



E.N.L.U. PROJECT TASK GROUP 3

The use of distance education and e-learning for language learning among undergraduates

Rationale

This report results from research undertaken within the ENLU project. The research was established to investigate the extent to which open and distance learning and e-learning are currently exploited or may be used in the future in developing the provision of language training across undergraduate programmes for non-specialist language learners. The aim of the work is to establish such learning as an entitlement for all undergraduates.

The aim of the task group is to identify the key issues, establish concerns, identify experience and address these collectively. The role of collaborative working and the benefits of such working provide the main context for the study.

The project and the research have been prompted by a number of factors:

- the spread of new technologies in the learning of languages
- the Bologna Agreement and the ensuing protocols
- the inclusion of new member states into the European Union

This at a time when language learning trends are changing and adapting to new circumstances. Traditional language learning as a specialist discipline is in decline in many countries. The languages in demand are changing – driven by changes in global markets and commercial demands. Learners are increasingly learning alongside other study or professional responsibilities and are seeking programmes that meet their specific needs, delivered in personally convenient modes. Whilst these changes can be accommodated they have concomitant costs and raise issues of resourcing. None of these is easy to resolve within one context be that a single institution, school or specialist provider. Funding is increasingly targeting co-operative ventures and collaborative provision.

The survey aims to explore this territory by identifying some important needs raised by users themselves and from this evidence to extrapolate some of the main directions for the work of the proposed ENLU network within the realms of

open and distance teaching and incorporating e-learning and web- based resources.

Context of the research

It is acknowledged that language skills are an important factor in career success, in preparing young people for a multi-cultural world and in understanding the society in which we live. This generation will live and work in a global market. The problem is that current practice is limited to restricted groups, possibly by country and often by socio-economic factors.

The proposition to extend such provision across all undergraduates must encompass wider social groups and more varied learning conditions. Hence the investigation into the exploitation, both current and potential of open and distance learning (ODL) and e-learning including open sourcing, shared resources and easy accessibility are all important dimensions to be considered.

Evidence taken from the ENLU partnership and from among the members of this Task Group prior to launching the survey, demonstrated that the approach was to be one of identifying trends, changes and directions rather than gathering specific models or examples of best practice.

With the exception of the UK Open University, very few institutions it seemed were involved in any strategic way with the implementation of e-learning and associated distance teaching for language learning provision. The vast majority of participants in the project were keen to learn more about how to implement such delivery programmes and to share experiences with others.

Any one or more models of best practice are it seems unlikely to fit the needs of all other institutions. The contexts vary to such an extent that it is in practice the responsibility of individual institutions to create the model that best suits their own needs. Given the current landscape in terms of the changing nature of the demand for language learning, the new technologies involved and above all the investment required, it is perhaps understandable why more expansion is not evident on the ground.

The starting point of the survey is that any expansion of provision involves building from the bottom up, exploiting current practice where relevant and demonstrating the value to learners and institutions alike. This may well prove the most powerful approach. It requires action from individual institutions rather than a collective response. It also suggests that within the ENLU network that assistance with identifying and defining relevant best practice could be a key to success. This basis would provide valuable and clear pointers for the work of the proposed network and a focus for some of its activities.

In terms of surveying current and best practice, defining the role of ODL and e-learning presented the Task Group with a formidable challenge.

Approach to the research

The ENLU project was organised into a number of Task Groups. The group responsible for this research was led by Anne Stevens of the UK Open University. It was carried out via consultation with the members of the project and others drawn in all from 28 institutions.

An interim paper was prepared by the research leader setting out models of ODL to provide a template and guideline as a basis for comment and questionnaire responses. This approach was adopted once it was clear that most institutions, whilst aiming to extend and expand provision in ODL had, in effect, very little practical experience of exploiting the new approaches for the learning of languages.

As the aim of the research was to ascertain demand and from there the specific issues within provision, it was decided to adopt a pragmatic approach of assessing current use, views, awareness of and support for ODL.

The results present a picture of the current scene together with personal assessments of future trends and directions. Taken together with the results of Task Group 2 which provide a comprehensive picture of current numbers studying, the research reveals a number of important insights into future needs.

Care has been taken to ensure that the respondents represent a cross section of types of institution, and that they are located across a wide mix of cultures and educational systems. Whilst it is not comprehensive, it is hoped that the work will provide significant insights into the future provision of language learning as an entitlement amongst all undergraduates across European Union Member States.

