survey data collected via questionnaires. In line with the data collection methodology stated by CLIL-HET project, tailored disciplinary lecturers signed in the digital platform at the official web page of CLIL-HET project to take firstly language diagnostic test and then, the theoretical didactic literature on CLIL lesson planning and fundamental teaching principles for English instruction. Also, a disciplinary teacher at Albanian-English Law department recorded videos of teaching Business law to Albanian undergraduate students. Moreover, apart from diagnosing the English proficiency level and didactic competence of the university staff, students of the Business law courses completed an individual survey designed by the Project coordinators (ESP and CLIL experts) to extract students' attitudes on the quality of their teachers' English competence to explain legal concepts; their legal knowledge acquisition, difficulties and achievements at this investigative course taught in English by Albanian-native disciplinary lecturer. The descriptive excel method is utilized to interpret the statistical data driven from participants' feedback and their open comments.

The research found that the English proficiency and mastery level of the disciplinary staff is quite high at B2 level in general. In contrast, the didactic competence through English teaching needed lots of room for improvement through further training. The case study revealed weaknesses and strengths in the Albanian context. It identified the need to show the related importance of teaching competence of English didactic for subject related lecturers in the future. As a bilingual language policy applied to learners, it imposes the requirement to have EMI lecturers as bilingual lecturers. Therefore, among the future recommendations illuminated by the shortcomings and attainments of this two-year project, is the ongoing English language assessment and further English proficiency improvement of the disciplinary academic staff along with the contemporary CLIL/ESP methodology of language teaching to be integrated successfully per each course at the three faculties of EPOKA university.

First, this study offers a literature review on definitions, theoretical analyses, achievements, and limitations of CLIL/EMI. Then, the chapter locates English Medium Instructed/ ESP/CLIL courses at national level to continue with the case study of EPOKA University in Tirana, Albania. Next, the CLIL-HET local chronicle in the Albanian education is depicted to be pursued by the original case study of CLIL-HET Visegrad project newly implemented at EPOKA university where the author was the national project coordinator. Finally, the results of this project are discussed considering the local settings at this institution, at country level but also in comparison to regional and European development in EMI/CLIL developments. This study paves the way to more systematic investigation of the ESP/EMI/CLIL local practices, highlighting every special feature and measure to boost the efficiency of EMI university programs for better knowledge and language acquisition. It will enable a monitoring and evaluative mechanism on the barriers and successes of EMI education in Albania.

2. ESP/EMI/CLIL LITERATURE REVIEW

To better comprehend the local context, the project objectives and its outcomes, some theoretical definitions of CLIL /EMI are firstly given while accommodating its evolution and impact on higher education teaching methodology. In the framework of bilingual and multilingual educational policies boosted at European level, CLIL standing for Content Language Integrated Learning was firstly coined in language literature in the mid-1990s (D. Coyle, 2010). This linguistic novelty was particularly triggered by the European multilingual policy prioritized by the European Commission and the Council of Europe in 1994 (Eurydice, 2006). However, immersion programs of language and content subjects originate back in the 1960s and 1970s in Canada to be followed up, in early 1990s, in Austria, Spain, Italy, Finland, Sweden mainly in secondary education level. In these European models CLIL was used to teach one or two school subjects or units within a subject envisaging the learner to be geared with an additional foreign language, heritage, or community language (Eurydice, 2006). The undeniable expansion of English medium instruction is explained by Jay in the context of the modern function of universities. Jay ascertains that universities worldwide have changed their traditional role as producers, protectors and incubators of solely national identity and national culture (Jay, 2010)

Other scholars, depict the distinctive difference that CLIL and Immersion programs pursue both content knowledge and target language, whereas the EMI approach focuses mainly on content learning (Jim Coleman, Kristina Hultgren, Wei Li, Chenh-Fang Cynthia Tsui & Philip Shaw, 2018). English Medium Instruction (EMI) is defined by Julie Dearden as “the use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English” (Dearden, 2015). Richards and Pun explored all the different forms and terms associated with EMI in a typology of 51 features across 10 curriculum categories noting the numerous dimensions of EMI related to its description, planning, and evaluation process (Jack C. Richards & Pun, 2021).

