MANAGING THE PROCESS OF CONDUCTING AND MONITORING LANGUAGE TEACHING ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT IN RZESZÓW

Roman Wisz

Abstract

In the paper, the author presents a brief outline of conducting and monitoring foreign language teaching. Such management must be based on strictly specified procedures and norms. The paper also presents procedures for performing teaching tasks as well as administrative ones, connected with teaching students a foreign language, on the example of UITM. The author describes the system for qualifying students to language groups, informs about risks that might occur when performing the tasks, and suggests preventive means to avoid those risks. The qualitative objectives and measures of attaining them are also covered.

The paper indicates that the on-going process of economic and political changes as well as recent major demographic changes in Poland and in Europe make it necessary to continue seeking further improvements in managing the process of conducting and monitoring language teaching. Further concrete and effective action needs to be taken in managing the process of conducting and monitoring foreign language teaching.

Keywords: change management, language teaching system, electronic system, testing, qualifying students

Introduction

“The multiculturalism of Europe and its multilingualism have become a challenge both for politicians, universities and all educational institutions which are responsible for preparing Europeans for living in the multifarious but common house.”

The above quoted statement of Stanisław Hibner, Director of the Foreign Language Study Centre at the University of Łódź, very clearly and distinctly defines the importance of the mission of not only universities, but any educational institutions concerned with teaching foreign languages. Concern for learners’ communicative competences, for the quality of the process, for suitable monitoring of the tasks undertaken, must be seen as the major objective, if the whole venture is to have the desired effects.

The need for foreign language teaching of very high quality and conforming to the most state-of-the-art standards is enforced in the recent years also by the progressing

1 Mgr Roman Wisz, Wyższa Szkoła Informatyki i Zarządzania, Ul. Sucharskiego 2, 35-225 Rzeszów, rwisz@wsiz.rzeszow.pl.
globalisation of life. Soon, particular nations will not view each other as foreign. Such trend of societies’ development will result in life-long learning, and not only in the area of foreign languages. Life-long learning will be a necessary mechanism of adjusting to the technological development that is connected with generally understood progress and the said globalisation.

Managing the process of conducting and monitoring language teaching must be based on strictly defined processes and norms. Below presented are procedures of performing didactic and administrative tasks related to teaching students within the course of a foreign language, on the example of the University of Information Technology and Management in Rzeszów, in a system of vocational degree studies, in accordance with study plans and provisions contained within the National Qualifications Framework.

Object and scope of the project

The object of the aforementioned process is preparing, implementing and conducting foreign language courses for students of the University of Information Technology and Management. The process consists of two main areas of activity:

A. QUALIFYING STUDENTS TO PARTICULAR LANGUAGE GROUPS
B. CONDUCTING AND MONITORING THE TEACHING

Both areas are described in detail below.

Customer requirements

The customers here are students. From their perspective – but also from that of the university – the main objective in the first stage of the proceedings is to correctly qualify students to language groups. Students are assigned to particular groups according to their abilities gained at school and shown in the entry (qualifying) test. The next stage is teaching the course in accordance with Course Cards and syllabi for the given field of study, as approved by chair heads, deans and the Vice-President for Teaching. The schedule of classes is prepared by the schedule preparation team in the university’s Logistics Department.

The offer is meant to make the students constantly develop and test their language competences, and focuses on preparing learners to use the foreign language in their everyday life, in their careers, and also to pass international language examinations. In that connection, the content of the course includes issues of everyday life and professional life in areas related to the particular fields of study. The programme includes issues and vocabulary related to economy, the functioning of companies and enterprises, and serves to create the competitive edge, which – next to knowledge of the subject – is viewed as a major factor in finding a job. Grammar covers issues which enable the student to freely use the vocabulary learned in the said situations. Considering the above, foreign languages are taught using an interactive communication method, which develops the students’ ability to freely use the given foreign language and also enhances their faith in their own abilities and final success.

Process objectives

The aims of the process are to correctly qualify students to language groups, teach the course in the particular language groups, and monitor the process, with particular focus on correct functioning of the university’s administrative system and customer service level during the whole course of studies. The aims are achieved by developing and properly implementing the procedures defined and their regular monitoring.
Objective attainment measures

The following procedures, listed in points, are used to measure whether the set objectives have been attained:
- qualifying and assigning students to correct language groups within a foreign language course (standard or intensive);
- keeping the deadlines set for the adopted procedures, including language tests and examinations;
- obtaining learning outcomes concerning the level of knowledge of the foreign language as defined in the Course Cards and syllabi for the given field of study;
- monitoring the results of tests and examinations on a regular basis.

Risk and prevention

The table below shows certain risks, or threats, which can appear when performing the tasks, along with suggestions of preventive measures aimed at minimising or mitigating the risk.

