



MOLAN RES 1: Case Study

TITLE: Motivate students via the introduction of fee exemption and ECTS credit award for language modules at the Language Centre of the University of Lausanne

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INSTITUTION/S, NETWORK/S ETC. COVERED BY THE CASE STUDY:

Students of the three cycles of the University of Lausanne, Switzerland

CASE STUDY SUMMARY (max. 350 words)

This case study treats the introduction in 2005 of the fee exemption as well as the optional award of ECTS credits by a number of faculties of the University of Lausanne, of language modules and independent language training provided by the Language Centre of the university. These changes have aimed to develop plurilingual competence as a transversal competence according to Bologna requisites. Prior to 2005, nearly every possibility to study any of the seven languages offered at the Language Center was fee-based and entirely facultative. The new structural measure, applied across all disciplines to undergraduate and graduate students alike, has witnessed a notable increase of the number of participants enrolled in Language Centre modules. According to this new concept, the expected learning outcome is not for everyone to attain a homogeneous level, but rather to encourage each student to enlarge his or her plurilingual and pluricultural repertoire via individual paths and profile developments and based on each person's needs (employability, academic needs and social integration), thereby contributing to increases in learning motivation. To support this development, plural forms of study methods have been introduced, based on analyses of learners' needs, promoting student autonomy, and allowing more flexibility with concern to schedule. Systematic use of the Council of Europe's *European Language Portfolio* (ELP) assures an action-oriented plurilingual approach as well as international transparency and comparability, and allows students to develop their plurilingual repertoire in the lifelong learning paradigm. A clear vision, perseverance, and continuous action on multiple levels (congress, round table discussions, research projects, the university Rectorate's Language Policy Commission, presentations, open houses) involving stakeholders (decision-makers,

instructors, students) and international specialists have contributed to the success of this project. Furthermore, they have allowed said public to become sensible to the stakes of plurilingualism in an academic, socio-political and economic context, at the same time emphasising the benefits linked to this change. The Rectorate's support, the allocation of supplementary resources, and the participation in European cooperation projects (RTL/TNP, ENLU) have equally played major roles in the success of this project.

1. DESCRIPTION OF THE SUCCESS CASE

1.1 Scope of the initiative

Since academic year 2005-06, the University of Lausanne has rendered free of charge all courses offered by its Language Centre (<http://www.unil.ch/cdl>). Previously, language courses were fee-based, entirely optional, and extracurricular for the 1st-, 2nd-, and 3rd- cycle students regardless of discipline. The change has permitted all students to have access to formal language and communication study free of charge, and has allowed students of some faculties (Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Faculty of Business, and Faculty of Theology and Religious Sciences) to receive ECTS credits in recognition of their efforts in language and communication training. Approximately 2500 students per year (out of 11,000 in the entire student body at the University of Lausanne) benefit from this offer.

1.2 Range of languages studied

The Language Centre offers various types of accompanied learning (group modules, guided autonomy, guided Tandem) for seven languages, as follows: Chinese, English, German, Italian, Russian, Spanish, Swiss-German. These are either Swiss national languages and/or languages of global importance.

Students are free to choose the languages that they wish to study. ECTS credits may be earned for all languages, all types of competences developed and all levels. The accent is therefore placed not on attaining a homogeneous level but rather on building plurilingual competence, that is to say a differentiated profile for a specific student and thus for individualised paths; this is based on the reasoning that each individual, our general society and the economy all benefit from multiple and varied resources.

In principle, with the addition of the Tandem programme, which was organised by the Faculty of Arts of the University of Lausanne (<http://www.unil.ch/tandem>), the students have access to the ensemble of languages present at the University, which has a large percentage of international students. Courses in French, the local language, are also free, but are handled by another department (the School of French as a Foreign Language, which is under the auspices of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Lausanne, and thus subject to different regulations.

