



Council of Europe
Language Policy Unit
DGII – Education Department
www.coe.int/lang-migrants

Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants



Language Policy
Politiques linguistiques

Language needs

The concept of language needs was present in the Council of Europe's first works, in particular those by R Richterich (A model for the definition of language needs of adults learning a modern language, 1972) and then by R Richterich and J-L Chancerel (Identifying the needs of adults learning a foreign language, 1980).

The concept of language needs

This term refers to the linguistic resources which learners need in order successfully to cope with the forms of communication in which they are going to be involved in the short or medium term. These needs (and hence these communication situations) are identified as part of a specific process which consists of gathering together the information required to assess what uses will actually be made of the language learnt and thereby determine what types of content should be taught on a priority basis. This process necessarily is the starting point for the development of language programmes intended for learners like adults who are not covered by school education. It is particularly relevant for adult migrants who have to cope in a pressing manner, from the moment of their arrival and on a daily basis, with exchanges in a language of which they have limited or no knowledge. It must lead to the development of tailor-made courses, which are the only means of meeting the expectations of the relevant groups. However, it should not be reduced to a technique for specialists, as the needs cannot be defined without input from those concerned or indeed on their behalf.

Analysis of language needs

In order to specify the language needs of a particular group which is regarded as homogeneous on the basis of certain aspects, use is made of data such as information questionnaires for learners, interviews with them and with native speakers in contact with them, samples of their spoken and written production and observations of language activities which take place in the context(s) concerned... This approach is particularly vital if the needs to be identified concern professional activities: what competences for a given job or professional assignment? The information is gathered by means of external observations (which may be described as "objective") or through the feelings of those concerned (subjective analysis), the two being complementary. Approaches of this kind may be cumbersome and expensive and the findings need to be properly processed afterwards to form the elements of a programme (for instance, which categories for analysing forms of communication or frequent "mistakes"?). Transition from the survey to the programme stage is not automatic.

Needs and expectations

Several players are involved in the process of developing courses for adults and adult migrants and they do not necessarily have the same views about the aims or the methods of the teaching. If the promoters of a language course are business managers, they may wish to obtain immediate, practical results; for their part,

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teachers may give precedence to the teaching methodologies which they believe are effective (communicative approach, task-based approach...); while learners often approach their needs from the angle of their previous experience of education/learning and their educational culture. These varied expectations involving that many different interpretations of the language needs which have to be satisfied require negotiation so that the objective and subjective needs are harmonised. Adult migrants must not be excluded from the relevant exchanges.

JCB

Related Resources

- *Learning the language of the host country for professional purposes*, 2012, Claire Extramiana
- *Language learning, teaching and assessment and the integration of adult immigrants. The importance of needs analysis*, 2008 - Piet van Avermaet & Sara Gysen
- *Living together in diversity - Linguistic integration in Flanders*, 2008 - Reinhilde Pulinx