

FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN TERTIARY EDUCATION: A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE¹

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ABSTRACT

In a time of big changes in the political and educational structures of our most immediate environment, this paper tries to provide an overview of the current situation of the teaching of foreign languages in Europe. Weaknesses and strengths are identified, as well as similarities and discrepancies between the different European university institutions. Reference is also made to the latest educational initiatives taken by the European Council as regards the promotion and development of a European Higher Education Area. The final part of the study is concerned with the role of foreign language teaching in education, followed by a number of proposals for the improvement of foreign language teaching in Tertiary Education. The ideas conveyed in this study should be considered as a starting-point for a general debate on all these issues.

RESUMEN

En una época de grandes cambios en los órdenes políticos y educativos de nuestro entorno más inmediato, este artículo intenta ofrecer una visión general de la situación actual de la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras en el continente europeo. Se apuntan aspectos positivos y deficiencias del sistema al mismo tiempo que se vislumbran las similitudes y diferencias existentes entre las distintas instituciones universitarias europeas. Se reseñan las últimas iniciativas educativas del Consejo de Europa en relación con la promoción y el desarrollo de Educación Superior Europea. La última sección de este estudio se centra en el papel que la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras juega en el mundo

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educativo; a continuación, se hacen una serie de propuestas que pudieran servir para mejorar el panorama de la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras en la educación universitaria. Las ideas expresadas en este trabajo deben ser consideradas simplemente como puntos de partida para fomentar un debate general sobre todas estas cuestiones.

RÉSUMÉ

À une époque de grands changements dans les domaines politiques et éducatifs de notre environnement le plus immédiat, cet article vise à offrir une vision générale de la situation actuelle de l'enseignement des LE sur le continent européen. On y aborde les aspects positifs et les déficiences du système ainsi que les similitudes et les différences qui existent entre les différentes institutions universitaires. On fait mention des dernières initiatives éducatives du Conseil de l'Europe en relation avec la promotion et le développement de l'enseignement supérieur. Enfin, la dernière section de cette étude s'intéresse au rôle que joue l'enseignement des LE dans le monde éducatif, auquel s'ajoute une série de propositions qui pourraient servir à améliorer le panorama de l'enseignement des LE dans l'enseignement universitaire. Les idées exprimées dans cet article doivent simplement être considérées comme un point de départ visant à encourager un débat général sur toutes ces questions.

INTRODUCTION

In our globalised world information technology has become increasingly important and significant communication barriers between people no longer exist. Considering these developments it may be worthwhile exploring the position and function of foreign-language teaching within the general education system. In the last decades our societies have gone through important changes: industrial, social, educational... Both inside and outside academic circles humanities degrees are very often compared unfavourably to technological courses in terms of their real value and their contribution to society. In recent years there has also been a gradual but clearly marked decline in the number of students choosing modern languages as main degrees at university.

In the light of all the previous questions it will be interesting to see to what extent the teaching of languages has been adapted to this new international situation, offering as it does new internal and external challenges. Furthermore, it is important to point out that in the educational sphere the majority of European countries such as France, Spain,

United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Poland, Italy, Russia², to mention just a few, have gone through recent and important reforms that have directly affected the different levels of education. Although the role of foreign-language teaching is extensively discussed at the primary and secondary levels because of its being obligatory for children and teenagers, this is not so at the tertiary level.

The purpose of this paper is, firstly, to provide a comprehensive view of the current status of the teaching of foreign languages in Europe with special reference to the Tertiary Level and to Spain; secondly, to reflect upon the value and role of these languages within the general education system and, thirdly, to make a proposal of possible measures that could be taken to improve foreign-languages teaching in Third Level Education. These three objectives are obviously very ambitious: we intend to cover not only a wide area of knowledge but an extensive geographical zone as well. This report should be regarded then as a preliminary account on all these issues. What is more, it is necessary to initiate a serious and formal debate by all the persons, institutions and sectors involved (teachers, students, administrators, curriculum designers, materials producers, etc.) as foreign-language teaching has important implications not only for education but also for the development of our society as a whole.