After considerable discussion with expert researchers and also with the Task Group 2(TG2) leader, it was decided to adopt the approach of seeking views, perspectives and experience from respondents. TG2 providing the statistical information about how many current students were in the system and what they were studying.

Task Group 3 was seeking to establish the extent of new delivery modes, their impact across the system from policy to practice, and importantly their likely impact on future delivery and provision. As the *raison d'être* of ENLU is to extend language provision, we were seeking to identify where and how these delivery modes could support these aims and where particular barriers arose to in seeking solutions. The original prognosis of building from experience, proved less influential than anticipated in that experience in the main was located not only in a few specific locations but also with limited discipline areas –and rarely within modern language provision.

We therefore set out to establish just how much current provision in modern language teaching is based on these new technologies and to solicit views on future directions.

The survey

Responses were given by 28 institutions in total representing a cross section of providers in terms of size and location. They cover a range of responses that provide a basis from which to hypothesise as to scenarios for the future.

- The 28 respondents may present a rather optimistic picture as they are a cross-section of interested institutions
- Though not a large sample, the results are, nevertheless indicative of issues across a range of countries and cultures. It may well be worthwhile to follow up this pilot work with an in-depth study to include qualitative research into the issues raised by the respondents.

Respondents varied from senior management to full and part time teachers. In general terms they can be classified into four groups:

- Senior managers
- Senior language managers
- Language teachers
- Others (ICT Manager; Project Manager)

It was decided to divide the survey into sections:

1. To explore whether ODL existed in any discipline in the institution
2. What current work was carried out in languages
3. Developments and plans for languages where they exist:
 - a. Internationally
 - b. Nationally
 - c. Institutionally
4. Issues related to funding:
 - a. Institutionally
 - b. Nationally
 - c. Internationally

Respondents were invited to answer only those questions that applied to their experience.

The survey was designed to establish the impact on individuals in their role of the new methodologies. Work from other parts of the project (Task Group 1) surveyed policy implementation with respect to language provision. Practice shows that the presence of a policy may not necessarily mean that practice follows on from the policy. At a national level the same situation can also occur.

If the ENLU Network is to be effective it would seem prudent to address those issues as defined and deemed necessary by practitioners. The evidence from the survey is presented below.

The results

Note: The percentages quoted have been rounded to the nearest 10% for ease of reading and interpretation. The number of respondents is given in order to emphasise the level of activity at each stage of the survey.

SECTION 1: EXISTING OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING DELIVERY IN ANY DISCIPLINE IN THE INSTITUTION

Wider policies: This question explores wider institutional engagement in the field of open and distance teaching, beyond modern languages.

1a Does your institution have development policies in any disciplines using open and distance teaching?

NO 30% YES 70% (n=27)

The responses demonstrate that even taken across all areas of study, the percentage of institutions engaged in ODL is limited. Given that we can assume some interest / enthusiasm or ambitions in this area among partners and respondents, it can be surmised that this figure is probably optimistic in relation to the sector as a whole.

This being the case, the development of strategies for language teaching may be starting from a low base within the institution itself.

Recommended action

ENLU should bring together the advantages to language learning of online and ODL. These delivery modes address a number of key issues including learner retention, motivation to continue study, delivery costs and a number of important recognised didactic barriers in language acquisition.

1b Does your institution have institutional targets that you are aware of for growth of open and distance teaching?

NO 21% YES 79% (n=28)

Despite the lack of practice recorded previously, two thirds of institutions do have targets for growth. The significance of this is that the role of ODL should be formalised and its value recognised. It is however, a top down policy. Staff are aware of plans but may not be confident in implementing them without training.

1c Does your institution have plans to expand open and distance teaching in any disciplines?

NO 11% YES 89% (n=28)

When the institutional approach is widened to cover all disciplines, the response is even more positive- almost 90% recognising expansion plans. This suggests that priorities, as anticipated, are not in modern languages. However the paucity of experience and the wider application of ODL to modern foreign languages opens the door to language provision leading the way to develop institutional experience in the its application. Overall, the responses suggest that that there is a discrepancy therefore between actual practice and expectations. Of concern is

the perceived lack of policy suggesting that planning and development may be unrealistic.

Recommended action

Ambitions cannot draw on current experience so that activating programmes to bring about shared expertise would seem a logical next step.

