



Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir
University of Iceland

Transitioning EAL Students from EFL Classes to EMI Programs at The University of Iceland

The growth in EMI programs in Nordic higher education has exposed the limitations of traditional EFL pedagogies in preparing students for study in Academic English (Hellekjær, 2005; Dimova, et al., 2015; Arnbjörnsdóttir and Prinz, 2014; Arnbjörnsdóttir and Ingvarsdóttir, 2010). This presentation describes a project that maps the characteristics of English education at all levels as well as the functional uses of English in Iceland. The presentation begins with a description of the constraints of traditional secondary EFL instruction in Iceland. It examines the divergence between the official status of English as a foreign language and the actual use of English as an additional language. This inconsistency results in inadequate student preparation for EMI study at university. Then the challenges posed by study in two languages are presented. Students initially express confidence in their English skills and their preparation for university study. However, many report that the additional strategies required to access English texts increases their workloads and many admit to not reading the texts at all. Finally, the presentation outlines a new program that addresses identified challenges in writing English. The instructional approach draws from a range of pedagogical traditions (Flowerdew, 2016) to operationalize a targeted set of core writing competencies to improve writing in a single semester. To maximize writing practice, a concise textbook was developed which reduces reading time through graphic representations and examples. Explicit instruction “shows” how to reproduce a targeted writing skill, followed by scaffolded practice, and production. The program has been tested over six-semester with 800 participants from mixed-language backgrounds. Pre-study surveys reveal that years of EFL writing instruction developed students’ awareness of the principles of academic writing but most students fail to apply the principles to their actual writing. Post program data reveals improved academic writing, increased writer efficacy and autonomy, and reduced plagiarism.

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