

The situation of modern language learning and teaching in Europe:

HUNGARY

State education at primary and secondary level (ages 6 to 19)

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Historical, political, cultural and social background to foreign language teaching today

The political situation has always had a determining effect on foreign language teaching/learning in eastern Central Europe. This fact has to be considered when looking at the present situation of foreign language education, especially since the structure of education has not changed as radically as, for instance, the choice of languages and materials on offer.

Diversification of foreign languages on offer

Between the end of World War II and 1989, Russian was the compulsory foreign language in schools in Hungary. Almost all students started learning it at the age of 10 in the fourth or fifth grade of primary education and studied it for at least four years in primary school and another four years in secondary schools. Thus, Russian was the number one foreign language. For obvious reasons, the teaching Russian to Hungarians became synonymous with total failure in language education: after eight years of study of the language, the vast majority of Hungarians could hardly survive in Russian. A fine example of counter-motivation in education.

In the first year of secondary education (9th grade), students started a second foreign language, generally a modern western European language such as English, German, French, Italian, or perhaps Spanish. This language was studied for four years.

In 1989, Russian stopped being the compulsory foreign language. Naturally, everybody wanted to start studying other languages, thus creating yet another problem, namely that of finding teachers for western European languages, such as by turning Russian teachers into English teachers, for example, and preferably overnight. Teacher training for modern foreign languages became a national priority. The great shortage of such teachers is still a burning problem in Hungary.

At present, students in

- *primary education* start their first foreign language in the fifth or sometimes the third grade and their second language in fifth grade.
- *academic secondary schools* are obliged to study two foreign languages;
- *secondary vocational schools* have only one compulsory foreign language;
- only a small number of *vocational schools* are offered foreign language education.

While German is the first choice in primary education, English predominates in secondary education. The distribution of students studying different languages in 1995/96 is shown in Table 1.

<i>School</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>German</i>	<i>Russian</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>Spanish</i>	<i>Italian</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Primary, FL1</i>	277,404	346,460	12,661	8,874	312	1,804	2,708	
<i>Primary, FL2</i>	18,950	13,135	1,180	1,526	86	826	5,058	
<i>Secondary Vocational 1 compulsory FL</i>	98,045	92,612	5,244	8,189	0	0	0	
<i>Secondary Academic 2 compulsory FLs)</i>	112,097	88,525	12,756	19,806	0	0	0	
<i>Vocational</i>	7,556	26,790	0	1,548	0	0	0	

Table 1.

Diversification in intensity of study

Both first and second foreign languages were taught usually for 3 lessons per week as the basic provision. From 1970, 2 more lessons/week could be given in specialised classes. In addition, there were schools/classes where specially authorised programmes offered 6, 9 or even 16 lessons a week (the latter being very special cases in Russian, later offered also in English and French). Since 1982, the above spread has widened. Most schools do not only give 3 lessons a week in a foreign language but the students can add 2 more as an optional course, or 3 and even 6 more lessons if they specialise in the language.

In 1987, the Ministry of Education established 15 *bilingual secondary schools* where 5 subjects are taught in the target language (history, geography, mathematics, biology and physics) after the initial year of language improvement (with 20 foreign language lessons/week). Thus teaching language/s for special purposes (LSP) has gained far more weight in state education. Bilingual instruction has always been extremely popular, expressing a public demand for intensive language learning, and the method is spreading like wildfire, creating a real problem of finding good teachers for it.

Diversification in courses and materials

A great variety of courses and teaching materials have appeared on the market. Schools have offered, e.g., business English or English for tourist guides to help students in their future jobs. Relevant materials have been developed inside and outside Hungary often through collaboration of native

and non-native speakers of the target languages. Satellite television channels and tourism have helped greatly in improving students' language competencies.

If a student passes the *State Language Examination* of the *Hungarian Foreign Language Examination Board*, he or she can be exempt from the *matriculation exam* (final school-leaving exam) with the best mark after the 12th grade.

Curriculum

The present *National Core Curriculum* conveys the most commonly accepted values and aspects of human knowledge and skills in general. The foreign-language curriculum, as one of the cultural domains, specifies the general aims of foreign language education. It offers a list of requirements with respect to the four language skills and functions in accordance with the norms set by the educational authorities of the European Community. This Core Curriculum is expected to serve as a framework for the elaboration of syllabuses for each foreign language. For the time being it only requires one foreign language to be learnt before the age of 16.

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Teacher education for modern language teaching

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Pre-service teacher education

Before 1989

Due to the primacy of the Russian language described above, even as late as 1988/89 only 3% of primary-school pupils and less than 20% of secondary-school pupils had the opportunity to learn English, the most popular foreign language. This low percentage, interestingly, was not fully reflected in the pre-service training of foreign language teachers. All universities with faculties of humanities, as well as teacher training colleges, provided diploma and degree programmes for teachers of foreign languages, particularly in English, German and Russian, less so in French, Spanish, Italian and in lesser known languages.

