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RESEARCH MATERIAL AND FEEDBACK ON THE INNOVATIVE TRAINING OF TEACHERS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN SLOVAKIA

The aim of the contribution is to present the results of the evaluation of the innovative training provided to a group of foreign language teachers, which took place thanks to the Erasmus+ project “With French behind the Horizon” (ID 2021-1-SK01-KA122-SCH-000014674). Teachers who teach French and English at primary and secondary schools in Slovakia took part in the project.

1 FEEDBACK

Feedback in education is a critical aspect of the studying process, and its primary purpose is to enhance any improvements that have been made and address any weaknesses. Effective feedback is an ongoing process, and in this context it refers to the information provided to a trainee about their performance or understanding of a particular topic or skill. It serves as a mechanism to inform trainees about their strengths, areas for improvement, and how to progress further in their learning journey. It should be integrated into the learning cycle to support continuous improvement and growth (Bratská, 2000: 31-32). Effective feedback is a dynamic process that requires thoughtful consideration and adaptability to the needs of individual trainees (Cohen, Marrion, Morison, 2000; Grochalska, 2020). It plays a crucial role in helping trainees reach their full potential and become self-regulated teachers. In short, this is why the current article was written: to provide feedback research material on innovative and updating teacher training and to measure the improvement, success and motivation of the participants.

2 RESEARCH REPORTS ON INNOVATIVE TRAINING

2.1 Project management

The Slovak Association of Teachers of French is a non-profit organization that provides many activities, such as methodological seminars. The association was granted accreditation by the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic to provide innovative training to teachers of Romance languages and English. The aims to achieve high-quality professional development, especially with the help of the highest quality tool of education courses and job-shadowing – Erasmus+ projects.

The teachers of French and other Romance languages in Slovakia and the Czech Republic (Nadvornikova, Klinka, 2023) and their students are an educationally disadvantaged group, as these languages are taught minimally. The teachers of these languages are thus few and isolated, with ever fewer opportunities for exchanging work-related knowledge.

The teachers who took part in the project agree that it is necessary to learn new tools of digitization to transfer their knowledge with regard to practical French language lessons, preserving some of it in pedagogical documentation. This material can then be used to create a high-quality teaching process in an innovative manner, such as offering mixed classes in which the students would get an explanation of the subject matter digitally (an inverted lecture) and then in the real, physical classroom can apply the knowledge gained, for example by preparing graduation questions, or the material can be used to create various educational portals on which learning games can also be hosted. Improving one's competences in the field of ICT is a strong motivational element in the activation of teachers in this context.

2.2 Goals

The goals of Erasmus+ innovative training were to improve the methodological competences of the participants, to innovate methodological procedures by exchanging experience and knowledge in an international context, to improve ICT knowledge and competences, to create new lesson plans, and to apply them to the school education programme.

2.3 Number of participants and activities for the innovative education

The activities we used in our project to motivate the teachers to participate in innovative education were a training course and job-shadowing. As part of this teachers were sent abroad 31 times.

Activity Type	Number of participants	Total duration (in days)	Average duration (in days)
Job-shadowing	8	81	10.125
Courses and training	23	230	10.00
Total	31	311	10.03

Activity Type	Teaching staff	Non-teaching staff
Job-shadowing	8	0
Courses and training	23	0
Total	31	0

During Erasmus+, most of the participants (23) took part in a hybrid methodological training course at the Francophonie teacher training centre in Nice in the summer of 2022 (for some of the teachers this entailed 70 hours of training, and for others 56). Seven teachers participated in an observation internship (job-shadowing) in CLA Besancon linked to the methodological training course (50 hours). One teacher went on an observation internship in CFAIE Val-de-Reuil.

2.4 Participants' feedback on activities

The following table presents the participants' replies, asking them if they received any preparation, training or information about the destination country and the hosting organization before departing for their mobility activity, and if they felt that the preparation and information were useful to them.

