

Synthesis Report on quality measures related to the process of teaching and learning

Learning and teaching has both human and contextual terms. Postmodernist crisis in values on the one hand and research findings on the other one resulted in identification of deeper links and relatively independent educational worlds existing in the worlds of social phenomena. This new concept created an immense complexity and dynamism in the evaluation of the teaching-learning process. The easiest way of presenting the summary of research and empirical observations may be explained by words "taught is not learnt". This statement, however, does not provide any clues to the identification of ways how to ensure quality. Uniqueness of each teaching situation and thereby relevant, meaningful and effective pedagogical approach to teaching, requires special awareness of necessity to understand their inner logic and dynamics seen through the manifested identity of each participant as a member of a socio-cultural or professional group.

Personality, attitudes and beliefs, even life experience, influence how the participant of the teaching-learning process interprets and interacts within the process itself. Although indirectly, even the writer of teaching materials exerts a strong influence on modes of interaction in the classroom by giving it a mental and socio-pedagogical framework. Teaching thus enables cross fertilisation of communication and socialising factors as well as controlled and autonomous activity.

1. New methods facilitating quality language learning

Relatively independent seems to be methodology i.e. the means by which language is presented to students, teaching-learning activities that are organised and how classroom relations are defined. Methodological choices in their three fundamental components, (the nature of: language, learning and the classroom) do not influence classroom realities in a linear manner, rather, they constitute a pivot around which students and teachers interact and negotiate their classroom behaviours and identities.

In most of the analysed countries the learner centred approach is being used and as for methods of teaching, interactive ones prevail. Main student`s work is organised around a subject or a course. Programmes with two majors dominate in post communist HEIs, whereas in western HEIs, one subject may represent student`s programme or course. They are usually scheduled with a full breakdown at the start of the term, given are also work to be covered, dates, assessment submissions and a description of the process and criteria of the exam, reading and resources list. This is particularly a field where corporate culture of HEIs is clearly identifiable – the better their IT system works, the more accessible this information is- and the whole communication between students, teachers and administrators is on the web.

Naturally, the profile of all language professionals is very heterogenous. Interpreters and translators possess a different training and profile from a language teacher, an economist or an engineer, though all of them use languages in their activities. One of the most important aspects of LSP, language for specific purposes that should be a relevant methodology to teach prospective professionals must comprise a common aspect to all language speakers i.e. professional communication with its written and spoken skills.

Currently, HEIs face different stages of the implementation of credit schemes. In all post communist countries ECTS is being implemented, however, at different pace. As for quality of knowledge and required workload, report do not give enough comparative clues.

There is no doubt that communicative approach prevailingly adopted in methodology of nearly all surveyed educational institutions in FL, contributes to learning group dynamics. Yet we must mention other quality factors that make a difference in the teaching outcomes of language teachers namely:

- a. the quality of Teaching theory they acquired during the pre-graduate training
- b. connections they made between the Theory and classroom realities
- c. regularly updated knowledge, language skills and methodology of teaching
- d. use of appropriate counselling techniques
- e. new learning environments deliberately created for the sake of student`s learning outcomes
- f. raised awareness of similarities and differences in physical manifestation of emotional states in students
- g. giving and receiving positive feedback based on giving information on progress in a non-judgemental, factual way.

Predominately students in post communist countries are found not to be aware of learning strategies at an appropriate level to become autonomous learners based on their learning history in authoritarian school system. A new phenomenon is witnessed in post communist countries applicants and later HE students do not belong to the category of knowledge seekers, alas, they very often solve situation on the job market and social benefits in the country, sit for entrance exams and try to manage their studies so that they avoid unemployment.

All reports highlight the necessity to develop more materials related to self-study, preferably accessible on the web. After the fall of communism all Eastern universities experienced a tremendous increase in the number of educational and scientific events within the framework of conferences, study trips, peer teaching, retraining and inset courses or mentoring programmes organised by foreign language institutes such as the British Council, Goethe Institute, Italian Institute, etc. Cultural studies have also become more important for language studies than ever before.

All countries reflect on some system of criteria used in the self-evaluation procedures in some of them combined with peer-evaluation procedures and those of official accreditation. In countries where HE is financed from the state budget, not from tuition fees, the accreditation process shows some signs of political correctness rather than academic insight.

2. New learning environments facilitating quality language learning

It is generally believed there is no observable shift in the environments of language learning apart, of course, from a clear tendency to co-operate with other institutions both at home and abroad in electronic chat rooms, tandem work, increased number of exchanges within Lingua or other programmes of Socrates helped improve foreign language skills as a side effect of going abroad. However, foreign language proficiency of the project members is taken for granted and there are no specific preparatory courses provided for them at HEIs. On the other hand post communist countries identified significant shifts in new environments constituted by multimedia self access centres or labs, availability of PCs, foreign language literature, newspapers and other realia in everyday life.

3. Delivery programmes in other languages

A fair proportion of teaching in the area of languages is still taking place in the lecture format, mostly in the target language, some introductory courses or specific theoretical courses in linguistics are provided in Finland either in Finnish or Swedish and in Lithuania in Lithuanian. The main reason is to economise resources. This time and place management principle allows several philology programme participants to attend the same lecture. The smaller the country the more often the necessity to learn foreign languages is highlighted and HEIs tend to provide quite a lot of courses or programmes in FL, especially in English. Finnish university Jyväskylä launched a new language technology specialisation for language teachers and the same university has a Chair in Interdepartmental Communication.

4. Students mobility

Students mobility is highly appreciated by the labour market, much more than by HEIs themselves. Formal qualification recognition in a diploma supplement that will give a record of linguistic preparation is positively accepted by both sides.

