



F11.3 Summary report for website

WP2: Research and Contextualisation

Summary Report

The research and contextualisation phase of the Going Places with Languages in Europe project studied both primary and secondary data in order to gain an informed insight into the position of languages education, in particular, vocational education and training (VET) and vocationally orientated language learning (VOLL), in the partner countries. The key findings of the research will guide and assist the adaptation of an existing language learning resource into an English Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) resource available in the languages of the consortium.

As part of the research and contextualisation phase, primary data was collected from target groups of the project (stakeholders/policy makers and end users/beneficiaries) in the form of questionnaires and focus groups. The aim of this stage of the research, which was carried out in the UK, Germany, Poland and Romania between May and July 2012, was to discover how widespread VET, VOLL and CLIL are in the education systems and institutions of the partner countries.

The general response from stakeholders and policy makers was that VET, VOLL and CLIL methods are present in their country or region but are obscure in terms of practice; they are not applied successfully within the education systems. In terms of changes in the provision and training of VET, VOLL and CLIL across partner countries over recent years, mostly the situation has remained static with some becoming more widely known in some countries; for example, the training and provision of VOLL has remained the same in Poland and Romania, whilst spreading across the UK and Germany. Cuts to education and government funding and the consequent conservative approach to teaching present in partner countries was highlighted as the main reason for the lack of implementation of such language teaching methods in education systems; in the UK the success of students on vocational courses and evidence of improved results provide reason for an increase in such methods.

Regarding ways of promoting and implementing VET, VOLL and CLIL methods in language education, respondents noted that establishing partnerships with local businesses, as well as with international institutions particularly in the country of the target language, combined with involvement in international projects as the most effective means. International projects have already raised the profile of these methods in language teaching, but for a widespread impact national policy is considered necessary.

The most effective teaching strategies for VET, VOLL and CLIL shown by the survey include the use of interactive activities, total immersion in the target language from the

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start of the course, use of real-life contexts within learning tasks and a focus on the needs of the learners. A major resource used in teaching is the Internet including online articles, interactive activities and specialised sites. Educational software was also mentioned along with the more traditional resources such as textbooks, group work and worksheets. ICT is considered a useful and powerful resource in vocational education as it enables access to uncountable resources, engages and motivates learners and makes use of a tool students are familiar with. Problems noted with using ICT include a lack of resources in some partner countries such as Romania and a lack of ICT skills amongst teachers.

This leads to a recurrent theme in the survey regarding the lack of participation of teachers in training and continued professional development (CPD); the lack of responses when asked what types of CPD they had undertaken relating to VET, VOLL and CLIL suggests a low level of participation. An issue raised in connection with this is the responsibility that falls to the individual teachers or schools to participate in training courses, with a need for further external support expressed in Poland. Policies and organisations for support for teachers of VET, VOLL and CLIL also appear to be insufficient. Although there are independent support organisations and workshops for sharing good practice, no support appears to be offered by a national or central policy.

The focus groups highlighted both the benefits of vocational education in language learning as well as the barriers such methods are susceptible to. All partner countries recognise the increase in the demand for foreign language skills within the labour market, and therefore the increase in the importance of the presence of quality language teaching within education systems. A respondent from Romania commented specifically on the benefit of knowing English within specific contexts, which is a focus of vocational learning. In addition, there is a need for extracurricular elements within language learning, for example successfully writing a CV or job application in the target language to increase mobility within the European labour market. Vocational learning is considered to increase pupil motivation and allow learners to gain valuable insight into the workplace.

However, barriers preventing the spread of vocational language learning include a lack of resources common to all partner countries, insufficient national recognition or support and inadequate promotion of the benefits of VET, VOLL and CLIL. A UK respondent noted that the strong link between vocational learning and employability is not always successfully conveyed to current or potential learners.

The primary data overall demonstrates a growing need for those teachers and education providers who are aware of the benefits of foreign language skills and vocational education to promote and disseminate these among the field. This, combined with promotional bodies at national and European levels, could lead to the expansion of

VET, VOLL and CLIL into mainstream education systems and subsequently improvements in individual and societal prosperity.

The research and contextualisation phase of the project also involved using secondary data to analyse the organisation of language education and national policies supporting VET, VOLL and CLIL in partner countries. As globalisation increases throughout Europe, the demand for language skills is rising and therefore is raising the profile of the learning and teaching of languages. Although the education systems differ greatly between the partner countries, the key principles, as well as the teaching strategies, of vocational education remain the same; vocational education must respond to the conditions of the labour market, be flexible so as not to limit learners to a narrow stream of education and emphasise the continuation of vocational education. Also common to the majority of partner countries is the need for a reform of their education systems to improve the implementation of vocational learning and the national debates that have derived from this.

Foreign language skills are recognised in all partner countries as being key factors to success in the challenges of the labour market. English is the most popular language to learn and is most widely taught, followed by French and German. For the UK, the most popular and widely taught second languages are French, then Spanish and then German; Latin holds fourth place as it is a common subject in independent schools. Other languages taught in the UK education systems include Arabic, Japanese and Ancient Greek. Language learning is introduced at a young age in most education systems with pupils in Romania beginning lessons in a foreign language at the age of 9.

A shared advantage across the partner countries related to vocational qualifications is the alternative route they offer into further or higher education. Vocational qualifications can offer learners an alternative path into universities. Those participating in vocational education generally differ by country with participation being dependent on factors such as profession in Poland and Germany, and previous educational background in Romania. In the UK, as well as seeing many young pupils on vocational courses, adult learners are also undertaking vocational education to extend their skill base or widen career prospects.

Both the curriculums in general, and the specific inclusion of vocational methods, vary greatly among partner countries. CLIL is a key recent development within vocational language learning and VET and VOLL constitute a wide range of possible topics and pedagogical approaches.

Regarding the use of ICT in language learning, the UK has regular evaluations taking place and a widespread belief that ICT raises standards in education. In Germany, among objectives set out in 2008 was the aim to encourage and implement more use of ICT in education, and under the Polish Ministry of Education Policy goals are set to improve access to, skills in and use of ICT in learning.

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All partner countries recognise the importance of foreign language skills for specific career choices and acknowledge that qualifications in a foreign language enhance career prospects and lead to new opportunities. The secondary data overall illustrates the great variety in many aspects of education provision throughout the partner countries, whilst simultaneously indicating a shared consensus concerning the importance, advantages and demand for foreign language skills in the current labour market.

The key findings of the research and contextualisation provide a substantial insight into the position of languages education, VET, VOLL and CLIL provision and relevant resources in the education systems of partner countries. The demand for language skills and the increasing acknowledgement of the benefits of vocational learning should, combined, drive forward the promotion and implementation of vocational language learning and overcome the many barriers which have thus far prevented the widespread practice of vocational methods.

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