1.3 Learning outcomes

The Language Centre training applies an action-oriented approach of integrating practical language use situations relevant to the context of higher education, taking into consideration the specific communication needs of the academic domain (support teaching in L2 within the various subject areas and support of the development of academic expertise: access, critical treatment, and professional communication of knowledge), of mobility, of social and professional integration, and of employability within a multilingual and multicultural context. This training aims to develop knowledge, know-how, and attitudes which allow a person to act competently with her/his plurilingual repertoire in a multilingual and multicultural environment, in diverse contexts and for various reasons; they explicitly bring together the

interpersonal, methodological, and strategic aspects related to academic and professional domains. Cultural and intercultural aspects are emphasized, as is the ability to learn independently, thus promoting the idea of lifelong learning.

The targeted learning outcomes are defined in accordance with Bologna requirements. Each module has an elaborate syllabus which clearly defines the mastery level expected, expressed in terms of competencies and related to the reference levels of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Language* (CEFR) of the Council of Europe, in order to be understood and easy comparable all across Europe. The assessment criteria, as well as the number of credits attributable to each module (according to the length and workload it represents) are equally systematic and clearly defined.

The freedom to choose one's own module allows for the differentiation of learning objectives according to the context, needs and preliminary paths of various target groups as well as the personal preferences and needs at a given moment. Hence, it is in recognition of the existence of these heterogeneous individual profiles that the University of Lausanne aims to promote plurilingualism. Obtaining ECTS credits corresponds with the attainment of pre-defined learning outcomes, fixed with regard to each student's starting level (determined by a placement test).

1.4 Practical realisation

The Language Centre proposes a plurality of forms and approaches of learning experiences:

A. Semester-based group modules

- *Specific skills modules* – generally, 2 periods of group modules: for the development of specific competences for academic needs, especially for English (for example, academic writing, conference skills, seminar skills, etc.), to support students whose studies will involve a language other than the local language or who will eventually leave to study abroad. Other needs for these modules may be workplace-related, discipline-specific, thematic, or for the development of partial competences.
- *Integrated skills modules*
 - o German, English, Russian, Italian, Spanish, Swiss-German
Beginner through A2 levels: 2 periods of group modules plus 2 structurally-integrated periods in the multimedia centre weekly; A2/B1 through B2 levels: 2 periods of group lessons plus 1 structurally-integrated period in the multimedia centre weekly; Other levels – no obligatory multimedia centre periods
 - o Chinese
Beginner level – 4 periods of group lessons; other levels: 2 group lesson periods

For German, English, Spanish and Italian, the structurally-integrated periods in the multimedia are monitored by teachers of each target language; although a certain number of periods are dedicated to each of these languages, the students may register for any timeslot which is convenient for them (regardless of level or language). In addition, they are accompanied by an online tutor who introduces them to their virtual personal work space. This device aims to promote the acquisition of independent learning competences through a combination of pedagogical support, distance communication activities, and access to a rich selection of learning materials offering numerous language learning activities. This concept of differentiated learning also aims to promote the flexibility and individualisation of learning. It offers a significant number of possible schedule combinations for students. It permits a

greater number of learning periods while assuring professional monitoring of the participant. The structurally integrated work in the multimedia centre for levels A0 through B2 represents approximately 600 students per semester (1,213 for the 2006/07 school year).

For Russian and Swiss-German, the periods in the multimedia centre are carried out and monitored during the free-access periods and with the assistance of a program conceived by the teachers. For technical reasons, there is not yet an online monitoring device in place for these languages.

- *External international exam preparation modules*
German and English – 4 periods of group lessons; for the other languages – the preparation for external exams is integrated into the integrated skills modules
- *Intensive integrated skills modules*
Spring: 1 week, 30 periods; summer: 2 weeks, 40 periods

B. Individual learning with tutoring (= guided autonomy) involving study at the multimedia centre or via a guided Tandem

To render the offer more flexible and to permit independent learning adapted to each individual's needs and rhythm, the Language Centre proposes a certain number of possibilities for independent language learning with the guidance of a tutor. In this way, it may satisfy the needs of certain people in domains for which there is not enough mass interest to justify organising group modules. Individualised learning with a tutor also permits students who are not placed in group modules due to scheduling problems to pursue the enlargement of their plurilingual repertoire. A concept of accompaniment exists (introduction course to learner autonomy, individual meetings, virtual accompaniment in a learning platform).

