

## **CURRICULUM INNOVATIONS IN LANGUAGE TEACHERS' INITIAL TRAINING PROGRAMMES**

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### **Abstract**

*The aim of this study consists in the analysis of the approaches centered on the curriculum innovations in preparing pre-service language teachers. There are explored the contemporary perspectives in language teacher education at a general level. Also, there are identified the curriculum innovations in language teacher education at a specific level, with the accent on the initial training programmes.*

**Key words:** curriculum innovations, initial training, language teachers

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### **Introduction**

Teacher's initial training represents one of the main preoccupations of educational debates focused on finding appropriate solutions for the requirements of contemporary society in close connection with the expectations of the community, of families and students. The new requirements demand new models of the process of education which didactics can provide for both teachers and students (Popovici, 2000). During the 1990s, pre-service teacher training reforms led to substantial change within teacher training institutions, as well as within schools, where an increasing proportion of practical training now takes place (Tardif, 2001). These changes have had an impact on university and school personnel, including their workload, their career prospects and orientation and in some cases, their professional identity. The initial professionalization is the most important aspect of initial training as well as the training of the individual for the teaching career (Iucu, 2007). Innovative approaches to the curriculum at the present time have shifted some of the stress from subject knowledge to the acquisition of “21st

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century skills” and “personalization” which are seen as essential both for individuals’ personal successes in learning and adult life, and for national economic development (Williamson and Payton, 2009). The new frameworks for skills and new curricular aims reinforce the need for innovative approaches to education that can contribute to social and economic renewal.

### **Contemporary perspectives in language teacher education**

The literature supporting this analysis includes current approaches that seek to conceptualise a knowledge base for language teacher education. Certain programmes have been recently recognized by language teacher education research as having enormous influence on the future development of language teachers. The general perspectives outlined on this topic are relevant for reaching a better knowledge and understanding of the evolution and representation of language teacher education in the contemporary context. The new international perspectives in language training programmes are created in correlation with the basic theories and approaches to teacher education, but they add important variables emerging from the new needs of the contemporary society and the new needs, desires and expectations of the actors (students, teachers, parents, the institutions of learning, community, decision making bodies and for a, legislators) involved in the act of education.

Kroon and Sturm (1990) analyzed the context of training mother tongue teachers in the Netherlands since 1970. Wang (2001) investigated the current status of mother tongue teaching in elementary school. The research results indicate that most teachers wish to attend teacher training courses, however these classes are insufficient. Also, most teachers have a positive attitude toward mother-tongue language teacher certification.

Roberts (1998) summarises and unites the paradigms of teacher education (Table 1) proposed by Zeichner – behaviourist, personalistic, traditional craft, inquiry (1983) and Wallace – craft model, applied science model, reflective model (1991) so as to obtain a more complex view upon this aspect. The combination of these perspectives allows the author to include in the discussion a series of models whose integrative application would lead to a larger spectrum in what manifestation within the classroom is concerned but, more importantly in our opinion to the development of multiple skills both for the teacher and for the student.

**Table 1.** *The paradigms of language teacher education* (Roberts, 1998)

<b>Paradigm</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
Behaviourist	Teacher education (TE) as mastery by imitation of scientifically validated behavioural skills (e.g. micro-teaching)
Personalistic	TE as growth of the whole person and assertion of the self (e.g. counselling-based approaches)
Traditional craft	TE as mastery of inherited craft knowledge by means of apprenticeship to a master teacher (e.g. whole school-based Initial Teacher Education)
Inquiry	TE as development in attitudes and skills-orientated enabling teachers to analyse novel pedagogic problems and arrive at contextually appropriate solutions
Craft model	The young trainee learns by imitating the expert's techniques, and by following the expert's instructions and advice
Applied science model	Professional education seen as the acquisition of empirical scientific knowledge as the basis for effective practice, a theory-into-practice approach
Reflective model	Developing expertise by direct experience and conscious reflection about that experience; enabling development by exposing assumptions that underlie routine behaviour and considering alternatives.