Various aspects of EMI have been explored by linguistic scholars and higher education academics. Insightful data has been collected encompassing students and teachers involved in CLIL and EMI university programs along with overall EMI language policies. To illustrate, Karakas explored students’ preferences for native and non-native English-speaking instructors finding out that for content courses Turkish students preferred non-native instructors versus preference for native speakers in ESP language-oriented courses (Karakas, 2017). Most significant suggestion by this Turkish case study was for university management to employ staff accordingly to their professional training and competence in language and content rather than simply native language background (Karakas, 2017). International perspectives on CLIL have indicated that, despite its universally acknowledged properties, CLIL is flexible and adjustable to local country based students’ needs in terms of English language acquisition and content programs at university studies (Hemni, C. & Banegas, D.L., 2021). Harrop accentuates the unique attribute of CLIL where content is taught not *in*, but *with* and *through* the foreign language (Harrop, 2012).

In addition, the 4C holistic model by integrating content, communication, cognition, and culture, has convinced governments to boost CLIL language approach as a medium to building up linguistic proficiency for their students (Harrop, 2012). However, CLIL learners demonstrate inequitable linguistic growth to the detriment of productive skills versus receptive ones (Harrop, 2012). Lorenzo also discusses the limitations and achievements of CLIL by placing as a key responsibility the role of CLIL teachers lacking the adequate

strategies to put academic content into a comprehensible interlanguage (Lorenzo, 2008). Ciambello sheds light on Italian History CLIL booklets in English characterized mainly by expository nature where the argumentative line is hidden by the narrative facts revealed via neutral objective and language. The most significant findings among the five groups of booklets studies by the author, was CLIL History. Teaching through English as the sole one not including any VERB+that-clause patterns neither a modal verb pattern, hence, anticipating pedagogical implications for CLIL training courses in Italy (Ciambella, 2020).

These global and regional studies contribute to contextualizing the degree of fruitful implementation, confronted problems, and current achievements of English medium instruction in the Visegrad region and the Western Balkans in line with the above global trends. It also offers insights to measure the effectiveness of local initiatives and future reforming expectations for the case study in Albania.

3. EMI/CLIL AND HETS IN ALBANIA

In Albania, the Ministry of Education and Sports (MASH) approved implementation of content-based national curriculum regarding CLIL programs in bilingual secondary and high schools in 2002. It was substituted by objective-based curriculum and, eventually, from 2016 onwards being replaced by competence-based curriculum (Ministria e Arsimit dhe Sportit, 2016). The first contemporary bilingual secondary school was the Albanian - French one in the city of Korca. It was established in 1998 originating from the French Lycée of Korca city dating back from 1917 to 1939 (Ministria e Arsimit dhe e Sportit, 2016). Overall, in Albania, foreign language curriculum and textbooks have been undergoing reform ever since mid-1990s. Albanian educational institutions in pursuant of the Council of Europe Language policy "From linguistic diversity to Plurilingual Education: Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe" precisely Chapter 4.1.1.126L/ Lesson, Signed Languages in Education in Europe - a preliminary exploration to acknowledge importance of EMI/CLIL and bilingual education for the further international recognition of the country (Council of Europe, 2006).

Foreign languages start at the third grade of elementary education in public schools to be continued to the end of basic education. Then, in the secondary schools (Class VI), a second foreign language is offered on optional choice. The two foreign languages typically among English, French, Italian and German continue to be taught for three years of the high schools. Moreover, English subject is a mandatory State Graduation examination (Ministria e Arsimit dhe Sportit, 2016). However, English, French, German, Italian continue to be taught no more than three hours per week as foreign language in higher education. In other words, CLIL is not provided in the public higher education thus, interrupting the lifetime investment of multilingualism in other cycles of pre-university education. Only some newly established, private universities, have pioneered complete English teaching instruction to stand out their competitiveness as genuine international actors rivaling in the Balkan labor market and European one.