C. Unaccompanied individual learning, involving free-access periods at the multimedia centre and Tandem learning – in order to continue one's education independent of group modules.

The pedagogical approach fully integrates the utilisation of the *European Language Portfolio* (ELP) of the Council of Europe, Higher Education version, edited by the ELC/CEL. Each educational unit (group or individual learning) is granted 3 ECTS credits. For the obtainment of credits, the student builds his/her own *European Language Portfolio* (ELP) containing a mandatory number of different types of work samples which are evaluated in a continuous manner. The Centre applies an enlarged assessment (including the assessment of mandatory tasks, tests, self-assessment and reflexion tasks in order to evaluate intercultural competence and learning capacity).

Faculty recognition of ECTS credits is optional, and each faculty has different regulations; regarding the faculties which attribute credits to Language Centre modules, each one nevertheless recognises the ensemble of languages, levels and types of training (group modules as well as guided autonomy at the multimedia centre and guided tandem). In the Business Faculty, Bachelor students may earn 12 language credits, but only a maximum of 6 per language in order to encourage them to learn several languages. The Social and Political Sciences Faculty accords 6 credits to Bachelor or Master students.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE INITIATIVE

2.1 Context

Switzerland is a country with four official languages; at the institutional level of the University of Lausanne, the Winter 2006 student population was composed of 20.21% of international students, to which we must still add the Swiss students whose mother tongue is other than the local language (French), which raises this figure to 25 to 30%; The staff of the University is also very international. This state of affairs creates a highly multi-lingual and multicultural context with an environment of openness towards other languages and cultures and a willingness to continue progress in languages learned at school as well as to learn new languages. There is also a awareness among a certain number of the stakeholders (students, certain faculties, decision makers) of the importance of languages for collaboration between national and international universities as well as for the employability and success in a multilingual and multicultural national and international labour market. Furthermore, during secondary school, local students have learned at least two foreign languages and already possess a significant plurilingual repertoire.

To this we must add that, in the context of Bologna reforms, along with the transformation of higher education objectives in general, and in relation to the effects of internationalisation, the University of Lausanne has begun to put into motion a language policy for the whole of its institution by the creation, in 2003, of a Language Policy Commission of the Rectorate of the University; thus the question of plurilingualism was no longer merely a concern of individual faculties, but rather a university-wide concern. This Commission is composed of representatives from every faculty and other bodies and has for its objective to promote and valorise plurilingualism at the University of Lausanne. Through diverse actions (inventories of available language resources at UNIL; comparison with devices in other Swiss universities; the draft of a reference document entitled « Bologna and Languages » upon consultation with the faculties, whose input was solicited in order to deepen understanding of the role of plurilingualism in the realisation of Bologna objectives; diverse demonstrations; language policy advocacy within faculty decision makers), this Commission has succeeded to create a sensibility and to raise consciousness in certain faculties about the importance of an adequate plurilingual and pluricultural repertoire and of the necessity of offering language learning opportunities which are free of charge and recognisable by credits. It supports informed choices in language policy matters.

2.2 Strategic goals of the initiative

The strategic goal of this initiative is to specify the plurilingual and pluricultural repertoire of the students in order to respond to the various needs created by their studies, by mobility, and by the Swiss, European and global labour markets, with regard to the fundamental and transversal role that plurilingualism plays in academic life, employability, and citizenship, as well as for the personal development of students. With this role, languages enter the 2006-2011 strategic plan of the Administration of the University of Lausanne, dated 20 December 2006 – point 3 Objectives, sub-point 9 "To reinforce the acquisition of transversal competences and to prepare for the use of acquired skills in diverse contexts".