1. THIRD LEVEL EDUCATION: DEFINITION

Third Level Education includes university institutions, technological and polytechnic colleges, teacher-training institutes and colleges of further education. Tertiary education also comprises in some contexts distance learning; that is the case, for example, of the UNED (*Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia*) in Spain, the CNED (*Centre National d'Enseignement à Distance*) in France, the *Universidade Aberta* in Portugal, the *OpenUniversiteitNederland* in the Netherlands and the *Open University* in the UK. Third-level students have all gone through secondary education and they are generally 18 plus. All of them have al-

² Mackenzie (1998) and Billi (2001) provide a good account of the university reform in the Netherlands and Italy, respectively. Minasova (1997:47) gives us a general picture of the situation in Russia and points out "the unprecedented and ever-increasing urge for foreign language learning- mostly and overwhelmingly English". The importance of cultural studies in Russia right now is also shown.

ready studied at least one foreign language for a number of years. Tertiary Education is not obligatory but optional and it generally offers specialized teaching in a particular area. In general terms this type of education is not free although in some European countries students receive a government grant and student support schemes are available. It is also assumed that Third Level Education should prepare students for the world of labour, providing them with the necessary knowledge and skills to conduct a professional task successfully.

2. PRESENT STATE OF THE TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN EUROPE
WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO SPAIN AND THE TERTIARY LEVEL

2.1. *The teaching of foreign languages in Europe: Some general facts and figures*

According to data provided by the European Commission³, English is the most widely foreign language studied by Europeans followed, by first French, German and third Spanish. Overall, 89% of pupils learn English, 32% of pupils learn French, 18% German and 8% Spanish.

The teaching of languages in primary education is becoming more and more widespread. Latest figures indicate that in Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium-Flanders, Greece, Spain, Austria, Finland and Sweden more than 33% of primary pupils are learning a foreign language. In fact, in Spain children start with the study of a foreign language, mainly English, at the age of 8 and in some schools the learning of English is even introduced in infant education, that is, at the age of 4. A conference of experts, "Early Learning and After", was organised in Luxembourg in September 1997. European Union Education Ministers subsequently adopted a resolution (98/C1) encouraging the early teaching of languages in Member States.

In Ireland, Italy and Greece, only one foreign language is generally taught, elsewhere two or three languages are studied, or can be studied. In the UK, Germany, Portugal, Spain and France pupils are first introduced to a first foreign language at primary level and later on in the curriculum they are given the possibility of studying an additional one. In most countries students are offered several foreign lan-

³ This data was obtained from the following web page:
<http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/languages/lang/europeanlanguages.html>

guages to choose from. In Greece, for example, pupils can study English, French or German. In the UK the most common foreign languages offered are French, German, Spanish and Italian while in France, English, German and Spanish are the most popular. In Spain, English and French are widely offered while the rest of the modern languages are neglected; in the last few years, however, there has been an increasing demand for German. In Poland, English and German are the most popular and the learning of foreign languages generally starts at the end of 11; this situation is now beginning to change because of an educational reform under which the study of modern languages will be initiated at an earlier time.

Between the ages of 12 and 18, the total number of hours devoted to language learning varies from 6 hours per week in Portugal to 1-3 hours per week in Belgium (Wallonia), in Greece, Ireland and Italy.

In some countries of the European Union teachers at primary and secondary levels have to teach more than one modern language. It is very common, for instance, that teachers in the UK teach French and Spanish, or Spanish and Portuguese. This means that modern language teachers have to specialise in more than one language.

As regards the methodology used for the teaching of foreign languages in Europe, learner-centred, communicative and task-based approaches are mainly followed. Distance learning, and information and communication technologies are favoured. However, more pedagogical and technological resources are in general required and more funds should be invested on the teaching and learning of foreign languages in Europe.

The learning of other subjects through the medium of a foreign language is also promoted in most countries of the European Union. The European Commission has contributed to developing a network, "Euroclit", of teachers and other parties interested in the learning of other educational subjects through a foreign language. This network produces regular bulletins; the Internet site includes a materials bank and a "chat" facility for teachers.

Considering that it is usually much easier to learn to understand a foreign language than to speak it fluently, multilingual comprehension is also advocated⁴.

⁴ The European Commission has also supported the development of a web site for the expansion and exchange of information in this area at <http://crim.inalco.fr/recomu/>.

