

Multilingualism in the Design of Degree Programmes: the Case of Higher School of Economics

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Abstract. *The focus of the article is on the value of multilingualism and the importance of creating a multilingual learning environment at the level of tertiary education. The author outlines a number of opportunities that exist for universities, which are sensitive to multilingual approaches, in the design of degree programmes. The case of Higher School of Economics in Saint Petersburg where 30 % of degree programmes are English-taught and the number of international faculty and students is constantly increasing, is used to illustrate the models of multilingual degree programmes.*

Keywords – *multilingualism, multilingual university, multilingual degree programme.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Multilingualism in higher education worldwide is a means of meeting the demands of globalised economic systems, developing cross-border education, involvement in international networks and research, bringing in foreign students, helping local students develop their language skills. In this global context of multilingualism English as lingua franca certainly plays the first fiddle. It has become a global trend to launch English-taught degree programmes in non-English speaking countries or at least to shift to the instruction in English in a number of courses. However, the countries like Russia, which are relatively new players in international education, face many challenges on the way to integrate multilingualism in higher education systems. These challenges include the necessity to make special provisions for teaching in a foreign language at the national and institutional levels; the deficit of faculty with a high foreign language competence who are able to teach in a foreign language; the need to implement new approaches in the design of degree programmes so that they could meet the demands of target audiences with different language learning backgrounds. It is also essential to integrate multilingualism in all fields of university activities as a part of the so-called home internationalization.

Meeting these challenges might seem Herculean tasks for the countries with just one national language and at the initial stage of developing international education. Definitely, such tasks cannot be accomplished without massive investments in human-resource development including attracting faculty with international experience, increasing English language competence of home faculty and administration, training and

motivating faculty to implement international standards in education including student-centered approach, interactive teaching and others. However, the focus of this article is not on these very important staff development issues but on the design of multilingual degree programmes and making necessary provisions for their successful lifecycle. The aim of the article is to analyze general approaches to the design of multilingual degree programmes and to illustrate some models of multilingual degree programmes at the case of Higher School of Economics in St. Petersburg, Russia.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In general, the category of multilingualism encompasses “the coexistence of languages and the diversity of language attitudes” [2, p. 1415]. With this vision of multilingualism as the basis, in academic literature there are several concepts that make the framework for considering multilingualism a current trend of university education. One of them is the concept of “a multilingual university” which is described as “a multilingual acting space” in higher education, an institution whose members are able to communicate in a foreign language in addition to official languages [5; 7; 9]. Research, conducted by E. Lurda et al. to compare the views of academic staff, students and administrative staff on a multilingual university, showed that for all groups of respondents another important feature in addition to this basic one is offering a range of degree programmes in different languages. For some respondents it is undoubtedly English, while for others it could be another [7].

In the general context of shifting to an extended or even exclusive use of English for international purposes, K. Risager identifies three main types of university policies related to multilingualism: a monolingual policy of using English more or less exclusively; a bilingual policy where English is used with the national language; a trilingual policy where English is used with the national and the regional language [10]. Apparently, only universities implementing the second and the third types of university policies can be referred to as multilingual. In their strategic development, according to M. Madiba (2010), such universities focus on two important dimensions: first - developing multilingual awareness and proficiency among students and staff; second - promoting multilingualism in teaching and learning programmes. This actually means “improving access to English for all students and staff on the

one hand, and promotion of multilingualism in the institutional policies and practices on the other” [8, p. 331].

Besides the concept of a multilingual university, multilingualism is inherent to the design of degree programmes and creating a multilingual learning environment. With respect to degree programmes multilingualism serves two main goals: increasing international student numbers and helping local students become global citizens. At the institutional level in different educational contexts worldwide this leads to the increase of English-medium instruction (EMI), especially in Masters and PhD programmes. However, in a multilingual university bilingual and trilingual policies result in the development of degree programmes with different combinations for the use of languages.