Academic research on CLIL/EMI and ESP has also been explored by applied linguistic and English educators exhibiting, thus the importance of this newly adopted higher education teaching methodology at country level. These are mainly *ad hoc* individual empirical inquiries of local Albanian researchers designing tailored ESP courses and analyzing further needs of improvements to fulfill the university learners' needs (Alhasani D, 2021). Some theoretical

and empirical analysis have been conducted at regional Balkan co-authorship limited to contextual educational functions of the ESP communication at the EU educational landscape (Alhasani D, Mirela & Nadezda Stojkovic, 2021). However, there is a noticeable vacuum of both theoretical and empirical research at national and international project-based cooperation and initiatives to further successful implementation and competitive quality EMI/CLIL improvements. This CLIL-HET Visegrad achievement contributed to filling in this gap before it is too late to catch up with the higher education transformative changes at EU and globally where English is utilized as the *lingua franca* of international academic cooperation and recognition.

4. CLIL – HET VISEGRAD PROJECT PARTNERSHIP OF EPOKA UNIVERSITY

EPOKA University is an international higher education institution established in 2007-2008 academic year in compliance with the provisions of the Albanian higher education legislation. It is comprised of three faculties: the Faculty of Architecture and Engineering, composed of the Department of Architecture, the Department of Civil Engineering and the Department of Computer Engineering; the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, composed of the Department of Banking and Finance, the Department of Business Administration and the Department of Economics, the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences composed of the Department of Law, the Department of Political Science and International Relations, and the Center for European Studies . EPOKA University offers education in three study cycles where the language of instruction is English except for two bilingual English – Albanian programs, Banking and Finance and Law.

CLIL-HET project was the first and the only project to accentuate the need for the academic staff to possess both English language communicative competence and, equally to the same degree, didactic theoretical tools for effective class management relevant to the scientific discipline. At the early stages of the project, registration in the CLIL- HET website for Albania was technically unavailable and, as such it led to delay in the registration process of disciplinary teachers. The number of registered instructors who took both language tests and CLIL didactic questionnaire was 16 disciplinary academics. They were all Albanian native speakers- full time lectures of courses taught in English such as abstract algebra, structural engineering, business management, marketing, computer programming and machine learning, calculus, economic theories, at the undergraduate and graduate programs of study. All of them scored a diagnostic English language test above B1 level; however, all of them considered the didactic questionnaire very challenging due to lack of any previous teaching methodology qualification or training. The didactic input was assessed as a very useful component to their future teaching approach in English instruction career at EPOKA but not limited only to Albania. They saw it as a useful opportunity for quality teaching in mobility projects within the Erasmus + schemes for academic staff exchange and teaching mobility in the approaching future. However, initially, there was lack of enthusiasm by the academic staff on the importance of taking the didactic material for English teaching competence driven by their misunderstanding of the need to possess English teaching mastery similar pre - university English teachers. In other words, the status of English teaching didactic was initially regarded as not rigidly compatible to their scientific qualification.

Contrary to the first introductory reluctance, there was a massive participation at the CLIL-HET training workshop organized at Epoka university in March 2021 by the ESP expert representative of CLIL-HET project and at the same time author of this research. There were around 60 academic staff members who participated online and only 10 physically in campus auditorium during the pandemic. They were offered with the fundamental theoretical principles of CLIL class management, syllabus design and lesson planning (EPOKA University, 2021). The trainees in the said academic workshop compiled a well structured CLIL lesson plan for their respective course of instruction hence, successfully practicing the theoretical input of the literature from the project and the training. This variable within the CLIL-HET project of Albania had a very positive impact in the equipment of the staff with the linguistic and didactic theoretical tools for course competence but, above all it changed the mindset of academic staff on the relevance of English teaching methodology to functional knowledge transfer of scientific concepts in their teaching and class management.