2a Whether or not there is on-going work in languages, is your institution actively developing / planning to develop online or distance teaching in languages and if so, does it have formal policies relating to development?

NO 63% YES 37% (n=27)

It is clear that the planned developments referred to are in main not in modern languages. An obvious response is to harness relevant and transferable experience in any institution and work to ensure that practice extends to modern languages provision.

Recommended action

One approach would be to define the advantages and cite results of current practices and successes from experienced partners currently working alongside smaller traditional institutions.

2b Does your institution have existing work/projects/partnerships to explore and develop e-learning?

NO 11% YES 89% (n=28)

In relation to the preceding question, the responses confirm the findings that on-going work is not located in languages. The high level of response to activity suggests that development is being treated with some priority.

Recommended action

Relate policy and active research, develop action plan and work on an institution by institution basis.

2c Does your institution have supporting frameworks to encourage such development?

NO 29% YES 71% (n=28)

This is an important insight. Despite the high levels of declared commitment – recognised widely throughout the institutions and their staff- the levels of internal commitment are lower. In an institutional audit the levels of support and accessibility and range of resourcing should be identified. This will provide direction for the priorities of the proposed ENLU network. The discrepancy between the lack of policy and the proposed development of work is of concern.

Recommended action

ENLU could work to encourage institutions to relate policies, institutional practice and practice in languages. One approach would be to identify gaps and exploit those parts of relevant, existing practice to make the case for expansion.

Q3 As far as you are aware, how is / would any such work be funded?

3a Via internal funding sources?

NO 18% YES 82% (n=28)

The percentage of negative responses is of concern, however the relatively high positive response suggest that internal funding could be exploited were relevant calls on resources to be made.

3b Through external sources at a regional or national level?

NO 18% YES 82% (n=28)

The responses suggest that some co-ordination is needed at regional or national level. Given the low likelihood of language activity existing this may be difficult. It suggests that in fact such funding may not be easy to access for languages unless their economic and social value is emphasised.

Recommended action

The ENLU network should assist institutions in creating regional or national links to foster relationships and increase potential of funding from such sources.

3c Via international project development?

NO 38% YES 62% (n=26)

Unsurprisingly, the perceived likelihood of international project funding is lower. Again advice support and assistance could be given to inter-relate needs to wider projects with identified common aims. This could be supported by promulgating information as to available funding sources and relevant conditions for eligibility.

Recommended action

This could be included in advice and information to the European Commission as evidence suggests that there is considerable potential for much needed projects linking institutions with define common project aims.

SECTION 2: CURRENT WORK IN LANGUAGES NATIONAL / INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS IN LANGUAGE PROVISION

These questions look beyond your institution to developments more widely.

4a Are you aware of any engagement by your institution in the areas of open and distance teaching in languages?

At national level:	NO 29%	YES 71%	(n=28)
At international level:	NO 46%	YES 54%	(n=28)

Although not necessarily actively engaged in any activity, respondents seem to keep abreast of developments, are aware of activity but clearly do not see their institution as being one where international activities on the whole will be fostered.

Recommended action

Ensure that all institutions are aware that any experience is valid and that any institution should apply for funding to start, continue or to collaborate over developments. This suggests that outreach is perhaps a key priority at all levels, including for the ENLU network.

4b/c Do you think that your institution seeks to raise its profile in this area?

At national level:	NO 7%	YES 93%	(n=27)
At international level:	NO 15%	YES 85%	(n=27)

These responses endorse the comment to the above question. Institutions clearly are ambitious and have expectations to deliver in this field.

4d As far as you know, does your institution - aim to be more / become involved in such international programmes?

NO 7%	YES 93%	(n=28)
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As above, responses are stronger in each section of this question. For ENLU, this suggests potential areas of activity therefore.

4e National priorities for growth in e-learning in languages in your country.

i) Are you aware of national plans?

NO 46%	YES 54%	(n=28)
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This suggests that institutions have little fall back or support at higher levels – again something for the ENLU network to consider.

4e

ii) Do they affect your institution?

NO 46%	YES 54%	(n=26)
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Not surprising given the last response rate.

COMMENTS:

The comments endorse the responses in saying that trends are upwards and that development is expected. Much is triggered by the Bologna declaration.

Everything in today's system of education depends on next year's implementation of the Bologna requirements

I really feel the trend is up on this whole area. It works at many levels... teachers want it, students expect it and management encourage it!