Replies regarding preparation		Share of participants
Participants indicating they have received preparation, training or information		100.00%
Out of the positive answers, replies to a follow-up question about usefulness of the preparation	Yes, I felt well prepared	92.00%
	Yes, but I needed more preparation	8.00%
	No, I did not find it useful	0,00%
Participants indicating they did not receive any preparation, training or information		0,00%

In the feedback the participants were asked to answer the questions concerning any improvements in language proficiency. The following table the presents participants' reports on their language learning. The data exclude those participants who stated they were already fluent in the main language used during their mobility period.

	Percentage of positive replies - individual activities	Percentage of positive replies - group activities
Do you think that you have improved your skills in the main language used during your mobility period?	80.00%	-%
Did you receive any support to improve your language skills before or during your mobility period (for example: a language course, language learning materials, language coaching or similar)?	45.00%	-%

The following table summarizes the information about the certifications provided to the participants in this project.

	Number of participants
Europass Certificate Supplement	30
Erasmus+ Learning Agreement Complement	1
Recognition at national level	20
Recognition at regional level	16

The replies to the question “How satisfied were you with your Erasmus+ mobility experience?” are presented below:

Activity Type	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
Job-shadowing	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Courses and trainings	89.47%	10.53%	0.00%	0.00%
Overall	92.00%	8.00%	0.00%	0.00%

Participants' rating of attended courses and training					
	5 - Very good quality	4 - Good quality	3 - Acceptable quality	2 - Low quality	1 - Very low quality
Information and transparency	52.63%	42.11%	5.26%	0.00%	0.00%
Content and pedagogy	94.74%	5.26%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
European dimension	84.21%	15.79%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Services and facilities	57.89%	42.11%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Follow-up	63.16%	36.84%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Overall course rating (average)	4.69				

In the feedback provided by the teachers who went to observe the classes in France, we can find information about their level of satisfaction as well as the relevance and quality of the classes.

	Percentage of positive replies
The teaching / training at the hosting organisation was of good quality and relevant for me / the group of learners that I have accompanied.	100.00%
I felt well received and well integrated at my hosting organisation. I / Myself and the participants in my group felt well received and well integrated at my hosting organisation.	100.00%

In short, 100% of the teachers who attended the observation classes were satisfied with them and appreciated the quality of the observed classes.

The following tables present the participants' replies to the questions asking how they benefited from their mobility experience.

Staff participants in individual mobility activities	Share of participants indicating they have benefited in this way
I have learned or improved practical skills relevant for my current job and for my professional development.	96.00%
I have improved my knowledge of the subject I am teaching and of my professional field.	88.00%
I have improved my organisational, management and leadership skills.	48.00%
I have improved my career opponunities.	68.00%

Individual mobility activities	Percentage of staff participants agreeing with the statement	Percentage of learner participants agreeing with the statement
I have learned more about environmental, climate and sustainability issues.	48.00%	-
I have changed my habits to become more sustainable.	28.00%	-
I have a better understanding of the diversity in my society.	92.00%	-
I am more committed to work against discrimination, intolerance, xenophobia and racism.	80.00%	-
I am more interested in participating in elections, in other democratic processes, and in the life of my local community.	40.00%	-

Individual mobility activities	Percentage of staff participants agreeing with the statement	Percentage of learner participants agreeing with the statement
I have learned more about Europe, the European Union and European values.	76.00%	-
I have learned more about new and useful ways to apply digital technology.	92.00%	-
I am eager to use more digital technologies in my studies or work.	92.00%	-

A total of 92% of the teachers who participated in the mobilities stated that after the experience they had a better understanding of diversity in the society, learned a lot about ITC and digital technologies and were now more eager to use such technologies in their studies or work.

However, only 28% of teachers stated that they had changed their habits and become more sustainable.

The last table summarizes information about the key competences targeted for improvement.