In addition, this initiative aims to:

- Be engaged in an internationalisation strategy (to welcome and attract international students and to render local students competitive insofar as their plurilingual communicative competencies)

- Develop transversal competences according to Bologna requirements in view of lifelong learning
- Be engaged in a coherent approach which integrates and coordinates all forms of formal and informal learning present at UNIL (language modules, independent learning, distance learning, tandem learning, extra-curricular language courses, foreign exchanges and stays, intercultural sensibility training, disciplinary courses taken in a language other than the local language, informal learning of all sorts, etc.) in order to enlarge students' plurilingual and pluricultural repertoire in a coordinated manner, documented through use of the *European Language Portfolio*
- Promote new learning environments
- Motivate students to enlarge and specify their plurilingual repertoire by raising consciousness levels about the importance of an adequate plurilingual and pluricultural repertoire and of lifelong language learning

3. SUCCESS INDICATORS

The following indicators attest to the success of this project:

- Massive increase of the number of participants and of demonstrations of interest. During the 2006/07 academic year, 2'593 participants in accompanied forms of learning (German: 500; English: 1'209; Chinese: 99; Spanish: 381, Italian: 171; Russian: 164; Swiss-German: 69) 23% of whom earned credits. 1'670 supplementary demands were unable to be met in the frame of accompanied lessons. The multimedia centre's free access sessions and the Tandem program allow the students in these cases to continue their language learning independent of an available place in group modules. The free access sessions (open 2-3 hours per day during the semester) witnessed 1'729 visits.
- Positive student feed-back
- Commencement of a certain number of faculties to allocate credits for language training, henceforth in agreement with the concept of an adequate plurilingual and pluricultural repertoire as an integral part of the academic profile of diploma candidates
- Collaboration with faculties to define needs
- Supplementary budget allocation
- Improvement of teacher employment conditions
- Better structural integration of the Language Centre within the University of Lausanne

4. SUCCESS FACTORS

There are numerous success factors on diverse levels.

During the implementation stage:

- Bologna reform: lever for re-conceptualising the ensemble of training, the objectives of training, the values and competences to develop.
- Administration: open and sensitive to the question of languages, demonstrated a support and an engagement for the project.
- Perseverance and diligence of initiators, despite several years of failure to demonstrate and clarify reasons for which the desired change is the best response to the actual situation as well as an appropriate response to the new requirements.
- Institutional support through the Language Policy Commission of the Rectorate, which permits the issue of plurilingualism to be treated in consideration of all of the stakeholders involved (and not only by language specialists) and allows the creation of a forum

permitting the demonstration of the benefits of change as well as the fact that the project is desired or desirable for the students and the University.

- Student support and student representative support in commissions.
- Participation of acknowledged experts in the elaboration of the project.
- Definition of program quality criteria in accordance with Bologna requirements.

Framework conditions

- Suitable financing
- Appropriate infrastructures
- Adequate staff and working conditions (well-trained staff, contractualisation of teachers previously payed hourly wages, and permanent continuous education)
- Alignment of Bologna quality principles and institutional development strategies in demonstrating the relationships between the project's changes and the organisation's vision and orientation

Training offered

- Development of language training opportunities based on needs analyses, adapted to the targeted public
- Centred on students and their various learning processes, addressing all types of learners
- Active approach and consideration of formerly acquired skills
- Multiple forms of learning and possibility of choice according to needs and interests; the pertinence of training for students stimulates their motivation.
- Limitation of the number of participants per group (max. 16 persons), permitting interactive approaches
- Utilisation of engaging arts of teaching and of an approach integrating proven methods, as well as the latest innovations and the most recent research findings
- Adequate support structures and concepts for students working in autonomy
- Module descriptions which assure transparency and comparability (course descriptions list learning outcomes in a comprehensible and transnational manner via the use of competency language and related to European standards - CEFRL)
- Validation et recognition of learning by ECTS credits
- Scheduling flexibility due to the use of individualised learning and the use of new learning technologies
- Reflective approach and action-research by instructors to constantly improve teaching and learning
- Quality control (training evaluations by participants, self-assessment of instructors, etc.)

