# DANISH NATIONAL REPORT ON NEW LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS – THE EUROPEAN LEARNING SPACE

**Ole Helmersen, Faculty of Modern Languages**
**Copenhagen Business School**

## 1. General introduction

The purpose of this report is to give as updated a picture of the situation in Danish universities as regards the implementation of new learning environments in language programmes and courses as possible.

The information in the report has been collated through personal contacts with key players and informants at some of the Danish universities.

The report primarily deals with the situation at university level and does not address the situation in institutions below university level.

There are at present 11 universities in Denmark.[1] Of these language degree programmes (BA, MA, Ph.D.-degrees) are offered at the 5 multi-faculty universities and the 2 two-faculty business schools. For historical reasons the two business schools in Denmark have separate modern language faculties. These are focused on professional business communication; translation and interpreting as opposed to the more philologically oriented 'old' universities. The business school faculties are by far the largest providers of university level language programmes in Denmark.

Education is state funded in Denmark: 6.2 per cent of the GDP is spent on education, which corresponds to the OECD average. Denmark spends more than the OECD average on the basic levels of education and less than the average on the higher education level. Of the total public expenditure on education, higher education receives 23 per cent; this figure, however, comprises the costs of the education programmes as well

---

[1] At the time of writing a new 12th university 'The IT University' is being added as one result of a fairly comprehensive university governance reform. This institution has existed for 3 years as a semi-independent faculty under the Copenhagen Business School. It may turn out to have effects also with regard to new learning environments.

as basic research at the universities and the state education grant and loan scheme for students.

The resource allocation from the Ministry of Education is activity based. Schools and universities receive grants according to the number of students enrolled who have successfully passed their exams. This output-based resource allocation is combined with other quality control mechanisms such as continuous evaluation (peer reviews), centrally appointed external examiners, and quality development programmes, cf. section 3 below.

Tuition is free of charge. This, however, does not apply to the continuing education system, which is financed by a combination of state funding and tuition fees. In the tertiary or higher education system, students must buy their own books and other teaching material.

Unlike what is seen in a number of other European countries languages are not taught as part of any non-language university programme in Danish universities, and none of these universities have language centres to cater for students' possible language needs. If students of other disciplines wish to learn languages they are basically left to themselves.

The general reasoning behind this lack of priority to languages is a belief that Danish university entrants have sufficient language skills in one or two foreign languages from primary and secondary education. That may have been the situation decades ago, but is hardly true any more. Another reason is, of course, that it is difficult to persuade people teaching other programmes that language skills are essential, to provide room for such courses in the curricula. Languages would be seen as leading to a crowding out of the, in their view, essential courses in economics, chemistry, or what have you.

The term 'new learning environments' may be perceived as a rather broad and vague term which may cover many different types of activities and facilities. It will be used  to include the integration and/or use of ICT as well as the implementation of new pedagogical methods and the availability of other resources like exchange students more broadly speaking, although the focus will primarily be on ICT.
Similarly the phrases 'using ICT in language teaching/language learning' and 'using ICT to develop new learning environments' need clarification. In the following these will be seen as  different points on a continuum from using ICT to support traditional contact teaching to autonomous, web-based e-learning and it will be attempted to specify in each case where on the continuum a described activity is.

As I final note of introduction it should be mentioned that the variety among universities in Denmark in this respect is fairly small. Denmark is a fairly small country with a limited number of universities, which are all regulated by the same University Act and are under similar financial rules. The language programmes are offered under the same few ministerial orders, which lead to quite a large measure of homogeneity. The main differences are in fact found between the programmes offered by the traditional universities, which are mainly directed towards training teachers for secondary schools, and those offered by the business schools, which have a broader scope in that they train graduates to work professionally with languages and communication in organisations in the private and public sectors.

## 2. The role of New Learning Environments in language teaching and learning

### 2.1 The integration of New Learning Environments in language teaching and learning

In most university programmes in languages efforts are made to integrate new learning environments and ICT in teaching and the delivery of teaching. This is a fairly slow and costly process but generally the situation for the learners has improved over the past few years, especially n the delivery side. Students are in many cases becoming fairly 'independent of time and place' which in itself has a beneficial impact on their learning. However key parameters in this process, such as teacher qualifications and support facilities (more than availability of sufficient numbers of computers), limit the speed of this development.

### 2.2 Policies underlying the integration of New Learning Environments

It would be stretching reality a bit much to say that there is much concerted effort at ministerial level in Denmark to formulate policies to support the integration of new learning environments. New teaching methods, pedagogical reform and raining of teachers, integration of ICT are often held out as important goals but without the backing of a thought-through strategy at national level. Basically these matters are seen as

within the remit of the individual universities to be carried out at their own initiative and expense.

Although not coordinated as a conscious policy a couple of initiatives should be mentioned. The Danish Evaluation Institute has the task of, regularly, evaluating i.a. university programmes – usually a number similar programmes together with internal benchmarking. The recommendations emanating from these evaluations usually include recommendations to revise teaching methods and pedagogy and the ministry is monitoring the follow-up on such recommendations by instructing universities to report on them.

