

Thematic Network Project in the area of Languages

Subgroup 8: Language Studies for Students of Other Disciplines

Recommendations

Sub-project 8: Language Provision for Students
Of Other Disciplines

Recommendations

Appendix to the Final Report for Year Three

THEMATIC NETWORK PROJECT IN THE AREA OF LANGUAGES

Sub-project 8: Language Studies for Students of Other Disciplines

RECOMMENDATIONS

The letters in brackets indicate the group or body that is invited to take the recommendations into consideration: (E) European level; (N) national or regional level; (I) institutional level, or the level at which the recommendations should be implemented; (S) students; (T) teachers.

1. Organisation of language teaching in HE institutions

- 1.1. HE institutions should be encouraged to include linguistic and intercultural preparation as part of their institutional policy. Compulsory, or at least optional, accredited language modules should be integrated into all degree programmes. (E, N, I)**

Rationale: In a number of EU member states degree programmes and courses are the responsibility of departments or faculties; there is often neither time nor finance to include language learning. In other cases, where traditional language departments are asked to provide language teaching for students of other disciplines, such teaching is given lower priority than teaching to specialists. Such problems can be solved at institutional level.

- 1.2. Whatever the institutional structure adopted within an institution, units whose main mission is language teaching should be provided with an infrastructure that meets the needs of modern language teaching and learning. (N, I)**

Rationale: A certain number of material conditions have to be satisfied in order to ensure the quality of language programmes. These include rooms equipped with audio-visual and CALL facilities, trained staff to maintain the equipment and a budget to ensure its reasonable renewal.

- 1.3. Students should be coached from the beginning of their studies in HE, or even as early as secondary education, to plan their future study abroad in order to start their language studies at an early stage. (I, T, S)**

Rationale: Very often students begin to look for information on mobility in the academic year preceding the period of study abroad. Such behaviour either produces a high demand for countries where the most widely taught languages are spoken or insufficient time to provide linguistic/cultural preparation for the lesser taught languages. By encouraging co-operation between HE institutions and secondary schools, school-leavers can be informed at an early stage of the range of possibilities for study abroad.

- 1.4. Measures should be taken to promote the continued modularisation of courses. (N, I)**

Rationale: A modular course structure allows more flexibility regarding timetables and methods of delivery, enabling students to choose the language(s) to be studied and the level of study.

- 1.5. In order to increase and enhance mobility towards countries where less widely taught languages are spoken, (Euro)regional collaboration mechanisms should be set up, thus widening the range of languages and cultures available to students. (N, I)**

Rationale: For financial reasons it is not possible for all HE institutions to offer the complete range of languages required for international co-operation through exchange programmes. Pooling resources and competence, and making full use of ODL, are cost-effective and provide the best service to students.

1.6. Intensive Language Preparation Courses should be extended, accredited, institutionalised and funded. (E, I)

Rationale: Participation in ILPCs remains highly selective, and such courses are limited to the lesser widely used, lesser taught languages. Extension of such programmes to reach a wider student audience and to include the main languages would greatly improve the quality of the student's experience in a new learning environment. While many HE institutions propose such courses as part of their institutional European policy, there are instances where the student is required to pay for such a service.

2. Levels of competence

2.1. A distinction should be made between discipline-specific language skills (languages for professional purposes) and general language skills. (I, T)

Rationale: In many cases, in particular in subjects such as law and business studies, courses tend to be limited to lexical acquisition. It is necessary in all cases to provide students with a general approach to language skills.

2.2. Exchange students should be provided, both by the sending and by the receiving institutions, with language courses that stress differences in academic discourse. (I, T)

Rationale: Academic discourse and study methods vary from one country to another. Since students will be studying in a foreign environment, they should be given the opportunity to acquire the new study skills. This requires suitably trained staff.

2.3. Comparable terms of reference should be used by sending and receiving institutions to assess language skills. (E, N, I)

Rationale: The Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference and the European Language Portfolio, at present being piloted, provide suitable tools for measuring and comparing language skills.

