

DOES THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF TERTIARY EDUCATION IN SLOVAKIA IMPACT LANGUAGE TEACHING?

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Abstract

Language teaching for university students in Slovakia is seen as a fundamental instrument for effectively implementing internationalization strategies in tertiary education. The accomplishment of these strategies is one of the priorities of national policy in the Slovak Republic. Promoting the ideas of internationalization in tertiary education by enhancement of the content of the study programs is a vital step toward improving training. Curriculums in a foreign language and methodological-educational support for carrying out graduate programs' purposes contribute to realizing internationalization strategies. Foreign language proficiency is considered a critical tool for improving the quality of graduate training, preparing highly skilled personnel proficient in foreign languages, including English and Spanish, knowing political and social terminology, and understanding how to use international political tools in professional activities. It is stated that implementing internationalization strategies into university spaces in Slovakia and the public throughout the country is essential for national development policy.

Keywords: language teaching, internationalization, policy, tertiary education, English, Spanish, academic mobility.

Introduction

Language teaching of university students is an essential task bearing in mind the internationalization process in tertiary education in Slovakia. This process is regulated at the state level by the “Strategy of Internationalization of Higher Education until 2030” (Stratégia, 2021). Internationalization is an approach that aims to equip educators and university students “with a mindset, skills, and competencies geared towards addressing global challenges and solutions, including measures to develop such a mindset through course content and teaching methods” (Internationalisation in learning and teaching, 2020).

The importance of improving efficiency and providing a higher-quality regulatory environment for tertiary education institutions under current conditions is stressed by Depoo, Urbancová, and Smolová (2022), Šnýdrová, Depoo, and Šnýdrová (2021), Ferro and D’Elia (2021), Leonard (2021) and many others.

The quality of the Slovak educational system is, according to Bahna (2015), Fischer and Lipovská (2015), and Shumeiko (2017), vital for delivering university knowledge to society. Modern scholars and language teaching specialists carried out the pedagogical study of different fields in university students’ professional language training. Moreover, among them are the authors of the current research. Mariá Spišiaková investigated methodological principles of teaching contemporary Spanish business language (Spišiaková, 2018), and together with Z. Kittová analyzed labor market requirements for foreign language tutoring with a focus on Spanish (Spišiaková, Kittová, 2020). Natalia Shumeiko, in her work *Content peculiarities of Master’s foreign language teaching in Slovakia*, paid attention to the content of studying materials at the university level (Shumeiko, 2016). Furthermore, Natalia Shumeiko, in her paper *The educational potential of innovative foreign language training programs for future humanitarian specialists in Slovak universities* focuses on the peculiarities of the content of the curriculum (Shumeiko, 2016). Moreover, the other work, *Language education in the Slovak higher education space* (Shumeiko, 2019) by Natalia Shumeiko, emphasizes the Slovak experience in professional university-level foreign language training of professionals in management and economics.

Top-quality language learning at the university requires a deep and fundamental understanding of the language and culture. Bohdan Ulašín, a modern Slovak scientist, who gave detailed research on false internationalism, studied treasured elements of the Spanish language and culture (Ulašín, 2020). The researcher studies false or pseudo-internationalism by providing examples of word pairs with similar pronunciation and spelling but different meanings in Spanish. This study serves as an essential basis for the student's understanding of the similarity of words in the Spanish language, avoiding false associations, misunderstanding, or wrong usage, or, in the best case, distortion and imprecision of context in Spanish. The scholar also presented outcomes of scientific studies relating to lexicology, and the cultural specificity of learning a new Spanish language vocabulary (Ulašín, 2022).

Scientists investigate the internationalization of tertiary education. Knight J. considered the definition of internationalization (Knight, 2003; 2008). Kurylo V. and Myhovych I. studied the concept of internationalization of tertiary education relying on lean management principles (Kurylo, Myhovych, 2021). Bohdan Ulašín gave detailed research on false internationalism. Moreover, the scholar studied the basics of the lexicology of the Spanish language (Ulašín, 2020; 2022). Zuzana Hrdličková explored the ways of developing learners' language skills in the business English course, relevance and correctness of vocabulary in business discourse (Hrdličková, 2021).

