

## DEVELOPING INSTITUTIONAL LANGUAGE POLICY

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Higher education institutions face challenges set by Bologna process, the implementation of which requires creating conditions for language learning and intercultural competence acquisition. Although higher education institutions in Lithuania maintain different and in a way promiscuous approaches to the role of HEI in the development of students' linguistic and intercultural competences, but a certain institutional policy with regard to language learning and teaching has inevitably been formed on the institutional level, though not always defined by normative documents. The aim of the research is to summarise the development of language policy in HEIs on the basis of the practice of European higher education institutions. The research applied the findings of ENLU (European Network for the Promotion of Language Learning among All Undergraduates) and MOLAN (Network for the Exchange of Information about Good Practices that Serve to Motivate Language Learners), performing comparative and content analysis. The descriptive statistics and analysis of research into the practical organisation of language learning and teaching provided at VMU served as the basis aiming to identify preconditions for institutional language policy formation.

**Keywords:** language policy, language proficiency, strategic dimensions, enabling conditions, plurilingualism.

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### Introduction

The challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> century higher education institutions set by the Bologna process (1999) and summarized in the requirements of Berlin Communiqué *Realising the European Higher Education Area* (2003) can be ensured only by due attention to preserving national languages, maintenance of the acquired foreign language competence, creating conditions for students' plurilingual and intercultural competence development.

The European Commission's Action Plan COM(2003) 449 final. *Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity* (2004–2006) adopted on 27 July 2003, after an extensive preparation and consultation process, proposed 45 actions to be carried out in the period of

2004–2006 supporting different language learning related initiatives on national, regional and local levels. One of these initiatives was that each university should implement a coherent language policy clarifying its role in promoting language learning and linguistic diversity. It was proposed that the university language policies should include explicit actions to foster not only foreign but, which is of utmost importance, the national or regional languages.

As a response to these challenges, higher education institutions (hereinafter – HEIs) in Europe have increasingly started describing and designing their language policies which have existed hereto, though not laid down on paper explicitly or included in strategic documents

of the institution. Following this initiative and performing the set objectives, the EU funded ENLU project (European Network for the Promotion of Language Learning among All Undergraduates) initiated the establishment of a permanent European framework for promoting language learning amongst undergraduate students. This permanent network was created under the auspices of the Conseil Européen pour les Langues / European Language Council (CEL/ELC) as the HELP (Higher Education Language Policy) network. HELP aims to ensure that universities enable students to: communicate in at least two foreign languages; have the confidence and know-how to improve their language skills, including learning new languages, in the future; gain experience of working in or with other countries and other cultures (European Commission 2008).

At the launch of the ENLU meeting the coordinator of the project and the president of the CEL/ELC Wolfgang Mackiewicz metaphorically summarised the situation in higher education institutions: in most participating countries, *Languages for all* policy has been, and still is, the Cinderella of higher education (HE) as language studies are either outside the curriculum, under-resourced and lack prestige and motivation, or language supply is insufficient. This idea reflects a similar situation in Lithuanian higher education institutions.

In Lithuania, the implementation of the European language policy at tertiary level, as expected by the National Strategy of Education for 2003–2012 (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas 2003), which set the aim for higher education institutions to provide conditions for students to acquire good competence in two-three foreign languages, encounters difficulties. HEIs, in their attempt to offer a diverse range of foreign languages to students and ensure plurilingual competence acquisition, have to comply with requirements for study programme design which is based on regulations of the scientific fields approved by the Ministry of Education and Science, the absolute majority of which do not include foreign language competence development (e.g.

Regulations for Chemistry (2004), Geology (2004), Psychology (2004), Biochemistry (2005), Physics (2007), Biology (2008), etc.) at all (neither in description of general education part nor in describing competencies) or foresee the acquisition of one foreign language only (professional foreign language) by HE graduates (Regulations for Technology Science (Engineering) (2005), etc.). Consequently, only a few credits are allocated for language learning at HEIs, hours devoted for languages have been reduced with the increasing focus on hours for specialty subjects in the programme.