Randall and Thornton (2001) consider that one of the greatest challenges in foreign language teacher education is to be encountered at the very level of the implementation of theoretical knowledge about language. In this direction one very important aspect is that of performing the act of learning on the background of the contemporary context of defined by an increased dynamics in knowledge production – in this context the teacher has to find and apply the most appropriate processes of using that knowledge in classroom in order to promote successful learning. The same authors question whether teaching is purely a theoretical activity or it can be considered only a practical process. Transferring the idea in the stage of teachers' education, they also try to answer the question whether teachers' training should be concentrated only on behaviour in the classroom and teaching routines, by observing others in practice, or whether those superficial routines should be incorporated into the theoretical perspective of methodological knowledge. Hellekjaer and Simensen (2002) observed that current language teacher education in Europe varies from country to country according to certain criteria: “organizational differences; the number and types of components required in the subject-content element of teacher education; the pedagogical part of teacher education, such as the minimum level of understanding required by the subject and the minimum time initial teacher trainees are expected to spend in schools doing teaching practice; the type of institutions that are responsible for teacher education, especially with regard to the pedagogical or methodological element”.

Kelly et al. (2004) consider that foreign language teacher education in the twenty-first century should include the following elements of initial and in-service education: “a curriculum that integrates academic study and the practical experience of teaching; the flexible and modular delivery of initial and in-service education; an explicit framework for teaching practice (stage/practicum); working with a mentor and understanding the value of mentoring; experience of an intercultural and multicultural environment; participation in links with partners abroad, including visits, exchanges or information and communication technology links; a period of work or study in a country or countries where the trainee’s foreign language is spoken as native language; the opportunity to observe or participate in teaching in more than one country; a European-level evaluation framework for initial and in-service teacher education programmes, enabling accreditation and mobility; continuous improvement of teaching skills as part of in-service education; ongoing education for teacher educators; training for school-based mentors in how to mentor; close links between trainees who are being educated to teach different languages”.

Walker et al. (2005) describe the evolution of a pre-service K-12 teacher course on language-sensitive instructional practices for English language learners. In agreement with the approach promoted by Varghese and Stritikus (2005), we also need to understand how language teachers form their identities in communities, among others, in their teacher education programmes, and beyond that, in their schools and classrooms. The authors conducted a research to establish the factors that influence how teachers respond to language policy in their respective contexts and make recommendations for teacher preparation programmes in terms of inclusion of issues around language policy. As the two above quoted teachers in the respective studies, these factors include, among others, an interaction between their personal beliefs and the policy environments in which the teachers find themselves.

Hornberger (2005) proposes that a USA-Australia comparative policy analysis regarding the content and what counts as language planning at the local, state and national levels should be taken. The authors envisage that such a policy analysis would include policy texts (legislation and public reports), institutional practices and public attitudes as forms of language planning and would examine how community-heritage languages are positioned in these policy processes.

Téllez and Waxman (2005) explore the role teacher education plays in English language development (ELD) of teachers and the recently developed standards for ELD of teachers. Varghese and Stritikus (2005) formulate a recent call for language teacher education to “specifically address how teachers can respond to, change, and even create policy”. This is the exact idea that our proposed models, scales and hierarchies have as a basis in the attempt of

raising of the participants' awareness concerning the degree of involvement in the act of education and power of influencing the decision making process. The main philosophy of such a manner of thinking is that we have to take into consideration all the actors, resources, contexts and levels at which and in which education is produced with the ultimate purpose of achieving genuine, relevant communication between them.

Cross (2006) argues that the key to rethinking the knowledge base of language teacher education is less a matter of defining "what" language teachers need to know (although that remains a significant consideration, connected to forming and developing specific competencies for a certain field); instead the stress is laid on the need to educate language teachers so that they could understand and be aware of the complexity of contexts within which they are positioned as language teachers. It is this latter aspect that plays perhaps the most significant role in constructing what they further "do" in that role and, even more importantly how they do it.

According to Johnson (2009), teachers' education should try in large terms and on the long run to rationalize, apply and support such programmes for the education of teachers that would focus on learning, originating in practice and dedicated to foreign language teaching practice. Another study (Cately's, 2011) insists upon the production of evidence for stakeholders in education concerning the new roles foreign language teachers could and should play to fully meet these demands. Most importantly, they should be supported by appropriate curricular changes to develop Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) focused on competences.

Starc (2004) elaborates a model of mother-tongue learning and teaching in Slovenia. Under the influence of new didactical research in the 1980s, the condition became favourable for modernising the curriculum. Since 1998 new curricula have been implemented in which communicative approaches have become prominent in language, grammar and literature curricula and teaching.