Table 1. Risks, or threats, which can appear when performing the tasks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Risk</th>
<th>Prevention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Defining the level of skills in the foreign language (entry test)</td>
<td>Faulty electronic system at the Virtual University (the entry test freezes while being solved). Wrong/deficient information to students about the dates of the entry tests.</td>
<td>Preparing and approving the schedule of work on the electronic system by the end of June each year, at the latest. Proper testing of the corrected system’s functioning. Placing the dates of the test-taking in the students’ schedule of classes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Teaching and monitoring the teaching</td>
<td>Losing the database on students on an electronic carrier.</td>
<td>Testing and configuring the system correctly. Archiving data at least once daily on three different carriers. Forbidding to configure the network while entry test results are being processed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own study.

Below, the tasks concerning the first of the two areas of activity related to the object and scope of the process are described in detail.
Qualifying to language group (A)

Object and scope

The object of the procedure is to test the level of foreign language knowledge in an entry test. It is done in order to correctly assign students to language groups at the right level of language skills.

Quality objective and attainments measurement

The aim of the proceedings is to correctly assign students to language groups, according to their choice and their level of foreign language knowledge. Attaining the aim is measured by:

- processing the tests and passing them to the university Department of IT Sections and Systems on time;
- transferring the tests to the university electronic system on time;
- properly defining category threshold;
- analysing the results obtained in the tests – in the electronic system;
- specifying the right number of intensive language groups;
- specifying the right number of standard language groups;
- transferring the data to the university Department of IT Sections and Systems, and then to the Dean’s Office, to have the students assigned to the particular language groups.

Proceedings

What follows is a brief description of the steps needed to properly perform the tasks in the process. The beginning phase is marked as INPUT, the end as OUTPUT.

INPUT:

Current list of students

Teachers appointed by the Director of the Centre for Modern Languages prepare a set of tests checking the knowledge in foreign languages as specified in the resolution for each faculty.

Part-time and full-time students take part in organisational meetings, or introductory classes, where they are informed in detail about the way, possibilities and chances of gaining language skills while taking a foreign language course.

The above mentioned information is provided to students in more than one way – not only during the said organisational meetings/introductory classes, but also by e-mail and by way of a message in information kiosks placed around the university. The procedure of assigning students to language groups is developed each year, also given in tables, and for international students it is each time translated into the given foreign language. (When starting their studies, international students do not know Polish well enough to process such messages.) Those messages contain many details concerning the procedure. The process itself goes as follows:

1. Students take the test.
2. Students learn a foreign language they have chosen. They can choose from among: English, German, Russian, and French.
   - Students choose a language they learned before and want to continue.
   - The foreign language course starts in the second semester of studies.
   - Students are assigned to their language groups during the first semester of studies, according to the adopted schedule.

3. First-cycle full-time students are assigned to language groups based on their results in the entry tests and according to the declaration they had submitted. The declaration concerns choosing an intensive or standard language group. In the second semester, students start the course in their respective groups as assigned, under the following conditions:
   - First-cycle full-time students who achieve the required threshold of foreign language skills in one of two tests (one in the beginning, and other at the end of the first semester of studies) may choose whether they want to learn the foreign language in an intensive or a standard group. The declaration submitted by the student is binding throughout his or her studies and cannot be changed.
   - First-cycle full-time students who do not achieve the required threshold of foreign language skills in one of two entry tests, do not take either test, or do not submit a declaration of choosing a particular kind of the foreign language group, are automatically assigned to a standard group.
   - Students who do not achieve the required threshold, may take advantage of compensatory classes.

4. First-cycle part-time students are assigned to language groups based on their results in the final school-leaving examination, verified by the entry test. The students also start the foreign language course in the second semester.

By the end of their first-cycle studies, students should achieve the B2 level of language competence according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). In that connection, in the system adopted at the university, no foreign language groups are formed at the elementary level.

**OUTPUT:**

- Current database of students to divide them into correct language groups

**Tasks, duties, responsibilities**

The table below presents the tasks within the discussed activity, indicating the persons responsible as well as particular areas of duties.

**Table 2. The tasks – the persons responsible and particular areas of duties.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person responsible</th>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Area of duties</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director of the Centre for Modern Languages</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Appointing employees/teachers to develop the tests.</td>
<td>Preparing the entry tests on time. Ensuring quality according to the set standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person responsible</td>
<td>Task</td>
<td>Area of duties</td>
<td>Responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of the Centre for Modern Languages, Head of Dean’s Office</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Setting the dates for the organisational meetings/introductory classes.</td>
<td>Complete information on the mode and way in which the course is conducted, and on possibilities given by the Centre’s offer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers of the Centre for Modern Languages, Head of the Department of IT Sections and Systems</td>
<td>3 4</td>
<td>Making the test available at the Virtual University Conducting the test</td>
<td>Proper functioning of the electronic system. Keeping to the adopted procedures during the test.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deans of Faculties, Director of the Centre for Modern Languages, Head of the Department of IT Sections and Systems</td>
<td>5 6 7</td>
<td>Appointing people responsible for analysing test results. Transferring the results to the university database. Defining the thresholds.</td>
<td>Developing the algorithm. Proper functioning of the system.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own study.

