



The current situation and prospects for German as a foreign and technical language at universities of applied sciences in Serbia

Ana Cvetković^{*,a}, Marija Jović^a

^aToplica Academy of Applied Studies, Department of Medical Studies Prokuplje, Serbia

Article info

Professional paper

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.46793/ICEMIT23.355C>

UDC/ UDK:

378.4::811.112.2'243(497.11)

Abstract

The five main language policy issues at EU level were conceived in the Barcelona target as conclusions of the Council of Europe on foreign language teaching: (1) foreign language canon; (2) quality of foreign language teaching with a focus on the teachers and their stay abroad; (3) bilingual education as a teaching concept; (4) the expected level of achievement in the foreign language; (5) language support for migrant learners (European Commission, 2017a; European Commission, 2017b; European Commission, 2017c: 5-8). The objective of Barcelona is to support foreign language teaching, and thus it could represent a basis for the legal regulations in the field of language policy in the broader sense of foreign language teaching and also specifically of technical language teaching. The European Commission supports multilingualism at various levels, such as at the legal level, language policy guidelines and with concrete proposals for the adequate training and further education of teachers and also for the entire teaching process. The desired multilingualism is mostly realized through English lessons, which is the result of the fact that the EU initiatives and recommendations are often not directly and fully applied at the national level. In this lecture, the current situation of the teaching practice of technical language teaching in the German language at universities of applied sciences in Serbia will be presented. Finally, recommendations are made for the implementation of technical language classes in Serbia. The aim of the work is to present the current problems and challenges of teaching the technical language German in Serbia.


Keywords: education system in Serbia, technical language German, German as a technical language, German as a foreign language lesson, tertiary education

1. Introduction

Foreign languages have played a very important role in secondary vocational schools since their inception (Vujović, 2018: 201). Vujović (2018) states that in the educational secondary professional profiles in which a foreign language has the status of a compulsory subject, the same is classified among the professional subjects, while the other foreign language is most often offered as an elective. In four-year secondary vocational school's compulsory, it is a foreign language (usually English) with a different set of classes. Students generally have two first-language classes per week (trade, tourism and hospitality and economics, while law and administration have three lessons per week). In three-year schools, a foreign language is taught for two or three academic years. Students of some three-year schools have two classes per week of compulsory foreign language in all three years. There are also those schools that still perform classes as they did within the survey that was completed in 2011/12 – two lessons a week is a foreign language compulsory subject in the first two grades, while in the third grade it is possible to choose it as an elective subject and learn one lesson per week. There are also those three-year vocational schools that work according to the new curriculum and have two classes of compulsory foreign language in the first two years, and in the third year they offer it as an elective subject with two classes per week. Second foreign language is encountered in vocational high schools in the fields of tourism and hospitality, traffic, culture, art and public information. Foreign languages also appear in these schools as elective and optional subjects, which are mainly Japanese and Chinese (ibidem 149).

* Corresponding author

E-mail address: aidnimpasic@yahoo.com

This is an open access paper under the license 

2. Foreign language teaching in the republic of Serbia

Based on the results collected for the 2018/19 school year, it can be noticed that in secondary education in the Republic of Serbia, English is the most represented first foreign language (95%), followed by German (2%), then Russian (about 2%), French (1%), Italian (0% - 365 students) and Spanish (0% - 93 students). As a second foreign language in secondary education, German is the most represented (44%), followed by French (29%), Russian (15%), Italian (6%), English (4%) and Spanish (2%).

According to the data provided by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (Dissemination and Public Relations Division) in June 2023, at the end of the 2021/22 school year, **133,250** elementary school students in **739** regular elementary schools were learning German. In the same school year, **40,868** students were learning German in **256** regular high schools.

German was taught as a second foreign language in **708** regular elementary schools, **96** high schools, **71** vocational high schools, and **36** mixed high schools (gymnasium-vocational).