The Disciplinary Teacher who participated in our project, lecturer of the course *Business Law*, taught in English to the Albanian instructed program of Law department. The impact of the theoretical didactic material was highly acknowledged by her side while preparing the video-lectures of her course in the Business law content. The lecturer provided four video lectures applying CLIL lesson plan in the following topics: *Corporate Law, Capital and Contributions, Jurisdiction Personality, and Liability*, and *The Legal Framework for Business in Albania*. She demonstrated very high English-speaking competence, yet, she reflected unclear distinction between language aims and content aims. Moreover, knowledge assessment for both subject content acquisition and linguistic expression turned to be a teaching aspects in need of professional support given by the ESP expert to all disciplinary staff who agreed to participate in the project diagnostic steps and theoretical input delivery and further training.

5.EMI/CLIL AND STUDENTS

The Business law lecturer, successfully conducted a survey with 45 students of her undergraduate course Business Law providing their feedback via a standardized template questionnaire by CLIL-HET project. Some of the most significant responses of this large sample is provided in the graphs below:

Do you think that knowledge of English language is important for your future career?

43 responses

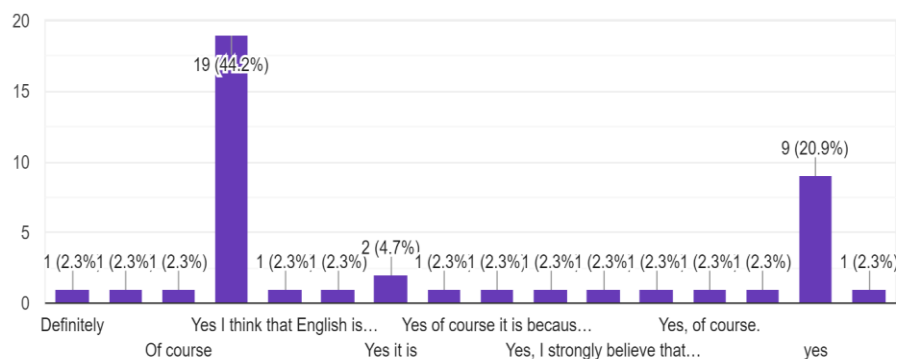


Figure 1

How would you grade your knowledge of English on the scale from 1 to 5?
43 responses

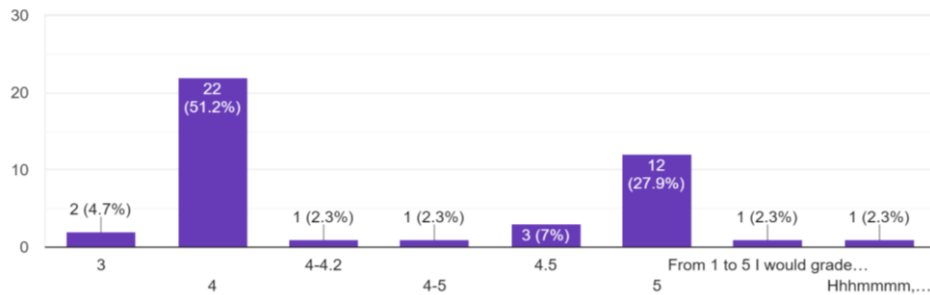


Figure 2

Did you understand what your instructor was talking about during lectures delivered in English?
YES/NO
43 responses

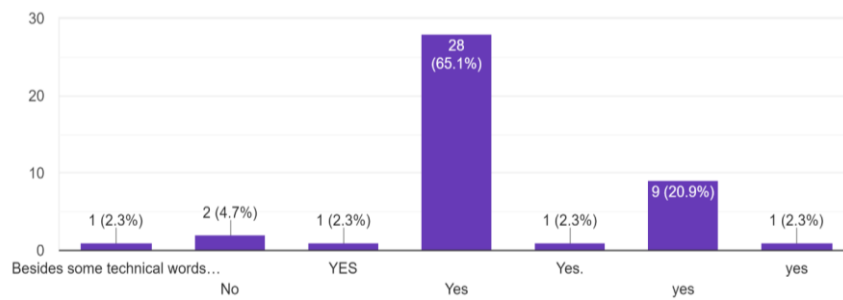


Figure 3

What did you like the most about the lectures your instructor delivered in English?
36 responses