Language policy is a new phenomenon and has been developed and approved only in the most advanced universities that value the importance of students' overall preparation for meeting the challenges of life in global society. These universities create conditions for the acquisition of plurilingual language competence. Therefore, it was purposeful to investigate the extent of the solution to this research problem, new arguments for its solution and compare them with the strategic goals and conditions created in Vytautas Magnus University, where the situation for learner plurilingual competence development is exceptionally favourable as compared with other HEIs in Lithuania.

The paper **aims** at analyzing the existing best practices in the development of language policy at higher education institutions across Europe and provides statistical data on the conditions created at VMU for plurilingual and intercultural competence development. Thus, **the object** of the study is the development of language policy at higher education institutions.

## Research methods

The following research methods were applied in the study: literary source analysis, document analysis, comparative content analysis, descriptive statistics.

### Research design

During Stage One, the concept of language policy (hereinafter – LP) was analysed identi-

fyng its role, purpose and the main structural elements on the basis of theoretical research. In Stage Two of the research, the analysis of the current situation with regard to language policy development was performed and European projects ENLU and MOLAN as well as scientific literature sources served as the basis for choosing several higher education institutions as samples for the research. Only those institutions that could be comparable alongside the two chosen variables, i.e. the variable of strategic goals and the variable of conditions enabling the acquisition of language competence were selected for the purpose of comparison. The fact that the research participants were chosen by convenience sampling does not allow making broad generalizations about language policy in a larger population, still the examples can be of utmost importance comparing the two issues and laying the foundations for language policy development. During Stage Three, the strategic goals and conditions created for the development of plurilingual competence at VMU were analysed as preconditions for the language policy development. The quantitative data gathered in the Centre of Foreign Languages of Vytautas Magnus University were used as the evidence of practical implementation of language policy. On the basis of the research findings the conclusions were drawn.

## Research results and discussion

All political decisions are based on two types of considerations: the planned measures that reflect general principles and the technical measures that take into account how those planned measures can be implemented in practice (if there are necessary resources, time, etc.) (Beacco & Byram 2003). Therefore, the main part of this research will briefly focus, first, on theoretical principles of language policy development and then, on implementation of the planned measures in practice.

### *Concept of language policy*

LP development encompasses a range of actions, starting from strategic dispositions of

the university, institutional participation in international mobility, and etc., to provision of language learning (compulsory and elective) to linguistic and non-linguistic study programme students. Stephen May (1997, cited in Wright 2008: 243), defined a school language policy as a “policy document aimed at addressing the particular language needs of a school” (1997: 229). He argued that this document centralizes language in learning and should be developed in consultation with the wider school community. Corson (1999) also viewed the main role of LP in meeting the needs of learners when he stated that language policy provides schools with a specific direction in dealing with the issues, challenges and possibilities that diversity and disparate learning needs pose. According to Wright (2008: 244), language policies adapted or created in some countries give privilege to some languages over others, whereas other countries support diverse languages. The UK National Centre for Languages (CILT) defines *language policy* as “the means by which governments and other groups [...] set out their intentions to safeguard, develop and exploit the capacity in languages among the people they represent” (Chambers 2004). LP is impacted by global factors, the development of business and economy, increasing motivation and educational policy. Therefore, the development of LP in each country should reflect and is a reflection of a particular context and strategic goals of an institution. According to Tollefson, *language policies* created by educational institutions are “statements of goals and means for achieving them that constitute guidelines or rules shaping language structure, language use, and language acquisition within educational institutions (Tollefson 2008: 3).

The most recent document which urges HEIs to design and define language policies is the position statement of a Focus Group on Language Policy of Cercles (Confédération Européenne des Centres de Langues de l'Enseignement Supérieur / European Confederation of Language Centres in Higher Education), adopted in May 2011. The statement is based on

analysis and discussions of the focus group and presented in the form of guidelines for HEIs. The necessity for HEIs to define their LPs is described, suggesting determining institutional LPs by the stake-holders of the institution to “provide continuity over time in a constantly evolving context” (Cercles 2011: 1). The statement for designing an LP document embraces 6 areas the language policy should be focused on:

