

# IMPACT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AS A HUMAN CAPITAL IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS' DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

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## Abstract

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Entirely evident, the English language is dominating the academic world, and higher education institutions' development apparently depends on this skill. As Rhekhalilit and Lerdpaisalwong (2019) point out, "In the era of globalization, English has played a significant role as a global language in different communicative aspects, especially in international academic exchange among scientists, scholars, and researchers" (p. 336). The study aims to highlight the importance of English foreign language (EFL) and its role in the professional and academic development of university lecturers and the development of higher education institutions (HEI) in non-English speaking countries. The study used the qualitative method, and the data were extracted through semi-structured interviews, the data of which are presented in a way of descriptive analysis by writing the opinions of the interviewees in the form of quotes. The findings show that the academic staff strongly supports the role that the English language has in meeting these standards, which directly affects their professional development and the institution's development they represent. In addition, the study tends to raise the motivation in improving the level of the English language among academic staff, since it concludes this ability is also considered to be a human capital in institutions of higher education. The relevance of EFL knowledge by academic staff in HEI is related closely to the institutional development goals.

**Keywords:** EFL, Human Capital, Teaching Staff, Research, Internationalization, HEI Development

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Different researchers in the field of education have already studied enough, and also continue to further research on the topics of English as a foreign language. Higher education institutions' (HEI) development gives significant importance to the learning of the English language and attracts the academic staff to its continuous improvement, considering it as a prerequisite of the most advanced standards that are required to be met. According to Seidlhofer (2005), in recent years 'the term English as a lingua franca' (ELF) has emerged as a way of referring to communication in English between speakers with different first languages" (p. 339). The study aims to research the English foreign language (EFL) role in the academic and professional development of lecturers at HEIs in Kosovo and beyond, as well as the impact of EFL on HEIs development. Kosovo, as a not very developed country, is paying great attention to English in its academic world as a matter of developing different issues. Therefore, Galloway, Numajiri, and Rees (2020, p. 396) have admitted that as HEIs around the globe seek to internationalise, unprecedented growth in the number of non-language subjects being taught in English has been witnessed.

The study is focused on three important standards: teaching, scientific research, and internationalization, which are common for both academic staff (lecturers) and HEIs. Implementing and improving the quality of these standards are certainly influenced by EFL level proficiency. In Kosovo universities, about 90% of study programs include English as a compulsory or elective module. Al-Jardani (2012) specifies that on average students have "3-4 hours of English per week" (p. 42). English teachers motivate students by constantly reminding them that English knowledge will influence them in achieving their goals in the academic world. Education and living abroad have become not only a desire but also a goal of young people in our country. In the study conducted by Trice (2007), it is found that "many international students' weak English language skills contributed to their isolation from host national students" (p. 112). Moreover, "language learning is a powerful way to develop new behaviors that express higher status" (Tollefson, 2000, p. 10).

A significant number of lecturers have visited foreign countries, at least as PhD candidates, and later as visiting professors through exchange programs. In some countries, exchange visits are a prerequisite for dissertations. Moreover, many lecturers have emphasized the fact that to be a doctoral student they had to possess an EFL test certificate as a condition for admission and registration in the doctoral studies, or to be employed as a teacher in a HEI. As Shohamy (2007) claims, language tests are often introduced in a top-down manner as devices that define and impose language knowledge and create *de facto* language policies (p. 522).

In the study conducted by Kırkgöz (2009), she recounts that, "Given the fact that increasing numbers of undergraduate students prefer to study in English-medium rather than Turkish, and a large number of students receive an EAP [Extensible Authentication Protocol] programme due to inadequacy in their level of English proficiency, it is

important to identify the efficacy of receiving EAP instruction to one's higher education in the medium of English" (p. 81).

In addition to teaching, academic staff engages in scientific research. Researchers write the literature review of papers referring to the best scientific articles, which are mainly written in English. These articles are published in journals indexed on internationally known platforms where information can be found on the internet only in English language. HEI's internationalization starts with the promotion of the institution through official websites where all those who are interested in getting to know this institution receive the right information. Everything on the official websites of the universities is published in both the native language and the English language. This is because HEIs try to be promoted in foreign countries as well. Students' and teachers' mobility is one of the other processes that must be implemented in order for the institution to meet the standard of internationalization.