2.2. *Foreign Language Teaching at the Tertiary Level in Spain*

In Spain English is by far the most commonly studied foreign language. It is studied as a main degree in the Faculties of Philology. A great majority of the universities offer this four or five-year degree usually referred to as *licenciatura*. The curriculum is generally a combination of language and literature courses and there is also room for cultural studies within it. Students have to study another foreign language and literature for at least two years. Depending on the university a wide range of these are offered: French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Dutch and Danish are the most popular. Students normally achieve a good theoretical knowledge of English, but the standards obtained as regards a practical and instrumental use of the language are not so high. About 90% of the English graduates choose to work as EFL teachers once they have taken an initial teacher training course, *Curso de Aptitud Pedagógica* (CAP). At present, the unemployment rate of these graduates is quite high as the market is not able to take in the large number of students who have graduated in the last few years. A decline in our birth-rate is also responsible for this as fewer teachers are required.

English is also offered as an obligatory or optional course in some degrees such as Education (for those who will become primary school teachers in the future), Economics, Law, Engineering, Physics, Chemistry, Pharmacy. ESP, that is, English for Specific Purposes, has developed quite a lot in the last few years but there is still a lot to be done because students' interests and needs are not always taken into account.

As regards the other foreign languages, they are only studied as main degrees in the Faculties of Philology where these degrees have a structure similar to that of the English curriculum. French and German are, in that order, the most popular while Italian, Portuguese, Arab and Russian follow. None of these foreign languages are offered as an obligatory or optional subject in any other technical degree.

Apart from the Philology Faculties mentioned above, there are also the Faculties of Translation and Interpretation. There are not many institutions of this type although, curiously enough, a number of Philology Faculties offer postgraduate courses (Master and doctoral programmes) in this area. Faculties of Translation and Interpretation are relatively new. For a long time students who wanted to do this degree had to go to Madrid, Barcelona, Salamanca or Granada. As before English is the most popular followed by French and German. Students specialise in at least two languages, majoring in one and minoring

in another. The curriculum is more practical than the Philology equivalent.

Apart from the Faculties of Translation and the Philology Faculties, there are also what are known as School of Languages (*Escuelas de Idiomas*). They are quite popular and there is normally one in every big city. They are not private language centres but state-run. This means that the fees are very low. Only students who are over 16 can attend courses offered by these institutions. Their curriculum is organized over five years on a part-time basis. Courses run through all the day but specially in the afternoons and evenings. The number of students attending these schools is quite large. One of the problems these institutions have at the moment is that the diploma awarded by them has little recognition and it opens very few doors in the job market.

In the last few years there have been timid attempts to set up or create new university degrees with a combination of language and scientific/economic/legal courses, that is, mixed degrees. However, these attempts have not been, so far, very successful. Finally, it is important to point out the existence of language centres working out of particular universities. These language centres or 'institutes' provide foreign language teaching to their students, teachers and non-teaching staff. In the last few years some of them have also offered courses of Spanish as a foreign language. That field is becoming more and more important.

Master programmes are quite new in Spain and there is not a wide range of them in the Humanities branch. They tend to be more common in the fields of Medicine, Law and Economics. However, a few universities offer courses of this kind on Applied Linguistics, Teaching of English/Spanish as a Foreign Language, Foreign Languages Applied to the Industry, Speech Therapy, etc. They generally last one year and in some cases there is a 'practicum' module where students have to put into practice the principles and theories studied in the theory component.

Doctoral programmes are divided into two cycles, making a total of at least 5 years. In the first part of two years' duration candidates have to take 7/8 courses of 3 credits each (approximately 30 teaching hours) dealing with different linguistic, cultural and literary topics. Once these courses have been completed, in the following year students have to submit a research project called TIT (*Trabajo de Investigación Tutelado*) which will be reviewed by a committee of three members of the staff Department. Those students who do well are awarded the *Diploma de Estudios Avanzados* or DEA. The second stage consists of individual

work on a dissertation under the guidance of a supervisor. This usually takes three or four years, although very frequently students take longer. Original research is expected. Once submitted, the dissertation is defended in public before a board of five members, three of which are necessarily doctors of different universities. Candidates first present their main findings and results together with the most important conclusions gathered. This is followed by questions and discussion with the members of the panel. There is an important disproportion between the number of students who start with the doctoral programme and those who succeed in completing it. This is, in fact, one of the weaknesses of the present doctoral system.