1. issues for native and foreign languages (fostering plurilingualism and institutional multilingualism, lifelong language learning, enhancing student and staff mobility);
2. issues at all levels of the organization (university, faculty, programmes, courses etc.), co-owned by all stake-holders and the whole university community (governing bodies, teaching, research, administrative staff and students);
3. coherence of external (European, national, regional and local) and internal strategic goals;
4. responsibilities within the organization;
5. providing guiding principles to address *language appropriation* – compulsory levels of language competence for students and lecturers, defining support infrastructure and services; *language of tuition* – programme coherence and cohesion while respecting the inherent historical characteristics of the subject; *research* – existing and future research cooperation agreements and networks; *administration* – ensuring plurilingual competence of administrative staff under the growing degree of internationalization; *internal and external communication*.
6. Language Policy design should be seen as a process.

In brief, it can be summed up that language policy whether written as a separate document or assumed by the community of educational institution should embrace all issues related to language provision, use as a medium of instruction and medium of internal and external communication.

### *Overview of the development of institution language policies*

As the findings of the ENLU project indicate in a *Snapshot of Actions and Trends*, out of 32 institutions from 23 countries researched in 2005, 10 institutions had a document describing all issues related to institutional language policy (however, three representatives of these institutions were critical about their language policy even if their institutions had the ones) and 13 others were developing their language policy documents. They mentioned obstacles to the realization of their language policies, such as lack of awareness of the whole institution of the benefit of languages, lack of cooperation between the faculty and language centre, time, financial constraints and others. Thus it is obvious that LP development of the whole HEI is an insurmountable challenge if language teachers or language centres have to face it alone. Notwithstanding their concern with the language issues, LP development is the endeavour of the whole institution and particularly of those in power, those who accept the decisions and are most responsible for the final product of the institution – intelligent plurilingual and pluricultural open-minded graduates.

Further, some criteria or parameters of LP development are presented. Tudor (2004) in the *Report on the Basis of the Activities of ENLU Task Force 1* outlined some main parameters or benchmarks which should be taken into account while designing an institutional language policy: strategic dimensions, enabling conditions and pedagogical issues. In this research only two of them – strategic dimension and enabling conditions - will be analyzed. The first parameter is defined as the “strategic positioning of HEIs with respect to the current European and international context, and their policy decisions with respect to language learning”, whereas the parameter of enabling conditions is understood as conditions “set in place to ensure effective policy development and implementation” (Tudor 2004: 5) which allow for “strategic reflection on the role of languages and the planning of practical actions to promote more extensive language learning” (Tudor 2004: 8).

### Strategic Dimensions

The strategic goals of an institution with regard to language policy differ from institution to institution depending on the importance attached to the language issue, different cultural context of the country, educational priorities and traditions and a number of other factors.

The Jyväskylä University in Finland was one of the first to design its language policy in the EU. The aims and objectives of the Jyväskylä University Language Policy (2004) are founded on the overall strategy of the University and on the Finnish Universities Act. The language policy document describes the Finnish as the language of teaching and research, language degree programmes and teacher education, teaching in a foreign language, language assessment and other language issues. The language policy addresses the issues of increased awareness of language competences (both mother tongue and foreign languages), promotion of languages for all students and an increased engagement of all university lecturers in improving the university's efforts in language education.

The strategic goals of language policy of the University of Lausanne, Switzerland, are to specify the plurilingual and pluricultural repertoire of the students in order to respond to the various needs created by their studies, mobility, and the Swiss, European and global labour markets, with regard to the fundamental and transversal role that plurilingualism plays in academic life, employability, and citizenship, as well as for the personal development of students. Languages are included in the strategic plan of the Administration of the University of Lausanne for 2006–2011 “to reinforce the acquisition of transversal competences and to prepare for the use of acquired skills in diverse contexts” (Vosicki 2008).

The best practices of the goal of Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona (Vidal 2008) as regards languages are to contribute to shaping up a multilingual framework which, with the preservation and promotion of the Catalan language and identity as a basic premise, makes it possible to create favourable conditions for linguistic and cultural exchange and for the personal better-

ment of everyone in the university community at the university, based on the use and interaction of various languages for unfolding administrative, academic and institutional activities.