As El-Sakran and EL-Sakran (2021) suggest, "In order to successfully communicate with native speakers of the language and to maintain the relationships without misunderstanding or miscommunication, language users should be competent intercultural communicators" (p. 39). It seems that the internationalization of universities is directly related to English. As for English next languages trends, Graddol (2006) defines it as follows: "Where the global importance of language used to depend on the number and wealth of native speakers, now the number of people who use it as a second language is becoming a more significant factor" (p. 64).

Teaching, research and internationalization are standards that must be fully compliant for HEI to be accredited. Accreditation is the key to HEI functioning. The accreditation process is done by the accreditation agency together with foreign international experts who carry out the process in English. The purpose of the study is to express what gives importance to EFL in the implementation of these processes and standards which every HEI faces, how and why it happens.

Based on the purpose of the research, the following research questions are addressed:

*RQ1: What is the role of EFL in the teaching process in HEIs?*

*RQ2: How does the EFL impact scientific research in HEIs?*

*RQ3: What is the impact of EFL on HEI internationalization?*

The importance of research lies in providing information revealed among researchers for the field of study, for all those who have the will and obligation to contribute to the development of the institution where they work. In particular, the present study has the potential to inform policymakers about the centers for excellence in teaching or similar centers established within the university to provide English language courses for their academic staff. The study further shows that knowledge of English is a necessity for all professors who intend to be a part of the teaching staff in HEIs as well as for professors to develop professionally and to advance continuously. Moreover, the teachers' academic development has a positive impact on the development of their home institution as well, and may lead to international

recognition. Implications from the study data shed light on the importance of English language knowledge by HEI teachers.

The following part of the paper is structured as follows: In Section 2, the previous literature on the role of English as an important asset of human capital in the development of higher education institutions is reviewed. Section 3 consists of the research methodology and the data analysis procedure, sample and research instrument. Section 4 discusses the results revealed from the data. Finally, in Section 5 the conclusion and recommendations for further work are presented.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. The importance of English in teaching staff and HEI development

This study reviewed literature related to the role of the EFL in HEI in non-English speaking countries. From the existing literature and teachers' experience in HEI, it appears that the academic development of staff and collaboration among them are directly influenced by EFL knowledge.

Therefore, according to Al-Khalil (2017), the use of English language becomes now a must not only at the local level but at the global education level as well. In addition to studying programs in English, Altbach (2007) says that "A small number of new private universities operating solely in English have also been established, sometimes calling themselves the American University of ... to take advantage of the prestige and popularity of English" (p. 3).

In the academic affairs of higher education institutions, English over the last decade is being identified as English medium instruction (EMI). "A growing concern in EMI is how the academic achievement can be achieved when content knowledge is taught in English" (Muttaqin & Chuang, 2022, p. 1). According to Galloway et al. (2020), "English medium instruction (EMI) refers to the use of English to teach a non-language subject in a context where English is not the official language, and has become one of the most significant trends facing HEIs in such context today" (p. 396). "Although there is no special policy paper documenting the national approach to learning foreign languages, educational standards for higher education prescribe the ability to communicate in a foreign language in interpersonal and intercultural communication for all educational programs" (Guzikova, 2021, p. 551).

### 2.2. The impact of EFL on the HEI teaching process

As Nguyen, Marlina, and Cao (2021) claim: "The worldwide spread of English, brought about by the forces of globalization and the unprecedented growth in the number of multilingual users of English, has impacted the English language teaching (ELT) discipline and profession in profound ways" (p. 184). Further, the spread of English as the language of global communication has also become a tool in the internationalization process of universities, as it is a tool for world business and commerce (Despaigne, 2019, p. 44). The study materials and teaching literature for the study programs offered in universities are usually more

appropriate and richer in the English language. Lecturers often find the necessary material for teaching in English nevertheless their English language level proficiency must be good enough for them to use English literature. Moreover, they cannot meet the needs of students and easily apply differentiated lessons in the classroom, given that students differ from each other in language skills and learning styles. Findings from the study conducted by Despaigne (2019, p. 54) show that content teachers who teach their topic in English need to receive specific teacher training on how to teach in a foreign language. Therefore, Li, Chen, and Duanmu (2010) state that, considering the crucial role that English language proficiency plays in their studies, language support should be further strengthened.

Also, as Bukach and Golubova (2019) share, "It is necessary to develop students' ability to remove and apply at foreign language lessons the information that is obtained from the study of other subjects" (p. 28). In order to find out better the teachers' needs, Butler (2004) in his study "investigates those aspects of teachers' language proficiency that they feel are relevant to their English teaching" (p. 252). "We believe that it is important for teachers to be aware of the difficulties so that they can further develop their repertoire of teaching techniques thereby improving their professional practice" (Chen & Goh, 2011 p. 334). As Clyne and Sharifan (2008) discuss in their study paper, "some non-English-speaking countries have contributed to the belief in the sufficiency of English for inter-national and inter-cultural communication and to its consequences" (p. 28.5). Eventually, the lack of English might be a gap that accompanies teachers in their professional development.