Key competences targeted for improvement	Number of participants - individual activities for staff
Active citizenship	4
Cultural awareness and expression	28
Digital and technology based competences	28
Entrepreneurship	0
Interpersonal skills, and the ability to adopt new competences	31
Literacy	0
Multilingualism	0
Numerical, scientific and engineering skills	0

Most of the teachers (28) stated that they had improved their digital and ITC competences. All of the teachers (31) claimed that they had improved their interpersonal skills and ability to adopt new competences. Four of them said that they were now better at organizing their competence of being an active citizen.

3 ACHIEVEMENTS AND DISCUSSION

The project participants improved their competences after both the training course in Nice and the job-shadowing in Besancon.

1. Twenty-three of the project participants completed Francophonía's training course in Nice (56 teaching hours). Twenty of them also completed online education with Francophonía in March (14 teaching hours). After successfully completing the course the teachers received an international certificate.

Evaluation of participants' performance using the benchmark system:

20 participants – 70 hours of training – benchmark 1.4

3 participants – 56 hours of training – benchmark 1.12

Average performance per group: 1.3635

2. In autumn, eight teachers participated in job-shadowing in Besancon. During the observations in the schedule, they took notes from indirect observation and marked ideas and feedback on the observation sheets, which they then compared with the tutors and conducted a pedagogical reflection. In Besancon they attended 50 hours of the training course. This educational course was not in the project plan and was a bonus.

Evaluation of participants' performance using the benchmark system:

8 participants – 50 hours of training – benchmark 1

Average performance per group - benchmark 1

In June 2023, these participants completed the training course by final examination and received their official diplomas.

Success was also measured by asking the participants to create 10 methodical lesson plans (10 lesson preparations) applying the new methodologies and ICT technologies they had learned during the mobilities. They were then supposed to choose three of these and present and defend them during the dissemination seminars that served as updating training courses for all the participants (active and otherwise). The active teachers (project participants) were supposed to present the lesson plans in the form of microteaching. Microteaching is effective if the applied technology meets the language goal, and the speech interactions or activity of the microteaching participants is greater than the speech interaction or activity of the teacher, to a maximum ratio of 1:3 of the total lesson time. In other words, the teacher's activity should not exceed 1/3 of the total lesson time. Each additional and successful example of micro-teaching indicated the overperformance of the participants.

Microteaching took place at dissemination seminars. The participants prepared interesting activities in which they initiated the audience's (other teachers') activity, with the aim that their own activity did not exceed 1/3 of the total sum of ICT activities or

other tasks. However, the weak side of ICT tasks was that they initiated rather individual activities that focused more on receptive skills, and they initiated very few productive skills and little peer communication. Other tasks prepared by teachers initiated collective activity.

Some of the participants introduced changes to their practices without the need to complete the course on innovative education, and one of them disseminates their knowledge in the Košice region.

4 CONCLUSION

To summarize, all the participants stated that they were very satisfied with their innovative training courses, and all of them met the sub-goals.

In the project, 31 mobilities were managed. Hybrid mobility in Nice brought its fruit in the form of 70 hours of training course education for 20 participants who achieved a benchmark grade of 1.4, and 56 hours of education for three participants who achieved a benchmark grade of 1.12. Job-shadowing mobility in Besancon with a bonus training course brought 50 hours of training for seven participants, and job-shadowing mobility in CFAIE Val-de-Reuil was an extra mobility. All the training participants received an international certificate for successful completion of the activities.

All the participants were also offered the opportunity to complete their training by presenting their work and defending it through recognition of innovative education at the national level. Registered and completed participants were issued a certificate of innovative training education. Since the defences took place as a dissemination exchange of knowledge for other teachers of the French language, the participants of these disseminations were also issued certificates for updating training education at the national level.

Finally, we conclude our study by pointing at the teachers' activity in schools, were they created a collection of activating lessons, instructions and techniques, and they are all already applying the acquired knowledge and multiplicatively created activities in their teaching process.