Tulasiewicz and Adams (2005) explored mother tongue teaching in a multilingual Europe. Svobodová and Gejgušová (2006) studied the communication component in teacher training with a focus on future mother-tongue teachers of Czech language and literature. Training of mother-tongue teachers aim to enable future teachers to learn how to support pupils' development and learning processes, to create suitable conditions for achieving this goal, to manage any direct learning process, to uncover and respect the personal qualities of individuals and to lead pupils to achieve their personal best.

Cummings Hlas and Conroy (2010) identified some of the main challenges facing new language teacher educators starting from the premise that, generally, they are left to their own devices and choices. Thus, the two important aspects to consider in teacher education are connected to the methods of teaching and to the curricular content: how to prepare teachers in their discipline, and what content to include in the course.

In line with the very recent theories on teaching, Richards (2011) asserts that the language *teacher training* involves the development of a repertoire of teaching skills, acquired through observing experienced teachers and often through practice-teaching in a controlled setting using activities such as microteaching or peer-teaching. In the contemporary times of accelerating economic, cultural, social, political and educational globalization, the field of language teacher education, as any other field of education for that matter, is imperiously demanding a coherent, realistic, relevant, feasible and comprehensive framework for teacher preparation. Responding this demand, Kumaravadivelu (2011) introduces a model for transforming prospective and practicing teachers into strategic thinkers, exploratory researchers, and transformative teachers. The model which is adapted to the contemporary necessities and transformations includes five modules: Knowing, Analyzing, Recognizing, Doing, and Seeing (KARDS). With the help of this model language teachers understand:

- how to build a viable professional, personal and procedural knowledge-base;
- how to analyze learner needs, motivation and autonomy;
- how to recognize their own identities, beliefs and values;
- how to do teaching, theorizing and dialogising;
- how to see their own teaching acts from learner, teacher, and observer perspectives.

This model has the merit of offering a scaffold for other future potential holistic frameworks of teaching languages. Starting from a basic observation of what happens in the language classroom, this model enables teachers, on the one hand, to formulate the theoretical basis of what they practice and, on the other hand, to put into practice what they theorize upon. The implications derived from this literature review are presented below in the form of elaborating the profile of language teachers from the perspective of developing pedagogical competences in agreement with the recent approaches in the domain of language teacher education. We consider that it is this stage of initial training that is crucial in the shaping of future professionals in the field of education as it is in this stage that they can be regarded from the double-standing position of teacher and student, being able to offer a feed-back from these two positions.

### **Curriculum innovations in language teachers' initial training programmes**

Initial training refers to the training received before entering full-time service as a teacher at primary or secondary level. At secondary school level, the universities are generally responsible for initial teacher training. Some of the most important aspects the initial training programmes of language teachers as analyzed by specialists (Davis and Kelly, 2001, 2002) are: objectives, content, changes, needs, measures. In some cases, the Philology Faculties/ Departments of the universities take sole responsibility for training, e.g. in Bulgaria, while in others, the role is shared between the Philology Departments and the Teacher Training/ Pedagogical Departments, e.g. in Romania. In France, in addition to the universities, the IUFM (Instituts universitaires de formation des maîtres) are responsible for both secondary and primary teacher training. The teacher-trainers in these French institutions are qualified teachers and academics. In the United Kingdom, the role of secondary schools in initial teacher training has increased in importance and in a few cases, the schools are the one to devise and sanction the teacher training syllabus and the role of the university is reduced to that of consultant.

The objectives of these programmes are to give students a thorough academic background in their chosen subject(s), together with the theoretical, pedagogical knowledge and practical experience, which is meant to enable them to become effective teachers at primary or secondary levels, specialized in their particular disciplines. Increasingly, there is a trend towards developing research skills, positive, pro-active attitudes and openness to innovation, in order to improve the professional status of teaching. Theoretical teaching studies typically consist of educational theory, general and subject-related pedagogy, teaching methodology, psychology, and sometimes, research methodology. As for the practical teaching studies, they are designed after studying a series of processes, programmes in assigned schools under the guidance of an experienced teacher. This study usually involves classroom observation and planning and carrying out lessons in a real classroom situation.

