

## Report of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Symposium of the Schools of Foreign Languages in the Aegean Region

Pınar GÜZEL GÜRBÜZ\*, Ali CEYLAN, Süheyla HEREK, Saffet DİNÇER, Serap DURMUŞ, Melike ÇELİKER, Çakır Ceylin YAVUZ ESKİCİOĞLU, Sibel ÇALIŞKAN, Sezin KANAAT

### Abstract

It is just as vital to disseminate scientific knowledge to all parties involved in teaching foreign languages as it is to produce it methodically. Furthermore, disseminating successful methods for teaching English is just as important as publishing the theoretical conclusions of pertinent studies in the area. Consequently, in the current setting, scientific gatherings like symposiums are essential for identifying the advantages and disadvantages of teaching strategies used by each participating institution. The current symposium, one of the rare initiatives and the first in Türkiye's Aegean Region, gathered together universities that share many standards but use distinct approaches to achieve the same or similar learning objectives. The symposium's concurrent sessions provided insight into best practices. Among the subjects covered in the concurrent sessions were internationalization, modular system, AI practices and online teaching, and professional development. In summary, it was determined that while every institution possessed examples of excellent English language teaching techniques, they also all had a great deal to learn from one another and implement for future growth.

### Keywords

Symposium  
School of Foreign Languages  
Artificial Intelligence  
Internationalisation  
Modular System  
Professional Development

Cite as: Güzel Gürbüz, P., Ceylan, A., Herek, S., Dinçer, S., Durmuş, S., Çeliker, M., Yavuz Eskicioğlu, Ç. C., Çalışkan, S., & Kanaat, S. (2023). Report of the 2nd Symposium of the Schools of Foreign Languages in the Aegean Region. *Manisa Celal Bayar University International Journal of English Language Studies*. 2(1), 1-9.  
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10435745>

## Introduction

Conferences, congresses, and symposiums are examples of scientific and academic gatherings that are recognized to effectively disseminate scientific knowledge because they allow stakeholders to engage in the exchange of knowledge and collaboration. Furthermore, these kinds of gatherings offer priceless chances for individuals with related interests or fields of study to unite and form a shared practice and research community. Therefore, the School of Foreign Languages at Manisa Celal Bayar University (MCBU) aimed to bridge the gaps between the academicians of the foreign language schools at different universities in the Aegean Region of Türkiye by bringing them together. Its specific goals were to exchange best practices in the field of teaching foreign languages, address important concerns in the field, and offer answers to challenges and experiences.

## Concurrent Session Reports

### Internationalisation: Priorities, Processes and Planning

Over the last thirty years, a dynamic combination of academic, political, economic, and socio-cultural rationales and interests have propelled the emergence of what is known as the "internationalization of higher education" as a concept and policy (Witt, 2021). According to Jones and de Wit (2012), the internationalization of higher education was mostly viewed through the lens of a westernized, primarily English-speaking paradigm. The Western world has received the majority of academic and popular attention about internationalization in higher education throughout the previous few decades. New perspectives from people whose voices don't typically have a significant representation in the discourse are vital as more and more countries and types of institutions worldwide engage in the process of internationalization (De Wit, 2021). We also "need to learn from other non-western national and cultural contexts-to understand the full extent of internationalisation, as a phenomenon and what we can learn from each other in order to benefit students, employers and nations" (Jones and de Wit, 2012, p. 50). Global talent competition, the increasing complexity of cross-border activities, branch campuses, and the development of global professionals and citizens are aspects of the world that are becoming increasingly important, as noted by Jones and de Wit (forthcoming). For those who are able and willing to take advantage of them, the more complicated global mobility flows present new opportunities. Internationalization debate has been dominated by the West, but non-Western nations are starting to emerge as major participants. In today's globalised world, employers are expecting graduates with cross-cultural competency—ideally with foreign experience—to fulfil ever-higher standards.

This session consists of three parts: Serap Durmuş, as the head of the international projects unit of MCBU SFL, will explain the MCBU School of Foreign Languages' internationalization journey, including its priorities, procedures, and planning period; Kiara Halliday from the Erasmus Office of the Limerick University will present the University's internationalization opportunities and activities; and group work will allow participants from each participating institution to share their international experiences.

By incorporating a number of foreign components into teaching, research, and campus life, internationalization can be accomplished. This can be done through staff mobility, exchange

programs, international courses, and, of course, relationships with other institutions across the globe. Global competency, cultural awareness, diversity and inclusivity, global reputation, addressing global issues, and economic impact are the priorities of internationalization. Faculty and students who have experienced internationalization are better prepared to succeed in a globalized labor market.