5. Organisational structures facilitating learning languages

There is a consensus among report writers that the language centres should be authorised to cater for second or third foreign language provision for university students. In the existing centres, (in Norway there are not any and in Lithuania only one) the courses are either part of the compulsory programme and then paid in the tuition fee, or if schooling is for free it is available not only to students, but also to the general public. The second target group pays course fees. They are run by HEIs and fulfil the task of life-long education facilities. One of their potential directions of development lies with interdepartmental co-operation aimed at creation of teaching materials. Currently they are using compilation from various sources, standard textbooks and occasionally, own developed material.

6. Languages of communication in modern language departments

Tenured native speakers are largely responsible for language proficiency work at language departments. A fair number of native speakers have classes at the language centres and FL institutes which gives them specific feedback transferable to HEI practice. In some cases, face-to-face or contact classes have been replaced by reading and essay assignments, a new tendency on the grounds of understaffed departments, or legal limitation of teaching load or excessive number of students taken as an American, easily transferable model to European conditions. In certain types of language courses, on the contrary, there are new ways in teaching being implemented in academic writing courses in Finland by two teachers teaching simultaneously, with a positive impact on learning outcomes.

7. New methods facilitating quality learning in language teacher

Reports are rather sceptical about change in paradigm in FLT methodology in future. Departments still adhere to rather traditional types of teaching aimed at students' skills. A kind of shift can be seen from transferred practices of bilingual or trilingual natural, administrative or educational settings into HEIs. (Belgium, Switzerland) To enhance quality it is needed to

have a global framework providing for general guidelines and philosophy of QE in the area of languages that would guarantee rigour, relevance and good pedagogical governance. At the moment HE teachers have a plenty of leeway to develop only rough outline of the course content for the accreditation process, and they are meeting the objectives with the principle of liberty of teaching. The workload of students is seldom taken into account by individual teachers and only some universities co-ordinate course design, credits and workload. Simultaneously, QE requires local initiatives providing for specific responses to local needs, taking into account historical roots and identity, yet encouraging new innovations in the line with global guidelines. Experience of The Teaching and Learning Technology Programme (TLTP) launched in 1992 in the UK could be implemented in other HEIs to improve and maintain quality. Some generalised experience of ALADIN (Autonomous Language Learning for Art and Design Using Interactive Networks) from the UK may help to raise awareness of the benefits that new technologies bring to language acquisition.

It needs to be pointed out that quality of teaching is extremely difficult to evaluate objectively as there are no measurable criteria indicating what content and process aspects it should entail. There is a fairly stable Finnish system of assessing a teacher after two years of holding a post that is based on a consensus of opinions that screen the teacher in the process of trial lecture, pedagogical portfolio, description of the teaching experience, characterisation of his-her teaching philosophy.

Largely used are feedback questionnaires taken into account in the renewal of contracts of teaching staff but also for dissemination of good and bad practice or warning from hierarchical superiors to remedy the weakness. The construction of a questionnaire must cover different aspects of the teaching process, to involve students and give them right to ask for a change in the teacher's work have an effective follow-up of their implications, so that interpersonal relations between teacher and students do not bias the assessment.

Although the appraisal system considers the primacy of teaching at HEI, seen as the quality of delivering curricula of programmes or courses, teachers are also assessed on their research activities leading to acquiring higher scientific or academic degrees, number of advisees for master or doctoral theses, and their publications meeting quality requirements based on high citation index. When the university is not financed from the state budget only, it becomes a source of income and an important tenure factor whether the staff member is or is not a member of some projects with funding. In some countries Czech Republic, Slovakia, no category of HE teacher is accorded a permanent contract.

Last but not least career prospects of the teaching staff at language departments and language centres are not very good, since there are few higher position they might be promoted to. In some countries (Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia) this leads to low financial incentives that are not stimulating the quality enhancement.

8. New methods facilitating quality learning in the training of translators and interpreters

The report do not identify any. In post communist countries the emphasis is put on preparation of experts in the area relevant to current demand, i.e. economy, law, IT.

9. Preparation for life-long learning

Lifelong education to learning is based on institutional principle, across European countries it starts at pre-primary level with optional learning of foreign languages through all levels of education with compulsory FLT. In this mode some countries` graduates of secondary schools

have 12 years of FL learning, mainly English (Norway) in other countries it is from 8-10 years although in comparison to former requirements it replaced three classical languages. Generally, at various levels of proficiency stated in the Common European Framework of Reference, all countries have two foreign languages in compulsory curriculum. FLT provided for at HE institutions outside degree conferring one, does not lead to formally recognised qualifications. Language exams of long tradition in western part of Europe have a highly prestigious status in former communist bloc countries. The presence of NARIC agencies will be more important when the Bologna process starts in full.

The long term recommendation of the EU is to enable access tertiary education to 50% of population group and thus increase the proportion of bachelor's study. All accession countries have started introducing it into the system but their current system of recognition of qualifications as well as course designs will have to be changed. This long term recommendation also tries to ensure permeability of all kinds of tertiary education along with special support to distance education, non-university higher institutions and higher professional schools and local community. In some countries, e.g. Norwegian universities have to cater for community and business needs by law. Distance learning and e-learning have already proved quite successful there, too.

10. Identification, validation, recognition and certification of skills, competences and knowledge acquired outside a given institution

see 8.

11. To what extent has a new learning culture been introduced into programmes and provision in the area of languages

To a great extent new technologies, along with the access to various teaching resources, authentic resources from everyday life, increase in learners experience of study abroad, tourism, satellite TV, subsidiaries of multinational companies and the world franchises contribute to qualitative changes in learning culture. Naturally, this is more obvious in former communist countries where certain methodologies and organisational issues have been implemented.

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