DESIGNING CURRICULA FOR LANGUAGE TEACHER TRAINING IN COMPUTER LITERACY

Dr. Anelly I. Kremenska

Chief Ass. Prof., Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Sofia, Bulgaria, e-mail: akremenska@fmi.uni-sofia.bg

Abstract

The article is devoted to presenting preliminary results of an on-going research on good practices and contemporary theories on introducing innovation in university language teaching and learning. The focus is on supporting the academia to efficiently use technology in analyzing, planning, designing, applying and evaluating courses in a foreign language. A curriculum aimed at standardizing lecturer training in providing high-quality contemporary courses in a foreign language is proposed.

Key words*:* language teacher training, quality of language e-learning, standards for language teaching, university language courses

Introduction

Bringing innovation in the language class at university level is a challenging endeavor. The discrepancy between the availability of technology and the lack of adequate training for academic staff has been identified as a pressing issue. In order to address it, we at Sofia University Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, launched a new project to propose a step-by-step approach to training and supporting university language lecturers in both applying and designing effective e-courses to meet the needs of the students. This article presents a training course designed to ensure high quality of language courses in a foreign language at Sofia University based on the understanding that these courses must be built upon innovation in terms of using adequate technologies, appropriate methodology and relevant evaluation tools.

The approach

The approach we adopted was practice and outcome-oriented. First we carried out a preliminary research on good practices and current theories in the field of language education. It consisted of analyzing the results of a number of projects researching the status, the needs and the good practices within the University, nationwide and abroad, as well as current theories and studies in the field of must-have competencies for university lecturers. In addition, quality standards for university language education were taken into consideration. Then we designed the curriculum presented below.

The findings

Based on the research conclusions, three areas of competence were identified: general computer literacy, specific computer literacy and new pedagogy related to technology enhanced education [Healey et al, 2008. Garrison, Voghan, 2008; Beetham et al, 2009]. The general computer literacy suggests basic knowledge, skills and competencies related to using the available technologies and equipment adequately to the best of its potential for language education at university level. The specific computer literacy respectively addresses the subject specific areas of technology use, such as translation software and equipment, for example. The new pedagogy involves knowledge, skills and competencies in introducing technologies at all stages of analyzing, planning, designing, applying and evaluating quality courses in a foreign language.

In addition, the analysis of the needs and competences of the language lecturers at Sofia University showed that there is a recognized need for further training. It, however, needs to be personalized and specified as the lecturers' competence and competencies widely vary in terms of previous training, experience and desire to improve in a particular narrow computer field [Yaneva et al, 2011].

The curriculum proposed

As a result of the above analysis, a training curriculum is proposed. In order to provide flexibility and choice for the lecturers, it has a modular structure covering the three areas of expertise to be further developed. The delivery means are envisioned to add further

customization as there will be three modes of training sessions: a blended one (web-based contents delivered in face-to-face sessions), individual consultancy sessions (face-to-face and online) and workshops (training and sharing experience). The curriculum is directed at two main target groups: university lecturers teaching foreign languages (general and specific English, German and French) to students of all specialities at Sofia University; university lecturers teaching a subject in a foreign language (philology and non-philology disciplines in more than 10 languages taught in the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology and all other 16 Faculties of the University).

The curriculum comprises 5 modules, each containing a theoretical and a practical part, with specific goals, tasks and respective activities, as well as particular products as outcomes. The provisional topics to be covered are as follows:

Module 1 Introduction to current pedagogies for technology enhanced language education.

The theoretical part of the module aims at presenting innovative approaches and methodology, as well as good practices. The practice includes discussion on personal experience. A suggestion for a language course to be (re)designed is expected as a product.

Topics:

1. Educational paradigms in the digital era: overview, choosing a leading paradigm (constructivism), shifts in teaching and learning in foreign languages (roles, resources, accessibility).
2. Terminology disambiguation.
3. The basics of using current information and communication technologies (ICT) in language education: for communication, resource, delivery and assessment.
4. Computer based academic communication: types, affordances, Netiquette.
5. Information and resources: types, searching, evaluation.

Module 2 Designing a technology enhanced course in a foreign language.

The theoretical part presents models for designing e-learning courses, as well as criteria for quality assurance. The practice

includes discussion on personal experience and describing a particular language course to be (re)designed. Products: a course description, based on a template, especially designed for redesigning language courses into e-learning ones, and on the official form of the University.

Topics:

1. Stages: analysis, planning, design, application, evaluation.
2. Quality of e-learning language courses at university level (definition and standards). Course description tools.
3. Analyzing and planning own course (practice).
4. Designing a course (practice).
5. Designing a session (practice).

Module 3 Technologies to support designing activities.

Theory: introducing the basic notions in the context of language learning; promoting criteria to make informed choice of appropriate technologies to support effective learning. The practice involves presenting good practices tools for designing activities on the basis of carefully formulated tasks. Special attention is given to activity instructions and descriptions. At least one task with related activities is expected as a product.

1. Activity vs task.
2. General overview on technologies and their affordances (incl. Web 2.0, 3.0, virtual learning environments).
3. Types of activities and matching them with adequate technologies.
4. Formulating tasks (practice).
5. Designing activities (practice).

Module 4 Resources and software for technology enhanced language learning.

The module focus is on finding, evaluating, choosing, adapting and creating materials for a particular language course. Based on theory and good practices, the participants are expected to be able to provide relevant supporting materials for the task and activities planned in Module 3. Product: a material to be provided, equipped with appropriate description and instructions for use.

1. Types of resources. Criteria for evaluation of language resources.

2. Technologies to adapt and create own resources. Practice.
3. Specialized software for language teaching.
4. Specialized software for translation.
5. Specialized software for teaching an academic discipline in a foreign language.

Module 5 Technology for evaluation and assessment.

The theoretical part presents pedagogical, psychological and technical issues of introducing technology in assessment and evaluation. Special attention is given to feedback. The focus is on ensuring quality and standardization of university language education. The product to be expected is a task and/or activity for language learning assessment.

1. Types of evaluation and assessment.
2. Standardized tools for evaluation and assessment.
3. Technologies to support evaluation, feedback and assessment in language learning.
4. Tests for a university course in a foreign language, criteria. Practice.
5. Quality of assessment.

The overall idea of the modules is to present a focused, step-by-step approach facilitating the process of designing and redesigning university courses in a foreign language for the particular context of Sofia University. The modules cover theoretical and practical issues and involve trainees in discussions, sharing and experimenting with different technologies to explore their potential for a concrete teaching situation.

Conclusion

The training under the presented curriculum is planned to be piloted for 20 young, postdoctoral and specializing language specialists during the winter semester of the academic 2013/2014 as the first stage of in-service training of the academic staff. The second stage will involve 20 specialists teaching different subjects in a foreign language. After scrutinizing the results of the training and comparing it to similar trainings in other universities (when applicable), it is to be further improved. What we expect to achieve is higher quality standards of the university courses in a foreign

language by establishing this specialized training as part of the attestation process.

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