

ELT Matters 2

Developments in English Language Learning and Teaching

Editors

Jayakaran Mukundan
Dzeelfa Zainal Abidin
Dulip Singh Ranjet Singh

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Contents

Preface	vii
Language Loyalty and Identity in a Global World	1
Ain Nadzimah Abdullah <i>Universiti Putra Malaysia</i>	
Norms, Varieties and Intelligibility	11
Andy Kirkpatrick <i>Curtin University of Technology, Australia</i>	
Analysing Students' Essays with the Help of Writer's Workbench	28
Anealka Aziz Hussin <i>Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam</i>	
Re-evaluating Language Use and Usefulness: Concerns of ESL Language Practitioners	40
Chan Swee Heng <i>Universiti Putra Malaysia</i>	
Language and Context in E-mail Communication at the Workplace	51
Chong Wei Yee <i>Taylor's College School of Hospitality and Tourism, Petaling Jaya</i> Jariah Mohd. Jan <i>University of Malaya</i>	
English as a Medium of Instruction Policy at Petra Christian University: Are the Economics Teachers Ready to Implement It?	64
Flora Debora Floris <i>Petra Christian University, Surabaya, Indonesia</i>	
A Nation on the Move: from Chalkface to Laptops	77
Hannah Pillay & Mercy Thomas <i>English Language Teaching Centre, Malaysia</i>	
The Metaphors of ELT in Malaysia and Their Educational Implications	90
Imran Ho-Abdullah <i>Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia</i>	

English Language Proficiency and Students' Attitude and Performance in Entrepreneurial Studies Jamaliah Abdul Hamid <i>Universiti Putra Malaysia</i>	98
Making Textbook Evaluation Meaningful Jayakaran Mukundan <i>Universiti Putra Malaysia</i>	105
I Speak in My Mother-alien Tongue Lee Su Kim <i>Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia</i>	114
Beyond Terrestrial Understanding: the Need for Pragmatic Competence Misyana Susanti Husin, Kamisah Hj Ariffin & Roselina Musahar <i>Universiti Teknologi MARA, Jengka, Pahang</i>	126
The Effectiveness of an In-service Course for the English Literature Component in Secondary Schools Nalini Arumugam & Naginder Kaur <i>Universiti Teknologi MARA, Alor Gajah, Melaka</i>	136
A Corpus-based Study on an English Preposition of Place, at Norwati Roslim <i>Universiti Teknologi MARA, Kuala Pilah, Negeri Sembilan</i>	147
Towards a Knowledge Management Perspective to ELT Management Rajasegaran Krishnasamy, Ramesh Nair & Jasbir Rai <i>Universiti Teknologi MARA, Alor Gajah, Melaka</i>	160
The Planning and Implementation of English for Science and Technology in Malaysian Schools Rohani Abdul Hamid & Netty Yushani Yusof <i>Curriculum Development Centre, Ministry of Education Malaysia</i>	169
Teachers' Perception on Thinking Skills as an Innovation and Its Implementation in English Language Teaching Rosma Osman <i>Ministry of Education, Malaysia</i> Ghazali Mustapha, Turiman Suandi, Ibrahim Nazri & Bahaman Abu Samah <i>Universiti Putra Malaysia</i>	177

The Effects of Learners' Language Proficiency and Gender on Their Strategy Use	186
Rosyati Abdul Rashid <i>Kolej Universiti Sains & Teknologi Malaysia</i>	
Attitude, Motivation and Achievement in English Language Learning Amongst Secondary School Students in Kuala Terengganu	195
Samsiah Abdul Hamid <i>Kolej Universiti Sains & Teknologi Malaysia</i>	
Continuing Professional Education for English Language Teachers	205
Sebastian K. Francis & Shamsuddin bin Ahmad <i>Universiti Putra Malaysia</i>	
Assessing Performance in Literature Review Writing of ESL Tertiary Students	214
Sharon Goh Seng Pang, Chan Swee Heng & Lee Geok Imm <i>Universiti Putra Malaysia</i>	
Motivation and Strategy Choice: How These Could Reframe Teaching	225
Siti Katijah Johari <i>Universiti Malaysia Sabah</i>	
Teaching Styles of Malaysian ESL Instructors: an Investigation into Current Practices and Implications to ELT	235
Thang Siew Ming & Wong Fook Fei <i>Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia</i>	
Aspects of Designs and Decisions in Multimedia Presentations	250
Kaarthiyainy Supramaniam, Sheela Paramasivam & Nalini Arumugam <i>Universiti Teknologi MARA, Alor Gajah, Melaka</i>	
Cultural Familiarity in Literary Texts: Consideration for Text-selection	260
Zailin Shah Haji Yusoff <i>University College of Engineering and Technology (KUKTEM) Pahang</i>	
A Strategic Tool for Enhancing Summary Writing	271
Jasvir Kaur Amar Singh <i>SMK Pendamaran Jaya, Port Klang</i> Shameem Rafik-Galea <i>Universiti Putra Malaysia</i>	