According to E. Moore (2016), multilingualism at the degree programme level may be materialised in the curriculum, in teachers’ course plans and in actual classroom practice. Respectively she defines two types of the curriculum: multilingual – “one that includes subjects in different languages” [9, p. 26-27], and monolingual – based on the use of a single language. Multilingualism at the curriculum level is described as macro-alternation. E. Moore assumes that within a multilingual curriculum there may also be two types of courses. The first type are the courses with the unilingual pedagogical design and, respectively, unilingual classroom practices. The second type demonstrates one more level of multilingualism - meso-alternation - and refers to the courses with the plurilingual pedagogical design in which “the use of more than one language across different activities or participation formats (e.g. lectures, group work, etc.) and modes of communication (e.g. written and spoken language) is contemplated explicitly in course documentation, learning materials and in teachers’ discourse about their subject” [9, p. 26]. Plurilingual pedagogical design is further traced in the plurilingual classroom practices – micro-alternation. A very interesting finding of E. Moore’s research relates to the cases of plurilingual learning processes within a unilingual course design. Despite not officially sanctioned to apply bilingual or plurilingual pedagogy instructors and students use plurilingual resources in the cases of academic troubles or problem situations.

In some studies of multilingual degree programmes such plurilingual practices are called “translanguaging” or “flexible bilingualism” [1; 3; 4; 6]. “Translanguaging” is a relatively new and developing term and its effectiveness as a classroom practice is still only beginning to be researched. Classroom translanguaging is described as a planned and serendipitous use of two languages to organize and mediate mental processes with a pedagogic emphasis [6]. Natural translanguaging may occur spontaneously in classroom interaction to tackle difficult learning situations, while “official translanguaging refers to explicit strategies employed by teachers in order to use several languages in class” [4, p. 12]. Strategically translanguaging ensures the ecological perspective for multilingualism and emphasizes “the overlapping of languages in the student and teacher rather than enforcing the separation of languages for

learning and teaching” [1, p. 112]. Doiz et al (2014) point out that accepting translanguaging at university may help to warm students’ attitudes towards multilingualism and EMI and reduce some of the students’ misgivings towards English [3].

The conclusion from these findings is that multilingual classroom contexts are hugely varied, with multiple variations for implementing multilingualism at the degree programme level in different education systems across the world.

III. PROVISIONS FOR MULTILINGUALISM IN THE DEGREE PROGRAMMES OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

This section will give a general description of the provisions for multilingualism in the degree programmes that need to be made by universities in Russia. As it was mentioned earlier, Russia is not very advanced in international education. Though it joined the Bologna process in 2003, there were actually no provisions at the federal level for the introduction of EMI or teaching in a foreign language in general and thus to the attraction of international students. The change happened in 2012 when the new Federal Law on Education in the Russian Federation was issued [11]. The previous Law prescribed that teaching in all educational institutions could be conducted only in the official language that is in Russian. In the republics of the RF citizens could enjoy the right to study the languages of the nationalities of the Russian Federation, however teaching in the languages of nationalities could only be provided in case an educational institution had all the necessary resources. The new Law of 2012 allows for the teaching in a foreign language. The Law prescribes only one condition for the teaching in a foreign language – fixing this in the local regulatory documentation of an educational institution.

The Law having opened the doors to creating multilingual universities in Russia, however, it took time for the introduction of EMI and starting to implement multilingualism at the degree programmes level. There are several reasons for that. Making a decision about launching an English-taught programme or shifting to EMI in an existing programme as well as fixing this decision in a university regulatory document is just the top of an iceberg. Universities are supposed to undertake several deliberate initiatives to ensure quality teaching and learning in a foreign language. Just a few of these initiatives include the following: new enrollment regulations with the requirements to a foreign language proficiency, changes in the regulatory documents on the teaching process and quality control, developing all teaching resources in a foreign language, solving the staffing problem, subscription to electronic resources in a foreign language, creating support services in a foreign language, etc. As a rule, the shift to multilingualism becomes a vital component of the university strategic documents: university strategy for internationalization, roadmaps for strategic development and others, which are also to be reconsidered in view of new priorities and initiatives.