On the other hand, Pérez-Llantada (2018) states that "the spread of English has been reported to raise conflicting views, as English is regarded both as an opportunity and a threat in the context of higher education internationalization" (p. 31).

### 2.3. EFL impact on scientific research

According to Bordons and Gómez (2004), the increasing role of English in science can be observed through the analysis of the language use in scientific journals. This is because English is said to be the academic language in the modern era or an international language. "Scholars tend to aim to publish in English not only to share their research in academia but also because of the pressure they may experience at work" (Ozdemir, 2014, p. 75). The Kosovo Accreditation Agency has set standards that require universities to have programs accredited by professors whose work is published on certain platforms. The same criteria must be met by professors who seek to advance in their academic vocation as well. For many researchers around the world who publish their articles in journals and international platforms, English is a foreign language.

What Breeze (2015) pointed out is that "publishing in a language other than English means lessening the odds of being read and cited by other scholars, and ultimately reducing one's chances of receiving promotion and research funding" (p. 41). "As English-language articles are cited more frequently, they will in turn take on increasing prestige and importance" (Tardy, 2004, p. 249).

Further, Yen and Hung (2019) stress, while an author's contribution depends on the content of the paper, language is a key vehicle for that content. Since the goal of every institution is to compete in the field of scientific research and in this way to develop, it seems that the English language plays a special role in this context. Scientific papers published in English are likely to be recognized more internationally.

#### 2.4. EMI and internationalization in higher education institutions

Internationalization as a standard in the development of HEI aims to implement both EMI programs and courses. EMI is defined as the "use of the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English" (Macaro, Curle, Pun, An, & Dearden, 2018, p. 37). Therefore, as Murray (2010) cites: "The most obvious professional development activity for an English teacher is reading journal articles about teaching English; reading journals (and maybe even writing an article for one) keeps you informed about new trends and research developments" (p. 3). Furthermore, Murray (2010), in addition, advises that "Conference participation also enables teachers to develop long-lasting professional and personal contacts in the English teaching community" (p. 10).

Although conferences, meetings and workshops within the country have their importance, still of special importance remain those at the international level. Internationalization has proven that the world through this standard becomes smaller and to access it we need to have sufficient knowledge of English language.

According to Rahman and Singh (2022), English has remained uncritically accepted as the most appropriate form of instruction, while the role of other languages and modalities in knowledge construction is neglected. Rao (2019) gives even more importance to English, indicating that English, being the first world language, is said to be the first global lingua franca and it is the most widely used language in the world in international trade, diplomacy, mass entertainment, international telecommunications and scientific publications as well as publishing newspapers and other books (p. 66). "It is worth noting that the relationship between EMI and internationalisation is complex, as EMI is simultaneously a driver, reaction and outcome of institutions' approaches to internationalization" (Galloway, 2020, p. 17). Simbolon (2021) claims that many universities strive to attract global citizens to enroll in their programs, and the English language is used as the medium of instruction for this purpose (p. 73).

Teachers have different opinions regarding teaching in English, depending on the field of study they are in charge of. Despite the challenges, "In many non-English-speaking countries around the world, scholars are being pressured to teach classes in English and to publish articles in internationally circulated journals, most of which are printed in English" (Byun et al., 2011, p. 434). A paper conducted by Lueg (2018) posits that EMI is one of the more adequate and effective tools for

reaching the goal of further internationalizing the universities to transform them into diverse and accessible trans-border organizations (p. 57). "A shift from internationalization abroad with its strong focus on a small elite of mobile students, faculty, administrators, and programs toward internationalization at home for all members of the academic community has become more urgent than ever" (De Wit & Altbach, 2021, pp. 43-44).

#### 2.5. English language learning as a human capital

According to Holborow (2018), human capital stands for the abilities and qualities of people that make them productive, viewed in terms of their value or cost to an individual, an organisation or a country (p. 521). The English language is considered to be a valuable human capital that affects the professional development of an individual in a HEI, but also in the development of the entire institution using the English language skills of a group of individuals.

