

# SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE BENEFITS OF THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TRAINING COURSE “WITH EDUCATION TO PLURILINGUALISM” MANAGED THROUGH THE ERASMUS PLUS PROGRAMME

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## ABSTRACT

**Aim.** The aim of the research was to find out and confirm the benefits of the professional development training course for language teachers managed thanks to the Erasmus Plus scheme.

**Methods.** We used the evaluative form of the questionnaire and mathematical methods. The results represent the number of participants and the scale they agree with the statements.

**Results.** 29 teachers evaluated two training internships in France, in Francophonía and Nice, and two internships in Slovakia. The third internship was provided by the European Centre for Modern Languages based in Graz on the topic of the Framework of reference

for pluralistic approaches. The fourth training was focused on etwinning and the ESEP platform. The overall quality and satisfaction rating out of 5 points was 4.9.

**Conclusions.** Thanks to Erasmus Plus, we facilitated a high-quality exchange of knowledge by incorporating innovative techniques, methods, and tools, which were promptly integrated into teaching practices. This collaboration significantly enhanced the partnership between schools and educators. As a result, teachers gained access to exceptional methodologies and approaches, which they applied in classrooms throughout Slovakia.

**Keywords:** professional development, language teachers, Erasmus plus, training course, benefits

## INTRODUCTION

The professional development of foreign language teachers in Slovakia and the Czech Republic involves several key aspects to enhance teaching techniques, linguistic skills and proficiency, and pedagogical or methodological knowledge. During their professional life, they meet several stages of development, such as pre-service education, in-service training, language improvement courses and pedagogical teacher training. Pre-service education deals with students studying at universities (Gjikolli & Gashi-Berisha, 2023). Future foreign language teachers typically receive their education at universities where they study the language as a philology branch and teaching methodologies. Programmes often include a combination of linguistic, literary, and cultural studies along with pedagogy and didactics. As part of their university education, students usually undergo teaching practice sessions in schools, allowing them to gain practical experience. About improvement of teachers competences, see the works of Agaath M. Dekker-Groen et al. (2013) and Morana Drakulić (2020).

In-service teachers engage in continuous professional development. They participate in workshops, seminars, and courses offered by educational institutions, language centres, and professional organisations. Teachers can undergo adaptational education (for new graduate pre-service teachers), updating methodological or innovative educational courses. Pedagogical ongoing training in new teaching methodologies counts as professional development training if considered innovative training (50 hours). The second sort of ongoing training is the updated /training, which is obligatory in Slovakia for all teachers working in the school education sector. Teachers are supposed to participate in at least 20 hours of training. Attending and presenting at national and international conferences and workshops allows teachers to stay updated on the latest research and best practices in language teaching. The programmes can be provided through national education programmes or international collaborations.

Language teachers need take additional courses to improve their proficiency in the foreign language they teach. This may involve attending language courses, participating in immersion programmes, or studying abroad (compare with Jin et al., 2022; Stingu, 2020).

Many foreign language teachers join professional organisations or language-specific associations (see also Grochalska, 2020). These organisations provide resources, networking opportunities, and professional development programs.

The professional development of language teachers in the Czech Republic also involves various aspects designed to enhance their teaching skills, language proficiency, and pedagogical knowledge (compare Nadvorníková & Klinka, 2023).

Teachers can also use support from their national Ministry of Education or local foreign supporters such as the French embassy. Both Ministries, Slovak and Czech, of Education, support professional development through various programmes and initiatives to improve language education.

The well-known European Commission Erasmus Plus programme (see Croce & Ghignoni, 2024; Kundahbayeva et al., 2023; Martins et al., 2024) is the best and most proven means for improving language skills and pedagogical and methodological competencies. Members of the Slovak Association of French Teachers complete their qualifications on highly specialised training courses chosen by the association abroad. They improve their pedagogical as well as communicative, and language competences. The last such training courses had objectives of the development of plurilingualism in schools, the development of competencies to work with ICT and the development of the techniques in communicative competence. The training courses took place at the educational centre Francophonie in Nice and the educational, professional centre Observatoire Européen du Plurilinguisme in Paris.

## ANALYSIS

### Objectives

The aim of the study is to analyse in depth the strengths and weaknesses of the training courses abroad managed thanks to the Erasmus Plus programme, to analyse the evaluation of the training course by participants, and to analyse the fulfilment of the project goals. The secondary aim of the study is to highlight the need for further training of language teachers.