In some countries, e.g. Cyprus and Latvia, the teacher training programmes are relatively new, so have not undergone any major changes. The main changes that have taken place elsewhere include more emphasis on the communicative aspects of language (e.g. in Denmark and Ireland), the introduction of intercultural dimensions (e.g. the new cultural studies component in Lithuania), and the increasing use of information technologies in teaching. The political changes have had a major impact on initial teacher training programmes in Eastern and Central European countries. Political changes have also had an effect in other countries, e.g. a new Higher Education Ordinance comes into effect in Sweden later this year. In the United Kingdom, there is

now a greater degree of accountability to outside inspection, which has impacted on the quality of teacher education programmes. Changes to the school curriculum have a direct effect on the content of initial teacher training programmes. Decentralization in many countries has given schools greater autonomy, which has led to a less theoretical, more “hands-on” approach in some cases. Current thinking is that good practice in teacher training programmes involves a balance between academic and professional competence, attention to cultural aspects, an emphasis on the creative, reflective and active aspects of teacher education, and high priority given to the use of information and communication technologies.

The Scientific Committee has identified the following priority needs in the area of initial teacher training: improve the status of language teachers; a greater practical training component in many countries; more development of specialised subject-based teaching methods; more access to the insights of applied linguistics; more courses for teachers of young language learners; more information on the training of teachers in non-native language schools. A set of measures which must be taken at institutional, regional, national, and European level is established in strong connection with the needs of language teachers from initial training programmes (Table 2).

**Table 2.** *Measures correlated with needs of language teachers from initial training programmes*

Level	Measures
Institutional/ regional level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- better programme evaluation;</li> <li>- more consultation between school authorities and the institutions;</li> <li>- ensuring the compulsory nature of applied linguistic subjects relevant to language learning and teaching;</li> <li>- widening of curriculum to include other languages;</li> <li>- introducing courses focusing on teaching foreign languages to young learners;</li> <li>- using educational technology to develop oral competencies, particularly for primary trainees</li> </ul>
National level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- urgent action is needed and politicians should commit themselves to this;</li> <li>- national bodies should ensure that various regulations cohere and reflect multi-cultural aspects;</li> <li>- there should be a period of study abroad for all secondary language trainee-teachers;</li> <li>- more extensive funding for language studies, particularly in primary teacher training and providing schools with new technologies;</li> <li>- more competitive wages for teachers;</li> <li>- foreign language learning at an earlier stage of schooling should be encouraged</li> </ul>
European level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- increased funding for time abroad (outside Socrates programme)</li> </ul>



Referring to curriculum innovation at the level of initial training programmes for language teachers, there are relevant developments and contributions. These new directions are presented from three perspectives: a) educational practice; b) theoretical perspective; c) research status.

a) From the perspective of *educational practice*, the curriculum innovation is offered by the good practice examples of modern courses for initial training teachers. In language teacher education, the course comprised three components: lectures, applied practice sessions, which involved the reflective analysis of existing materials and the practice in developing lesson plans, and micro-teaching workshops. There are different examples which demonstrate how “creative approaches to training in initial teacher education support the development of a suitably qualified workforce to meet the growing demand for modern language teachers” (OFSTED, 2012). There are also various educational projects centered on the development of innovations in this field. Newby et al. (2005) aimed to develop a core portfolio of competences, knowledge, and values required by language teachers which can be used as a tool for reflection by students during their initial teacher education. On the one hand, “the portfolio is intended primarily as a resource for initial teacher education, but it will also serve as a tool to assist curriculum development and course planning and also as an awareness-raising instrument during in-service teacher education”.

b) From the *theoretical perspective*, following the analysis of the reference literature, there are identified approaches focused on the curriculum development of initial training programmes of language teachers. Roberts (1998) introduced clear criteria to design curriculum of initial language teacher education. Two issues are taken in consideration: the effect of pre-existing factors on design choices (Intake: numbers, full/ part-time involvement, characteristics, course duration and structure) and the principle of coherence, the integration between different course components. The author formulates a set of implications for initial teacher education design of language teachers starting from the findings of reference literature (Table 3).

Darling-Hammon (1999) highlights that an important first concern in the examination of quality indicators in language teaching may be found in the assessment procedures employed during initial teacher training, which are seen as potentially determining the quality of the future teacher. Using national technology goals and standards, and institutional factors as a framework, Wildner (1999) describes the planning process and the initial phases of the implementation of a *model of technology* integration into the foreign language pre-service teacher education program for K-12 teachers. AFMLTA Professional Standards for Accomplished Teachers of Languages and Cultures (2005) provided the main *framework of pre-service language teachers* which have used to “measure” and frame their progress.