The situation in Hungary resembles the situation in Lithuania in the way that the strategic goals of higher education in Hungary do not envisage the provision of general language courses at HEIs as it is the prerogative of secondary education. However, the findings of several nationwide studies have determined that, in general, the level of language competencies of school leavers (aged 18) is far from sufficient. Besides, there is a state requirement in Hungary to take an accredited state foreign language examination in one or two languages and graduates cannot receive their degree without the successful completion of the required level, which can be B1, B2 or C1. The required focus is mostly general language, but in some cases a specific purpose language exam is required. The criteria of the necessary language examination differ according to the field of study and they are determined in a ministerial decree. The research results show that in summer 2006, approximately 40 percent of graduates did not obtain their degree because they did not pass the required state language examination. Thus it is obvious that the HELP in Hungary has to be redefined (Sárdi 2008).

In brief, the language policies developed at different HEIs reflect the strategic goals of the institution in meeting the challenges of the global world; the development of plurilingualism is recognised as an important value alongside with the preservation and development of the native language.

### Enabling conditions

The research analysis revealed that the practical organization of language teaching at the institutional level differs to such an extent that in many cases the comparison is impossible. Language teaching and learning or, in other words, plurilingual and pluricultural competence development of non-linguistic students is organised in different units and divisions of HEIs: language teaching departments, language centres, non-language specialist faculties of departments, separate faculties.

It is also important to mention that different structures responsible for language provision co-exist within an institution, also there is collaboration with non-university agencies such as the British Council, cultural institutes (e.g., Camões Institute or Italian Institute of Culture in Lithuania), where students can acquire, remedy or improve their language competence.

Table 1 illustrates the results of the research into practical organisation of language provision. Five universities were analysed and compared in terms of the following variables: number of languages provided; compulsory or optional choice of language; credited or non-credited; kind of language provided (general, specific, academic), proficiency levels to be attained and other peculiarities.

It is evident that in all five researched universities a certain type of foreign language study is compulsory; however, the provision of language study is different: languages are for general, academic and specific purposes, the number of languages of offer is different; the expected level also varies. As stated in the by CILT website, language policy depends on a number of variables and it is constantly evolving, and as languages and intercultural skills are about communication between people, the consequences of that evolution, whether intended or otherwise, have an impact not only in the education sector but across the whole of society.

The situation of foreign language study for non-linguistic programme students is similar in a number of Lithuanian HEIs. As research (using the method of content analysis of university

**Table 1.** *Enabling conditions of EU university language policies*

Institution, country	Foreign language courses	Which languages	Peculiarities	Source
<b>Agricultural University Plovdiv, Bulgaria</b>	Compulsory in all faculties.	Students continue studying at least 1 of the FLs already studied at secondary level.	2 semesters 1 <sup>st</sup> stage – L for general purposes 2 <sup>nd</sup> stage – LSP.	ENLU Report (2004)
<b>University of Lausanne, Switzerland</b>	FL - a component of the “generic competences” to be acquired by all undergraduates.	7 - Chinese, English, German, Italian, Russian, Spanish, Swiss-German.	Free of charge since 2005/2006. Students in Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Faculty of Business, and Faculty of Theology and Religious Sciences receive ECTS credits.	Vosicki (2008)
<b>Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece</b>	Compulsory or elective, depending on department.	English, French, German, Italian.	LAP and LSP; languages offered during the first two years of studies; Ministry of Education expects the English competence of 1st year university students to be at B2.	Kiliari and Hatzitheodorou (2008)
<b>BABEŞ-BOLYAI University of Cluj, Romania</b>	1+2 language policy for all the students in the institution.	English, French, German, Italian, Spanish or Russian.	Second language selected from among 6 international languages already studied at school, students expected to be already proficient at B1 level.	MOLAN RES 1: Case Study.
<b>Kodolányi University College, Hungary</b>	90 ac. hours/semester, 6 ECTS Compulsory.	English, French, German.	LSP. CLIL as part of the programme. No courses at beginner level.	Sárdi (2008)