In their article, Grenier and Zhang (2021) are convinced that economic studies have shown that fluency in a dominant language is important to economic success and increases economic efficiency. As Luo and Daly (2019) stress, "Human capital theory describes the complex connection between language proficiency and employment, as a foreign language skill, English is similar to other human capital and has the potential for economic value" (p. 73). Regardless of the field of study, whether for teachers or students, there is a serious effort towards EFL learning, as an important asset for further professional development for teachers and a relevant factor that opens doors for employment and further education for students. "The influence of English on the employment of college students is mainly reflected in requirements that employees demonstrate English proficiency" (Luo & Daly, 2019, p. 74).

According to Grishnova and Panaseiko (2021), having English knowledge as a great communication tool allows workers not only to make decisions faster, but also to develop their labor potential, and thus to build up human capital assets, increase competitiveness, and obtain higher incomes in the labor market. In addition, "Competitive performance in English in the global academic and professional market is not an easy feat to achieve for the whole of the HEI community, especially in non-English speaking countries" (Tejada-Sánchez & Molina-Naar, 2020, p. 344). Higher English proficiency leads to lower gender inequality, greater international mobility of residents, and a higher chance of being promoted (Grishnova & Panaseiko, 2021). Therefore, the English language is not only a human capital in education and professional and academic development but it is also an economic, cultural and social capital.

d'Almeida (2016) believes that "With regard to language learning, cultural capital could have an impact on many factors including pupils' interests in the target language, their motivation and their participation in the classroom" (p. 10). In considering the entitlement of every pupil to study another language, social class is a major factor at work in the classroom (d'Almeida, 2016, p. 11).

As Pham, Tomlinson, and Thompson (2019) put in, cultural capital refers to cultural-valued

knowledge, dispositions and insights typically valued within organisations and which graduates need to embody in order to signal their attractiveness to employers. To prepare learners to use English in global contexts, there is a need for ELT pedagogy to move away from monolingual and mono-cultural norms to encourage learners to learn to embrace diversity as well as their unique identities as multilingual users of the language (McKay, 2018). Dafouz and Smit (2020) defined the societal function of English as the use of languages in a broader environment outside the institution. Based on the data from the study conducted by Bezborodova and Radjabzade (2022), English is seen as trendy and prestigious on a societal level and the main reason for this kind of thinking is connected with internationalization, which is often associated with the English language. After analyzing the data from the research conducted by Hamzah, Abdullah, and Ahmad (2017), the raised hypotheses were proved that students' social capital outside the family provides a positive effect towards the students' academic achievement and the impact of English language proficiency on students' academic achievement is mediated by the students' social capital outside the family. Therefore, in the proposed policy offered by Linn, Bezborodova, and Radjabzade (2020) they claim that in oral and written communication with the public, the university representatives should accommodate the language preferences of the community and target audience.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper used the qualitative method, specifically the descriptive analysis method. As Nassaji (2015) confirms, "The goal of descriptive research is to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics. This research is more concerned with what rather than how or why something has happened" (p. 129). The use of this method enables the research not to be limited to closed questions. In advance, the observation method was used in order to make sure that the web pages of the institutions where the respondents/interviewees are from, the news posts and every information is also in the English language. All the institutions of higher education

where the respondents are from are non-English speaking countries, therefore, the aim was to understand the role and importance of EFL in the development of these HEIs. Another alternative method that would be suitable for conducting the research would have been the questionnaire for doctoral students in non-English speaking countries, who already face the process of teaching, research, mobility and conferences. Moreover, as Mohajan (2018) expresses, "In qualitative research we need to emphasize less on counting numbers of people who think or behave in certain ways, and need more emphasis on explaining why people think and behave in certain ways" (p. 39). During the semi-structured interviews, notes were taken which were considered sufficient to show the respondents' opinions on the research study. Field notes are still used mainly because of their simplicity (Tessier, 2012).

#### 3.1. Sampling

A prerequisite for the selection of the population was the fact that the respondents were HEI teachers. Out of 19 respondents in total, some have managerial posts in the institution where they teach and operate in the academic field. "The target population corresponds to the entire set of subjects whose characteristics are of interest to the research team" is pointed out by Martinez-Mesa, González-Chica, Duquia, Bonamigo, and Bastos (2016, p. 326). Participants were readily available to respond to interviews. The respondents from abroad were interviewed in their countries during the visit for project activities as our institutions are partners. Respondents were familiar with the field of study, such as research, teaching, internationalization and mobility, conferences, and other similar topics and could, therefore, provide needed information. The respondents who took part in the present study are five vice-rectors, two deans and two vice-deans, three professors from foreign countries, and seven professors from HEIs in Kosovo. The data for their positions and which institutions they come from are presented in Table 1. Due to professional ethics and at their request, the research will present participants by code, as presented in the following table.