### Setting and Objectives of the Erasmus plus training courses

The project set itself the goal of innovating methodological training techniques by exchanging experience and knowledge within an international multilingual and plurilingual context, creating innovative lessons with integration into school educational programmes, and improving teachers' pedagogical competence in teaching communication and communicative competence, multilingual competence and ICT tools. As part of the sociali-

sation and sustainability of the teachers of French and Romance languages, we wanted to bring teachers together. The educational courses were supposed to be a personal, interpersonal, cultural, intercultural and international bridge to eliminate communication and psychological barriers by building European citizenship. The successful achievement of goals ensured the recognition of teacher training in the number of 50 hours and more as innovative education. For the teachers who were represented by a variety of schools from all over Slovakia on internships one at a time, the courses and exchange of knowledge will translate into professional career growth as well as a 3% salary increase. They will use the variety of tasks they created in their classes. The content was disseminated at over 25 meetings throughout Slovakia and is on ESEP.

To meet the objectives, the Erasmus plus activity called “training courses” focused on our set goals – plurilingualism, communicative competence and ICT tools was used. Tailor-made courses were offered at the most favourable prices by Francophonie in Nice, where there was no extra charge. Other providers in France offer a small number of hours for a higher amount, for which our participants or SAUF would have to pay extra. Trainees from schools are only released in the summer, when there are no classes, finding a course tailored to our topic, also combining a course with an exchange of knowledge with other countries, finding cheap accommodation in France is very difficult. Outside of holidays, it is even more difficult, almost impossible. For the activity in Francophonie, the teachers received 44 hours of credit. Some teachers participated in hybrid teaching, which added hours. In the framework of this project, we had a supporting activity provided completely by the Center for Modern Languages from Graz, which sent two experts on plurilingualism. There were another 20 hours for this course. In March, we organised modules at the Observatory for Plurilingualism, where professors from Sorbonne, Strasbourg, Brussels, Spain and Italy and France Education International gave lectures – 40 hours. 10 hours were gained at the TIC training managed by etwinning ambassadors. The training course concerned the ESEP platform.

**Table 1**

*Number of Slovak participants in educational courses*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Total number of the project participants Erasmus plus “With Education to Plurilingualism”	29 women
Total number of participants in all training courses	35 women
Number of participants of the training course in Francophonie Nice	19 women
Number of participants of the training course in OEP Paris	10 women
Number of participants of the training course CELV, Graz	20 women
Number of participants of the training course Etwinning	35 women
Number of participants taking part in the questionnaire	29 women

*Source.* Own research.

## RESEARCH METHODS

Questionnaire, analysis, interpretation (see more in Cohen et al., 2000).

### Benefits

**Table 2**

*The participants' replies to questions asking how they benefited from their mobility experience*

<b>Staff participants in individual mobility activities</b>	<b>% in satisfaction and benefits</b>
Improvement of practical skills relevant to their work and professional development.	100%
The subject knowledge improvement teachers teach and improvement of their professional field.	92,59%
Organisational, management and leadership skills improvement	40,74%
Career opportunities improvement	59,26%

*Source.* Own research.

### Interpretation

100% of the respondents declare that they improved their practical skills for work. 92,59% improved communication skills in the language. 40,74% said they improved organisational skills, and 59,26% said they will have a better career application. All those who graduated from the innovation training will have a better career classification. They probably misinterpreted the question. The percentage should have been 100% at this point.

**Table 3**

*The participants' replies about how their mobility experience affected them*

<b>Individual mobility activities</b>	<b>% of participants agreeing with the statement</b>
I have deepened my understanding of environmental, climate, and sustainability issues.	33,33%
I have adjusted my habits to be more sustainable.	44,44%
I have gained a deeper understanding of the diversity within my society.	96,30%
I am more dedicated to combating discrimination, intolerance, xenophobia, and racism.	85,19%
I am more engaged in participating in elections, other democratic processes, and the activities of my local community.	40.74%

<b>Individual mobility activities</b>	<b>% of participants agreeing with the statement</b>
I have expanded my knowledge of Europe, the European Union, and European values.	81.48%
I have gained greater insight into new and practical ways to use digital technology.	59.26%
I am enthusiastic about incorporating more digital technologies into my studies or work.	59.26%
I have enhanced my French language skills during the mobility period.	92.59%

*Source.* Own research.

The project also affected the participants in terms of dimension sustainability and life and environment issues (33.33% and 44.44% declare this). We are very pleased that the item on knowledge and recognition of diversity achieved the highest score percent 96.30%. It is one of the goals of pluralistic approaches and plurilingualism in education. The item on Europe and European values also achieved a high percentage rating, as well as the item on discrimination, intolerance and racism, 85.19%. These are priorities that are part of education in the field of multilingualism and interculturality. Digital technologies in education, 59.26% and 92.59 %, prove that they improved their skills in French.