Internationalization of tertiary education in Slovakia

Jane Knight, a professor at the University of Toronto, gave her opinion concerning internationalization. He wrote: it was "defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education" (Knight, 2003).

In Slovakia, the national document entitled "Strategy of Internationalization of Higher Education until 2030" (Stratégia, 2021) defines the great, in our view, and overwhelming priorities of tertiary education considering the dimensions outlined in the above definition. We believe that international, global, and intercultural dimensions are essential when realizing the goals of increasing education quality and international accessibility and modernizing the tertiary education system globally.

The document "Strategy of Internationalization of Higher Education until 2030" contains normative characteristics for tertiary education. Organizational factors are also essential. Internationalization strategies in Slovakia maintain international experience in the field of internationalization of tertiary education. A modern and professional learning environment motivates students to achieve high success.

"Strategy of Internationalization of Higher Education until 2030" states that the Slovak Republic directs its efforts to strengthen the quality of higher education and to increase the competitiveness of Slovak higher education institutions (HEIs) in the European Higher Education Area. The Slovak higher education system is designed to create new offers to university students to support the internationalization strategy of higher education until 2030. In particular, Slovak HEIs, following the requirements of the document mentioned above (Stratégia, 2021), concentrate on the following:

- the improvement of the quality of study programs taking into account international standards;
- providing opportunities for establishing and developing international partnerships between universities to exchange experience on questions relating to education and research;
- giving university soon-to-graduate students the knowledge, skills, and competencies for employment in a globalized labor market, to enable them to keep pace with modern business trends;
- contributing to the successful implementation of international projects in higher education.

Language teaching expands opportunities for soon-to-graduate students of Slovak HEIs to see internationalization in all its complexity

In the current study, we reviewed English-language study programs. In this regard, we consider tertiary education international and global dimensions. In particular, we analyzed the educational opportunities offered at the universities in Slovakia for future Master's graduates with a major in European Studies. We paid attention to programs in foreign languages. We have found that students can obtain the academic degree of Master in European Studies with the English language of instruction at the following universities in Slovakia: the Comenius University in Bratislava and Pan European University in Bratislava (Portál vysokých škôl, 2022).

According to Knight (2003), "international, intercultural, and global dimension are three terms intentionally used as a triad." The scholar believes that international means relationships between and among countries, cultures, or nations. Also, internationalization relates to connecting diverse cultures within organizations, societies, and governments. Accordingly, intercultural addresses this dimension. Global is a valuable term. It gives a feeling of universal significance. So, these three terms complement one another and illustrate the richness in the capacity and profundity of internationalization.

Ideas of social and political values and the theme of internationalization are in the English-language curriculum for Master's training in European Studies. Below we have looked at the study plan for the English-language educational program "European Studies 2022/2023". The program is taught at Comenius University in Bratislava and immerses students in political analysis through exploring economic policy models and political philosophy. We note that in the first winter semester, students study disciplines of two blocks: the first block – "Political analysis," and the second block – "EU Policies." The same blocks but different political themes are in the study plan during the entire study period. Political themes of the disciplines "Justice and Equality: Modern Political Philosophy," "Political Economy of the European Union," and "Economic Policy Models" (1st year of study / the winter semester) encourage critical thinking and increase political awareness. European Union Policies are also under consideration in the study plan. So it is pretty apparent that the themes of the greening of European Union policies ("Contemporary Challenges: Greening of EU Policies"), political science ("Organizational and Institutional Analysis in Political Science and International Relations") are included (1st year of study / the winter semester) in the curriculum. Political ideas of the contemporary world are thematically united in the "European Union in Political and Public Discourse" academic subject. The content of the English-language study for students working towards a Master's degree in European Studies gives valuable insight into the basics of policy analysis. In this context, two blocks of disciplines – "Political Analysis" and "EU Policies" – should be seen. In particular, block 1 (1st year of study / the summer semester) – "Political Analysis" – reveals the essence of statistical analysis and political development. This block thematically combines the subjects: "Statistical analysis," "Development assistance: theory and practice," and "Politics of Collective Memory." Block 2 (1st year of study / the summer semester) focuses on the issues of European Union policies and offers for consideration the themes of migration, international human rights protection, and European Union sectoral policies ("Migration in context," "EU Sectoral Policies in Practice," "International Human Rights Protection"). Block 2 (2nd year of study / the winter semester) includes academic courses that contribute to developing communicative skills needed to succeed in political conversations in English. "Policies of Gender Equality," "International Humanitarian Law," and "Regionalism and Global Order" (Študijné plány, 2022/2023) are subjects that students study. Learning themes containing. Political themes of the English-language courses of the Master's program foster the ability of students to improve their communicative skills to function efficiently in the political environment in a highly professional manner, transferable skills, and solid conceptual foundations, raising the competitiveness of the graduates in Slovakia and abroad. The major in European Studies aims to make university graduates more competitive in the job market by providing pragmatically grounded knowledge.