There is capacity for development in this area. Internal and national funding is not likely to be allocated for this objective. People involved in the plans to develop distance learning do it mainly through their involvement in international programmes and projects as piloting of open and distance learning.

.....growth in e-learning in general is promoted.... we're in the planning/policies stage rather than implementation stage

Ministry of Education is trying to promote open and distance learning. Some universities are experimenting with it.

SECTION 3: GENERAL QUESTIONS RELATED TO LANGUAGE LEARNING

These questions relate to the provision of language learning as a skill across all disciplines and the potential role of new delivery modes within modern languages for all undergraduates

5a Are you aware of any stated policy or strategy within your institution that aims to expand the numbers of students on any existing non-specialist language courses ?

NO 30% YES 70% (n=23)

5b Are you aware of any stated policy or strategy within your institution that aims to extend the range of languages offered to all students on such courses?

NO 39% YES 61% (n=23)

5c Are you aware of any stated policy or strategy within your institution that aims to exploit open and distance learning with such provision?

NO 25% YES 75% (n=24)

5d Are you aware of any stated policy or strategy within your institution that aims to provide language training for specific vocational or professional purposes?

NO 29% YES 71% (n=24)

Taken together, these responses demonstrate once again that language provision is not a priority for extension of ODL in the institutions. One comment stated that it was being used to communicate across campuses. This is important but does not address the central focus of pedagogical development and outreach beyond the campus base.

The negative responses in particular point to a lack of confidence that the range of languages taught will extend. It seems more likely that where plans exist that they aim to provide for anticipated new demands in existing languages – amongst which English would seem to be paramount, based on the findings from Task Group 2.

For ENLU one key issue will be whether to start with an area such as English where there is institutional and learner demand. This may not be a prime motivator for the network where the learning of new languages both to deliver the Bologna Agreement and to support the EU position, both suggest that more foreign languages should be learned.

Recommended Action

Addressing the learning of other languages, and especially those spoken by relatively limited sized groups of population, remains an issue. Given the apparent low level of current involvement in new delivery methods, it would seem prudent to start where there are immediate needs.

Language training, directed at vocational and professional needs which are seen as potentially important, should be investigated and levels of required specificity defined. Overall, market size and the extent of commonly identified needs will be some of the determining factors in selecting development areas.

COMMENTS:

Strategy plans do aim to do this but institutional plans do not currently make a specific reference to such aims.

..more extensive and profession-oriented language training is being increasingly recognised by our university. A wider range of language courses are offered - from general purpose courses to language courses for specific programmes.

In all Dutch universities, English will be the official language in almost all MA courses, which will officially start from the academic year 2005-2006.

Our institution provides a specific department aimed at non-specialist students, especially focused on self-study and resources based on new technologies.

Our Faculty and School is pushing distance-learning and CALL in the mainstream courses. As yet there is not any plan to promote this in non-specialist/vocational programmes, though I know there would be a willingness should the conditions permit.

We used to promote non-specialist language teaching several years ago, but this has tailed off lately due to some loss of interest in those areas (business, biology, environmental science - though in the latter there remains a residual interest and some activity).

6 EXISTING use of online and distance resources

6a From your personal experience in your institution and work in modern languages, do you or your colleagues make use of any free learning resources in languages?

NO 13% YES 87% (n=23)

6b From your personal experience in your institution and work in modern languages, do you or your colleagues access any broadcast media sites in support of language learning?

NO 22% YES 78% (n=23)

6c From your personal experience in your institution and work in modern languages, do you or your colleagues make use of any other free/open access language resources?

NO 17% YES 83% (n=23)

The responses to this section revealed surprisingly low numbers using freely available resources. This suggests that there is potential here to exploit. It would seem that the same few groups are exploiting all resources with many others not using very much if any of what is available.

Links into public service broadcasting is one route that could be better publicised. Issues relating to open sourcing and the availability of appropriate learning should also be better defined and presented. Given the overall low levels of experience it is likely that institutions that could make good use of such resources are overwhelmed as they struggle to create the starting points for new learning.

Recommended action

The ENLU network could perhaps provide some guidelines, user feedback and recommended sites that could be used to advantage.

COMMENTS:

The comments demonstrate that free resources are used by a limited number of institutions. This experience could be shared to advantage across the network.