IV. THE CASE OF HIGHER SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS IN ST. PETERSBURG

In the Russian higher education environment, HSE St. Petersburg is a branch of National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE). HSE is a public university and the only one in the field of social sciences and humanities with the status of a national research university. According to the QS Subject Ranking, HSE is number one in Russia in Economics and Econometrics, Business & Management, Accounting & Finance among other fields. Established in 1992, the university intended to promote national economic and social reforms by educating a new generation of future leaders in Russia. HSE is also a participant of the national Academic Excellence Project (informally called the 5-100 Project). The project was launched in 2013 by a special Decree of the President of Russia not to simply achieve high positions in rankings but to create a group of WCUs (world class universities) in Russia which are globally competitive in terms of both education and research. From the very start of the project, HSE has become one of the project leaders demonstrating the best results in gradually achieving global competitiveness. Having the status of a national research university, HSE is entitled to establish its own education standards across all degree programmes. It gives sufficient flexibility for integrating best international practices, ensuring personalization and launching innovative degree programmes.

Participation in the Academic Excellence Project with high global and national significance and high status of a national research university have led to a number of strategic initiatives aimed at internationalisation of all university policies and fields of activities. The strategic priorities shifted towards attracting international researchers and creating international research laboratories, recruiting faculty with international experience, increasing numbers of international students, establishing international partnerships and launching collaborative measures such as double-degree programmes. English as the language of delivery and operations has become increasingly important. Programmes and modules in English were developed to create opportunities for intensive student and faculty mobility.

The aspiration for internationalisation is most evident in HSE St. Petersburg, the second largest (after Moscow) campus of HSE in student numbers. This is very much due to the unique location of the campus. Historically the city of St Petersburg is known as the “window on to Europe” for Russia, it is the historical and cultural capital of Russia, recognized for its long traditions in higher education, lively business landscape, and international atmosphere. New priorities in HSE development combined with the location benefits have promoted re-branding of the campus, which is now positioning itself as the international hub of the whole university.

The comprehensive internationalisation of education and research started with the development of the campus Internationalisation strategy, which was adopted by the Academic council in 2016, and the establishment of the campus

Internationalisation steering group (ISG). With reference to educational policy and in keeping with the University priorities the campus internationalisation strategy puts emphasis on three broad measures. The first measure consists of the development of degree programmes competitive in the global market and attractive for both international faculty and students. This task is being implemented through a set of activities: the design of new and upgrade of the existing degree programmes that meet international standards in the quality of teaching; introduction of modules to develop digital skills, the skills of data analytics and other “competences for the future; provision for the individual pathways in learning; establishing partnerships with leading foreign universities including agreements for double degrees; international certification and accreditation of certain degree programmes.

The second measure deals with the international experience of faculty and students. This action resulted in the increase of student and faculty mobility through the creation of the student and personnel mobility programmes; recruitment of faculty with the experience of teaching in leading foreign universities; involvement in international networks, associations and consortia.

The third strategic focus of internationalization is multilingualism. HSE has developed and implemented a comprehensive university programme for language learning with the main focus on the English language communicative competences, a variety of options to enhance them in formal and informal educational contexts, and the requirement to all the students to pass external assessment organized and funded by the university. Students have the opportunity to learn another foreign language above the curricula in addition to English. To promote home internationalization English language courses are offered to administrative staff and faculty free of charge.

The most significant and challenging measures concerned integrating multilingualism at the degree programme level. We will describe the results of these measures at the case of HSE St. Petersburg where a number of initiatives were implemented in addition to the whole university activities which actually led to a rather quick transformation of the campus educational landscape.

Historically the campus has passed several stages in terms of integrating multilingualism and the range of degree programmes:

1. 100% monolingual Russian-taught degree programmes (in strict accordance with the previous Federal Law on Education).
2. A combination of monolingual Russian-taught degree programmes and multilingual programmes with up to 25% of English-taught modules in the curricula.
3. A combination of monolingual Russian-taught degree programmes, monolingual English-taught degree programme (three master programmes) and multilingual programmes with up to 25% of English-taught modules in the curricula.