Bilingualism and Nonverbal Intelligence : a Case Study of Malay Secondary School Students in Malaysia	282
Nor Azmi b. Mostafa <i>Sultan Idris University of Education, Tanjung Malim, Perak</i>	
Literacy, Stories and the Self: Giving Meaning to Lived Experience	292
Noritah Omar <i>Universiti Putra Malaysia</i>	
Applying a Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) Approach in the Intensive English Language Classroom: a Practitioner's Perspective	310
Saras Sathiah <i>Wollongong University College, Australia</i>	
Women Awareness in Literature	320
Teh Chee Seng <i>SMK Selayang Bharu, Selangor Darul Ehsan</i>	
Biodata	323



ELT Matters 2: Developments in English Language Learning and Teaching

English as a Medium of Instruction Policy at Petra Christian University: Are the Economics Teachers Ready to Implement It?

Flora Debora Floris
Petra Christian University, Surabaya, Indonesia

Abstract

This study attempts to investigate the present state of knowledge, skills and attitudes as well as the potential problems of Economics teachers at Petra Christian University (PCU), in preparation for the implementation of new teaching policy, i.e. the use of English as a medium of instruction in classrooms.

A questionnaire survey, interviews and classroom observations were used as the instruments of data collection in the Economics faculty at PCU as this faculty taught non-language based courses.

The main findings of the study showed that in general, most teachers were not aware of what English as a medium of instruction entailed. They also pointed out that potential problems that they would face during the implementation included a) the lack of English proficiency among teachers and students at PCU, b) negative attitudes of students towards the use of English as a medium of teaching and learning, and c) logistical problems such as the lack of textbooks in English.

Background

University graduates in Indonesia have many responsibilities and demands to fulfil in the present move towards acknowledging the role of English as a lingua franca. They are required not only to achieve mastery of their own subjects, but also to be able to use English proficiently in oral and written communication.

As a result, many changes in university policies have progressively been introduced throughout Indonesia. In *Petra Christian University (PCU)* for example, English is to be used as the medium of instruction (see http://www.petra.ac.id/Indonesian/fokus_rencana.htm for further details). It is not an easy task for university teachers to adjust to these new policies and demands after many years of using their mother tongue, *Bahasa Indonesia*.

In October 2002, *English Language Teaching Centre (ELTC)* was set up at Petra Christian University (PCU). The unit has been assigned to set up teacher training programmes for the university lecturers. The first step done was to identify aspects that

teachers felt they needed training in. My reason for wanting to assess the kinds of training a teacher should receive was influenced by Sanders and Eberhart's (1994: 75) advice that "to ensure [training] programs are relevant, teachers should take the lead in identifying their own needs".

Literature Review

Types of Training Programme

Typical training programmes tend to focus on institutional aims. These programmes are driven also by managerial decisions about the teacher's role in the school and a prioritising of the type of teacher development that would best meet the needs of the institution (Kyriacou 1996: 11). This type of programme can be considered what Nunan (1989: 111) labels the "top-down approach".

