

Core Curriculum

English Language Teaching Methodology

Bachelor's Level

Rationale

Introduction

Ukraine's move towards Europe and the wider world has brought into focus the need for higher standards of English among the country's citizens. There is widespread agreement that English is needed for trade, travel, education and international relations. The improvement that is needed can only be achieved if standards of English teaching are raised at every level of the education system. Pre-existing traditions in language teaching were relevant as long as restrictions on travel and contacts with western countries were in place. English could be taught and examined simply as a school subject, with an emphasis on knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, and with little or no need to see the language as a means of active communication or as a life skill. This approach, underpinned as it is by academic traditions of philology at university level, is now neither relevant nor sufficient.

Right across Europe, multilingualism is seen as an important educational aspiration and a key plank in economic development, and the work of the Council of Europe in setting internationally accepted standards for proficiency in foreign languages has come to fruition in the publication of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. This document has been used by Ministries and Examination Boards in countries around the world as a reliable reference for setting the standards that need to be achieved at various levels of their education systems. Ukraine has followed suit and has begun to set desirable exit levels of English for school leavers and university graduates. However, there is a gap between what is now recommended and what is actually happening, and these standards will remain aspirational rather than realistic until standards of English teaching in schools and universities are raised. Achieving this is the primary objective of the new Pre-Service Teacher Training (PRESETT) curriculum at Bachelor's level for trainee teachers of English.

Foundations

Reform in any curriculum is necessarily a delicate and time-consuming process which cannot be achieved overnight. It needs to be planned carefully and based in a sound understanding of the current situation and of future needs and priorities. This requires research and a team approach. This is why the British Council Ukraine and the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine established a project to see the work through to a conclusion. A team of professionals from universities across Ukraine was put together and their first task was to conduct a Baseline Study to establish how language teaching methodology was taught at university level in Ukraine as well as in certain other countries. The key findings of the Baseline Study were as follows:

- a wide variation in the number of hours allotted to language improvement and to methodology among the eight universities surveyed
- average proportion of total programme hours devoted to methodology was found to be less than 4%
- methodology usually delivered in Ukrainian or Russian
- methodology widely taught and assessed as a theoretical discipline, with courses delivered as lectures devoid of interaction
- methodology courses pay insufficient attention to a number of essential aspects of language teacher preparation, for example Intercultural Awareness, Developing Independent Study Strategies, Developing ICT Competence and Learner-Centred Approaches.

- insufficient attention to modern ways of assessing progress and achievement in a foreign language
- in some cases, little or no connection between theory and practice (here between the methodology course and the practicum in schools)
- no unified approach to the final assessment of student teachers.

Team members also found that students' language standards on exit from the programme were in most cases below those which would be expected of a teacher of English.

The team made two study visits as part of their research: to Uzbekistan where the PRESETT project had been running for over seven years and the first graduates were already teaching in schools, and to the UK to look into the preparation of foreign language teachers in universities. These visits served to reinforce the conclusions from the in-Ukraine research.

Key Design Principles for the PRESETT Curriculum

The following principles guided the team through the process of curriculum design:

1. Methodology as the key to the preparation of student teachers

It was agreed that the new methodology programme should be at the core of language teacher education, and that it should provide a bridge between principles and practice. Methodology in this programme is concerned with the application of knowledge in real situations rather than about knowledge itself. The curriculum includes a profile of a newly qualified teacher of English, which is effectively the intended overall target of the methodology programme.

2. Delivery in English

The curriculum to be developed in English, and taught through the medium of English. Methodology courses to start in the third semester of the programme, to allow a focus on language improvement in the first year, thus preparing students to study Methodology in English.

3. Variety of approaches to teaching

It is now widely recognised that lecturing is not an efficient way of delivering content on a practical course. Accordingly, the new curriculum recommends a range of teaching approaches, including task-based learning, the use of case studies, simulations, group projects and problem solving. All of these approaches are intended to promote high levels of interaction and student involvement in their own learning processes.

4. Language courses to complement methodology courses

Language classes to be taught in a way that exemplifies good practice, thereby illustrating the principles underlying the Methodology courses.

5. Standardisation of basic requirements

Number of hours for methodology set at the same level at all PRESETT institutions. Course modules standardised in terms of aims, outcomes and assessment specifications.

6. Carefully phased school experience

Student teachers will experience the reality of school classrooms in three phases: initially (semesters 3 and 4) as observers, then (semesters 5, 6 and 7) as teaching assistants and finally (semester 8) as practising teachers with responsibility for full-length lessons. At each of these stages, there are strong links (through tasks) from the methodology courses to school experience.

7. Continuous assessment throughout the programme

Assessment tasks are designed to reinforce learning throughout the programme. Each module has specified outcomes, assessed by a combination of stand-alone assignments and portfolios including two or more assignments. Final assessment will be based on school practice as well as in-course assignments.

The Content of the PRESETT Curriculum

The curriculum is made up of six modules, each representing a broad area of methodology, and each module contains a number of units, each of which covers an essential specialist topic for English teachers in training. Each module is designed to be taught for a semester, starting in Semester 3. The programme starts with a four-hour introduction to the course structure and requirements by way of orientation for the students.

The six modules are arranged to reflect the pathway that students embark on from being language learners to becoming language teachers by the end of the programme. Thus, the more basic content is covered in early modules in Semesters 3 and 4 and more challenging topics follow later. Each unit has an allocation of 18 hours of class contact time, backed up by a recommended number of hours of self-study, in most cases 12. Module descriptions include aims, learning outcomes and recommended assessment specifications. Unit descriptions contain detailed objectives, indicative content and recommended reading references.

Supplementary Materials

The introduction of the new PRESETT Curriculum constitutes a significant reform for universities, and for their teachers and students, a departure from previously existing practices. In recognition of this, support is offered in a supplement to the curriculum in the form of:

- sample unit maps to help with course planning
- sample session materials
- sample observation tasks for use during school experience
- self-assessment checklists for students to use at the end of each unit.

It is possible to download all these materials from the New Generation School Teacher website <http://ngschoolteacher.wix.com/ngscht>.

Implementing the Curriculum

According to the Ministry of Education and Science order of 12 August 2015 No871, the curriculum was piloted in selected universities across Ukraine in 2016-2019 academic years. The participating universities were:

Bohdan Khmelnytskyi Melitopol State Pedagogical University
Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University
Hryhoriy Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University
Ivan Franko Zhytomyr National University
Khmelnytskyi Humanitarian Pedagogical Academy
Mykhailo Gogol Nizhyn National University
Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi Vinnitsya State Pedagogical University
Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University
Rivne State University for Humanities
Uzhgorod National University
Vasyl Stefanyk Pre-Carpathian National University
Volodymyr Hnatiuk Ternopil National Pedagogical University
Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University

The piloting was carefully monitored and the results evaluated year on year.

The final evaluation of the New Generation School Teacher project was undertaken in 2019. The evaluation report states that the experimental course has enabled the pilot universities to develop a cadre of novice teachers who are very well prepared to enter schools as highly competent classroom teachers. Their levels of professionalism and the depth to which they can analyse and discuss their own teaching and the teaching they observe are very impressive.