2.3. *Foreign Language Teaching at the Tertiary Level in Europe*

The situation in other European countries is not very different from the one described for Spain. Tertiary basic or first degrees are organized in three/four year-courses in most European countries. Obviously the types of institutions and the duration and denomination of the degrees change from one country to another. Rusiecki (1999, 2000) presents a very good report on varieties of undergraduate and postgraduate study of English in Europe. Much of the data provided can be easily applied to modern languages in general.

In England and Wales, for example, the undergraduate course lasts three years and leads to the degree of Bachelor of Arts (BA). The same is true for Denmark although in this case students may specialise in one subject for the three years or, alternatively, do two years in a major subject and one year in a minor. Danish students are asked to do a final project although they are not expected to produce original research. In France the undergraduate course is organised in two cycles. The first two years lead to the Diploma of General University Studies, generally known by the French abbreviation DEUD (*Diplôme d'Études Universitaires Générales*). This is followed by another year of study, leading to the *Licence*, equivalent to the BA. Apart from the traditional degrees in modern languages, special languages courses are also offered in this country; these are known as *Langues Étrangères Appliquées* (LEA), which combine two foreign languages with Economics, Tourism, Political Sciences, Law, Communication, etc. The main aim of these studies is to provide students with the necessary professional skills to work in the industry world as translators, public relations, secretaries for the international departments of a company, marketing directors, etc.

In Portugal the undergraduate course has a four years' duration and leads to the *Licenciatura em Línguas e Literaturas Modernas*, that is, a joint honours degree in English and an additional foreign language, which in most cases is German or French. Those students who want to become teachers of modern languages have to follow a series of vocational courses. In the Netherlands (Mackenzie, 1998), first degree programmes last four years consisting of 168 credits, each credit equivalent to a total of 40 hours. The degree obtained is at Masters level, confusingly known as the 'doctoral' diploma, being the minimal requirement for admission to post-graduate training. In Germany the duration of an undergraduate course is generally of four years leading directly either to the MA or Magister degree, or the state examination (*Staatsexam für das höhere Lehramt*). There is no equivalent as such of the BA degree. The curriculum is generally organised into basic and main study. Hungary follows a similar system to that of Germany. Finally, in both Poland and Russia there are two parallel systems now in operation. In the traditional curriculum there is no degree equivalent to the BA, and all students take a five-year course. Moreover, some universities have lately introduced a two-tier system according to which students obtain a BA, which usually lasts four years, and then can proceed with the MA of two or even three years' duration.

As regards postgraduate courses, Master programs are generally more flexible as they can be followed on a part-time or full-time basis and are usually completed in one or two years. Doctoral degrees on their part normally have a five/six years' duration. Students are asked to take a number of seminars and they also have to produce an original research work which can be considered a relevant contribution to the field.

As before, the organization and structure of postgraduate degrees vary quite considerably from one to another European country. Let us consider some examples.

In England and Wales students entering a Master programme should have a good first degree. The completion of the whole programme usually takes two years although at times it may take less than that. Students usually follow a number of postgraduate classes in the first year while the second is generally devoted to the writing of a dissertation. A full-time doctorate normally requires three years' work although in practice some students take longer. The candidate has to submit a dissertation based on original research which has then to be defended in front of a committee.

In the case of Denmark students can continue for two further years to complete an MA degree, called *cand. mag.* The possession of a *cand. mag.* is an entrance requirement to the doctoral programme which generally lasts three years. Candidates have to produce a dissertation based on original work and it has to be defended publicly before a committee of three specialists (two of whom should belong to a different university) and an audience. In France the *maitrise* is the first postgraduate course and it generally takes one year to complete. A dissertation is also required. Holding a *maitrise* is a general requirement to be entitled to apply for doctoral studies which are organised in two stages. To be admitted to the first stage candidates have to present a summary of their previous studies together with a research project. An interview with members of the Department is followed. Students who do well enter a course of studies leading to the *Diplome d'Études Approfondies* (DEA). This generally takes a year to be finalised. The second stage consists of independent work on a dissertation under the direction of a supervisor. Students normally take three or four years to accomplish it. Once submitted, the dissertation is assessed and defended before a three-professor board, two of which must belong to other university institutions.