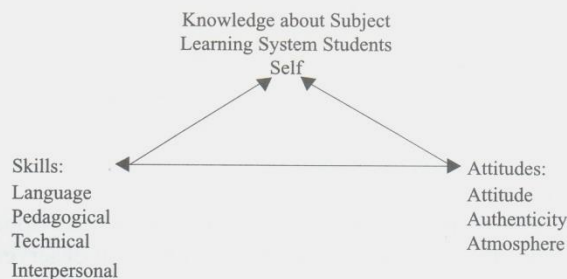
On the other hand, according to Kumar (1989: 36), a training programme that emphasises the personal growth and development of an individual teacher will cater to the perceived needs of the teachers. In order to achieve this objective, Sanders and Eberhart (1994: 78) suggest that teachers be allowed to take the lead in identifying their own needs.

From my point of view, the latter type of training programme could be a more effective programme for Petra Christian University (*PCU*). This kind of programme can create a non-threatening environment for the participants since this programme applies a more humanistic approach, in the sense that each teacher is valued as an individual who has his/her own needs, experiences, etc.

Components of Training Programme

Traditional concept for teacher training programme according to Head and Taylor (1997) mainly concerns knowledge of the topic to be taught, and of the methodology for teaching it. The emphasis is on classroom skills and techniques while affective factors, although important, are often neglected.

Other concepts for teacher training programme however, focus on three major points: personal qualities, knowledge and skills which Anderson (1989: 9) calls, 'trademarks of teachers'. Maley (1996: 19) describes these components in his "triangle of forces" as displayed below:



Methodology

The data collection period lasted four weeks in the month of June 2003.

Subjects

The subjects for this study were the Economics teachers of the *PCU*. They are teaching at Accounting, Management and Hotel Management Departments. The population was 44, out of which, 21 were women. Twenty-one out of the 44 teachers have been involved in teaching at the Economics Faculty of *PCU* for more than seven years. Twenty-six out of the 44 teachers hold master's degrees and two out of the 44 have doctorates.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- What are the Economics teachers' present state of knowledge, skills and attitudes with regard to using English as the medium of instruction policy at Petra Christian University?
- What are some of the potential problems the Economics teachers feel they will encounter if they have to teach Economics using English as a medium of instruction?

Instruments

Questionnaire

The questionnaires were distributed to the whole population of 44 teachers. However, by the end of June 2003, only 30 respondents, out of which 21 were women, returned their complete questionnaires. These respondents included 18 teachers from the Management department, 8 from the Accounting department, and 4 from Hotel Management. One lecturer had a doctorate degree, 16 lecturers had masters while the rest (13) had bachelor degrees. Six lecturers out of the 30 respondents had been teaching for more than 10 years, 15 lecturers had been teaching between 1-9 years, and the rest (9) were new lecturers who had taught for less than a year. The complete results of questionnaire can be found in the Appendix.

Interview

Nine teachers (three from each of the three departments in the Economics faculty) were selected for the interviews based on seniority in rank and highest academic qualification. A semi-structured interview was conducted with the aim of getting a more detailed response from the teachers to support any findings obtained from the questionnaire. Each interview lasted for about 15-30 minutes.

Classroom Observation

Classroom observations were conducted using a non-participant approach where the researcher joined the class, but took on the role simply as an observer. As it was near

the end of the semester, most of the teachers had already finished their syllabus, leaving only three classes for observation. Each class observation lasted between one and a half to two hours.

Discussion

Findings for RQ 1

The Economics Teachers' Present State of Knowledge

63.33% of the respondents pointed out that they had good mastery of the subjects that they taught while 20% said that they had excellent mastery. Only 16.67% said that their mastery level was average, and no one admitted that they had little knowledge mastery. These results were not surprising since as teachers at Petra Christian University (PCU), they were required to have scored an adequate GPA of at least 3.50 (out of 4 scale point) in order to work in the faculty. However, when they were asked whether they had the same level of mastery for their English proficiency, only 30% said that they had good mastery of it and only 6.67% believed they were in the excellent level. Most of the respondents admitted that their language proficiency was average (56.67%) or even in the low level (6.67%).

It is interesting to note that the teachers who considered their English language level as low were in fact senior teachers who had more than seven years of teaching experiences. This lack of English proficiency might be due to the fact that only in recent years, PCU requires its teacher candidates to obtain a minimum TOEFL score of 450 if they wanted to be employed at the university. If any PCU teacher felt that they needed to improve their English proficiency, they could contact one of the two supporting units, i.e. Continuing Education and Language Courses, which organise some language courses. Unfortunately, the language courses are not free and this could be one of the factors that hindered the language development of these senior teachers. As Teacher 1 commented, "senior teachers were not required to have TOEFL scores when they applied for the first time. Also, English courses, even those held by the university, are expensive so most of us cannot afford them".