Table 1. Job description and codes of respondents

No.	Name of HEI	Respondents' position	Respondents' initials
1	University of Mitrovica in Kosovo, UMIB	Vice-rector	VR1
2	University of Gjilan in Kosovo, UKZ	Vice-rector	VR2
3	University of Peja in Kosovo, UHZ	Vice-rector	VR3
4	University of Gjakova in Kosovo, UFAGJ	Vice-rector	VR4
5	University of Gjakova in Kosovo, UFAGJ	Vice-rector	VR5
6	University of Prishtina in Kosovo, UP	Dean	D1
7	University of Gjakova in Kosovo, UFAGJ	Dean	D2
8	University of Gjakova in Kosovo, UFAGJ	Vice-dean	VD1
9	University of Gjakova in Kosovo, UFAGJ	Vice-dean	VD2
10	Lumsa University in Rome, Italy	Full Professor	T1
11	University of Zagreb in Croatia	Full Professor	T2
12	South East European University in Macedonia	Full Professor	T3
13	University of Prishtina in Kosovo, UP	Associate Professor	T4
14	University of Ferizaj in Kosovo, USHAF	Assistant Professor	T5
15	University of Prizren in Kosovo, UUHP	Assistant Professor	T6
16	University of Gjakova in Kosovo, UFAGJ	Associate Professor	T7
17	University of Prizren in Kosovo, UUHP	Assistant Professor	T8
18	University of Gjakova in Kosovo, UFAGJ	Assistant Professor	T9
19	University of Peja in Kosovo, UHZ	Assistant Professor	T10

### 3.2. Research instrument

The study was conducted through semi-structured interviews. Some questions were planned and created in advance, while the rest were unstructured questions. This style of interview gives the opportunity to spontaneously bring out relevant topics related to the study. Semi-structured interviews contained discussions on about twenty questions derived from the main research questions. The questions are designed to provide information on the role of EFL in teaching, research and internationalization.

### 3.3. The process of conducting interviews

Respondents were interviewed from early September to late December 2021. Nineteen (19) respondents participated in the study, but there were 17 interviews held. We met VR1 and D1 at a meeting we had together, so an interview was conducted with both at the same time. The same happened with D2 and T7 in the UFAGJ. Other interviews were conducted one by one, which means a total of 17 interviews have been conducted for the present study. Except for the fact that the interviews were recorded, the interviewer kept notes the whole time but occasionally asked to write the opinions or expressions of the respondents when it seemed that a certain statement is worth noting in the paper. Interviews were conducted in the mother tongue with the respondents of the HEI in Kosovo and in English language with the foreign respondents. Each interview lasted approximately from 45 minutes to an hour.

### 3.4. Data analysis

The starting point of the research was the observation of the Universities' websites, from which came the purpose of the study. Data from interviews lasting about four months were collected by being listed in three categories (teaching, research and internationalization), and at the same time, some data that might deviate from the purpose of the study were kept aside. This was one of the challenges because sometimes the interviewees changed the discourse about various issues of education, which were not relevant to the topic being researched. After collecting accurate data, the findings were interpreted in the form of detailed descriptive analysis, summarized, analyzed and mainly written in the form of quotes based on participants' responses during the semi-structured interviews as well as how they approached the relevance of this research. Data collection and interpretation of findings provide a clear picture of how important EFL knowledge is as a necessary skill for the academic community and HEI development.

### 3.5. Ethical considerations

Since the Code of Ethics is a document that educational institutions in particular are obliged to have and adhere to, the research has considered it as one of the standards that should be taken into account. Therefore, we obtained their permission in advance and respected their request. In advance, the study's purpose and objectives were explained

to participants, and permission was requested to answer the questions provided for interview discussion. For the sake of confidentiality, it was their request not to disclose their full names and in full compliance they agreed to be presented through whatever code the author proposes.

## 4. FINDINGS

This part of the research presents the results of the respondents' interviews regarding the EFL importance on the development of academic staff as well development of HEIs in non-English speaking countries.

The following table presents respondents' general information background in terms of their teaching experience in HEI, EFL speaking skills and the official website of the institution where they work.