Additionally, it encourages tolerance and cross-cultural awareness in this diverse yet linked world. Bringing in foreign instructors and students fosters a vibrant, inclusive, and diverse academic community. A university's global standing is enhanced through internationalization, which draws top students and funding. Through international collaborations and research, universities are also essential in tackling global concerns like social justice, health crises, and climate change. Drawing in foreign students brings in money for the university and boosts the local economy.

A university's internationalization process entails taking a methodical and planned approach to increasing its global engagement. Usually, it entails the following actions:

1. Planning and Assessment: The first step is to evaluate the university's present overseas initiatives, advantages, and disadvantages.
2. Team: Establishing a cohesive team is essential after the assessment is finished. People who are enthusiastic about working together harmoniously and who are prepared to put in a lot of effort should make up this team.
3. Network: Collaboration and cooperation require a network.
4. The Erasmus+ Programme Guide: It is necessary to comprehend the Erasmus+ Programme Guide. It offers a thorough rundown of all the opportunities that the program supports.

In the second part of the session, Keira Halliday gave a comprehensive presentation about the Erasmus projects coordinated by the Limerick University.

The final part of the session consisted of group work. Participants from each participating institution shared their international experiences and challenges they met, in groups. Each group's spokesperson provided a brief summary of the discussions within the group. Future collaborations were planned between the institutions.

## **Modular System**

In recent years, many universities around the world, especially for English Language Learning, have been trying to find different systems so as to enhance the skill of language acquisition and the way to use it outside the classroom. By doing so, the quality of education has been considered as the primary step of a system. Thus, as an alternative model to semester-based model, which is called modular system, is mainly started to be considered by many educational institutions (Jerry et al., 1972). In the modular system, a new model of learning is improved and flexibility prevails and this new model enhances student-centered learning system. (Orstein, 1992). Hence, it can be concluded that especially in language learning it can be a good alternative. Many universities apply modular system based on their own needs and facilities. The number of students and teachers are also another key factor to form and conduct this modular system. Depending on this data, universities determine how many weeks of lesson can be done and what the assessment criteria should be.

### *Objectives of the Session*

This session about “Modular System at English Preparatory Programs” was held to engage in a dialogue about modular system. Sharing experiences and best practises were also discussed. During the session, the pros and cons of the modular system were mainly mentioned. All the participants from different universities, both state or private universities, shared different educational structures in the preparatory programs.

### *Method of the session*

The method used in the session was mostly group discussion method. By implementing question-answer and discussing main ideas enriched the group discussion. After each group discussion part, all ideas and discussed point were combined and presented both by the session presenter and speaker of the group.

### *Outcomes and Findings*

The main outcome of the session was that the modular system is considered to be ideal and beneficial by the instructors provided that the number of students is viable and the number of instructors in the institution is sufficient to maintain the system efficiently. One of the benefits that were discussed about the establishment of the modular system includes student and instructor motivation, as classes, students, instructors and subjects are refreshed in each level. Another benefit that was discussed is that the modular system is more reliable in acquiring the learning outcome properly for each level compared to semester-based systems. On the other hand, considering the ratio between the number of students and the number of instructors in some instutions, the challenges that the modular system presented were also discussed in the session. One of the challenges mentioned by the majority was the lack of solutions that can be produced for repeating students. This poses a challenge in that there are many points to consider about the right course of action for the repeating students, such as deciding whether they are going to study different materials or the previous materials, whether they are going to be separated from the new students in their level or if they are going to be blended with the new students. It was also mentioned that the solutions to these challenges might not be applicable or practical for some institutions, while other institutions might be more flexible in applying various solutions. Another challenge that was mentioned is the pacing of the curriculum in a limited time frame, especially for the beginner levels, as some institutions have 4 quarters in an academic year which requires the curriculum to be completed in a shorter period of time. Some institutions explained that they have solved this challenge by implementing 3 quarters in an academic year, which allows them to complete their curriculum in an adequate amount of time.

### *Discussion and Recommendations*

During the group discussion, the members of the audience were divided into three groups in order to discuss curriculum design, assessment methods and student progress in the modular system. About the curriculum design in the modular system, it was pointed out that state and foundation universities might face different challenges in creating curriculums, these challenges include the limited number of instructors, and the difficulty of creating new materials and syllabi for multiple levels. In the assessment methods discussion, while the main advantage of the modular system was considered to be starting a new level freshly, the biggest challenge was decided to be the placement exams for the modular system, since sometimes students are not placed in the correct level as they might miss the exam or skip questions. As

for student progress tracking, while the learning outcome was pointed out to be more reliable in the modular system, the challenges posed by the number of students in the system, as well as the number of repeat students were also discussed. At the end of the session, the main recommendation for institutions who are thinking of transitioning to a modular system was that the exit level should be considered carefully according to the number of students studying in the institution as upper-intermediate level might pose more challenges in certain cases.