3. Professional training of language teachers

3.1. Language teaching to all students in HE, irrespective of their main course of study, should be carried out by professionally appointed teaching staff with satisfactory, permanent work contracts, recruited in accordance with clearly defined criteria. (N,I)

3.2. Advanced degree programmes of a Masters type should be developed to provide training for language teachers to students of other disciplines. Such programmes should include expertise in using the new learning environments, in curriculum development, in developing teaching and learning materials and learning tasks and in intercultural communication. (E, N, I, T)

3.3. Language teachers in HE should be guaranteed a suitable and flexible number of teaching hours per week allowing them to develop teaching materials, direct learning in self-access centres, carry out research in their field and take part in in-service training. (N, I, T)

3.4. Language teachers in HE institutions should be allowed to apply for funding under the LINGUA B programme to attend suitably targeted training programmes. (E)

Rationale (for recommendations 3.1., 3.2., 3.3. and 3.4.): There is considerable diversity in the qualifications, training and status of language teachers for students of other disciplines in HE throughout the EU, ranging from university professors or lecturers, through professional language teachers with tenure to teachers often without qualifications in the professional area who are given limited work contracts or are paid by the hour. Recruitment criteria should include possession of a university degree, native or near-native language competence, professional training as a teacher and experience in, or willingness to take part in, curriculum development and production of materials.

4. Meeting the needs of the labour market

- 4.1. HE institutions should be encouraged to carry out needs analyses in order to determine the skills that would best prepare students for professional life in an integrated Europe with a single labour market. (I, S)**

Rationale: Too often language programmes for students of other disciplines are drawn up by academic staff without reference to the real needs of students in their future professions and in relation solely to research interests of academic staff

- 4.2. A permanent forum should be set up, bringing together academics and administrators from HE institutions, public and private sector employers and employees' organisations, in order to ensure realistic language training of students in HE. (E, N)**

Rationale: Dialogue between academia and the professional and socio-economic environment can provide academics with an awareness of the needs of students when they leave HE and also a realistic perception on the part of employers of what can be achieved in terms of linguistic competence in a non-language degree course. In general, this is achieved in selective business schools, but should be extended to include all aspects of professional life.

5. The mobility experience

- 5.1. Local students and staff should be encouraged to develop a flexible and versatile learning environment to facilitate the full integration of exchange students. (I, T, S)**

Rationale: Staff and students at the receiving institution are often not prepared for working in learning environments which are increasingly international. Students and staff should be trained in intercultural awareness and staff should be made aware of differences in achievements and expectancies on the part of visiting students.

- 5.2. In order to achieve successful mobility a balance should be found between institutional involvement and personal commitment on the part of academic staff and students. (E, I, T, S)**

Rationale: The success of the ICPs in the original ERASMUS programme was to a large extent due to the dedication and commitment of individuals. With the Institutional Contract the SOCRATES programme has rightly encouraged HE institutions to set up international offices to manage mobility programmes, with the result that individual academics have often felt dispossessed of the initiative of such programmes. Successful mobility for a student depends both on institutional support and on personal support, which can be given by academic staff or by fellow students.

- 5.3. Briefing and debriefing should be an integral part of the mobility experience. (I, T, S)**

Rationale: Cultural/intercultural training is an integral part of language teaching for mobility purposes. In briefing students for a period of study or work placement in an international context it is necessary to address such questions as awareness-raising, skills-building, observational skills building, institutional knowledge (differences in teaching and learning methods, examination systems, staff expectations, degree of autonomy required, etc.) as well as psychological preparation for coping with culture shock. Similarly, evaluation of the mobility experience, both by the receiving institution and the sending institution is necessary to improve the quality of such programmes.

- 5.4. International involvement should be considered as an integral part of the professional duties of academic staff. (N, I)**

Rationale: In many cases involvement with international activities is looked on as a voluntary or even as a leisure activity. Examples exist, however, where HE institutions show their commitment to international co-operation by providing academic advisors to out-going and in-coming students.

- 5.5. Short term intensive mobility programmes should be developed, financed and accredited to allow a greater number of students to benefit from the mobility experience. (E, N, I)**

Rationale: A growing number of students, for socio-economic reasons, finance their studies by part-time employment. Such students, being unable to leave their employment for the minimum period of 3 months, are prevented from taking full advantage of mobility programmes such as ERASMUS.

5.6. Irrespective of the role of English as the language of instruction, all exchange students should be encouraged to become literate in the local language and culture. (N, I)

Rationale: there is a growing tendency in HE institutions in member-states where lesser-used languages are spoken to develop degree courses in English, in order to attract international students. Such courses should include course components which allow the host language to be learned.

5.7. In order to ensure the quality of mobility programmes, action research should be developed and financed. (E, N, I)

Rationale: For most of the above-mentioned recommendations examples of good practice can be given. Action research will enable such examples to be monitored and disseminated.