**Table 2.** Respondents' background information

	Criteria		Total
	What is your English language level proficiency?	Beginner	
Elementary		3	
Intermediate		6	
Advanced		9	
Your work experience in HEI?	1-5 years	2	19
	5-10 years	4	
	10-15 years	9	
	More than 15 years	4	
Information on the website of the HEI where I work is published in ...	Mother tongue	/	19
	English	/	
	Both	19	

### 4.1. Teaching

Taking into account that all respondents without exception have completed their PhD, during the interview they were asked if they had to prove their English language proficiency for enrollment in the doctoral school or to take any English language test as a prerequisite.

*RQ1: What is the role of EFL in the teaching process in HEIs?*

*Q1.1. Did EFL have an impact on your doctoral studies? What for?*

"As a condition to defend my doctoral thesis at a university in Albania, I was asked to pass the B2 (upper intermediate) English as a foreign language level, even though Kosovo and Albania have the same mother tongue and we have given lectures and consultations with professors in our mother tongue (Albanian language). We had to submit the certification of EFL together with other documents and a hard copy thesis" (Respondent T7).

"Studying literature and additional materials were often written in English" (Respondent T2).

"I have completed my PhD abroad, in a non-English speaking country, but studies were all in English" (Respondent VD1).

*Q1.2. What was your connection with EFL at the beginning of the teaching process in HEI?*

The teachers indicated that in addition to the English language they need for teaching, they are required to compile some forms and documents in English.

"Usually, before the beginning of the semester, we are asked for the syllabus of the course and an updated CV (curriculum vitae). I had sent it in

native language, but immediately the dean asked me for the syllabus in English” (Respondent T7).

“Unquestionable! CV and course syllabus — it is mandatory to provide in both languages, native and English language!” (Respondent VR4).

“In some cases when we have any foreign visitor we are even required to provide documents only in English, i.e., an evaluation report or description of the course, etc.” (Respondent D2).

“I often find study materials in English that are suitable, although I teach them in my mother tongue” (Respondent T4).

“The syllabus should be submitted in hard copy to the administration and uploaded to the university’s online system in both languages” (Respondent T6).

*Q1.3. Does English level proficiency limit your professional and academic development? If yes, give a brief description in a few words.*

A foreign Full Professor noted that English language not only limits but also deprives of any privilege one may enjoy as an academic. She listed the following:

1) scientific part — for applying for projects in Croatia (we write in Croatian and English), for publishing papers in international journals, for applying in international projects, organizing, participating and presenting papers at international conferences;

2) teaching — for applying for courses in English to attract foreign students and to exchange students from different countries;

3) to be recognizable in Europe and the whole world (Respondent T2).

“It gives you the possibility to broaden your horizons and to network on a global scale. We need to connect on a global net” (Respondent T1).

“We often have the opportunity for mobility, but it is impossible for those who lack English language knowledge. Colleagues who do not speak English are deficient and rarely travel abroad” (Respondent VD2).

“I have been taking private language courses for two years. Many things I cannot achieve without English. I want to apply for a post-doctorate because we are offered many opportunities through various projects, but it is useless without English” (Respondent T9).

“Study programs at our faculty offer courses for foreign students, but not all professors show readiness to teach in English for students coming from abroad” (Respondent VR1).

#### 4.2. Scientific research

Below there are listed some of the respondents’ attitudes towards scientific research and the English language, which, according to them, is a combination that cannot be divided. It is universally known that publication in prestigious journals is done in English, no matter where researchers come from. On the other hand, without a certain number of publications in international journals, it is not possible to become part of the academic staff at HEI nor is it possible to be promoted. There is a standard that these publications require. Respondents stated that to write a scientific paper they refer to researchers whose publications are in English. Therefore, the literature and materials we read to do scientific research are mostly written in English.

*RQ2: How does the EFL impact scientific research in HEIs?*

*Q2.1. What is the role of the EFL in scientific research?*

“No research can be done without literature review or theoretical background, and those can be referred mainly in English language” (Respondent VR2).

“The role of the English language in scientific research is inevitable, as we mainly publish in international journals rather than national ones” (Respondent T1).

“To publish a scientific article means to write a paper in English” (Respondent D2).

“At the very beginning of the work, we look for the journals that are worthwhile, and we find them only in English” (Respondent T10).

“MESTI’s [Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation in Kosovo] final decision is that heads of the program should publish only in journals indexed in Scopus or Web of Science if they apply for accreditation, which has put us at great risk of further development” (Respondent VR3).

*Q2.2. What is the ratio percentage of your scientific paper publications in English in relation to your mother tongue?*

“In recent years we have all published in international journals. It has become mandatory for us from the university because as the management claims, it is the required standard of accreditation agency” (Respondent T8).