Vujović (2018) states that the study of foreign languages, German and French, for professional purposes in our higher education has been present since the founding of the Great School in 1808 and the Lyceum in 1838 (except at the then University of Belgrade, where they were studied as a major). These two languages remain the most represented in our non-philological faculties and higher schools until the end of World War II, when Russian and English took over. At the beginning of this century, foreign language teaching in vocational faculties is increasingly perceived as an additional and unnecessary burden on students, they are mostly considered general education rather than professional subjects, so general foreign language teaching is mainly conducted. Foreign languages are increasingly offered as elective subjects, together with computer science or other skills (ibidem 150-154). Đorović (2014) states that foreign language teaching at university level aims to acquire knowledge of the language being studied. By becoming proficient in following professional and scientific literature in a foreign language, students expand their professional knowledge, and ideally, thanks to the cooperation between teachers of professional subjects and foreign language teachers, they achieve an interdisciplinary approach. By learning and working on texts related to the subject matter of professional subjects in the best possible way, they acquire parallel professional and linguistic knowledge. Finally, students also acquire knowledge about countries where the given foreign language is spoken and their cultures, thus developing intercultural competence (ibidem 257).

Krželj (2014) describes the current situation of teaching German as a technical language at higher education institutions in Serbia. The abolition of German as a technical language at non-philological faculties is not the only negative trend that relates to the teaching of German. In recent decades, there has been a tendency to reduce the number of students who decide to continue learning German as compared to the number of students who learned German during their previous education. In 2007, a group of university professors from German universities founded the “Working Group for German as a Language of Science”, which advocates for establishing German as a language of science in the fields of technical and natural sciences and medicine, since the process of English language domination in these disciplines is most advanced. In 2009, leading institutions that implicitly or explicitly deal with language policy will support efforts to return German as a language of science to the scientific scene. Krželj (2014) emphasizes that significant efforts have been made so far to modernize the teaching of German as a technical language. These are curricula and textbooks for teaching German as a technical language created in the last two decades. Regional production of interculturally oriented textbooks would contribute to improving the status of German as a technical language by taking into account the specificities of the target group and culturally determined characteristics of the area where teaching takes place, in addition to existing curricula for teaching German as a technical language at non-philological faculties.

3. Discussions

Based on available official documents dealing with foreign language teaching at all levels, it could be concluded that the status of foreign languages has changed over the years and that it is mostly in accordance with regulations, but not entirely compatible with EU guidelines and current trends. Durbaba (2016) emphasizes that the policy of multilingualism appears to be one of the principles of the educational system of the Republic of Serbia. Content analysis of these documents, procedures for their adoption, time and general resource frameworks for implementation, as well as current results, confirm the concern that in our educational system, despite external appearances, the principle of multilingualism is achieved discontinuously and inconsistently and that its results are almost symbolic.

Đurić (2014) concludes from his research that the weakest link is in the areas of monitoring teaching and evaluating its effects, as well as developing educational standards. It is also questioned whether and to what extent the problem of providing qualified teaching staff has been solved. Long-term monitoring of the implementation of the teaching program in correlation with teaching conditions is proposed. In April 2011, the National Education Council adopted Standards of Competence for Teachers and their Professional Development. This document (which contains a set of necessary knowledge and skills that every teacher should possess) defines a competent teacher as a professional who needs to constantly improve, interactively act on all actors in school life, expand cooperation and partnership with the local

community, and evaluate their results (Đurić, 2015: 291). As for qualifications of German language teachers in Niš, and we believe currently in Serbia as a whole, there is a great and justified suspicion about the quality of teaching German as a foreign language because there are not enough graduate Germanists who would meet the needs of both all state primary and secondary schools as well as private schools.