Below, tasks within the other area of activity as mentioned in the introduction – concerning teaching and monitoring – will be similarly described.

B. Teaching and monitoring the teaching

Object and scope

The procedure includes didactic tasks related to teaching students at foreign language courses at vocational degree studies as specified in the study plans.

Quality objective and attainments measurement

The objective of the procedure is to conduct classes in a foreign language course according to the schedule, and to have the student achieve a level of foreign language knowledge as specified in the approved syllabi.

Attaining the aims is measured by:
- the percentage of planned classes which have been actually conducted;
- the number of students who have reached the required level of foreign language knowledge by the end of their studies;
- teachers’ availability for students (office hours);
- test and examination results.

Proceedings

Analogically to point A, below given is a brief description of steps necessary to properly perform the tasks in the process. Also in this case, the beginning phase is marked as INPUT, the end as OUTPUT.
INPUT:

- Qualifying/assigning students to the correct language groups.

Teaching means conducting classes according to the schedule of classes for each language group in each semester. Characteristic features of the process include:

- a practical system of teaching levels with clearly stated learning objectives;
- developing all four language skills together;
- regular use of motivational techniques: analysis, evaluation, description, comparison, suggestion, expressing opinions and making decisions;
- inference based on course books and authentic materials;
- a module system;
- diagnostic examinations and tests – uniform for all language groups;
- mock and final examinations;
- additional courses – compensatory and academic ones.

The didactic process is conducted according to the Regulations passed with a relevant resolution of University Senate with later amendments. The accompanying documents are:

- academic year organisation (the President’s annual decision – according to the Regulations);
- principles of choosing the foreign language (specified by the Dean based on the Regulations).

In the described process, very important is controlling, or monitoring, the correct transfer of groups to following semesters (students of the particular language groups continue their studies in the semesters following in groups according to the level defined in the entry test and to Course Cards/syllabi).

The last step is transferring the results of tests and examinations to the Virtual University system.

OUTPUT:

- Final examination.
- Optimum mastering of the material covered by the syllabus.
- Ending the course.
- Teachers settling accounts for their work: submitting protocols with grades from classes and examinations, and exemplary written works and examinations to the Teaching Department and the Dean’s Office.

Tasks, duties, responsibilities

The table below presents the tasks within the discussed activity, indicating the persons responsible as well as particular areas of duties.
Table 3. The tasks – the persons responsible and particular areas of duties.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person responsible</th>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Area of duties</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President/Vice-President for Teaching</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Appointing people responsible for academic year organisation.</td>
<td>Preparing the document on time. Passing the information to all university departments, including the Centre for Modern Languages, in due time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of the Centre for Modern Languages</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Appointing employees to prepare a plan of language bands (times to conduct foreign language classes). Transferring the plan to the team which prepares the schedule of classes.</td>
<td>Preparing the schedule of language classes on time. Preparing the staffing for the particular language groups. Monitoring the quality of the process. Logistics of teaching the foreign language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of the Department of IT Sections and Systems, Dean’s Office Head</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Appointing employees to transfer language groups to following semesters.</td>
<td>Proper functioning of the university system. Careful monitoring of transfer correctness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers of the Centre for Modern Languages, Dean’s Office – person responsible for the Centre for Modern Languages</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Entering data in the system.</td>
<td>Entering the data to the system correctly.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own study.

Due to the quickly progressing technological developments and globalisation of social and cultural life, managing the process of teaching languages and monitoring that process requires constant changes, as has been briefly stated in the introduction. Hence, since its very beginning, the teaching process has been supported with modern teaching methods and multimedia tools, and is updated on a regular basis. Starting with the academic year 2012/2013, students may use applications available not only in portable electronic devices like laptops or notebooks, but also in mobile phones. The said applications are developed by the university’s own experts in teaching foreign languages (as concerns content), and by UITM IT experts – from the technical side. In addition to that, purchased are the most up-to-date didactic publications available in the market of educational books, together with the above described applications.
For several years now, foreign language teaching has also been supported with e-learning, which is treated as an integral element of the foreign language teaching programme. The e-learning programme is the university’s own programme. The didactic and methodological concept of the programme of teaching English through e-learning has been developed by the university’s staff. The content has also been prepared by language teachers working at the university, including native speakers of English. Completed materials were submitted to the Department of IT Sections and Systems. Then their graphical side and content were prepared by the E-Learning Team, and then the courses were placed at the Blackboard platform. Students mostly work with modules at the levels of B1 (input) to C1 (output) according to CEFR (the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). However, to present the whole system’s functioning, full monitoring of students’ work by the teachers, the possibility to follow students’ progress, synchronic and asynchronic consultation, etc., in detail would require a separate study of several pages.