...teaching courses are mostly based on materials from free/open language resources on the Internet. Most of the web-sites of the major journals in the specialist areas, broadcasting companies are used for (a range of) subjects

Open web-sites of universities are also used mostly for students in the humanities.

Different databases of exercises, programmes to produce interactive language exercises (hot potatoes)

TV and radio (e.g. BBC) both on internet and by satellite. Most of our CALL resources are commercial but use some free resources such as Vifax.

7 Providing for / increasing language learning via online and web delivery modes in your institution

Are you or is anyone within your institution currently working on this?

NO 9% YES 91% (n=23)

This suggests that some guidance in the availability / usefulness of current resources would be helpful.

COMMENTS:

Collaborative and project based resources are used by active participants providing outcomes from projects, national collaborations etc. The network could share the views and experience across partners.

The virtual learning environment "MOODLE" is being used

Together with a consortium of Dutch universities we developed a web based programme for language learning ... I'm responsible for exploring/finding new opportunities.

.....we are working on an online platform which meets especially the needs of our language courses (concept of blended learning)

8 Funding sources

8a Do you have access to internal funding Sources?
NO 22% YES 78% (n=23)

8b Do you have access to external funding Sources?
NO 40% YES 60% (n=20)

The preponderance of internal sources is unsurprising given the stages of development of most work. However experience seems to show that the cost and the complexity of demand make some collaborative provision a most valuable approach.

Recommended action

ENLU could encourage such contact cross institutions with similar needs and profiles. This would facilitate future development and possibly provide a basis for funding bids form Europe and elsewhere.

COMMENTS:

The comments reflect the difficulties reflected in the survey of locating funding and support. Some basis of development is needed to move forward. Reaching that critical point in development is a challenge for the inexperienced. Local or institutional support is critical in encouraging expansion and accessing funding.

..... for local delivery, we have been awarded £825,000 from Government for a Centre for Multimedia Language Learning

.... internal bid was made for national funding

Some research funding ... but support is minimal.

SECTION 4: INFRASTRUCTURES

(NOTE THIS SECTION WAS ANSWERED BY 21 OF THE 28 RESPONDENTS)

9 Staff training

9a Where some activity is in place, has consideration been given to staff training?

NO 0% YES 100% (n=21)

9b Do you personally consider that staff training is necessary?

NO 5%, YES 95% (n=21)

9c If there are existing training programmes in your institution -
9c i) are they sufficient?

NO 50% YES 50% (n=20)

9c ii) do you consider that they adequately cover staff training needs?

NO 56% YES 44% (n=18)

9c iii) are staff readily able to take up a training offer?

NO 19% YES 81% (n=21)

9c iv) is it compulsory for staff involved in online /distance teaching?

NO 85% YES 15% (n=20)

9c v) does the training carry professional recognition?

NO 79% YES 21% (n=19)

Issues related to the training of staff working in the new teaching environments are not consistent. The comments confirm that provision is not seen as a priority. To maximise the impact and value of the teaching, professional development must be formally integrated and, ideally, recognised and awarded. Much could be done in this area to raise the profile of training and to alert institutions to the risks of non- participation in such programmes. Without training and development of teachers delivery will be less effective.

Recommended action

The need to formalise and recognise the importance of training in successful delivery should be brought to the attention of providers at every level.

As learning environments continue to evolve it is essential that more if not all language staff are capable of exploiting new delivery modes as effectively as possible. Training could be created collaboratively and offered on an open source basis.

COMMENTS:

The comments reiterate the findings and provide evidence of the informal nature of any activity and, on the whole, the lack of priority given to staff development. There is little or no recognition in professional terms.

- *Training is mainly in the form of workshops and seminars (just a few so far) for anyone willing to attend. No certificate is given on completion of the training.*
- *..... it is WebCT training that is becoming key*
- *We have an ongoing methodology seminar where we talk about experiences.*
- *Some training (e.g. WebCT) is provided centrally while we supply others ourselves to fill the gaps for specifically language-related issues.*
- *There is an element of e-learningbut it is not specific to languages.*

10 Teaching and Learning support

Note: respondents could select more than one option, hence totals may exceed 100%

Where language learning is offered via these delivery modes, which of the following is offered to learners by way of support and via which means?

10a A personal tutor?

Face to face 47%	Telephone 14%
e-mail 54%	None 11%
	Other 18%

10b Generic support?

Face to Face 39%	Telephone 11%
e-mail 54%	None 0%
	Other 14%

10c Other?

