



Students of brand management listening to a lecture in English at Essec, an elite French business school. (Richard Harbus for the IHT)

In many business schools, the bottom line is in English

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Published: April 10, 2007

PARIS: When economics students returned this winter to the elite *École Normale Supérieure* here, a simple one-page petition was posted along the corridors demanding an unlikely privilege: French as a teaching language.

"We understand that economics is a discipline, like most scientific fields, where the research is published in English," the petition read, in apologetic tones. But it declared that it is "unacceptable" for a native French professor to teach standard courses to French-speaking students in the adopted tongue of English.

Bienvenue, or make that welcome, to the shifting universe of academia, where English is becoming as commonplace as creeping ivy and mortarboards. In the last five years, the world's top business schools and universities have been pushing to make English the teaching tongue in a calculated strategy to raise revenues, overcome declining birthrates and respond to globalization.

Business universities are driving the trend, but English is spreading to the undergraduate level, with some South Korean universities offering up to 30 percent of their courses in the language. The former president of Korea University sought to raise the bar to 60 percent, but ultimately lost his post in December in a faculty backlash over his ambitions.

In Madrid, business students can take their admissions test for the elite *Instituto de Empresa* in English and enroll in core courses for a master's degree in business administration in the same language. At the *Lille School of Management* in France, English stopped being considered a foreign language in 1999, and now half of the post-graduate programs are taught in English to accommodate a rising number of international students.

Over the last three years, the number of master's programs offered in English in schools with another host language has more than doubled to 3,300 programs in 1,700 universities, according to Dave Wilson, chief executive of the Graduate Management Admission Council, an international organization of leading business schools.

"We are shifting to English. Why?" said Laurent Bibard, the dean of MBA programs at Essec, a French business school in a suburb of Paris that is a fertile breeding ground for chief executives. "It's the language for international teaching. English allows students to be able to come from any place in the world and for our students - the French ones - to go everywhere."

In fact, this year the university is celebrating its 100th anniversary in its adopted tongue. The school's new publicity film made its debut in English and French. Along one of the main roads leading into Paris loomed a giant blue billboard boasting about the birthday in French and, in smaller lettering, English.

A number of elements are transforming English into a teaching tool. One is that international accreditation standards required business schools in the late 1990s to include English-language components. Another is the competition for foreign students, who offer new revenue sources to universities.

At Essec and the Lille School of Management in France, for example, the tuition for a two-year master's degree in business administration is €19,800, or more than \$26,000, for European Union citizens and €34,000 for non-EU citizens.

"The French market for local students is not unlimited," said Christian Bredillet, the associate dean for the Lille School of Management's MBA and postgraduate programs. "Revenue is very important, and in order to provide good services we need to cover our expenses for the library and research journals. We need to cover all these things with a bigger number of students, so it's quite important to attract international students."

Essec, whose population of foreign students has leaped by 38 percent in four years, to 909 today out of a student body of 3,700, is now offering 25 percent of its 200 courses in English. Its ambition is to accelerate the English offerings to 50 percent in the next three years.

Santiago Iñiguez, dean of the Instituto de Empresa, argues that the trend is a natural consequence of globalization, with English functioning as Latin did in the 13th century as the lingua franca most used by universities.

"English is being adapted as a working language, but it's not Oxford English," he said. "It's a language that most stakeholders speak." He carries out conversations on his blog, deanstalk.net, in English.

With the shift in working languages, the English testing industry is thriving on the rising demand to evaluate skills of a new generation that is expected to master English at more sophisticated levels. Many countries have stepped up English-language requirements at lower levels, which is improving the language abilities of students entering the university system.

The latest survey from ETS, the U.S. company that administers standardized tests, of 1.3 million takers of the Test of English as a Foreign Language showed that Europeans outperformed other areas of the world, with Germans achieving the highest scores.

But universities are looking for more proof that their students can demonstrate a working knowledge not only of written English, but also of speaking and listening comprehension.

The entertainment industry has given an unlikely advantage to smaller countries like Portugal or Greece where most original English-language films and television shows appear in subtitled form - unlike Italy, France and Spain, which have a dubbing tradition, according to Liam Vint, the country manager in Italy for Cambridge ESO. Cambridge is a testing service of the University of Cambridge that annually conducts English exams for almost two million candidates in 135 countries.

"No one has ever claimed that the school program was better in Portugal than Italy," Vint said. "The fact is that in Portugal there is no dubbing." Students raised on subtitled programming are stronger in their speaking and listening skills, he added.

But building the bridge between comprehension in the living room and participation in the classroom is easier said than done.

When younger French students at Essec start a required course in organizational analysis, the atmosphere is marked by long, uncomfortable silences, said Alan Jenkins, a management professor and academic director of the school's executive MBA program.

"They are very good on written tasks, but there's a lot of reticence on oral communication and talking with the teacher," Jenkins said, noting that he used role-playing to encourage them to speak. He also refuses to speak in French. "I have to force myself to say, 'Can you give me that in English?'"

The Ewha Woman's University in Seoul is also aware that it faces a difficult task at the first stage of its Global 2010 project, which will require new Ewha students to take four classes in English, two under the tutelage of native-speaking professors. The 121-year-old university has embarked on a hiring spree to attract 50 foreign professors.

At the beginning, "teaching courses in English may have less efficiency or effectiveness in terms of knowledge transfer than those courses taught in Korean," said Anna Suh, program manager for the university's office of global affairs, who noted that students see the benefits. "Our aim for this kind of program is to prepare and equip our students to be global leaders in this new era of internationalization."

The Lille school is planning to open a satellite business school program next autumn in Abu Dhabi, where the working language will also be in English.

"Internationally, the competition is everywhere," Bredillet said. "For a master's in management, I'm competing with George Washington University. I'm competing with some programs in Germany, Norway and the U.K. That's why we're delivering the curriculum in English."

Tomorrow: For adults who need English but did not master it in school, the pressure is on. A look at the many ways - some of them downright crazy - that English is taught around the world.