4. A combination of monolingual Russian-taught and English-taught degree programmes, multilingual programmes with up to 25% of English-taught modules in the curricula, and English-taught programmes with bilingual tracks in a number of modules.

It is worth mentioning that monolingual programmes (both Russian-taught and English-taught) and multilingual programmes with up to 25% of English-taught modules and an option for a second foreign language in the curricula are represented in the programme portfolio of all the university campuses. However, the model of English-taught programmes with bilingual tracks in a number of modules was first developed and launched in St. Petersburg campus and further recommended for implementation in the whole university. The idea behind developing this model of multilingual programmes was meeting the needs of different target audiences of applicants and providing them with equal opportunities in the learning process, lowering the risks of losing the applicants with insufficient English language competence while at the same time ensuring gradual shift to the status of a 100% English-taught programme and increasing international student numbers.

The model of an English-taught programme with bilingual tracks in a number of modules allows for both Russian speaking and non-Russian speaking students choose the language of tuition in a number of modules which are traditionally considered more difficult than others, and especially for studying in a foreign language. The number of such modules is normally not more than 10 and they are located in the first and second years of the curricula. These modules are taught to parallel groups of students in different languages, Russian or English, according to the students' choice. Simultaneously in the 1-st and 2-nd years students are offered intensive English language courses so that they could successfully continue doing the programme in the 3-d and 4-th years with 100% EMI. The same is true for international students from non-English speaking countries.

The new model was first implemented for the enrollment of 2017 in three bachelor programmes: International management, Sociology and social informatics, Political science and world politics. The results achieved are quite positive though different in each of the programmes. In three years' time the programme in International management has transformed into a monolingual English-taught programme with a double degree track. The bachelor programme in Sociology and social informatics has preserved the status of an English-taught programme with bilingual tracks and increased the number of international students. It also received a consequent follow-up: the master programme in Sociology has also adopted the same model and transformed from a monolingual Russian-taught programme to an English-taught programme with bilingual tracks in the first year and multilingual second year (one concentration with EMI and another taught in Russian). The third programme - Political science and world politics - has decreased the number of courses with bilingual tracks from 7 to 3 and at the same time it has doubled the number of international students, which is really a good result in such a short time span. In general, the model proved to be effective in terms of

promotion in the global and national market and attracting different categories of applicants. In the global environment such programmes are positioned as English-taught while in the national market they are positioned as EMI programmes with the possibility to do a number of courses in Russian and take some time to improve English language skills. On the whole this strategy has turned out to be successful and brings good results.

V. CONCLUSIONS

It is important to note that although globally oriented universities are more and more committed to using English as the primary medium of instruction and administration, monolingual policies seem inadequate in meeting the needs of students with different language backgrounds. Monolingual policies also prevent from creating enabling learning environments for students who are not native speakers in the language of instruction. Consequently, students and teachers may turn to unsanctioned plurilingualism in actual teaching and learning practices instead of using the just one language as a medium.

However, there are certain solutions that allow for both reaching the objectives of internationalization and integrating multilingualism and thus creating more stimulating multilingual learning environments. Some of these solutions lie in the field of degree programmes design. Multilingual or bilingual degree programmes with the combination of modules taught in different languages, monolingual programmes with bilingual tracks in a number of modules, officially authorised translanguaging in teaching and learning practices are effective ways of creating a multilingual university. Multilingual formats in the design of degree programmes are student-friendly. For example, legitimate translanguaging practices help students tackle learning-related problems and at the same time avoid language difficulties. Degree programmes with bilingual tracks allow students to make a soft transition from their native language to a foreign language in dealing with the subject content.

In other words, universities that are sensitive to multilingual needs of their students have a variety of effective options for integrating multilingualism at the level of degree programmes. They just need to be innovative or use the existing benchmarks on their way to a multilingual university.

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