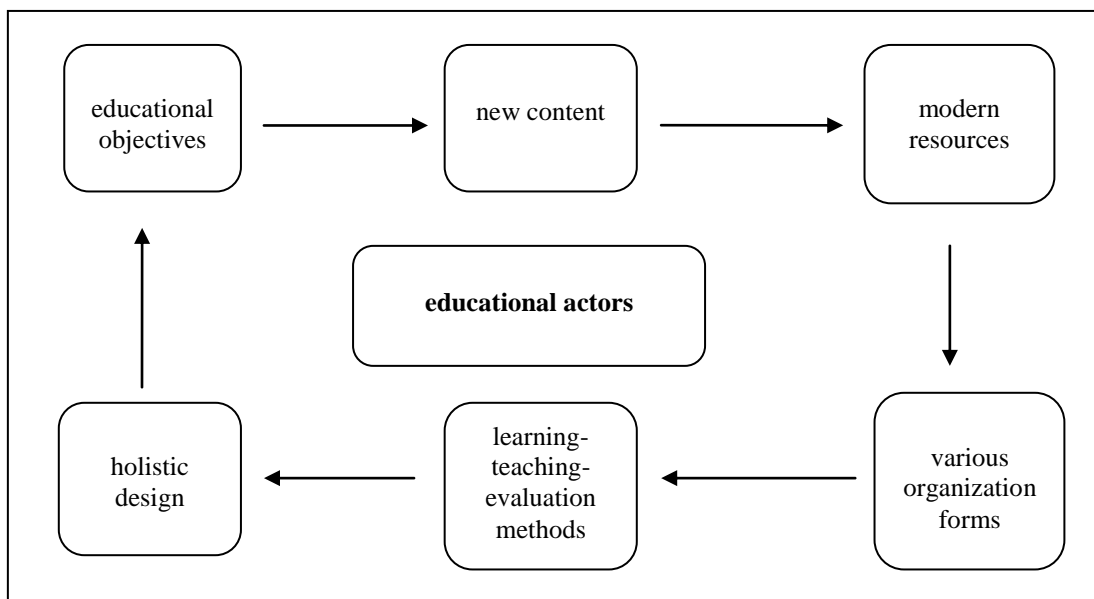
**Table 3.** *Implications for initial teacher education design*

<b>Finding</b>	<b>Implications for initial teacher education design</b>
Concern with survival	- Provide school-based practice
Tensions with school culture	- Develop awareness of school conditions as they are; - Provide experience of more than one school; - Set school culture analysis tasks.
Lack of validity in the ITE curriculum	- ITE programme designed with input from schools; - Need for formative feedback from schools on programme design
Pedagogic content knowledge	- Adequate classroom experience and responsibility for planning and teaching lesson sequences; - Materials analysis tasks focusing on pedagogic grammar; - Coherence between courses on language description and pedagogy.
Lack of power in the system	- Do not expect student teachers to act as agents of innovation.
'Marginal' teachers	- Improve selection; - Give training in practical skills.

The component elements are: educational theory and practice, language and culture, language pedagogy, ethics and responsibility, professional relationships, awareness of wider context, advocacy, and personal characteristics. Garrido and Alvarez (2006) introduce an innovative perspective in initial teacher education by the integration in curriculum of the *application of knowledge of the subject and the management of the teaching and learning process* (e.g., catering for students' linguistic needs, class management, assessment and recording of progress). Wright (2010) reviews recent accounts of research and practice in initial teacher preparation programmes for second language (L2) teachers – or second language teacher education (SLTE). The new agenda for second language teacher education (SLTE), drawn together by the reconceptualised knowledge base, has a clear consequence for the SLTE curriculum in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century in terms of: goal, learning experiences, evaluation. Opinions seem to collectively draw upon the necessity of encouraging the formation of a new of type of teachers – the goal-producing reflective teacher. Teachers belonging to this category, in a process which involves socio-cognitive demands, have to introspect and collaborate with others, and have to acknowledge previous learning and life experience as a starting point for new learning. A focus on the application of curriculum on learning experiences should be equivalent with the provision of a variety of learning experiences in institutionally based sessions and in real schools and classrooms, with an emphasis on awareness-raising, collaborative learning, reflection and learning from experience. The direction followed is that making use of and involving the participants' knowledge, skills, expertise and experience to the fullest, with a special focus on individual features and thinking, but also on combining perspectives, subjects, methods, and teaching styles. At the level of evaluation, what should be militated for is the creation of means of