**Table 4**

*The improved key competences of the project participants*

<b>Key competencies targeted for improvement</b>	<b>Number of participants – individual activities for staff</b>
Active citizenship	10
Cultural awareness and expression	29
Digital and technology-based competencies	19
Entrepreneurship	0
Interpersonal skills and the ability to adopt new competencies	19
Literacy	0
Multilingualism	29
Numerical, scientific and engineering skills	0

*Source.* Own research.

Active citizenship means or invites citizens to have control over their daily lives as users of public services, influence the teaching process in our case, influence opinion-making by avoiding prejudices and stereotypes, and so create or try to create a happy multilingual society. Active citizens, moreover, influence decisions, voice concerns, and engage with service provision. They interact with institutions and express preferences or modifications. For the group of teachers, it mostly encompasses

activities in their workplaces, civil society, and private spheres. 10 out of 29 declared improved this key competence and European priority.

Cultural awareness and expression as well as multilingualism, were improved in all 29 cases. Our goal of plurilingual teaching and development was to attain 100%.

19 teachers declare they improved in digital technologies. All project participants improved ICT competence by participating in the training course about the etwinning digital platform. They must have forgotten that this platform also counts for digital tools.

19 teachers say they improved their interpersonal skills and the ability to adopt new competencies.

**Table 5**

*Participants' rating of attended courses and training*

<b>Participants' rating of attended courses and training</b>	<b>5 Very good quality</b>	<b>4 Good quality</b>	<b>3 Acceptable quality</b>	<b>2 Low quality</b>	<b>1 Very low quality</b>
Overall organisation of the training course	100.00 %	0.00 %	0.00 %	0.00 %	0.00 %
Fulfillment of the project and training goals	100.00 %	0.00 %	0.00 %	0.00 %	0.00 %
Information and transparency	88.89 %	11.11 %	0.00 %	0.00 %	0.00 %
Content and pedagogy	96.30 %	3.70 %	0.00 %	0.00 %	0.00 %
European dimension	92.59 %	7.41 %	0.00 %	0.00 %	0.00 %
Services and facilities	85.19 %	14.81 %	0.00 %	0.00 %	0.00 %
Follow-up	88.89 %	11.11 %	0.00 %	0.00 %	0.00 %
Overall course rating (average)	4.9				

Source. Own research.

29 teachers evaluated two training internships in France, in Francophonie and Nice, and two internships in Slovakia. The third internship was provided by the European Center for Modern Languages based in Graz on the topic Framework of reference for pluralistic approaches, and the fourth training was focused on etwinning and the ESEP platform. The overall quality and satisfaction rating out of 5 points was 4.9. The teachers were satisfied with the educational courses. They underwent training aimed at improving competencies in the field of ICT tools, in the field of the development of plurilingualism in schools and in the field of improving communicative competence. They applied their knowledge and created activities to the school educational programs, which were changed on 1.9.2023 or will be changed on 1.9.2024.

## CONCLUSION

The professional development of foreign language teachers in Slovakia is a multifaceted process that involves a combination of pre-service education, continuous professional training, and support from various educational institutions and programs.

There are many opportunities for professional development. Challenges include ensuring equal access to these opportunities for all teachers, addressing resource constraints, and effectively integrating new technologies and methodologies in the classroom.

In our last project *With Education to Plurilingualism* 2022-2-SK01-KA122-SCH-000095283, the benefits were proved and are obvious. The project objectives were all fulfilled.

29 participants declared being very satisfied with their innovative training courses. In the project *With Education to plurilingualism*, 29 mobilities were managed. Hybrid mobility in Nice (18 participants from primary and secondary schools) brought its fruit in the form of maximum 48,5 hours of training course education. The training course in Paris brought 40 hours of training for 9 participants. The training course managed by CELV Graz (20 participants) was for 20 hours and the etwinning hybrid course counted for 10 hours of work for 35 participants. All training participants received the Europass certificate, an international certificate of successful completion.

All project participants had the opportunity to finalise their training by presenting and defending their work, which was recognised as innovative education at the national level. Those who registered and completed the training were awarded a certificate for innovative educational training. Additionally, since the defenses served as a knowledge dissemination event for other French language teachers, attendees of these dissemination sessions also received certificates for updated educational training at the national level.

In the end, we can conclude our study by pointing at the teachers' activity. On the platform of European school education platform, they created an online collection of new lessons and lesson plans that they already apply in their teaching process. The collection of their work is named *With Education to Plurilingualism*.

Thanks to Erasmus Plus, we enabled a valuable exchange of knowledge by incorporating new techniques, methods, and tools, which were quickly applied in teaching practices. This enhanced the collaboration between schools and teachers. Educators were introduced to excellent methodologies and approaches, which they effectively utilised in schools across Slovakia.



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