In Portugal the MA degree, the *Mestrado*, requires two years of work: one year of courses and an additional one for the writing of a dissertation. The dissertation is evaluated by three academics: the supervisor, the director of the Masters programme and an assessor from a different institution. The degree is assessed on the basis of the dissertation and a general discussion on it. The Ph.D. degree is awarded for a dissertation. Ph.D. programmes are not taught and original research is expected. While the holders of the first degree, that is, the *licenciatura* are entitled to use the title of *Dr.* before their name, possession of the doctorate allows one to write the title in its full form, that is, *Doutor*.

In Germany, Master degrees take an average of thirteen semesters to be completed. There is a research component throughout the whole course of study and particularly, the submission of a dissertation which is a requirement for the degree. Students have also to take three written exams (3-4 hours) and four half-hour oral examinations. As regards the doctoral programme, there are not any specific courses leading to the Ph.D. Candidates have to present a dissertation and pass a final exam, divided into four different papers according to their areas of specialization. Publication is required and the candidate may be given permission to publish in another language, frequently English or French.

In Hungary, Master programmes take four years. The programme of studies includes linguistic, literary, historical and cultural courses. In the last two years candidates have to produce a research project of no less than 40 pages long. Ph.D. programmes comprise two years of course work and an additional year of supervised research. After that students obtain what is known as the *absolutorium* and have three years to publish a few articles on their area of specialization, take the doctoral examination, submit the dissertation and defend it. The students who do not comply with these regulations lose the *absolutorium*. According to Mackenzie (1998), the opportunities for research in the Netherlands are quite limited. Doctorate students are low-paid employees who in return for their salary have to produce a doctoral thesis which has to be published or pre-published before being submitted. Mackenzie draws our attention to the fact that many of their graduate students are going abroad to complete their Ph.D. because of the poor current conditions.

Finally, in Russia Master programmes take an average of five years to be completed. In the third year students choose the area where they want to specialise. In the fourth year they are expected to write a 30-35 page 'course paper' and submit it for discussion with members of the Department. In their final year students have to produce a 50-100 page dissertation which should be based on original research. This dissertation is reviewed by two scholars and defended before the 'state examination commission' chaired by a professor from another university. In the Russian system the equivalent of the Ph.D. is the degree of *Kandidat* of philology. Firstly, candidates have to submit a paper of about 20 pages explaining their prospective research. The paper is reviewed and if considered satisfactory, the student is admitted for entrance examinations. A full-time doctoral course lasts three years. In the first year the candidate has to take two exams: one in philosophy and another in a second foreign language. The Ph.D. student also has to translate a book from that language into Russian. The candidate in agreement with the supervisor selects the dissertation topic. The average length is 150 pages and the maximum 200. No publication of the dissertation is required although before submission of the dissertation the candidate has to publish several papers on the areas of their study. The dissertation is first reviewed by two or three professors and then discussed at a Department meeting. Once it has been fully reviewed and amendments, if necessary, introduced, it is submitted for final assessment to a different university. The diploma is awarded by the Faculty

Dissertation Commission but issued by the Highest Attestation Commission in Moscow.

In spite of this wide variety of undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, there are concrete plans for their homogenization, which should be achieved before the year 2010 according to the Bologna Declaration, signed on 19 June 1999. The Bologna Declaration, which according to the current president of ESSE (European Society of English Studies), Professor Adolphe Haberer (2002), had its origin in the Sorbonne meeting held in Paris on 25 May 1998, was signed by 29 countries⁵ with the compromise of reforming the structures and organization of their higher education in a convergent way. According to the spirit of this resolution, the signing countries should not regard it as an imposed reform on their higher educational system but as a free commitment on their part to "search for a common European answer to common European problems". The Bologna Declaration also acknowledges the important role that the higher education community has to play in the success of the process. The adoption of common modules of qualifications based on a credit system is strongly emphasized. This, no doubt, will promote Europeans' mobility and mutual academic recognition with all the practical implications that can be derived from it at the social, cultural and labour levels⁶.