evaluating personal and professional learning, and long-term, research-based follow-up of successful graduates of SLTE programmes. The aim is that of observing the educational phenomena on a broader time frame and of using the experience of previous graduates so as to improve any current state of facts. Baffoka (2011) presents a case for change and proposes innovation in initial English language teacher education (IELTE) programmes of the contemporary dynamically developing world. In context, as the author states, the major problem in most initial teacher education programmes is a weak programme content and the actual training process. More explicitly, firstly, the content lacks a series of basic courses necessary for effective language teaching, and, secondly, the training approach does not improve deep learning and does not achieve genuine transfer of training-room learning into the context of real classroom teaching. The major negative result consists in the lack of effectiveness of these programmes of initial training as demonstrated by prospective teacher trainees' low proficiency and low teaching competence on graduation. The author proposes a revised programme in terms of content and methodology as a way necessary course of action towards achieving an effective initial teacher education programme.

In our opinion, the key components of an innovative curriculum for initial language teacher education are the following (Figure 1): educational actors involved, clear educational objectives, new content, innovative resources, various organization forms, modern methods of learning-teaching-evaluation, holistic design of educational activities.



**Figure 1.** *The key components of an innovative curriculum for initial language teacher education*

c) Regarding the *current research* status, we have observed and can assess that there are new studies in this domain which demonstrate the interest of developing the curriculum in initial training programmes of language teachers, due to the perceived necessity of changing the obsolete models and need to adapt them to the transformed contemporary individual and society. Lawes (2002) developed a pilot empirical research to suggest that a more academic, theoretically-orientated preparation for teaching is in the best interests of teachers and the teaching profession as a whole. The author argues that “Reflective Practice” is an insufficient basis for teacher professional development in the sense that it does not provide for the transformation of subjective experience. Abrahão and Helena (2006) achieved an interpretive research through which they analyzed how language student-teachers construct their knowledge about language teaching and learning during pre-service teacher education. The study performs an analysis of the degree to which, firstly, “language teachers’ knowledge construction or, rather, beliefs, assumptions” is transferred into the education programme, but also, secondly, how all these together with knowledge brought by student-teachers are introduced into their education programme. The authors continue by observing how, thirdly, these beliefs, assumptions and knowledge interact with the theoretical and practical content which are focused on the education programme. Ultimately, the study observes how all of the three above mentioned kinds of knowledge are manifested in the practice and produced during this stage.

The importance of the aspect is also highlighted by another recent study (Banegas, 2009) in which the author investigates the perceptions of a group of teachers regarding the initial programmes they completed in terms of positive and negative aspects, the impact in their professional life and the modalities of improvement the programmes. Ushioda et al. (2010) concentrated on another vital aspect of the initial training stage: the role of teacher-learner autonomy in initial language teacher education. The authors of this study consider that a key curriculum design issue is how to help students develop as learners of teaching through and beyond their formal academic studies.

Kourieos Angelidou (2011) conduct a research to offer prospective and practising primary teachers a “voice” to express their own views regarding the content and teaching approach to a potential English Language Teaching module within teacher education curricula. The findings have highlighted the importance of theory and practice, showing evidence that both are necessary in order to avoid fragmented language teaching. The study suggests, therefore, that providing student teachers with meaningful opportunities to form links between the taught theory and its practical application is a fundamental basis for a more holistic teacher approach to teacher

education. Hismanoglu (2012) investigated whether the new language teacher training curriculum provides an efficient information and communication technologies training or not through both a quantitative and a partially qualitative research methodology. The results highlight that the prospective teachers having five ICT-related courses displayed reasonably better attitudes in comparison to those not completing this training period.

### **Acknowledgements**

This research was financially supported by the Executive Unit for Financing Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation (Grant TE 282, NO. 58 “INOVACOM – Curricular innovations for the development of the pedagogical competences of teachers of Romanian Language and communication through initial training programs for teachers”).

### **Conclusion**

The richness of studies published in the last decade (with a larger concentration in the last three years) are a strong enough proof that curricular innovations in the initial training programme of language teachers are in a continuous process of updating and restructuring to the needs of students and professional integration requirements. More and more countries are borrowing models of reform from countries which have implemented such models successfully so as to achieve an alignment to a unitary type of education in initial training stages for individuals who would thus be able to be inserted not only a national labour market, but on an European (if not global) labour market.

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