## AI in Language Learning and Teaching

### *Overview*

This session aimed to explore the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the landscape of language learning and teaching, with a specific focus on gathering insights from English language teachers across universities.

### *Background*

- **Beijing Consensus on Artificial Intelligence and Education:** The "Beijing Consensus on Artificial Intelligence and Education" is an outcome document of the International Conference on Artificial Intelligence and Education, held in Beijing in May 2019. It addresses the rapid evolution of AI and its profound impact on societies, economies, and education systems. The document emphasizes the need for planning education policies in the AI era, focusing on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education. It stresses the importance of AI being human-centered, ethical, and transparent, highlighting the need for AI to be used in a manner that enhances human capacities and upholds human rights.
- **A Review on Artificial Intelligence in Education:** It details the role of AI in transforming educational practices. It likely covers various aspects of AI applications in learning and teaching, evaluating the benefits and challenges of AI integration in education, and proposing strategies for effectively implementing AI technologies.

Both documents provide essential context and frameworks for understanding the integration of AI in educational settings, focusing on policy, ethical considerations, and practical applications.

### *Discussion Highlights*

1. **Advantages of AI in Language Learning:**
  - AI's utility in preparing daily plans, reading tasks, and quizzes.
  - Enhanced personalization and efficiency in language learning.
2. **Challenges in Integrating AI into Current Educational Systems:**
  - **Main Barriers:** Financial constraints in schools, info security concerns, and the reliability of AI systems.
  - **Challenges for Students:** A lack of understanding in using AI for language acquisition. Instances of using AI for cheating, indicating a need for ethical guidelines.

- **Challenges for Teachers:** Issues with the engaging quality of AI-created content.
  - **Teacher and Student Training:** Both educators and students face challenges in efficiently using AI, highlighting a gap in digital literacy.
  - **Technological Infrastructure:** Many schools lack the necessary infrastructure for effective AI integration.
  - **Solutions:** Delivering outsourced AI training, allocating budgets for AI, and enhancing technological infrastructure in schools.
2. **Impact of AI on Student Engagement and Motivation:**
- **Influence on Engagement:** AI's impact varies based on usage; gamification and interactive tools can be effective if used appropriately.
  - **Downsides:** Over-reliance on AI might lead to negative outcomes if not balanced with traditional teaching methods.
  - **Effective Tools:** Apps like Jeopardy, Quizlet, and Kahoot can boost engagement if students have equal access.
  - **Potential Risks:** Excessive use of AI might overwhelm or distract students.
3. **The Future of AI in Education:**
- **Prospects:** AI is seen as a ubiquitous tool in the future, akin to Google, becoming a standard part of the educational toolkit.
  - **Limitations:** Concerns about the need for real human contact in education and skepticism about significant further advancements in AI's role.
  - **Consensus and Future Direction:** Recognition of AI's inevitable role in language classrooms. A shared opinion on the necessity for educators to develop skills to adapt to AI-induced changes in the educational landscape.

### *Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Actions*

- **Enhanced Training:** Address the need for comprehensive training programs for educators to boost digital competency and effective AI integration.
- **Curriculum Development:** Update language learning curricula to include ethical use and understanding of AI tools.
- **Ongoing Research:** Encourage continued exploration of AI's role in language education, focusing on creating engaging, ethically sound content.
- **Addressing Financial and Infrastructure Challenges:** Encourage administrations to prioritize budget allocation for AI and technological upgrades.
- **Balancing AI with Traditional Methods:** Emphasize the importance of using AI as a complementary tool rather than a complete substitute for traditional teaching.
- **Preparing for the Future:** Acknowledge the inevitability of AI in education while maintaining the crucial role of human interaction and teacher presence.

### *Participant Feedback*

Feedback from participants was quite positive, with appreciation for the balanced view of AI's potential and pitfalls in education. Many expressed a desire for more in-depth discussions and hands-on workshops in future sessions.

### *Final Thoughts*

The session concluded with an acknowledgment of AI's transformative potential in language education, underscoring the importance of preparing both educators and students for a future where AI is an integral part of the educational landscape. The need for balanced, ethical, and well-supported integration of AI in language learning was emphasized as vital to its success.