In addition to this, the European Ministers of Education in a convention held in the city of Prague, on 19 May 2001, reviewed the Bologna Declaration and ratified the objectives of the Bologna process by the prompting of a series of further actions which can be summarised as follows: a) The adoption of a similar university degree system in all countries based on two cycles: undergraduate (with a duration of three years) and postgraduate; b) The promotion of quality assurance in all European Tertiary institutions; c) The promotion of the European dimension in higher education, that is, the development of courses and curricula with a European orientation and with the joint participation of universities from different European countries; d) Tertiary Education

⁵ Apart from the 15 European Union members, the following countries also joined the Declaration: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Norway, Poland, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia and Switzerland.

⁶ The following are some of the Internet addresses which provide further information on the Bologna Declaration: <http://unige.ch/cre> (Association of European Universities), <http://crue.upm.es/eurec> (Confederation of EU Rectors' Conferences), <http://eaie.nl> (European Association for International Education) and <http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/socrates/erasmus/bologna.pdf>, p. 7.

should be concerned with lifelong learning and, to finish; e) The enhancement of the European higher education area, not only to European students but also to learners from other parts of the world. Finally, the participating European Ministers agreed on having a next meeting in Berlin in the second half of 2003 to assess progress and set priorities for the next stages of the process towards the Higher Education Area. Applications to participate in this process from the countries of Turkey, Cyprus and Croatia were also accepted⁷. For Haberer (2002, p. 4), "the Prague Communiqué is rather disappointing" as nothing totally new was said and he also seems to be quite skeptical about the Bologna process. In my view, it is perhaps too early to say. It is true that the participation of so many countries may make things more difficult but I do think it is still feasible to achieve unity in the development of the Tertiary Education in Europe.

Apart from these initiatives to obtain a common European Higher Education Area in the near future, which no doubt will foster mobility of European citizens and mutual recognition of their qualifications and skills, there has also been a recent development promoted by the Council of Europe. This will definitely have important consequences in particular for the teaching and learning of foreign languages; it is the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (2001), which provides a basis for the design of syllabuses, exams, textbooks and curriculum guides that can be applied to any European language. It also offers concrete guidelines for the development of the communicative competence of the learners, describing the cultural context in which each language is situated and defining different levels of the knowledge and command of the language that allow us to have a general view of the learner's progress. As the Bologna and the Prague Declarations, this project intends to promote international cooperation in the field of modern languages and it also favours the mobility of the Europeans and the mutual recognition of the qualifications and degrees of the citizens of the country members. Furthermore, multilingualism and multiculturalism are advocated. It is expected that Europeans in this way can achieve knowledge of different languages and cultures through their lives. As one of the instruments to attain these objectives, the *European Language Portfolio* (ELP) has been presented. This is a file of different documents

⁷ Further information on the Prague Convention can be obtained at the following Internet address of the European University Association (EUA): <http://unige.ch/eua/>21/05/2001>. It can also be consulted at <http://www.esib.org/prague/documents>.

that comprise and develop different forms of linguistic and intercultural learning. It is of personal use and consists of three components: a) *Language passport* or form that shows the level achieved by the learner in one or several languages together with qualifications obtained and intercultural experiences; b) *Language biography* that summarises the experiences of the learner in the target language as well as their learning priorities. This document tries to involve the learner in the planning and evaluation of their own learning process; and c) *Language dossier* that includes a selection of materials and certificates that state officially the qualifications obtained together with samples of the student's work.

3. EUROPEANS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS LANGUAGE LEARNING

Obviously when analysing the situation of the teaching of foreign languages in Europe, the attitudes of the European towards language learning have to be seriously considered. The information presented in this section was extracted from the results of the Special Eurobarometer survey 54 "Europeans and Languages", conducted by the European Commission in all European Union 15 Member States between 6th December and 23rd December 2000. In global terms almost 16,000 people, 15,900 to be more exact, gave their opinions and referred to their experience on the topic of languages and language learning⁸.

A total of 72% of Europeans believe that knowing foreign languages is or would be useful for them while 71% of them maintain that everyone in the European Union should be able to speak one European language in addition to their mother tongue. Almost the same proportion of respondents agrees that this should be English.

As regards their language learning, most Europeans are likely to have learned their foreign languages at secondary school and the most common way of learning languages is to attend group classes with a teacher (46%), followed by 'talking informally with a native speaker' and 'long (frequent) visits to a country where the language is spoken'.

The most popular places where Europeans would look for information about opportunities for language learning are the nearest adult education school (35%), friends (19%) and a private language school (14%).