When asked whether the respondents understood what "teaching non-English-subject(s) by using English as the medium of instruction" meant, the majority of the teachers (63.33%) said that they did. However, a substantial percentage of teachers (36.67%) said they did not. This lack of awareness was clearly demonstrated when teachers answered question 4 where they had to write what they understood by the phrase 'using English as the medium of instruction'. Five teachers wrote in their questionnaire that they thought this phrase meant they only had to use English references (including textbooks) in the classrooms.

The misconception among many of the teachers who thought they knew what English as the medium of instruction meant indicates that Economics teachers need more information about this teaching innovation before they can be expected to implement it in the classroom.

The Economics Teachers' Present State of Skills

Textbooks and lecture materials

A total of 83.33% (60% +23.33%) of the respondents said that they always or often used English textbooks in their classrooms. The remaining 16.67%, who said that they sometimes used English textbooks, said that they used Indonesian textbooks mainly in their teaching because the content was more relevant to Indonesia. As Teacher 4 commented during the interview:

In my opinion, Indonesian textbooks are useful especially if we talk about Indonesian context. If the topic is about tax, for example, we will use Indonesian textbooks to discuss about our government's policy and we will use English textbooks if we discuss international tax or treaty.

What was ironic was that only 36.67% of the respondents always encouraged their students to read these English textbooks. However, when the teachers who were interviewed were asked whether it was important for their students to read Economic textbooks in English, all of them replied 'yes'.

The mismatch between the teachers' perceptions regarding the value of students reading Economics textbooks in English and the actual practice of encouraging students to read these textbooks, could reflect a lack of confidence among them about their students' English proficiency. Since the teaching aim in the Economics faculty was to teach the subject of Economics and not English, it was probably natural for them to recommend Indonesian textbooks rather than English ones.

I also noticed that the use of English handouts was not popular among the Economics lecturers. 70% of the lecturers said they never used English handouts in their classrooms. Only 13.33% (3.33% + 10%) of the lecturers said that they often or always provided students with handouts in English.

Medium of instruction

86.67% of the respondents said that they always used *Bahasa Indonesia* in their classrooms and never used English to deliver their materials. As Teacher 7 confirmed,

I never use English in delivering my lectures even though I use English textbooks as my main references. The students' level of proficiency is quite low, so I am afraid that they will not understand my English explanations [...] I always use Indonesian in my classes. Otherwise, the students will not understand what I say.

Language medium used for classroom discussion

90% (86.67% + 3.33%) of the respondents said that they never or rarely asked their students to present their opinions and answers in English. 90% (83.33%+6.67%) of the teachers also said that they never or rarely asked their students to write their assignments in English.

Once again, the reason that lecturers allowed students to express themselves, orally and in written form, in Indonesian rather than in English was probably due to a concern that lecturers did not penalize the students for their poor English proficiency, but assessed them on the content of their ideas and opinions.

English competency and proficiency of lecturers

Initially, it was thought that this concern among the lecturers was the only reason for the heavy use of Indonesian in the delivery of lectures. However, data from the questionnaire showed that this was not the only reason. In fact, 90% (60% + 30%) of the respondents admitted that they themselves had low or moderate ability to teach in English. This fact indicates that in general, the present state of skills with regard to English competency and proficiency was not only poor among the students, but also poor among teachers.

The Economics teachers' present attitudes

The Economics teachers' attitudes towards their present roles

86.66% (53.33% + 33.33%) confirmed that they were enthusiastic about their present role as a teacher. Surprisingly, almost all the respondents 96.67% (40% + 56.67%) confirmed quite strongly that they were enthusiastic about the subject(s) that they were teaching. This result implies that the respondents were quite committed as teachers and enjoyed their jobs, despite the teaching situation in Indonesia, where teachers receive low salaries, teach large classes and undertake long teaching hours.