Examinations conducted after the first year of learning and then at the end of the foreign language course are prepared by independent examiners. In the intensive course, progress of students in their language skills is measured starting with the first semester of the course.

Perspectives

Managing the above presented process of conducting and monitoring foreign language teaching, as well as managing the changes which constantly occur in the said process, might well be said to place the university among the top universities and educational institutions in Poland. That is confirmed also by numerous national rankings. A statement may be risked to the effect that the process of changing and conducting foreign language teaching in Poland is noticed and viewed in a very positive light by European Union experts. Poland is often singled out among Central and Eastern European countries as one which, after transforming and joining the European Union, is the most consistent in implementing modern teaching methods and conducting the process of teaching foreign languages also in accordance to the statements of the Common European Framework (CEFR).

3 “Eine interessante Parallele ist derzeit in den Erfolgen kommunikativen Unterrichts in den mittel- und osteuropäischen Ländern zu beobachten, die – oftmals von der traditionellen klassischen Philologie der Neuen Sprachen tief geprägt – viel radikaler mit diesen traditionellen Zugängen zu den modernen Fremdsprachen gebrochen haben und die nach der politischen Wende zugänglichen, jahrzehntelang entwickelten und erprobten Curriculumkonzepte des Europarats im Gemeinsamen Europäischen Referenzrahmen (GER, Common European Framework; vgl. Europarat 2001 (1996); Council of Europe 2001 (1996)) im Fremdsprachenunterricht ihrer Kinder-, Jugend- und Erwachsenenbildung realisiert haben. Kommunikative Kompetenz steht in dieser epochalen Entwicklung als Metapher für die konkrete Motivation und die Befähigung zu realen Kontakten in und mit modernen Fremdsprachen… Als Beispiel kann hier Polen angeführt werden, wo dieser Prozess international auch schon vor der politischen Wende in der Zeitschrift „Glottodidactica“ verfolgt werden kann, die seit 1966 vom Institut für Angewandte Linguistik der Adam Mickiewicz Universität Poznan herausgegeben wird.“ (Edelhoff Ch., Kommunikative Kompetenz revisited, Forum Sprache 4.2010) – “An interesting parallel can nowadays be observed in the successes of communicative teaching in Central and Eastern European countries, which – oftentimes still bearing a deep imprint of the traditional classical philology of modern languages – have much more radically broken up with those traditional approaches to modern languages, and which after the political changes have been realising the ideas for curricula, developed and tested for decades, made available by the European Union within the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (cf. Council of Europe 2001 (1996)) – applying them in children, youth and adults foreign language teaching. In that epochal evolution, communicative competence stands for a metaphor of concrete motivation and the skill of maintaining real contacts with and in foreign languages… As an example, Poland may be quoted here. There, that process can be followed internationally also from before the political changes, in the paper “Glottodidactics”, published since 1966 by the Institute of Applied Linguistics of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań.”
The ongoing process of economic and political changes, as well as — if not mainly — major demographic changes occurring recently in Poland and in Europe, makes it necessary to continue seeking further improvements in managing the process of conducting and monitoring language teaching. The above thesis seems to be confirmed by an increasing number of experts and people of science, not only in publications but also at scientific conferences concerned with language teaching. The need for changes towards universities working more closely with enterprises and broadly understood labour market has been so distinctly articulated by Professor Zofia Berdychowska from the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, in the paper “Between the University and Labour Market – Towards Success Through Cooperation” („Między uczelnią i rynkiem pracy – do sukcesu przez współpracę”) that she presented at a conference on Linguistic Competence as the Basis for Professional and Social Success in Europe („Kompetencje językowe podstawą sukcesu zawodowego i społecznego w Europie”) in Warsaw (2011):

“For various professions and careers, language skills have a value that cannot be overestimated. The increased demand for language go-betweens and high-quality linguistic services is proven by current job offers and research results. For an ever larger group of employers, particularly in the BPO/SSC sector, which attends customers in many different languages, the knowledge of at least one foreign language (and English) is not only an additional asset when recruiting. It is the most important feature of a candidate’s competence profile. High linguistic competence of language study graduates does not, however, automatically mean communicative competence, including the ability to communicate in various specialist branches and professional situations which might be difficult to predict while teaching. Comparing results of surveys concerning linguistic competence of students and graduates with employers’ expectations and a review of current cooperation practices between universities and the labour market helps to identify the desired joint actions aimed at adjusting foreign language teaching to better suit the market’s needs.”

There is one major conclusion to be drawn: it is also, or maybe mainly, in managing the process of conducting and monitoring foreign language teaching that further concrete and effective action needs to be taken.

References