⁸ Full information about this survey is available in the following web site address: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/languages.html>

The main motivations for language learning are in this order: to use it on holidays abroad (47%), personal satisfaction (37%) and possibilities of using it at work (26%). As can be seen, it is a motivation with an instrumental orientation rather than with an integrative one. Incentives, which would be effective in motivating people to learn other languages, would be: free lessons (29%), if they were paid for it (22%) and if they could find a course which suited their schedule (19%).

Europeans regard foreign language learning not only as something useful but also as something of relevance. This is in keeping with the fact that 93% of parents say that it is important that their children learn other European languages.

As regard the offer of language courses, 4 respondents out of 10 declare that the availability of language courses is good in the area where they live. Finally, a large majority (63%) believes that it is necessary to protect their own language as the enlargement of the European Union is envisaged. This is specially so in the case of the respondents from Finland and Greece.

4. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS ON THE ROLE OF THE TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN EDUCATION

Before making some specific proposals for improving the teaching of foreign languages in Tertiary institutions, I would like to make a series of general considerations on the role of the teaching of foreign languages in education.

It is a cliché to say that the knowledge of a foreign language opens up work opportunities and that it also provides a new dimension to the individual. Cross-border commercial relationships are being increased and this means people of different countries get in contact with each other. In a world such as ours where communication between peoples is essential, one cannot lock oneself away. It is necessary to open up new horizons and new ways of observing and interpreting our reality. Our environment cannot be circumscribed to one's own area or country. We are living in a global world; however, this absolutely does not mean that we should lose our personal and cultural identity.

The knowledge of foreign languages allows us to encounter new people and cultures. It gives us new perspectives on life. By getting to know other people and other cultures, we appreciate our own much more and we become more tolerant and open. I am absolutely con-

vinced that many of the existing problems in the world would be solved if we were more flexible and tolerant of other people's ideas and cultures. The study of a foreign language takes us in that direction.

The knowledge of a foreign language serves to articulate the experiences we find in the world around us as well as to understand, share or reject the experiences and views of others. As teachers of foreign languages, we should bear in mind that teaching a foreign language at any educational level does not only involve the practice of the four language skills. It is basically a way of educating our intellect and sensibility (Vez Jeremías, 2000). As language teachers, we are doing much more than simply teaching a few words or grammatical structures. A learning experience is really valuable and useful if it contributes to the global education of the learner as well as to the learning of the language (Williams and Burden, 1997).

Apart from these utilitarian reasons, the learning of a foreign language serves to put into practice a series of skills necessary for everyday life. When learning a language, one has to make deductions, hypotheses, calculations, operations; one has to analyse language, to see how it works and come to conclusions. It is necessary to be aware of mistakes made, plan structures in advance, rehearse them, practice them and sometimes reformulate them. The skills learners have to use and develop can easily be compared with those practiced in scientific disciplines, such as Maths, for example. Gardner (1993) clearly demonstrates the existence of more than one kind of intelligence; he distinguishes up to seven different types: kinaesthetic, verbal, musical, numerical, etc. Our students should be trained not only in one of them but also in as many as possible. This also caters for diversity.

In the light of the previous statements, I believe that in Tertiary Education the knowledge students have of the foreign language they studied at secondary school should be consolidated and implemented. Furthermore, they should be initiated into a new foreign language either as part of their official curriculum or as an extramural activity.

5. GLOBAL PROPOSAL FOR IMPROVING THE TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

The following are a series of proposals I present for general discussion with regard to the improvement of the teaching of foreign languages in Tertiary Education. These proposals should be interpreted

simply as such, that is, as simple propositions that need to be widely debated before being implemented.