Thanks to Erasmus+, we provided the qualitative exchange of knowledge by using new techniques, methods, and tools, which were then immediately implemented in teaching. The mutual cooperation between the schools and teachers improved. The teachers got access to excellent methodologies and approaches to ICT tools, summarized, specified, and reflected on these during the dissemination seminars, and then applied them in the teaching process at schools all over Slovakia.

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POVZETEK

ANALIZA POVRATNIH INFORMACIJ O USPOSABLJANJU NA PODROČJU INOVATIVNIH UČNIH METOD IN STROKOVNEM IZPOPOLNJEVANJU UČITELJEV TUJIH JEZIKOV NA SLOVAŠKEM

Namen prispevka je predstaviti oceno usposabljanja na področju inovativnih učnih metod in strokovnega izpopolnjevanja učiteljev francoščine, vključenih v projekt Erasmus+ z naslovom »S francoščino na obzorju« (ID 2021-1-SK01-KA122-SCH-000014674). Usposabljanje in izpopolnjevanje so ocenili sodelujoči pri projektu – učitelji francoščine in angleščine, zaposleni na osnovnih in srednjih šolah na Slovaškem (31 mobilnosti). V okviru hibridne mobilnosti v Nici je 20 udeležencev opravilo 70 ur usposabljanja, trije pa 56 ur. V okviru mobilnosti z namenom opazovanja na delovnem mestu in dodatnega usposabljanja v Besançonu je sedem udeležencev opravilo 50 ur usposabljanja, eden pa je izvedel mobilnost z namenom opazovanja na delovnem mestu v CFAie de Val-de-Reuil. Analiza odzivov je pokazala, da so bili sodelujoči učitelji z izobraževalnimi programi Erasmus+ zelo zadovoljni. V okviru mobilnosti so pripravili veliko koristnih dejavnosti, ki so jih zbrali in predstavili v publikaciji. Vsi udeleženci so prejeli mednarodno veljavno potrdilo o opravljenem usposabljanju. Hkrati so dobili možnost, da ob koncu usposabljanja predstavijo in zagovarjajo svoje delo ter tako na državni ravni pridobijo potrdilo o usposabljanju na področju inovativnih učnih metod. Zagovori so bili zasnovani kot diseminacijski seminarji za učitelje francoskega jezika, zato so udeleženci teh seminarjev prav tako prejeli potrdila o opravljenem strokovnem izpopolnjevanju.

Ključne besede: inovacije, usposabljanja, učitelji, potrdilo, razred

ABSTRACT

RESEARCH MATERIAL AND FEEDBACK ON THE INNOVATIVE TRAINING OF TEACHERS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN SLOVAKIA

The aim of the contribution is to present an evaluation of the innovative and updating education of teachers of French who participated in the Erasmus+ project “With French on the Horizon” (ID 2021-1-SK01-KA122-SCH-000014674). Teachers involved in the project who teach French and English at primary and secondary schools in Slovakia took part in the assessment (31 mobilities). The hybrid mobility in Nice brought its fruit in the form of 70 hours of training course education for 20 participants and 56 hours of education for three participants. Job-shadowing mobility in Besançon with a bonus training course brought 50 hours of training for seven participants, while job-shadowing mobility in CFAIE Val-de-Reuil was an extra mobility for one teacher. The teachers stated their high level of satisfaction with the Erasmus+ training courses. They also prepared a lot of useful activities that were then published in a book. All the training participants received an international certificate of successful completion, and were offered the opportunity to complete their training by presenting their work and defending it through recognition of innovative education at the national level. Registered and completed participants were issued a certificate of innovative training education. Since the defences took place as a dissemination exchange of knowledge for other teachers of the French language, the participants of these disseminations were also issued certificates for updating training education at the national level.

Keywords: innovation, training, teachers, certificate, class