Online resources 50%	Conferencing 14%	Other 4%
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The responses suggest that the use of online and related delivery modes is integrated with traditional teaching such as face to face. It is seen as an enriching resource source to add value to the learning. It seems under-exploited in the domain of extending access to learning, of taking learning to new audiences and new environments away from formal structures.

It would seem that the potential to develop outward facing delivery modes is considerable. This could also address issues related to critical numbers, costs and efficiencies. Some modelling of best practice, of positive impact on learning

and expansion of learning would be motivating. Institutions specialising in ODL can provide many such examples.

The approach cited in Spain with one institution leading the national developments may be a practical way forward for more places.

COMMENTS:

It is the language teachers who explain to learners how to use the software.

Our emphasis in e-learning is on use of multimedia language learning labs

11 Developing courses

When new materials or content is required which of the following approaches to material development is MOST likely to be taken by your institution?

- | | | |
|----|------------------------------------|-----|
| a) | entirely self generated? | 22% |
| b) | mix of self generated + bought in | 47% |
| c) | buy in + share with other partners | 4% |

The responses demonstrate the financial limitations and the need presumably to maximise what pre-exists. Given the apparent lack of experience, the potential to share experience with other institutions would seem considerable.

11a) and b) In seeking to generate materials for use in such language courses, which of the following does your institution offer -

i) Teams with existing expertise?
NO 50% YES 50% (n=16)

ii) Teams developed from interested staff volunteers?
NO 5% YES 95% (n=19)

iii) Teams developed via formal training programmes within staff development plans?
NO 67% YES 33% (n=15)

Given the preponderance of inexperienced staff and that they opt into the work there seems to be potential for training to be developed. This could be networked, shared and delivered as open and free access – also to encourage other new participants over time.

12 Sharing experience and expertise

What would you expect from collaborative working with other institutions?
(including buying / sharing materials)

a) Opportunities to regularly feedback and evaluate experiences?

NO 0% YES 100% (n=17)

b) The potential to share materials?

NO 0% YES 100% (n=18)

c) Collaborative materials development?

NO 6% YES 94% (n=18)

d) Joint course development?

NO 16% YES 84% (n=19)

e) Would you favour a formally organised collaborative group?

NO 6% YES 94% (n=18)

The expectations reflect the needs and gaps identified in the survey as whole. It is also clear that in general it is felt that an organized structure is preferable – reliance on informal organization is not sufficient. Such structure will also allow for user needs to be integrated into activities and encourage greater participation.

COMMENTS:

We are looking for cooperation in the field of non-Western languages, due to staff reduction it is more difficult to produce materials alone

The initiative must come from the staff, i.e. bottom-up.

We think that cooperation in this area is essential.

13 What for you would be the value of such collaboration in terms of availability of teaching resources?

Would you want resources to be available?

a) at economic rates?

NO 0% YES 100% (n=19)

b) at reduced commercial rates?

NO 33% YES 67% (n=15)

c) via commercially brokered partnerships?

NO 75% YES 25% (n=16)

Economics are important especially availability of good value recommended products. A system of usability assessments and feedback would be of benefit e.g. a resources database would be valuable to any potential membership.

COMMENTS:

Our institutions find it difficult to fund commercial programmes.

14 Do you currently exchange specialised information/ experience? NO 15% YES 85% (n=20)
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There is clearly a desire to exchange information and experiences. This suggests that an active and easily accessible communication basis would be welcomed.

COMMENTS

Using conferences and relevant publications for dissemination.

Via existing funded projects, attending seminars, workshops, etc.

We exchange experience with specialists

On a limited scale (involving 2 or 3 persons at most)

*We have trained/experienced language teachers who work with ODL materials.
Many of our staff are active in CALL conferences/publication*

Additional commentary from the Task Group Leader – based on recent internal research into the delivery of languages on a global basis via open and distance learning

Challenges

1. Discussions among those concerned to apply ODL and e-learning to languages reveal a general awareness of the issues but an overall lack of confidence given their general lack of experience.
2. Existing work tends to be located in one or two more prestigious or high value areas of the HE curriculum such as Business Studies or Technology. Languages are not viewed as such and on the whole teachers have little contact with that experience.
3. Whether experienced or not, teachers are also aware of the myriad issues specific to the delivery of languages via these new delivery modes. Any initiative must be seen to succeed if it is to be accepted so that even among those committed to development there is serious reticence and risk aversion.