- More flexible curricula should be favoured. Students should be given the possibility to specialise in one or two foreign languages together with a technical, economic or legal discipline. In this line combined degrees (foreign languages + Economy/ + Law/ + Medicine/ + Political Sciences/ + Tourism) should be promoted. The practical side of the foreign language should be emphasized. This does not mean that the traditional modern languages degrees (Philology degrees) should be abandoned or neglected. However, they will probably require reformulation and reorientation in their objectives, structure and contents in the light of the learners' and society's changing wants. As a preliminary stage, needs analysis and programme evaluations should be then conducted to detect weaknesses and strengths in the current system as well as to come up with possible measures for further development and improvement. Quality control will also be central because as Schlaeger (2002, p. 6) maintains "the desired creation of a European area of higher education requires constant support, supervision and adaptation to continuously evolving needs".
- A foreign language should be offered at least as an optional course as part of the curriculum of most degrees. In fact this is done in many universities in the USA right now.
- Language learning should be regarded as a life long process. Tertiary institutions will have to play an important role in continuing education and their appeal should be quite wide in that area.
- LSP (Language with Specific Purposes) has to receive more attention in the future. We have to give importance to students' needs.
- Syllabuses at this level should incorporate a learning to learn component to develop learners' autonomy. Teachers should specially train students in the use of learning strategies that are useful to them. They should also help their learners to identify their own learning style and ultimately get to know themselves as persons.
- More specific language teaching materials should be produced and they should be specially designed considering the particular features of this level of education. In this respect new technologies such as the Internet will have to play an important role. Distance learning programmes ought to be devised. All tertiary institutions should also have a well-equipped resource or self-

access centre for their students supervised by specialised staff so that students can learn how to work autonomously. Libraries must also be funded for the necessary materials.

- Extramural activities intended to foster the learning of foreign languages should be promoted by tertiary institutions: organization of round tables and seminars on specific topics concerning the target language culture, book/music exhibitions, film showings followed by discussion, foreign-language clubs, lectures, foreign-language fairs, etc. Students should be particularly involved in these activities. They should be the real organizers, monitored by their teachers.
- Initial and in-service teacher training programmes should be essential so that teachers can face these innovations with confidence and without fear. Language and pedagogical recycling will be necessary in some cases.
- Teacher education has to be emphasized. This means that educators should be stimulated to keep-up-to-date in their teaching and research. They should be encouraged to try out new experiences and innovations.
- Exchange programmes of teachers and students such as Socrates and Leonardo should be given priority by the European Council. National exchange programmes might also be encouraged.
- There must be more contacts between the teachers of secondary and tertiary school levels to exchange views, share experiences and get to grips with the problems found in everyday teaching.
- National governments should finance and coordinate all these programmes. Foreign embassies through their foreign programmes and centres such as the Alliance Française, Goethe Institut, Instituto Cervantes, British Council, etc. could also work together and be directly involved. The European Council should devote special attention and financial aid to the promotion of language learning in Europe. This has to be done in different ways by favouring general meetings of teachers and administrators involved in the teaching of foreign languages and by devising specific actions to be taken in areas such as syllabus design, teacher training, exchange programmes, campaigns explaining the importance of studying foreign languages, materials production, etc. These actions should be real and practical enterprises. They should not only be restricted to paper. They should be actually implemented and made operative.

- It is also extremely important that teachers in different countries should be informed about the latest European initiatives and developments so that they can feel part of the process instead of considering themselves to be completely alien to it.
- Foreign language textbooks and other supplementary materials could be used in some degrees. Students would be learning other subjects though the medium of a foreign language and they would see the foreign language as something useful and practical.
- Research and pilot projects on all these issues must be favoured. Results and conclusions should be incorporated in national and transnational educational policies.
- Any innovation introduced into the system has to be carefully planned and properly funded. It should also be negotiated with all the parties involved (students, teachers, members of society, education specialists) and they must all have a significant input.

6. GENERAL SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In a time of big changes in the political and educational structures of our most immediate environment, this paper has tried to provide an overview of the current situation of the teaching of foreign languages in Europe. Weaknesses and strengths have been identified. Discrepancies among the different European university institutions have been pointed out although similarities and points in common have also been emphasised. Reference has been made to the educational initiatives taken by the European Council and the European Commission as regards the promotion and development of a European Higher Education Area such as the Bologna and the Prague Declarations. More specifically as regards the teaching of modern languages a brief account and explanation have been provided of the *Common European Framework for the Teaching, Learning and Assessment of Languages* and the *European Language Portfolio* (ELP). In the final part of the study we have reflected on the role of foreign language teaching in education followed by a series of proposals for the improvement of foreign language teaching in Tertiary Education. As stated at the beginning, this is just a preliminary report and it was primarily aimed at promoting a debate and discussion on all these issues. I feel that this debate is really necessary and it cannot be postponed for long if we really want to respond as educators to the new development and demands of our world and society.

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