websites providing information on requirements and conditions for foreign language competence development) into structure of foreign language teaching at Lithuanian universities indicates a number of universities offer from 3ECTS to 6 ECTS credits for language study. A number of universities witnessed a decrease in credits offered for foreign language study recently. The study of professional English, German and French prevail for students of non-linguistic programmes (VU, MRU; KUT; Lithuanian University of Health Sciences (LUHS) (in addition, Latin and Russian), Aleksandras Stulginskis University, Klaipėda University). The range of other foreign languages offered as optional or free subjects is from 3 to 8 (excluding the cases when commercial language courses are offered and the programmes of linguistic programme students). The situation at Vytautas Magnus University, which bases its policy on the principles of *liberal arts*, is completely different. Therefore, as the aim of the article suggests, more attention will be given to language policy development at this institution.

### **Language Policy Development at Vytautas Magnus University**

#### *Strategic goals and priorities of the institution*

Vytautas Magnus University is a leading university in Lithuania in terms of foreign language provision and the attained graduates' plurilingual language competence. A disposition is maintained at Vytautas Magnus University that proficiency in several languages is an indispensable part of a modern university graduate. University Strategy for the years 2007–2011 states that broad humanitarian, social and language preparation is the main feature (among others, such as modernity, liberal education, etc.). University creates opportunities and access to study 26 languages (2011) to all university linguistic and non-linguistic programme students (of first, second and third cycles). During the language courses students acquire not only good language skills but become aware of the target country culture, gain competencies in intercultural communication, team work, self-sufficient study, etc. An important aspect that

requires good language proficiency is the aim to develop partnership of research and study participants through initiation of the establishment of inter-institutional Lithuanian research and study clusters, and the creation of common study programmes; through promotion of the mobility of students and teachers; through participation in national and international research, study and social projects.

VMU Strategy Implementation Plan (2007) defines an ambition “to create an optimal foreign language learning system cohering students' ambitions and opportunities, requirements of professional activity and international communication” (2.1.5). Such a system has been created and functions efficiently.

The Strategy of the Centre of Foreign Languages for 2007–2011 set the following goals, among others: to liberalise the choice of foreign languages cohering students' needs with the employability and international communication requirements; to expand the diversity of languages offered and renew the content of language programs regularly, taking into account new societal and professional needs; to offer distant language education courses; to design language courses to university community (faculty staff), etc (2007).

It can be summarized that language policy development at Vytautas Magnus University is a bottom-up initiative: the Centre of Foreign Languages, a university unit, organises language provision for all VMU students and staff, offers new languages on the basis of students needs, has the right to decide about the offer of languages, course requirements, assessment criteria and other didactical issues of language competence development. Besides, some faculties have their own specific requirements for language learning depending on the nature of their study programmes. Eventually, it is a bottom-up initiative as all the optional language courses as well as cultural language related courses are chosen as elective subjects at the students' disposition. This initiative is supported by the university administration as organisation of language provision is regulated by Study Regulations and Rector's orders, etc.

*Enabling conditions*

Since the re-establishment of Vytautas Magnus University in Lithuania in 1989 (after being closed during the soviet period), conditions for learning languages have been favourable. The re-founders of the university set the goal to achieve that all university 1<sup>st</sup> cycle programme students acquire the English language competence at upper intermediate level and above. Four levels (A1-B2) of English as a foreign language (24 ECTS) were compulsory for all non-language students till 2006. Since autumn semester of 2006, the requirement is to attain the proficiency at B2 level, thus levels B1 and B2 are studies as compulsory (12 ECTS) whereas the lower or higher levels of English are chosen as elective subjects. Besides, learning of other foreign languages as elective, credited or non-credited subjects has been encouraged.

The scheme of learning English as a foreign language depends on two criteria: the results of a diagnostic test which is taken after signing the contract with the university (50% of the whole evaluation) and the evaluation marks for the accomplishment of the English language learning at a general education school (state examination, school examination, final mark at school, oral credit taken at school). If the students comply with the required B2 level upon entering the university, then they are exempted from studying the language and save 12 ECTS credits for elective subjects. The choice of other languages is particularly suggested.