4. Conclusion and suggestions

Durbaba (2014) believes that the introduction of innovations in foreign language teaching in our educational system was carried out unsystematically, without proper insight into objective needs, possibilities, and potential problems that could have been avoided with timely planning, which can be recognized in certain negative consequences in all attempts (real or simulated) to improve foreign language teaching:

1. Introduction of a second foreign language as a mandatory elective subject;
2. Introduction of early learning of the first foreign language, from the first grade of elementary school;
3. Expansion of the range of school foreign languages by introducing Italian, Spanish and Chinese;
4. Increasing opportunities for non-institutional foreign language learning;
5. Strengthening the mobility of students and teachers;
6. More diverse offer of teaching materials;
7. Introduction of bilingual programs and other pilot projects;
8. Intensification of scientific research in the field of glotodidactics;
9. Development of scientific youth;
10. Organizing teaching practice for students at undergraduate and master's studies.

Language policy in Serbia, as in other countries, is unstable and dependent on many factors. In different periods of time, they play roles of varying intensity. Although the situation may at first glance, it doesn't look so good, and although there are many problem points, it can be seen that the position and attitude towards multilingualism is slowly changing.

References

- Durbaba, O. (2014). Nastava stranih jezika u Srbiji i aspekti jezičkog planiranja na nacionalnom nivou i nivou lokalne zajednice: prikaz jedne studije slučaja. U: Filipović, J. i Durbaba, O. (prir.) *Jezici u obrazovanju i jezičke obrazovne politike* (51-73). Beograd: Filološki fakultet.
- Durbaba, O. (2016). *Kultura i nastava stranih jezika. Uvod u interkulturnu primenjenu lingvistiku*. Beograd: Filološki fakultet.
- Đorović, D. (2014). Specifičnosti nastave italijanskog jezika za studente društvenih i humanističkih nauka na Filozofskom fakultetu u Beogradu. U: Filipović, J. i Durbaba, O. (prir.) *Jezici u obrazovanju i jezičke obrazovne politike*. (249-267). Beograd: Filološki fakultet.
- Đurić, Lj. (2014). Vrednovanje ranog školskog učenja stranih jezika u Srbiji: zaglušujuća tišina. U: Filipović, J. i Durbaba, O. (prir.) *Jezici u obrazovanju i obrazovne politike*. (77-106). Beograd: Filološki fakultet.
- Đurić, Lj. (2015). *Strani jezici u obrazovnoj politici Srbije tokom poslednjih šest decenija: činioci, modeli, perspektive*. Doktorska disertacija, Univerzitet u Beogradu, Filološki fakultet.
- European Commission, 2017a; Europäische Kommission / EACEA / Eurydice (2017a). *Eurydice Brief Schlüsselzahlen zum Sprachenlernen an den Schulen in Europa – Ausgabe 2017*. DE.
- European Commission, 2017b; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2017b). *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe – 2017 Edition. Eurydice Report*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. EN.
- European Commission, 2017c; European Commission (2017c). *Istaknuti sadržaji. Ključni podaci o nastavi jezika u evropskim školama*. SR.
- Krželj, K. (2014). Nastava nemačkog jezika na nefilološkim fakultetima. U: Filipović, J. i Durbaba, O. (prir.) *Jezici u obrazovanju i jezičke obrazovne politike*. (217-248). Beograd: Filološki fakultet.
- Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (Dissemination and Public Relations Division), 2020; Republički zavod za statistiku RS (2020). *Saopštenje. Statistika obrazovanja. Osnovne škole. Kraj školske 2018/19. godine*.
- Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (Dissemination and Public Relations Division), 2023; Republički zavod za statistiku RS (2023). *Saopštenje. Statistika obrazovanja. Osnovne škole. Kraj školske 2021/22. godine*.
- Vujović, A. (2018). Položaj stranih jezika struke u srednjem i visokom obrazovanju u Srbiji. U: Vučo, J. i Filipović, J. (prir.). *Filološka istraživanja danas. Tom VIII. Jezici obrazovanja*. (147-165). Beograd: Filološki fakultet.