The positive attitude was also reflected when the respondents were asked about teaching innovations. 93.33% (40% + 53.33%) of the teachers agreed enthusiastically that they were open to teaching innovations or changes. The openness among teachers to learn new teaching innovations was reflected in their responses regarding further development of their professionalism. All the respondents indicated that teachers should keep promoting their professionalism; and training programmes were necessary for developing their professionalism.

These results seem quite encouraging since they predict that the lecturers would not be resistant to future teaching innovations. Similarly, the results would also imply that in order to develop their professionalism further, teachers would not resist undergoing English training courses in order to improve their English proficiency.

The Economics teachers' attitudes regarding the use of English as the medium of instruction

The lack of English proficiency would probably explain why the teachers seemed rather ambivalent in their views about the necessity of using English as a medium of instruction in the classroom, with the more or less equal percentages for the responses which ranged from strongly disagree (6.67%), disagree (26.67%), moderate (30%), agree (26.67%) and strongly agree (10%).

The teachers (36.67%) who agreed that they were enthusiastic about using English as the medium of instruction in teaching their subject(s) were probably those who felt that they were sufficiently proficient and confident in English to teach Economics in that language. The remaining 63.34% who disagreed or moderately agreed were probably those who did not have this same proficiency and confidence in English. As Teacher 3 commented, "I agree that English is important, but I don't think the university should implement this policy at present until the English proficiency of the teachers and students improves."

Findings for RQ 2

Problems in Using English as the Medium of Instruction

46.67% of the teachers were of the opinion that the students' English proficiency was the main problem they would face if the university would like all teachers and students to use English in the classrooms. Seven out of nine teachers interviewed also indicated that they felt the low proficiency of the students would be a potentially big stumbling block in the policy's success when it is implemented.

It is interesting to note that slightly less than half (40%) of the teachers surveyed also admitted that their own level of English proficiency needed to be improved if the university's policy were to be successfully implemented. Teacher 1 however commented that having a suitable command of English did not guarantee that teachers would have the ability to teach in English. She said:

The teachers at PCU... I think, most of them are good in English because in the recent years, the university requires every teacher to have TOEFL scores. But it does not guarantee that they can teach in English fluently. Teaching is different from daily speaking. Probably most teachers, including me, will have problems to explain concepts in English.

While the lack of proficiency among teachers and students and the lack of training among lecturers to teach in English were major problems cited, the students' negative attitudes towards English was also a point of concern among 6.67% teachers. Teacher 2 expressed this concern about the students' negative attitude towards using English when he said:

They [the students] are not motivated to improve their knowledge or skills in using English. So, I think if this plan is implemented, the students will feel that they are forced to use English; something which probably they do not like. They will ask, what is the use of using English in learning Economics?

6.67% of teachers also said that the lack of suitable Economics textbooks in English would be a potential problem. Although PCU's central library has 29,635 textbooks and 5,992 reference titles in which 70% are written in English (see <http://www.petra.ac.id/library/english/overview.php>), their major collections deal only with Architectural, Civil

Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Electrical Engineering, and English Literary Works. Hence, it would be difficult for Economics teachers to use appropriate textbooks in English since there is such a dearth of them in the university itself.

Conclusion

Although the findings discussed are based on a small-scale study, they are indicative of present and future problems that are encountered when new teaching guidelines are introduced by policy-makers. Some findings indicate that there is a mismatch between the university's new policies and their practical implementation.

The majority of the Economics teachers also have negative attitude towards the use of English as the medium of instruction. This could be a result of the fact that teachers did not see the value of learning non-language-based subjects, such as Economics, by using foreign language.

However, as English becomes progressively promoted as an international language, many EFL countries are beginning to implement educational policies which promote the use of English as the medium of teaching and learning. Research could then be conducted however to investigate which types of subjects would really benefit from this kind of English policy and whether the future needs of students are genuinely enhanced as a result of an English-only policy. A needs analysis of students taking subjects such as Science and Economics could be conducted to examine their present and future aspirations as well as their views on the advantages and disadvantages of learning scientific subjects such as these in English.