University lecturers of the University of Economics in Bratislava (Slovakia) are constantly working towards improving learners' language skills in a business English course with an increasing blurring between offline and online learning. University lecturers at the University of Economics in Bratislava pay much attention to business terminology (Hrdličková, 2021). Enhancing students' language skills is a step in the qualitative improvement of tertiary education, professional and research knowledge, and skills acquired by the student at the university.

Reflecting the development of science, culture, and education in Slovakia and supporting the European diversity of cultures, an intercultural dimension as an essential aspect of tertiary education is evident in Spanish-language teaching within the English-Spanish curriculum at the University of Economics in Bratislava (Študijné plány pre 1. a 2. stupeň štúdia, 2022).

We notice internationalization and international aspects in the Bachelor's and Master's curriculum units with English and Spanish teaching languages. We consider the study program "Foreign Languages and Intercultural Communication" for Bachelor's students of study field "Philology" (a form of study: full-time education). The program contains ideas of internationalization in the courses in Spanish. The primary aim of classes is to get the students acquainted with issues of relations in cultural diversity ("Intercultural studies in Spanish"). Moreover, the lessons contribute to the development of the professional communication skills of future employees ("Professional business Spanish language and communication"). Master's students within the study of the training program, as mentioned above, deal with cultural concerns ("Visual culture of Spanish speaking countries" and "Cultures in international relations"). Clear business communication ensures that every employee works on solving the same problem. That is why the courses for students working towards a Master's degree contribute to the study of professional terminology, foster an understanding of international and political tools and potentially help identify ways to address the concerns of career activities. These courses are the following: "Professional lexis and style of the Spanish language," "Practical rhetoric in the Spanish language," "Phraseology of the Spanish language," "Translation of specialized texts in Spanish," "Exercises in interpreting in Spanish," "Introduction to computer-assisted translation in Spanish," "Terminology work and terminography" (Študijné plány pre 1. a 2. stupeň štúdia, 2022).

Academic mobility and international cooperation: contemporary tendencies in Slovakia

The development of academic mobility and international cooperation of students and lecturers contributes to establishing international ties in various fields of science and presents the latest trends in tertiary levels of the educational system in Slovakia.

Modern tendencies in Slovakia are intended to strengthen the cooperation of universities and are endorsed by the University of Economics in Bratislava. The university participates actively in the works and meetings of the project La Red Mundial de Hispanistas, which contributes to the popularization of the Spanish language and culture among university youth. Spring and summer schools for university students are organized permanently. In particular, in 2022, students from Masaryk University in Brno (the Czech Republic), The West University of Timișoara (Romania), the University of Novi Sad (Serbia), the University of Pécs (Hungary), Pázmány Péter Catholic University (Budapest, Hungary), and Ekonomická univerzita v Bratislave (Slovakia), who study Spanish at the Faculty of Applied Languages, united to participate in the spring school. It should be noted that this is far from a comprehensive list of participants of the spring school that was organized within the framework of the La Red Mundial de Hispanistas program.