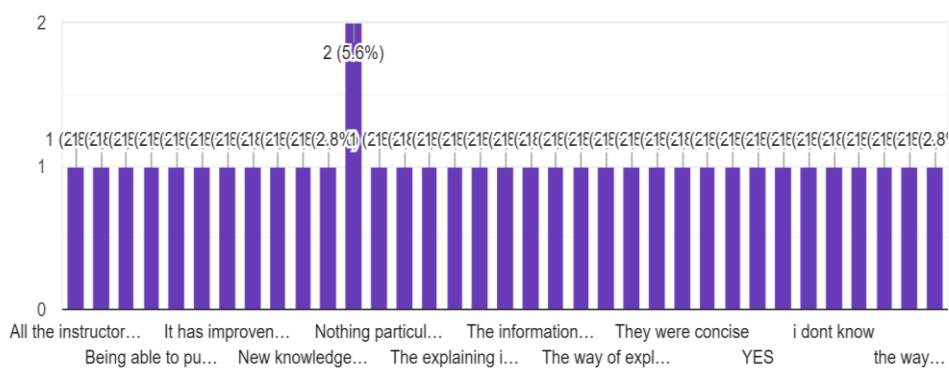


Figure 4

Did you struggle to understand what your instructor was talking about during lectures in English?
40 responses

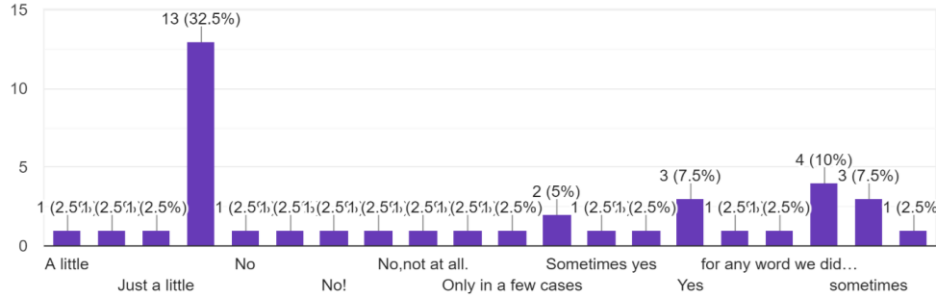


Figure 5

What was the most difficult part of the lecture?
23 responses

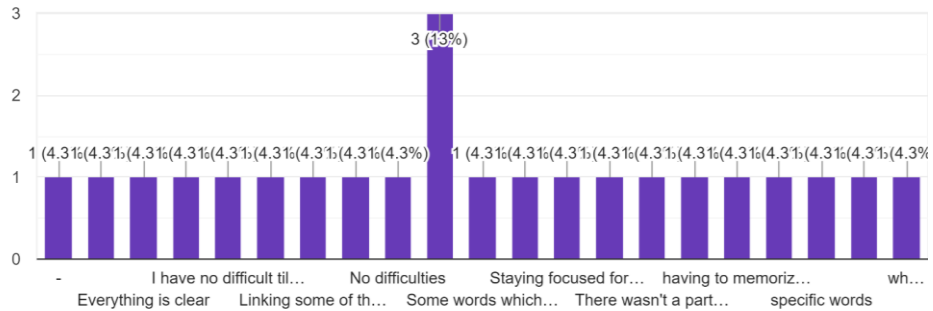


Figure 6

What caused most trouble to you?
37 responses

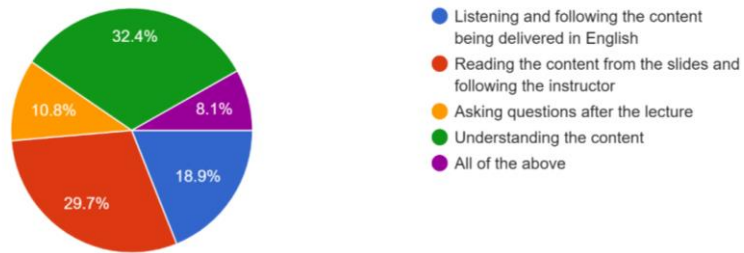


Figure 7

Undergraduate Students of the Albanian-English instructed department of Law highly appreciated their legal class taught in English as an opportunity to develop both English communication competence, legal vocabulary understanding, original literature displayed and analyzed through English. However, sometimes they found it hard to follow the English legal