“Only in the Faculty of Philology, the lecturers of the program of Albanian language and literature [mother tongue in Kosovo] have published so far in the mother tongue. Even they can no longer be promoted without publications on the platforms required for promotion, which are in English” (Respondent VR5).

“For two or three years this ratio has not even been discussed. It is 100% in English” (Respondent T5).

*Q2.3. Are there any legal regulations that oblige you to publish research articles in English?*

Most of the respondents stated that in Kosovo this is done by the decision of the Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation. In that decision, the platforms on which academics may publish are mentioned, otherwise, every scientific work cannot be evaluated. These platforms publish papers mainly in English. Also, the regulation for academic calling, promotion, and admission to a HEI emphasizes the same requirements.

“In each competition that opens for the admission of full- or part-time staff, the conditions are listed with the publication requirements” (Respondent D1).

“Yes, this is regulated by the regulation of advancements which has recently been revised in cooperation with all the commissions of other universities in our country. But, I do not consider this an obligation, in the negative sense. For me, this is an effort to develop academically and professionally. I think, the journey becomes closer to all those who claim to enter the academic world” (Respondent VR5).

“In fact, it is the legal regulation in our institution that we are obliged to respect” (Respondent T7).

“What is required by these rules I believe it helps in our advancement” (Respondent T9).

### 4.3. Internationalization

At the time this question was asked, everyone gave answers that were associated with accreditation as a process. Internationalization was the key standard required by the accreditation agency and international evaluators of the process. Accreditation is a complex and important process for every higher education institution. It is complex due to the burden of preparing for this process which requires the evidence of every action taken by every actor who works, operates, and supports the institution. For each process, endless documents are required that prove their existence and implementation. The accreditation agency has published the manual, which presents the standards that must be met by the institution and also instructions on how to meet these standards. More than all other areas and processes, accreditation is a process that is closely linked to English language proficiency. Eventually, this happens because the institutional accreditation and study programs are done by external experts who communicate in English with the staff and management of the institution.

*RQ3: What is the impact of EFL on HEI internationalization?*

*Q3.1. What is the connection of EFL with HEI internationalization?*

“Accreditation is the most special case when I need to know English, and I always say that I will work intensively in this direction once the accreditation finishes. Whether as a head program or as an academic staff or quality assurance representative, each of us inevitably becomes part of it and have no chance of escaping confrontation with foreign experts” (Respondent T9).

“Accreditation process? All in English! University Statute, strategic plan, self-assessment reports, assessment reports, decisions, regulations, manuals, CVs, syllabi, competitions, questionnaires, and many other documents are ensured to be translated into English” (Respondent VR5).

“Of course. We have external evaluators in accreditation” (Respondent T1).

“First of all, the internationalization of a university cannot happen without its accreditation. Accreditation is the ‘visa’ that the institution receives in order to function and operate” (Respondent T3).

*Q3.2. What do you focus on to fully be compliant with the standard of internationalization at your university?*

Obviously, every HEI has a strategic plan for internationalization. The same was stated by the respondents of all universities that were part of this study. They gave their opinions on the importance of various processes in the internationalization of universities. They mentioned student and staff mobility, agreements with institutions abroad, partnerships, visits for the purpose of exchanging teaching methodology, conferences, projects, seminars, workshops, presentations, etc. All of these are exclusively related to English language proficiency.

“We are looking forward to provide study programs in English and hope to attract foreign students to come to our university” (Respondent VD2).

“I have applied for an exchange program in teaching, but I have reservations because my English language level is not advanced. I will have to be interviewed, so I am skeptical” (Respondent D1).

*Q3.3. How often do you travel abroad and what language do you use?*

The data for this question turned out to be different. Teachers who know English travel frequently, while those who do not know the language have stated that they rarely visit foreign countries. They were honest and admitted that it is the lack of English language level proficiency that limits them from visiting higher education institutions in other countries. Some feel bad, expressing that as academics it is unacceptable to visit foreign countries without knowing the EFL.

“No matter where you travel, in the country where English is a native or non-native language of that country, it is enough to know a little English and you will exchange your ideas and knowledge” (Respondent VD1).

“I never travel alone. I always follow an English-speaking colleague because I do not believe in myself and that I can communicate. The great desire is to visit other universities and take advantage of their developments, but it is not worth it if I cannot debate. Therefore, I am dependent on colleagues if they join me” (Respondent T8).