The International Mobility Department at the University of Economics in Bratislava offers a comprehensive plan for the international mobility of university students, lecturers, and EU staff in Bratislava. The university supports ground-breaking research and education by providing Erasmus + on the administrative and financial level at UEBA in a complex way. Moreover, international mobility projects are suggested, cooperation agreements in the international

programs Erasmus + and CEEPUS are conducted, and new programs that support internationalization strategies are proposed for university staff (Oddelenie medzinárodnej mobility, 2022).

The recent trends in international relations at the University of Economics in Bratislava are subordinate to the university's strategic goal: strengthening the university's position in the international dimension of developing tertiary education opportunities in Slovakia. The University of Economics in Bratislava cooperates with 111 partner higher educational institutions in 41 countries. The university administration signed 309 bilateral agreements with 38 countries within the Erasmus+ program. The university uses and develops approaches to harmonizing a comprehensive internationalization strategy in Slovakia's tertiary education, research, and innovation. Moreover, the university actively participates in CEEPUS, the associations for double diplomas HERMES and CIDD, DAAD, and the Fulbright Commission (International Relations at the University of Economics in Bratislava, 2022).

International organizations, initiatives, and networks support the tertiary education sector in Slovakia. Among them: AACSB; AmCham; AUF; the CCFS; EDAMBA; EFMD; ERSA; EUA; Magna Charter Universitatum; SUERF. The University of Economics in Bratislava is a member of the above-mentioned organizations (International Relations at the University of Economics in Bratislava, 2022). The university is also a partner of international projects CORALL and PROMINENCE (Projects, 2022).

Conclusion

The internationalization of tertiary education is a significant public policy objective in the current stage of the development of the Slovak Republic. The document "Strategy of Internationalization of Higher Education until 2030" highlights the importance of improving the content of study programs to give soon-to-graduate students the competencies, skills, and knowledge to employ in a globalized labor market. "International studies in Spanish," "Professional business Spanish language and communication," "Cultures in international relationship," "Organizational and institutional analysis in political science and international relations," "European Union in political and public discourse," "International human rights protection", "EU Sectoral policies in practice," "Justice and equality: modern political philosophy," "Political economy of the European Union" are themes or courses that the students in Slovak HEIs study. The content of Spanish-language and English-language programs analyzed in this paper contributes to students' awareness of internationalization. The preliminary analysis of selected study programs exposes the ideas of internationalization in the university space of Slovakia. Understanding of these ideas contributes to forming the fundamental character of national development policy. English and Spanish language proficiency is a well-thought-out part of education in Slovakia for improving the quality of graduate training. Current research provides some of the highlights of our analysis to answer the question "Does the internationalization of tertiary education in Slovakia impact language teaching?" We contend that improving the content of study programs can expand opportunities for soon-to-graduate students to think critically about internationalization and see internationalization in all its complexity. The present article highlights the value of the content of English-language and Spanish-language programs. These study programs give new knowledge, help to understand issues of relations in cultural diversity and contribute to developing communication skills.

International mobility projects in tertiary education provide opportunities for developing partnerships between higher education institutions to exchange experience on education and research-related issues. CEEPUS, the association for double diplomas HERMES and CIDD, DAAD, and the Fulbright Commission contribute to developing approaches to harmonize a comprehensive internationalization strategy in tertiary education in the Slovak Republic. The support provided by EDAMBA; EFMD; ERSA; AACSB; AmCham; AUF; the CCFS; EUA;

Magna Charter Universitatum; SUERF is critical to the achievement of nationally determined priorities. The participation of the Slovak higher education institutions, particularly the University of Economics in Bratislava, in international projects CORALL and PROMINENCE is one of the most effective ways to implement public tasks. International mobility programs are the most visible manifestation of the internationalization of tertiary education in Slovakia.

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