### **Professional Development: Practises, Appraisal and Mentoring**

Teachers of English play an essential role in developing language competence of English learners. Therefore, it is important that teachers of English in a TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) setting to engage in professional development activities as continuous professional development will make it possible for them to match their teaching goals with the learners' needs. (Diaz&Maggioli 2003)

The Professional Development (PD) session of the symposium aimed at highlighting the meaning of Professional Development for TEFL instructors and focused on practices, appraisal methods, and the role of mentoring. The discussion addressed the definition and the theoretical background of PD, common misconceptions about it, and specific examples from participant universities. The appraisal processes were also discussed at the session. While the symposium session on professional development provided valuable insights, the practices shared by the participant universities might not be universally applicable due to the various needs and challenges faced by instructors in different regions or institutions.

Professional Development for teachers of English language can be defined as a never-ending learning platform for teachers as well as administrators and students. The professional development practices help teachers revisit their beliefs about the profession, take steps out of their comfort zone, discover their own limits and share their knowledge and skills with their colleagues.

The theoretical part of the session pointed out that all the professional development practices carried out are essentially for the sake of students. The main aim is to improve teaching practices to have better outcomes for the students and therefore the terms "Optimizing Student Learning" or "Enhancing and Empowering Student Learning" were suggested as a new alternative to the term "Professional Development".

The common misconceptions among instructors were also addressed at the session. Regarding PD only as a job evaluation or associating the Professional Development Units at institutions exclusively with observations were the major misconceptions making the teachers not willing to engage in PD activities. The session emphasised the voluntary nature of PD activities for the personal development of instructors as opposed to the common view that they are mandatory practices.

Identifying the needs of instructors and students is a prerequisite for Professional Development practices at an institution. While teachers themselves can identify their own needs, managers can also guide them to do so. Furthermore, student surveys, voluntary reflection groups and most importantly, classroom observations can help identify the professional development needs of teachers and students.

Mentoring practices at different institutions were also discussed. Regular observations are carried out especially for the inexperienced teachers and the post-observation feedback is valuable as it identifies the needs, focuses on the problems and their possible solutions. Exposing new teachers to exemplary models through peer observation and building teams that collaborate were also other useful mentoring practices shared at the session.

Quality should be prioritized over quantity in the appraisal process. Although yearly contracts at foundation universities may seem like the end goal of appraisal, it shouldn't be seen as a tool to decide whether to keep the instructor or not. Its final goal is accreditation and therefore there needs to be standards in practice for both state and foundation universities. A process-oriented approach should be adopted and development should be made visible to others.

In summary, the symposium's Professional Development session highlighted the role of instructors on their students' learning process, making the continuous development a crucial aspect of language teaching. The session explored professional development practices at participant institutions, appraisal methods, and mentoring practices. It defined professional development as a continuous learning platform, encouraging instructors to revisit their beliefs, collaborate, and share their knowledge. Valuable insights were shared at the session and the need for adaptability across different institutions was emphasized. The theoretical part focused on students as the end goal of professional development. The session also emphasized the voluntary nature of Professional Development and the necessity to establish a culture of Professional Development within institutions, which will take time.

## References

- Alexander G. Shchitova, Olga G. Shchitovaa, Daria A. Shchitovab, Polina Stasinskac, Doan T.C. Chieua. (2015). Features of the Learning Modular System Moodle Use in Teaching the Russian Language to Russian and Foreign Students at an Institution of Higher Education. (Electronic version). URL: [https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042815059686?ref=cra\\_js\\_challenge&fr=RR-1](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042815059686?ref=cra_js_challenge&fr=RR-1).
- Cristobal M. Ambayon (2020). Modular-Based Approach and Students' Achievement in Literature. (Electronic version) URL: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343684458\\_Modular-Based\\_Approach\\_and\\_Students%27\\_Achievement\\_in\\_Literature](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343684458_Modular-Based_Approach_and_Students%27_Achievement_in_Literature).
- De Wit, Hans, and Altbach, P. (2021). Internationalization in higher education: Global trends and recommendations for its future. *Policy Reviews in Higher Education*, 5(1), 28–46.
- Diaz-Maggioli, G. (2003). Professional development for language teachers. *Eric Digest*, 3(3), 1-4.



- Jerry, W., Robinson, Jr., & Crittenden, W.B. (1972). Learning Modules: A Concept for Extension Educators? *Journal of Extension: Winter*. (Electronic version). URL: <http://www.joe.org/joe/1972winter/1972-4-a3.pdf>
- Jones, Elspeth, and de Wit, H. (2012). Globalization of internationalization: Thematic and regional reflections on a traditional concept. *AUDEM: The International Journal of Higher Education and Democracy*, 3, 35–54, 2012. <https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/163/article/500242/pdf>
- Orstein, A. C. (1992). *Strategies for effective teaching*. Manila, Philippines: Harper Collins Publisher, Inc.

### Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the Journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (CC BY-NC-ND) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).