

XVII CercleS International Conference 2022, 15–17 September 2022, Porto – Portugal

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On 15–17 September, 2022, the conference “*The Future of Language Education in an Increasingly Digital World: Embracing Change*” brought together LSP specialists to critically assess the challenges, downsides and benefits of education in digital era. The theme of the conference was inspired by Covid-19 pandemic, which triggered the crucial change in the existent teaching methodology, and brought forward the ideas of online / hybrid / blended / e-learning.

The three-day conference comprised 4 Focus Groups’ discussions, 3 plenary sessions, a poster presentation session, a round table discussion, over 100 oral presentations in parallel online and onsite sessions and 2 intensive workshops per day. Each speaker was given 25 minutes to present and discuss a hot issue aligned to the core theme of the conference.

The range of topics was wide including plurilingualism and minority languages; translation and terminology management; learners and their environment; practices, strategies, and tools for the digital environment; LSP and teaching methodologies; managing and leading change in language centers; language policy and politics; testing and assessment; teacher training and development; internationalization and intercultural competence. My choice of the sessions to attend was affected by different criteria: 1) current placement interest (ESP for medical students); 2) professional development interest (new teaching methodology; testing and assessment; online / blended learning); 3) MU LC team members encouragement (oral presentations of my colleagues); 4) personal curiosity.

The conference started with Focus Groups’ discussions for the participants united by a common topic of interest such as autonomy, leadership and management, testing and assessment and language policy. One of the conference highlights was Focus Group 3 session (*Aligning teaching and assessment at university language centers: How to assess mediation skills*) moderated by Johann Fischer. The Focus Group members split up into 6 groups to foster a discussion about testing and assessment policy in European universities. Small group debates were monitored by Dr. Fischer, who walked around and jotted down ideas about mediation skills assessment for a follow-up discussion by all the members of the Focus Group. Some of the most significant learnings for me after this experience are: 1) assessment is a personal motivator rather than a demotivator; 2) online learning brings forward the issue of assessment validity and fairness, where e-portfolio might be a solution because it helps assess a personal progress disregarding peers’ academic achievement; 3) task-based assessment works well when you teach a spe-

cial interest group (e.g. medical students). The Focus Group debates helped me find answers to many questions concerning online teaching, though some issues (online cheating, online testing, assessment grids / rubrics, etc.) still remain open for further discussion.

Every conference day opened with plenary session reports which highlighted urgent changes in modern education. The report *“Language teaching and learning in the post-pandemic era: Where now?”* by Joseph Hopkins noted teachers’ gradual acquiring digital competence since the Covid-19 crisis depending on the teacher’s type (transforming / accepting / resistant teacher). The survey testified that on the scale rate from 1 to 5 the teachers’ digital competence increased up to 4.1 after coronavirus pandemic. Another plenary session report by Manuel Célio Conceição on the topic *“Embracing change in language education: dealing with new landscapes”* focused on multilingual competence for language teachers’ professional development. According to the keynote speaker, the growing interest to this topic is determined by the following factors: increase of international student audience and staff and students’ academic mobility. Thus, it is important to implement plurilingual approaches to language teacher competences in higher education settings so that all languages could be valued equally in multilingual and multicultural classrooms.

The plenary reports were followed by parallel online and onsite sessions, which raised the topical issues of language education in a digital era. In the section *“LSP and Teaching Methodologies”*, the presenters revealed the notion of “hyflex learning space”, introduced innovative approaches to teaching academic writing (my professional interest topic) through a series of videos and tutorials which are available on the YouTube. The common issues in the section *“Testing and Assessment”* were peer and supervisor’s/teacher’s feedback, online test validity and assessment, digital resources for teaching and assessment, etc. The speakers introduced possible rubrics of the supervisor’s evaluation sheet, advocated for MOODLE as a very reliable course management system for online assessment. The conference participants who were interested in the issue of designing online courses could attend the section *“Learners and their Environment”*. The presenters demonstrated course maps for their online language courses, provided website links to various series of videos and tutorials, and gave tips how to arrange an indirect monitoring of an online self-study language course via automatized feedback and online forums. Undoubtedly, one of the most interesting sections was *“Teacher Training and Development”*, where the presenters analyzed the results of their language training courses, highlighted the methodology of teaching medical terminology via a corpus analysis of authentic clinical texts and shared digital customizable tools for online teaching and assessment.

Alongside with the conference reports, the participants could choose to attend workshops, where presenters demonstrated their methodology of working with various course materials. Regarding my current placement, I attended a workshop “*Communication Skills in English for Future Doctors – a multifocal didactic approach*” conducted by Alena Holá, Tamara Koprivová and Katja Kulhánková. My colleagues demonstrated various classroom activities to enhance the medical students’ skills of doctor-patient interaction.

Overall, the conference provided valuable insights to improve a language teaching methodology in a digital world. A lot of questions remain arguable; thus, there is a motivation for further research.

On my behalf, I would like to thank the CercleS management for inviting Ukrainian academics to the international conference in Porto (Portugal), and I express deep gratitude to the CASALC committee for awarding me a scholarship for participation in this event.

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