literature and be logically focused since they possessed insufficient vocabulary for analytical system thinking of newly acquired legal concepts. Consequently, based on the open comments and score of students participating in this course survey, it is the responsibility of the disciplinary teachers to adjust the language of daily lecture and literature interpretation so that it fits to linguistic proficiency for low, medium and high level of English mastery, moreover, since Albanian students enrolled in LAW department do not take an English placement test prior to enrollment, it is the key responsibility of the disciplinary lecturers to diagnose the overall class level for any huge discrepancy between top and low levels within a target group of students exposed to the same class materials and task objectives. To fulfil this teaching goal, the disciplinary teachers need to consult the ESP language teaches on how to evaluate the class materials from the English language overdose of terminology in the domain and the motivational tools to encourage equal knowledge acquisition in line with English language improvement of the students.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

It should be emphasized that, ever since 2016, the higher education curricula in Albania are designed based on the competence-based approach. Contemporary practices of such curriculum show that this teaching approach is highly complex and entails a detailed understanding of social- constructivist language learning principles and their implications for the roles of teachers and learners. Competency-based curriculum is organized around competencies needed for practice and empirically based on the principle that appropriate instruction will make students master the planned performance outcomes (Kim, 2015). This curriculum reform imposes a critical consideration of language learning, teaching, and assessment at all levels of the educational systems. University disciplinary professors who transfer their disciplinary theories via English as a tool of communication, should be well trained to attain the competence and skills driven curriculum. Precisely, to implement this type of curriculum the staff should be capable of defining competences clearly, a planning of curriculum how to achieve such competences and finally, the relevant and tailored assessment process to those competencies (Jones, A.Voorhees, & Paulson, 2002).

Despite, the first lack of willingness to affiliate English teaching didactic mastery with the tailored disciplinary teaching development, upon the successful accomplishment of all the deliverables assigned by the CLIL-HET project, cross-curriculum staff of EPOKA university acknowledged that their subject courses were spaces for language development and identified the need to practice content acquisition. In addition, after taking the diagnostic English didactic test, they approved achieving teaching/learning outcomes by equally considering EMI linguistic objectives and scientific content ones. This is indispensable for an English instructed university relying on Albanian academic staff highly qualified not solely in the scientific track but in the English teaching knowledge transfer capabilities to compete in the international English instructed higher education arena.

It was ascertained that the EMI/CLIL staff needs systematic training to achieve desirable outcomes at their learners. The finding of this two-year Visegrad project where EPOKA university was a partner, is compatible with the recent verdict reached by the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) research which revealed a positive feedback from both staff and students by EMI programs in continental Europe about English

proficiency, however, it accentuated the need to further training to sensitize EMI teachers to the diverse language and cultural backgrounds (Wachter, Bernd. & Maiworm, Friedhelm (eds), 2014). This reputable study at European level is valid for a need for training even more in Albania where EMI/CLIL projects have been missing and training for university teachers almost in-existent. A solution is to get English language teachers and content teachers to collaborate in producing learning outcomes, assessment strategies and material that combine equally the teaching of language and content.

However, the difficulty arises in implementation since content teachers do not always consider language teaching their domain of interest and not interested to be involved in such joint initiatives. It was the case of our project to raise awareness on the importance and usefulness of knowledge and training in English teaching didactic for all the staff lecturing through English without having a prior methodological training on that EMI/CLIL class management and grading. It revealed the need to further highlight the correlation of English as a medium of transferring properly the competitive, cutting-edge scientific input to students for better competitive competence upon graduation from an Albanian university. Students' community and their parents show high estimation and appreciation of EMI/CLIL instruction versus the public alternative of Albanian study program continuing to offer English solely in isolate foreign language courses not tailored to functional communication of the program of study. Therefore, the professional future of local Albanian graduates relies heavily on the quality of English medium instruction of their university professors. More projects similar to CLIL-HET Visegrad will contribute to building a sustainable and standardized EMI/CLIL higher education and brighter future for Albanian learners.

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