

# Student and teacher English workshops as preparation for MSc programmes taught in English

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**Summary** In total, 51 students of 89 enrolled in MSc programmes attended the 2-day English workshop aimed at preparing them for the MSc programme in Human Nutrition, Clinical Nutrition and Gastronomy and Health taught in English. During the workshop, the students were introduced to strategies on listening, reading and writing in an academic environment, and they were tested in all three aspects. Furthermore, a 1-day workshop was held for the teachers to create awareness of the contents of the students' workshop, the students' challenges, and introduce some tools which they can use to help the students cope with their challenges. Both workshops were evaluated using short questionnaires. The students overall found the workshop very useful and all would recommend it highly to others. They found it valuable to know their own weaknesses and to be introduced to strategies on how to overcome these. Teachers valued the introduction to the students' challenges, and the introduction to how to accommodate these in the classroom.

## Background

From 2009 the MSc programmes in Human Nutrition, Clinical Nutrition and Gastronomy & Health (DHN, KU-LIFE) has been taught primarily in English. Concurrent with this change in teaching language, we experienced a drop in Grade Point Average (GPA) on some of the courses when comparing 2008 and 2009 GPA's. Thus, to overcome the language barriers of the students and prevent loss of academic learning outcome, we have held English workshops for students and teachers.

## Students' workshop

The students' workshop ran over 2 days. On the first workshop day the students were given an introduction to the different reading, writing and listening strategies. Also, tests in all three areas were carried out to assess the students' weaknesses and strengths. On the second workshop day, the students were given a more thorough insight into the strategies on reading, writing and listening in English medium courses based on their own experiences and test results.

The students' weakest areas were writing and listening (Figure 1), and this was in accordance with their self-evaluation prior to the workshop. A specific challenge of writing in English in an academic setting appeared to be present. Emphasis was therefore put on "academic word list" as a tool.

During block 2 in the autumn of 2011, we will make focus group interviews to examine the students' long term self-perceived learning outcome of the workshop after application during classes.

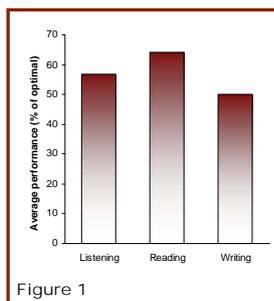


Figure 1

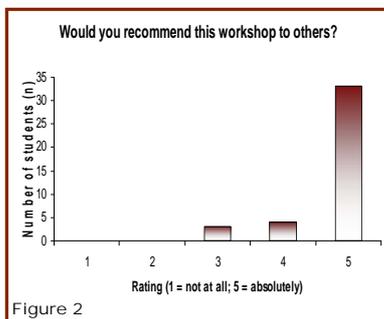


Figure 2

The students evaluated the workshop through questionnaires. In general, the students considered the workshop to be highly relevant, mainly because they felt that knowing their strengths and weaknesses is important.

From Figure 2 it is evident that this workshop is recommendable to fellow students as well as to other faculties facing similar difficulties.

## Teachers' workshop

The teachers' workshop was a 1-day workshop offered to all teachers from assistant professor level and up, and a total of 16 teachers participated, approximately half of which had been certified to teach in English. The teachers reported that they experienced lack of paraphrasing ability and loss of spontaneity as the major concerns when teaching in English.

The workshop covered a summary of the students' workshop and three other sessions: 1) on important aspects of lecturing in English, e.g. signposting, paraphrasing and pronunciation tips, 2) on student activation; and 3) on useful tools.

Overall, the teachers' rated the topics covered as very appropriate with a mean (mean rating 4.7 on a 1-5 scale), and the workshop was recommended to others, and the comments made also reflected that the workshop was useful:

*"The workshop will form the basis for considerations in future situations and will affect the way I prepare"*

However, a 1-day workshop does not solve the problems we face as teachers, and we will experience difficulties when teaching in English also in the future.

*"The workshop was very useful, but it cannot teach us experience and fluency which is what we lack"*

## Super users

We have introduced the concept of "Super users", i.e. a group of four teachers who have attended the students' workshop and are more acquainted with their strategies.

The role of the Super users is to aid knowledge sharing among teachers, for example on how to make and assess written exams, which is often perceived as a challenge to teachers.

## Perspectives

**This initiative was well accepted by both teachers and students, and we recommend its implementation in the future.**

**We will evaluate the students' long term learning outcome 2-3 months after the workshop using focus group interviews**