A couple of years ago a separate institution 'Learning Lab Denmark' was established as a new entity at Denmark's Pedagogical University' to carry out experimental research in new learning environments. It is too early to say at this point what kind of effect this initiative will have in actual teaching and learning.

From its mission statement: "Learning Lab Denmark is an untraditional research and development unit. Our vision is to focus on and expand public awareness of the role of learning in our collective transition to the knowledge society. We aim to do this by creating new paths of research in close dialogue with experimental practice."

## 2.3   New learning strategies: the introduction and promotion of independent learning

There is no strategy to promote independent language learning. However, students of non-language programmes, or others, may participate in a fairly wide variety of language courses at different levels at Open University (requires specific entrance levels) or at ordinary, local evening class courses. The provision is probably satisfactory but there is little official competence recognition of such courses.

This being said it also has to be emphasised that the increasing internationalisation of most university programmes does add to students' language skills. Ever increasing numbers of courses taught in English, increasing student exchange figures, the presence of many students speaking other languages all add positively to the situation.

The Copenhagen Business School has established a Language Centre (so far the only one among Danish universities) to cater specifically for the language needs of staff, students of other disciplines, incoming and out-

going exchange students. These facilities are attracting increasing numbers of students and staff also from other universities, which is probably an indication of a need for such language centres at other universities as well.

## 2.4 Facilities for independent learning

Facilities for independent learning, including language learning, are fairly good in Danish Universities. Most campuses are well equipped with computers with all standard software. Universities offering language degrees supplement this software with software specifically developed for language work (language technology). The use of web-based delivery platforms like Blackboard or Sitescape is also common.

## 2.5 Development of learning materials

The development of learning materials for language learning is not coordinated nationally. It is institutionally organised although it is often carried out among a number of institutions jointly. Often, however, individual teachers develop their own materials without much sharing of knowledge; not for lack of will to do so but because of time-constraints and the lack of overall polices to support such efforts.

It may be difficult to draw a clear distinction between the development of language technology products produced for language work and their use also for language learning. Often language technology products developed for professional use can serve very well also in language teaching, especially for advanced language-degree students. E.g. the programme called Translators Workbench has been developed as a tool for professional translators and the training of them but can also be seen as an example of a learning material/resource.

## 2.6 Redefining the profile of the actors involved

The main problem in this respect is the fact that university teachers are an aging group for whom it is a massive challenge to redefine their role. Most teachers make a very hard effort to adjust to new methods and student demands, but support for this from the ministry is lacking. It is of course also an institutional obligation to retrain teachers, but with

falling budgets this often does not get the attention it deserves. So again a national strategy is called for.

### 2.7 Training programmes and courses for language teachers: in-service programmes, staff development

Covered elsewhere

### 2.8 Measuring proficiency: assessment and self-assessment

Based on available information this is not a priority area so far.

### 2.9 Action research on the implementation of New Learning Environments

Research on pedagogy and new learning environments does take place in a number of institutions and settings, though none of it is specifically directed at language learning. Learning Lab Denmark has been established with this task among its primary tasks. Also the Copenhagen Business Schools Learning Lab should be mentioned. Through this unit, CBS invests quite heavily in this area with interesting results; some of the efforts are also directed at language teaching and learning.

## 3 Promoting multilingualism and cultural diversity

Denmark is probably one of the most homogeneous countries in Europe in terms of language. Danish is the only national language and the regional variation in terms of dialects is limited. This is one reason why language policy or issues are not high on the political agenda.

The Danish self-understanding is that we are a nation, which is good at foreign languages because languages have always played an important role in the primary and secondary school sectors. This is probably a dangerous and complacent attitude. Recent research has shown that more than 50% of the adult Danish population does not command English at anything near a functional level and that up to 20% of the population can hardly read or write Danish properly. The problem may trans-

late itself into a shortage of qualified employees for the labour market if these problems are not addressed.

There is growing concern at the, some would claim, totally unreflected way in which English is being adopted or accepted as almost a second mother tongue in Denmark. The concern is focused on two problems: 1) that Danish is not developed as a fully functional language in a number of areas (IT-sector, business management, natural sciences) and that as a consequence of the massive focus on English, other European languages like German and French are losing ground.

As a consequence of this there is increasing interest in language policies in Denmark. The Government will probably present a proposal for a national Danish language policy soon and recently the Danish University Rectors' Conference set up a small working party to draw up recommendations for language policies in universities. If these are actually adopted by universities it could have interesting effects in general on a number of the aspects included in this report.

## 3.1 Promoting the learning of the less widely used and taught languages

No specific attitude is paid to promoting the less widely used and taught languages in Denmark. The focus is predominantly on English, and, secondly, on languages like German, French and Spanish. Realistically, this situation will probably not change even with the inclusion of more countries and languages in the EU[2]. Many small languages are offered at universities (language programmes) but they attract few students and are only maintained at 'survival' level and are in constant danger of being closed down.

