Confédération Européenne des Centres de Langues dans l'Enseignement Supérieur

European Confederation of Language Centres in Higher Education

Europäischer Verband der Hochschulsprachenzentren

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CercleS Focus Group ADAPT White Paper

1. Introduction to the topic and relevance

According to the World Health Organization (WHO; 2023), one in six people in the world has a recorded disability, and yet the number of students with reported disabilities in higher education is well below this. At the same time, the number of students requesting support as the result of a disability is on the increase (https://www.ahead.ie/Launch-of-21-Report-on-Numbers-of-Students-with-Disabilites-in-Higher-Education). All students "have the right to learn and succeed" and this includes those with diverse educational needs such as physical, psychological, or cognitive impairment (Abdallah, 2016). Technologies such as those used in the context of online higher education provide opportunities for students with disabilities to access and become involved in education more than ever before (Reyes et al. 2021). However, teaching professionals need help in order to adapt language courses and language assessment in the most effective and efficient way possible, so that language education is even more accessible, while maintaining academic rigour.

The ADAPT Focus Group was established with the specific aims of:

- **promoting inclusive and accessible language education** for all university students, including those with disabilities, learning differences, or atypical learning profiles.
- **raising awareness** among language educators and institutional stakeholders about the challenges and opportunities of teaching students with specific needs in higher education. This includes advocating for best practices in applying the CEFR principles to diverse learners.
- **developing, sharing, and disseminating** good practices, pedagogical models, and standardised assessment support frameworks that enhance accessibility and equal participation.
- **fostering collaboration** among CercleS member institutions and other international networks working in inclusive education and language pedagogy.

2. Challenges in European Language Centres and Universities

The implementation of adaptations for language courses and assessment presents challenges in terms of:

- Limited resources: many language institutions are facing financial cuts and therefore do not have the resources to find optimum solutions for the growing number of learners with specific needs;

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- Limited awareness: many students with specific needs do not disclose their situation through fear of stigma, meaning that teaching professionals cannot offer support or consider adapting their courses and assessment using universal design principles;
- Limited institutional support and guidelines: lack of structured training, guidelines and support for teaching professionals to refer to when working with learners with specific needs.

2. Proposed Solutions and Actions

The ADAPT Focus Group proposes a range of solutions and actions to address these challenges:

- **Research and Mapping**
  - Map institutional practices, accommodations, and support services available for students with specific needs.
  - Identify and analyse the range of specific needs among language learners in higher education contexts across Europe.
  - Collect teachers feedback and experiences about inclusive teaching approaches.
  - Carry out research on the criteria used to grant accommodations in language testing and their effect on construct validity.
- **Pedagogical Development**
  - Develop adaptable teaching strategies, materials, and assessment tools for inclusive language classrooms.
  - Carry out an analysis of existing institutional guidelines and develop a framework of reference for institutional guidelines.
- **Capacity Building and Training**
  - Design and deliver professional development workshops and webinars for language teachers and assessment staff.
  - Provide guidance on collaboration between language teachers, disability support centres, and academic departments.
  - Analyse and provide training on the application of the CEFR Companion Volume descriptors (e.g., mediation, sign language) in curriculum design and assessment.

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- **Knowledge Exchange and Dissemination**
  - Contribute to CercleS conferences, newsletters, and policy discussions to ensure visibility of inclusive education issues.
- **Student Empowerment and Voice**
  - Collect student feedback and experiences to inform inclusive teaching approaches.
  - Encourage student participation in co-designing and evaluating language courses.

4. Intended Impact

By carrying out these actions, European language centres should be better able to:

- improve the quality and accessibility of language courses;
- improve the quality and accessibility of language assessment;
- improve learning outcomes for learners with specific needs; and
- foster international collaboration.

Through raising awareness, research and training, the ADAPT Focus Group aims to improve language teaching practices across European higher education for all learners.

5. References and Further Reading

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