

The Plur>E needs analysis 2015

The Plur>E needs analysis was carried out with 49 students from year 3 (grade 11), the school year before the internship. As the project aims at developing multilingual preparation modules for the internship (in addition to a sound preparation in individual languages), the most important group to be asked were the students.

Summary of the needs analysis (see uploaded pdf-file for the complete data)

1. Proficiency in and (daily) use of languages:

Ratings for “proficiency in languages” mirror the order of languages in the curriculum: The students’ L1 (= highest rating) is German, two students also rate their other L1 (Italian, Vietnamese) as high as German. 12 students (= 1/4 of all participants) say they can read and write in English nearly as well as in their mother tongue. English is the first modern language students learn (from grade 1 in primary school to grade 11 in HLW). French is the second foreign language (from grade 9 in HLW), and students’ ratings can be found in three categories but not in the highest. Spanish and Italian is the third foreign language taught (students start studying one of these languages in the third year).

All students use German “on a daily basis” (which in fact is a mixture of Austrian variants of German including dialects and standard German), 8 students say they use English every day, one student uses Polish on a daily basis. English is used “quite often” by as many as 29 students and is followed by French and Spanish with 7 and 6 students respectively.

2. Reasons for being/becoming highly proficient in languages:

English is mentioned by most of the students because “it is an international language”, “most people speak English”, “you can use it all over the world”. English is followed by **Spanish**, which is also seen as an international language; but students additionally mention Spanish culture and describe the countries where Spanish is spoken and the language itself as “beautiful”. **French** is mentioned several times for two main reasons: “because it is a beautiful language” and “because I will do my internship in France”. **Italian** is associated with the holidays. Some students also mention **other languages** such as Mandarin (because it is so different), sign languages, Russian (personal reasons), Swedish, Dutch, Polish (personal reasons).

For English, mainly one argument – it is a world language, you have to know it – is brought forward while the other languages are associated with personal and cultural aspects or are perceived as “beautiful languages”.

3. Would you like to study more languages at school?

More than half of the students do not want to learn more languages at school, and **only 11** say they would like to learn other languages. **The languages most often mentioned are** Russian, Spanish and Italian.

Main reasons for negative answers/“don’t know” answers:

Students at HLW Rankweil study about 14 different subjects and have about 32-34 lessons per week. “It is already difficult to study 4 languages, or three foreign languages” is the opinion most often expressed by those students who say that they would not like to study more languages at school, or are not sure whether they would like to do so. They feel they already have enough work/homework to do.

Some say that the languages they are studying are “the most important ones” (signalling a certain hierarchy of languages or implying that “this is enough”). Quite a few mention interference between the languages they are studying as a problem (“I already mix the languages I know, with more languages it would be even more difficult to separate them”). Some state that achieving a higher level in the languages they are studying is more important than adding more languages as school subjects to the curriculum.

4. Internship and languages:

(The majority of the students complete their internship in France, some in Spain, GB, Ireland, Belgium and Italy. Only one student from the group stays in Vorarlberg.)

Three results can be highlighted as far as expected language use during the work placement is concerned:

- a) Those who go to GB/Ireland think of “English” as the only language they will use.
- b) Most of the students mention the language spoken in the country where they will complete their work placement (e.g. French) together with English. German, which appears quite often, is the language they will certainly use with their classmates who work in the same hotel.
- c) Only two students seem to be aware of the fact that their clients might speak other languages than those spoken in the respective country; this, however, will be the situation they will have to deal with most often, i.e. they will have to switch from one language to another on a daily basis.

5. What students feel is **important for language learning **in their school**:**

Practising all four skills (i.e. also listening, speaking, writing) and everyday situations; practising vocabulary; teachers should speak the language they teach; vocabulary is mentioned more often than grammar and is seen as more important; good teachers; more repetition and practice.

There are students who are satisfied with the language classes in general (about $\frac{1}{4}$); however, many students want changes in the following fields: a) more oral communication; b) a clearer focus on what young people need in everyday situations (instead of academic topics); c) more practice/repetition; d) connected instead of isolated learning (e.g. vocabulary).

6. Implications for the Plur>E-project:

These findings will be compared to the findings from an additional survey carried out with students who have already completed their internship (2 questionnaires distributed so far, one in 2015, one in 2016; plus a shortened version of the questionnaire in 2017). Generally speaking, students have to deal with two challenges: the school trains them for certain CEFR-levels that have to be achieved in the individual languages, but at the same time they experience situations of multi-competence and multiple language use during their work placement, often with languages used as *lingua franca* languages. The question will be how to reconcile these two goals of language learning in school-based learning.

Students’ opinions and experiences abroad collected in the two questionnaires add new aspects to language learning and thus contribute to school development in the area of language teaching and learning and multiple language use.

The planned multilingual modules offered in June 2017 focused on multiple language use and target language training, i.e. combined the two goals mentioned so far.