Initiators et project managers

- Participation in European networks in the area of languages (TNP, EULPIG, ENLU)
- Support from international experts
- Credibility and professionalism of people carrying out the project of change
- Constant advocacy at all levels (university decision-makers, faculties, specialists, colleges, student representatives in faculties and commissions, students)
- Research project and action-research supporting the implementation of a language policy for plurilingualism and innovative pedagogical approaches
- Identification and valorisation of gains and advantages that receivers will draw from the change

Timely sensibilisation actions

Decision-makers

- Sensibility campaigns about the changes and which actively involve the decision-makers in reflection: conferences, round table discussions, information days, commission on linguistic policy
- Invitation to external experts to raise credibility and demonstrate examples of best practice
- Actions to create visibility and professional credibility of the Language Centre

Students

- Information and intensive communication policy: open houses, Language Centre presentations during new student orientation days, information in the university newspaper, advertising inserts, website, informational emails to all users, sensibilisation days, other diverse activities

5. LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

5.1 Lessons to be learned at the institutional level

Significant aspects of the policy changes have been:

- Having a clear vision of the objectives to obtain (no cost to students, credit allowance, competences to develop, necessary means, tasks involved)
- Integrating quality criteria set by Bologna and by the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL)*
- Moving away from merely individual initiative, anchoring the project in the development priorities and strategic objectives of the University, structuring a language policy based on the development of plurilingualism.
- Creating allies on every level
- Work with stakeholders to become acquainted with student needs, allowing the concept of training which is adequate and adapted to the intended target's needs
- Circumventing numerous forms of resistance (regarding project pertinence, values underpinning the project, implementation strategies, etc.) necessitates precise analysis and continuous activity to change attitudes and beliefs which are contrary to the development of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism. This permits an advanced understanding of the essential importance of these two competences in order to achieve the Bologna objectives and to develop a knowledge-based society and economy, to further European integration and the development of European values concerning democracy, rights, and equity as well as personal development. It's a slow process which demands a great deal of patience and perseverance:
 - On the decision-maker level (faculty and university administration and eventually policy authorities), for developing an awareness of the institution's role and responsibilities with regard to the development of an adequate plurilingual repertoire in view of lifelong learning
 - On the student level, with regard to the role of plurilingualism and of new forms and learning objectives, particularly independent learning
 - On the instructor level, teacher training in new pedagogical approaches and original ideas integrating the students' interests in the learning process, as well as an enlarged assessment to assure an appropriate application of new concepts and of student motivation
- Creating framework conditions which allow original pedagogical initiatives

At the Language Centre of the University of Lausanne, continuous action is necessary to advance the systematic development of the multilingual repertoire of each student.

We must still:

- integrate the language training in all of the faculties
- endeavor to make language training a mandatory part of every student's studies
- establish better coordination between offers of language training (as cases arise between the Language Centre and other entities providing language training – the School of French as a Foreign Language, language sections of the Arts Faculty, faculties which provide language training (Law Faculty), faculties which provide disciplinary teaching in one or more languages other than the local language – but also the International Relations Department for mobility issues, the Tandem program, etc.)
- continue working to build awareness with regard to the roles of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism
- regularly adapt the training offered to changing needs and latest research findings

5.2 Broader implications

- Collaboration with stakeholders (students, faculties, employers) to set up adequate programmes which are interesting and relevant to students as well as appropriate to faculty expectations, and to the multilingual and multicultural demands of the current global work environment, gives pertinence to the competences to develop, which in turn contributes to the maintenance and increase of the motivation to learn or to continue learning languages.
- Language training which develops communicative and intercultural competences relative to the current and future needs of students contribute to guarantee the realisation of Bologna objectives.
- The development of necessary plurilingual communicative competences for the growth of academic and professional expertise contributes to students' academic success, to their employability, and to the quality of academic training and research.
- Structurally integrating language components in a degree programmes and granting ECTS credits in recognition of students' efforts in broadening their plurilingual repertoire contributes to their motivation.
- The description of language skills in terms of competency and relative to CEFRL reference levels makes students' competences understandable to others and promotes lifelong learning.
- The use of the *European Language Portfolio* (ELP) highlights individual plurilingualism.
- The processing of research results in relevant domains increases the quality of possible language training offered.
- Adequate teacher training contributes to a successful application, which may influence student motivation.
- Continuous lobbying to convince stakeholders as well as decision-makers and teachers leads to deeper understanding of plurilingualism and allows these parties to move beyond often outdated subjective and personal preconceptions in order to implement an approach which considers all of the pertinent parameters.
- The timely organisation of special events promoting linguistic diversity and plurilingualism contributes to creating a favorable environment firstly for language learning and secondly to the organisation of devices permitting language learning.

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