## 3.2 Promoting cultural understanding and intercultural awareness

Cultural understanding and awareness at Danish universities take place as specific courses in some programmes but probably much more efficiently through the rather extensive exchange programmes.

## 3.3 Accessing authentic resources and materials

---

[2] Although the training of professional conference interpreters in these languages is given priority.

To the extent that good resources and materials exist, access to them is no major problem in Danish universities. Universities are generally well-equipped with technology to access such resources and some universities make a serious effort to make this as easy as possible for students, e.g. in the form of learning centres often attached to university libraries. For one example of what is more or less standard provision of learning resources from Danish University libraries see:
**http://www.cbs.dk/library/bibitsuk.shtml**

## 3.4   Student and staff exchanges

The rate of student exchanges is increasing year by year. Most universities write internationalisation into their strategic plans, often with concrete goals for what percentages of the student body ought to go on exchanges. EU-programmes have of course played a very major part in this development.
Staff exchanges are much more scarce. Danish university teachers are not very mobile.

# 4   The role of New Learning Environments in training programmes for language and language related professions

## 4.1   New Learning Environments and the training of language teachers

Foreign languages are taught at the teacher training colleges (for basic school teachers). Foreign languages, communication and culture is taught in a variety of programmes at the universities in Aalborg, Aarhus, Copenhagen, Roskilde, and Southern Denmark as well as the two business schools in Aarhus and Copenhagen. Translators & interpreters are trained at the two business schools (the completion of the MA programme leads to the professional certification of sworn translators granted by the Ministry of Trade & Industry).

## 4.2   New Learning Environments and the training of translators and interpreters

New learning environments with the integration of ICT in many different ways are used extensively at the two business schools' faculties of modern languages where the training of translators and interpreters take place. Language technology plays a major role in these programmes.

# 5  The role of New Learning Environments in continuing education programmes or courses

Denmark has a strong tradition for life-long learning, and there is also a parallel programme structure for adult (continuing) education in which the highest level is a 1-1½ year master programme (full-time equivalent), requiring as entrance qualifications another academic degree as well as a minimum of 2 years of professional experience.

This is an area where quite a lot of experimenting with new learning environments and ICT takes place, since this is seen as essential in order to attract this target group of students.

The University of Southern Denmark has run ICT-based distance-learning programmes for adult learners for a number of years with good results. Similarly the Copenhagen Business School and the Århus Business School together with Aalborg University in the ICT-West Consortium offer Master-degrees in languages or language related subjects, which are partly ICT and web-based.

# 6  How to use Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for promoting European co-operation?

## 6.1  Using ICT for co-operation in the development of programmes

Just like universities in many other European countries, also Danish universities participate in various EU-based development projects in this area. Notable examples are the Centre for Language Technology (a separate contract-research unit) and the CBS Department of Computational Linguistics.

## 6.2  Using ICT for co-operation in the delivery of programmes

Nothing to add in addition to what is mentioned under 5.


# 7  Needs in the area of new learning environments

As indicated throughout this report there is a huge need for coordinated efforts in all respects relevant to new learning environments, ICT-integration, development of Danish language technology, etc. However the combination of the general status of languages among university subjects and the fact that the problems of coordination seem daunting makes it difficult to see serious efforts at such coordination in the immediate future unless.

It doesn't really make sense to try to give further comments under the specific headlines below.

## 7.1  Seen in relation to language teaching and learning
## 7.2  Seen in relation to the promotion and multilingualism and cultural diversity
## 7.3  Seen in relation to the promotion of European co-operation
## 7.4  Seen in relation to the provision of language learning to students with special educational needs


# 8  Measures to be taken to meet the needs identified

The comments that are possible to make here are more or less a continuation of those given under 7 above. There is a clear need for action at national and institutional levels. The positive experience from the way in which EU-programmes led to massive improvements in the area of student exchanges should be transferred to the area of new learning environments and language learning. Seed-money schemes would probably make things happen much faster. The competence is there in many European universities – but fairly scattered and uncoordinated.

Instead of further elaborating this point I refer to the paper produced by the Commission: "Communication from the Commission: e-learning – Designing tomorrow's education" (Brussels, 24.5.2000), which sets out quite succinctly what is needed in Europe to address these problems – also in the area of language learning at university level.

In conclusion it should be emphasised that if Europe is going to get level with e.g. the US (see the Commission-paper quoted above) it will be necessary to set up EU-programmes which support projects and action research in all the areas falling under the broad concept of integrating ICT in new learning environments. Without such programmes universities and individuals will continue working on these matters but it will take too long (too long that is to fulfil the politically adopted ambitions of the EU in the areas of multilingualism and cultural diversity).

## 8.1   At institutional level
## 8.2   At regional level
Not relevant in the Danish context
## 8.3   8.3 At national level
## 8.4   At European level

# 9   Examples of good practice

It is necessary to make a selection here among quite many possible examples of good practice. The selection made attempts to show breadth and variety rather than quantity. In the selection I have tried to touch down on different points along the continuum mentioned in the general introduction.