The data of the entrants to VMU during the period of 2002–2011 illustrate that the students' English as a foreign language (EFL) proficiency has been increasing, still it is not adequate to the expected B2 level which ensures students' preparation for academic mobility, performance of academic tasks related to the use of English and

readiness for competitiveness in the world of work. It is evident that the number of students who leave general education schools with minimal English language competence (A1) is decreasing. As research at VMU shows the percentage of entrants who had not studied English at all decreased from 15.9% (in 2002) to 3% (in 2011).

VMU institutional language policy envisages the study of other foreign languages apart from English. Table 2 shows the increasing offer of languages during the period of 2002–2011 which, consequently, was followed by the increasing uptake of elective courses.

For instance, comparing the enrolment of full-time non-linguistic and linguistic programme students into elective language courses in autumn semester in 2004 and 2007, it was found that in 2004, 21% (876) of first cycle full time students of the whole first cycle student population were enrolled in elective language courses, 95% were learning one language, 3.7% – two languages and 1.3% – three languages. Whereas in the autumn semester of 2007, 54% (2133) of first cycle full time students were enrolled in elective language courses, among them 91.4% were studying one language, 7% – two, 1.2% – three and 0.4%. The percentage of students enrolled in elective language courses in 2011 is 68%.

The broad range of languages on offer creates opportunities for students to form their own language profiles containing various language constellations, which allow them to be exceptional and competitive in meeting the challenges of the world of work. Thus, strategic goals and enabling conditions of the institution create preconditions for institutional language policy development which would allow the institution to prepare qualified graduates and empower them to meet the challenges of life which is increasingly becoming global.

**Table 2.** *Increasing offer of languages during 2002–2010*

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Language	13	15	14	15	16	18	20	23	24	26

## Conclusions

1. In today's international context, knowledge of languages plays a significant role in the academic and professional education of all graduates. Students who have language competence in two or more languages in addition to English and to their mother tongue have access to more possibilities in terms of academic and professional mobility, and with respect to their employability, which they simply would not have in the absence of these linguistic competences. Ensuring that all graduates have access to effective language learning possibilities is thus a key goal of all Higher Education institutions throughout Europe.
2. Within this context institutions of higher education started designing and developing their language policy agendas. The principles underlying different national and institutional language policies differ depending on the cultural context, traditions, educational development and strategic goals of the institution.
3. Research revealed that the development of HE language policies should embrace the issues related to the native language, strategic dispositions, identifying enabling conditions for language learning to ensure the graduates' preparation to meet the challenges of the global world of work.
4. Analysis of language policy development at Vytautas Magnus University indicates favourable conditions created for plurilingual competence development at the university which allow students to create unique language profiles and efficiently prepare for competition in globalised life.

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## INSTITUCINĖS KALBŲ POLITIKOS KŪRIMAS

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Bolonijos proceso aukštajam mokslui keliami iššūkiai gali būti įgyvendinami tik sudarius sąlygas mokytis kalbų ir tarpkultūrinei kompetencijai įgyti. Nors aukštojo mokslo institucijos Lietuvoje nevienareikšmiškai supranta aukštosios mokyklos vaidmenį tobulinant studentų kalbines ir tarpkultūrinės kompetencijas, tačiau tam tikra institucijos politika kalbų mokymo ir mokymosi atžvilgiu aukštajame moksle neišvengiamai egzistuoja, nors ne visada apibrėžta normatyviniais dokumentais. Tyrimo tikslas – apibendrinti kalbų politikos kūrimą aukštojo mokslo institucijoje, remiantis Europos aukštojo mokslo institucijų kalbų politikos kūrimo praktika. Tyrime taikoma Europos Komisijos finansuojamų Mokymosi visą gyvenimą programos projektų ENLU (Europinis pirmos pakopos studentų kalbų mokymosi skatinimo tinklas) ir MOLAN (Tinklas keitimuisi informacija apie gerąją praktiką keliant kalbų mokymosi motyvaciją) tyrimų rezultatų lyginamoji ir turinio analizė, aprašomoji statistika ir Vytauto Didžiojo universiteto kalbų mokymo organizavimo praktikos analizė, kuriant prielaidas institucinei kalbų mokymosi politikai formuoti.

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** kalbų mokymosi politika, daugiakalbystė, aukštojo mokslo institucijos, kalbinė kompetencija.

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