It is worth mentioning that through Erasmus+, the universities of the Republic of Kosovo are partners in many projects. This enables lecturers and all academic staff of HEIs to exchange new experiences and socialize with colleagues from different countries, who they have the opportunity to practice English with as it is the language of communication regardless of the country they travel to.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The study is relevant for future research because both the reviewed literature and the data extracted from the study emphasize that English is an international language regarding the development of HEIs in all countries of the world, whether they are English-native or non-native countries.

The same attitude is held by Toprak (2019) who stresses that due to the fact that English has become the common language of communication among the EU member states, it seems that “the need for English will not diminish, but will grow overriding” (p. 14). Regardless of the authors’ origin and language, journal platforms require to publish articles in English.

In addition, when it comes to internationalization, it has been noted that the English language is the keyword for inter-institutional cooperation in higher education. “Competitiveness in the academic market that leads to bottom-up and top-down pressures within universities to become more international may have caused many higher education institutions to directly associate internationalization with Englishization” (Toprak, 2019, p. 12).

The study results show that according to participants, EFL has a positive impact on all areas where HEIs aim to develop. According to respondents, EFL is of vital importance for lecturers’ professional and academic development, since many



privileges were mentioned that they could attain through English. The same opinion is shared by Toprak (2019), who claims that the popularity and extensive use of English in higher education institutions can also be explained by the increasing staff and student mobility, the number of international research programs, and students' desires to study abroad (p. 14).

As Muth'im (2014) suggests, "As a professional occupation, teacher's professionalism should be continuously developed and upgraded. This is because of the fact that knowledge, skills, and expertise in this profession are always changing and developed. New ideas, new concepts, new theories, new approaches, new methods and strategies of teaching are introduced" (p. 1229).

Starting from the website, syllabi, CVs, literature, study program, teaching and other additional activities need the application of English language. Lecturers often read and study in English even though they teach in their native language. All respondents have acknowledged that they publish articles in English. According to them, publications in national journals are no longer in the interest of their institutions. Furthermore, the academic staff does not benefit from it and it is even a waste of time for them. Journals are the platforms that lecturers are required to publish, according to the decision of MESTI and accreditation agencies should be written in English language. This is a standard that is necessary for the advancement of the staff and affects institutional development as well. Likewise, Curry and Lillis (2007) claim that the dominance of English as the language of scholarly publishing means that scholars around the world are under increasing pressure to publish their research in English (p. 6).

The global dominance of English in scholarly publishing has implications for international higher education along two main lines: "1) for gatekeepers of scholarly publication and participation in international academic conferences to understand the challenges that multilingual scholars confront; and 2) for national governmental and institutional policymaking bodies to consider the effects of the premium placed on English-medium journal publishing" (Curry & Lillis, 2007, p. 6). The same importance of EFL is given to the internationalization of HEIs. With the evaluation by external experts, HEIs receive the green light for functionalization. HEIs focus on student and staff mobility issues and continuously increase capacities in this regard. Partnerships in projects with international

universities as well as exchanges of innovative methodologies through conferences and workshops play a special role in the internationalization of HEIs. English language is highlighted as a synonym of internationalization based on the study results. According to the findings of the study, in the academic world, English presents a desire to possess it not only as an ability but as an unavoidable necessity.

After many debates that arose during the interviews conducted, it was noticed that the teaching staff of universities gives special importance to the English language in the development of HEIs and their academic development. Although few lecturers see themselves as deficient in English communication skills, they still practice EFL and try to reach a level to avoid many restrictions they may have due to the lack of EFL.

Therefore, the study recommends that policymakers in HEIs work continuously in providing English language courses and trainings through centers for teaching excellence or other similar centers established by the university. Further, the study recommends that the management of HEIs motivate as much as possible the academic teaching staff to exchange experiences with other foreign universities through grants and various projects in order to improve English language skills through different collaborations.

Despite the findings from this research, there are limitations that can be addressed in further research. The sample of this research is considered to be limited in number. The next research could use more participants, respectively university professors whose professional development is closely related to the knowledge of the English language with specific emphasis on teaching and scientific research. Also, it is recommended to analyze the ratio of scientific publications in other languages compared to publications in English. Further, the research can be expanded to other non-English speaking countries, where the English language is a prerequisite for the development of HEIs, in terms of internationalization and the provision of joint EMI programs.

Eventually, another limitation that should be addressed in the future is the analysis of the steps taken by HEIs in capacity building on providing training and courses through centers within the university, in English language acquisition, since the results of the present research consider English as a necessity.

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