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Questionnaire Results

No.	Questions	N total=30	%
PART ONE KNOWLEDGE			
1.	If you could rank your mastery of the present subject(s) that you teach, how would you rate yourself?		
	Very Low	0	0
	Low	0	0
	Average	5	16.67
	Good	19	63.33
	Excellent	6	20
2.	If you could rank your mastery (degree of competence and proficiency) of the English language, how would you rate yourself?		
	Very Low	0	0
	Low	2	6.67
	Average	17	56.67
	Good	9	30
	Excellent	2	6.67
3.	Do you understand the meaning of: "using English as the medium of instruction to teach non-English subject(s)"?		
	No	11	36.67
	Yes	19	63.33
4.	What do you know about teaching non-English subject(s) by using English as the medium of instruction? Please give a brief explanation.		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching non-English subjects by using English Using English textbooks in teaching our course Teaching non-English subjects by using English texts and English handouts and then delivering the instructions in English. 		
SKILLS			
5.	Do you use English textbook(s) to teach your subject(s)?		
	Never	0	0
	Rarely	0	0
	Sometimes	5	16.67
	Often	7	23.33
	Always	18	60
6.	Do you ever ask your students to read English textbook(s)?		
	Never	0	0
	Rarely	4	13.33
	Sometimes	9	30
	Often	6	20
	Always	11	36.67

No.	Questions	N total=30	%
7.	Do you ever use supporting materials (handouts, transparencies, etc) written entirely in English in your classroom(s)?		
	Never	21	70
	Rarely	0	0
	Sometimes	5	16.67
	Often	1	3.33
	Always	3	10
8.	Do you ever deliver your subject(s) by using only English as the medium of instruction?		
	Never	26	86.67
	Rarely	1	3.33
	Sometimes	1	3.33
	Often	2	6.67
	Always	0	0
9.	Do you ever ask your students to give answers or opinions and ask questions orally in English?		
	Never	26	86.67
	Rarely	1	3.33
	Sometimes	1	3.33
	Often	2	6.67
	Always	0	0
10.	Do you ever ask your students to write their assignment(s) in English?		
	Never	25	83.33
	Rarely	2	6.67
	Sometimes	1	3.33
	Often	2	6.67
	Always	0	0
11.	On average, how would you rate your ability to teach your subject(s) by using English as the medium of instruction?		
	Very low	0	0
	Low	18	60
	Average	9	30
	Good	3	10
	Very excellent	0	0
	Excellent	1	3.33
ATTITUDES			
12.	I am enthusiastic about my present role as a teacher		
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	0	0
	Moderate	4	13.33
	Agree	16	53.33
	Strongly agree	10	33.33

No.	Questions	N total=30	%
13.	I am enthusiastic about the subject(s) that I am teaching		
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	0	0
	Moderate	1	3.33
	Agree	17	56.67
	Strongly agree	12	40
14.	I am open to new teaching innovations		
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	0	0
	Moderate	2	6.67
	Agree	16	53.33
	Strongly agree	12	40
15.	Teachers should keep developing their professionalism		
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	0	0
	Moderate	7	23.33
	Agree	17	56.67
	Strongly agree	6	20
16.	Training programmes for developing professionalism are necessary		
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	0	0
	Moderate	2	6.67
	Agree	16	53.33
	Strongly agree	12	40
17.	I am enthusiastic about using English as the medium of instruction in teaching my subject(s)		
	Strongly disagree	2	6.67
	Disagree	8	26.67
	Moderate	9	30
	Agree	8	26.67
	Strongly agree	3	10
PART TWO			
18.	What do you consider as the main obstacle to the implementation of English as the medium of instruction. Please describe only ONE main problem.		
	Insufficient number of Economics textbooks written in English	2	6.67
	Teachers' low English proficiency	12	40
	Students' low English proficiency	14	46.67
	Students' negative attitudes towards using English	2	6.67

other (please specify:)

0 0

PART THREE

19.	Sex	9	30
	Male	21	70
	Female		
20.	Department	8	26.67
	Accounting	18	60
	Management	4	13.33
	Hotel Management		
21.	Number of years of teaching experience	9	30
	Less than 1 year	6	20
	1-3 years	5	16.67
	4-6 years	4	13.33
	7-9 years	6	20
	10 years or more		
22.	Highest educational background	13	43.33
	Bachelor degree	16	53.33
	Master degree	1	3.33
	Doctorate		