The educational and social environment

Language teaching is characterised by change and rapid development. Change is accelerated by the application and recognised potential of communication technologies. They apply to the delivery of teaching and learning and improve the response capability of higher education to changing markets and new domains of use.

Market demands change as language learning is increasingly included in the curriculum at ever earlier stages of learning. This in turn creates highly differentiated sets of needs across various national and international groupings.

Open and Distance Learning

Defining the place of the open and distance teaching is complex. Currently, provision within the domain of open and distance learning within languages is not one that is applied widely. Where blended or mixed learning solutions are in place, they generally form a minority part of overall provision. Despite this evidence, some of the key factors that will play into the inevitable extension into distance and online teaching provision are present in the market and it is widely recognised that provision must and will change.

Experience demonstrates the dominance of traditional approaches and the sensitivity of education at this time of transition. In addition to meeting market needs, a key part of any strategy must be to partner with established and recognised providers who can help to persuade teachers and learners to move to new delivery modes and shift the teaching paradigm towards more flexible delivery. This will provide the much needed outreach to new learners.

Diversity

As new member states join the European Union bringing an even wider range of teaching and learning experience so the need to work collaboratively is more evident. The diversity of language and cultural backgrounds and the different needs that partners have is creating many new development challenges and opportunities.

The market in higher education

Although figures are available across Europe for students studying a modern foreign language as a full degree or major option, the picture becomes less clear in trying to find out more detail about those for whom it is a minor part of their degree or a professionally oriented course of study.

The study from the ENLU Task group 2 work reveals that where a language is studied within a degree programme but counting as less than 50% of the overall credit, English is the most popular by a significant margin. Among these cohorts, the number of students within the survey studying English (4192) exceeds the totals for the four other most popular European languages taken together by around 50%, namely French (866), German (613), Spanish (569) and Italian (244).

The study gives an indicator of trends and calls for further work in understanding and monitoring the situation in particular in relation to the increasing dominance of English across ability levels.

The markets defined – English and other languages

The teaching of English is set apart from other languages for a number of important reasons. As a factor in the development of global economies, it has become the common language across international developments. This commercial value of knowledge of English impacts on the motivations and outcomes for learners and the methodology and context of teaching the language.

There are broad sectors in the market:

- ELT – aimed at teachers who for whatever reason teach their specialist discipline in English but for whom English is not their native tongue.
- Students who study in English in their home territory and for whom the language of study is a medium of instruction within the context of their own native speaker learning environment
- Students who are studying English as they either are engaged in or propose to study and live in an English speaking country
- Students whose work requires them to communicate in English

Each segment will be defined by pre-requisite needs expressed in terms of:

- appropriate entry and exit levels
- length and mode of study required
- recognition of achievement

- content adapted to undergraduate, postgraduate or professional level study

Implications for all languages

Learning increasingly requires sets of defined priorities in terms of the skills and appropriate language domains. Provision in languages is moving increasingly towards speciality and tailored programmes delivered in short learning chunks to suit specific needs. These trends are stimulating new approaches to provision to allow more effective exploitation of existing resources and also to open the access to new markets.

It is possible to build new markets by exploiting current products and combining them with existing experience of distance teaching and learning in other languages, including online provision. These factors present a unique opportunity at this time.

ODL and e-learning in expanding provision

As our societies move towards spreading the learning of languages, so new learning needs arise within them. Whatever the use, provision is likely to be typified by a need for effective and appropriate acquisition of the learning skills.

These changes lead existing providers to continually seek new products. The key to success lies in an effective analysis of any new proposed markets, including a clear definition of content in terms of learning outcomes. From this basis success depends upon delivery across different territories via efficient provision, and, where appropriate, local links within the territory to meet local and regional preferences.

To shift patterns of provision, a gradualist approach is needed with a blended solution where necessary. Faced with such a scenario, collaborative provision could be envisaged as providing a common virtual platform, supported by and linked to local face to face teaching where demanded for effective delivery.

Partnerships

Materials developed collaboratively should meet immediately identified needs and also feed a longer term vision, securing products into future markets. Such an approach will enable the market with any partner(s) to grow alongside and within the collaborative venture.

The notion of flexibility of development, together with ease of re-versioning is therefore essential. The cost efficiency of any such development is a critical success factor in any partnership.

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