The training followed a rather old-fashioned model, in which (mostly double-major) students were obliged to focus their studies on literature and linguistics and on the acquisition of the highest level of proficiency in the foreign language. Methodology components were treated as being of minor importance, and graduates often entered the profession with an unacceptably brief spell of teaching practice. "The philosophy underlying this pattern of teacher training posited that teachers should be, first and foremost, highly erudite in the humanities, and should gradually acquire the necessary teaching skills whilst on the job." (Medgyes 1996: Chapter 1)

After 1989

With the disappearance of Russian as the compulsory foreign language, the road opened for the other major foreign languages. State education, on the other hand, was not ready to meet parental and pupil demands, which far exceeded the supply of qualified foreign language teachers. For the provision of proper English and German teaching alone, 10.000 teachers would have had to be trained as fast as possible.

The traditional university-level (5 years) and college level (3-4 years) initial teacher training programmes could not meet these demands. The measures taken by the Hungarian government aimed to handle the problem on two fronts:

a) Training a large number of teachers quickly at pre-service level

In 1990 and after, several universities and teacher training colleges set up the so-called Centres for English Teacher Training (CETTs) and their German counterparts, later on followed by one such centre to supply teachers of French.

These professionally successful three-year single-major, BEd. degree programmes place special emphasis on the practicum in teacher training. All of them have been operating according to curricula in which the proportion of language teaching methodology and classroom-related subjects outweighs the philology component. To make this progress even more emphatic, teaching practice in the final third year, although varying in precise length, has been extended significantly in comparison with the traditional model (see table below), in some cases amounting to no less than a full schoolyear.

However, the desired large number of qualified foreign language teachers has been counter-acted by the low social and financial status of the college-degree offered to graduates. Thus, it comes as no surprise that since graduates are allowed to extend their studies towards a full university degree, requiring an two additional years, most of them do choose this option, which, in return, prevents them from going into full-time teaching right after the first three years.

By 1996, most 3-year programmes had been integrated into more complex 3+2-year (college degree > university degree) teacher education schemes, in most cases having successfully transferred the strong methodology and classroom focus of the college programmes into the formerly humanities-based programmes.

b) Retraining of Russian teachers to become fully qualified teachers of another foreign language, mostly English and German

Even more universities and colleges with language departments took part in the so-called re-training programme for Russian teachers (a 3-year initial teacher education programme of the in-service type, common to most or all ex-Soviet-block countries). This programme, which will cease to exist in 1998, has arguably relieved the dire shortage of foreign language teachers. Its motivational implications cannot be underestimated either, since graduates of

the programme now proudly claim that they have managed to keep their jobs, obtained another degree in foreign language teaching and thus gained more confidence and self-esteem.

Current set-up

The following table intends to give an outline of the various pre-service programme types (including some of their special features) in operation in Hungary in 1996/7.

Level of teacher training	Length of studies	Length of teaching practice	Degree (international terminology)	School types degree holders are qualified to teach in
<i>University</i> ¹	4-5 years	15 hours + observation (observation may start in year 3)	MA. in English/French/German/Russian etc.	primary secondary tertiary
<i>3-year programmes (CETTs & German Centres)</i>	3 years	3 months > 1 year (includes observation)	BEd. TEFL or equivalent in teaching German and French	primary secondary
<i>Upper-primary teacher training college</i> ²	4 years (double majors)	2 months + observation (observation & limited teaching in year 3)	BEd. in upper-primary foreign language teaching	Upper primary (10-14)
<i>Lower primary teacher training college</i>	4 years (double majors)	4-6 weeks in final year + observation & teaching in year 3	BEd. in lower primary foreign language teaching	Lower primary (6-10) ³

¹ Most departments of foreign languages (including languages of ethnic minorities, e.g. Slovene, Romanian, Slovak etc.), as well as those of other European (e.g. Portuguese, Czech, Swedish) and non-European (e.g. Japanese) languages offer a teacher training strand in their programme, although not all of these languages are available in state education, so that practice teaching is not part of the curriculum.

² Colleges offer a much more limited number of languages, mainly English, German, French and Russian, while some run teacher training courses for minority languages in certain regions of Hungary.

³ Teacher education will need to respond to the disappearance of the 8-year primary + 4- year secondary division in education, since the emergence of the 6+6 (and to a lesser extent 4+8) model will blur the currently accepted division.

In-Service Teacher Training (INSETT) or Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

Pre-service and in-service teacher training have always been fairly strictly separated in Hungary. Higher education institutions have not been officially associated with INSETT, which has been provided mainly through a network of local pedagogical institutions. Although foreign language teachers were encouraged to take part in insett, no moral and financial incentives have been offered apart from meaningless certificates. Courses and sessions were and are still provided by local experts, foreign agencies (e.g. The British Council, Goethe Institut) and publishers, but mainly to a small section of the most highly- motivated core of the teaching population. The major criticism concerning most of these attempts is that they lack proper professional co-ordination, since the basis for this INSETT provision is mostly what expertise is available locally, instead of what expertise teachers would need to improve their teaching. This remains true even though teachers of the most popular foreign languages have already formed their own associations or pressure groups. However, such initiatives have achieved very little in trying to represent the professional demands of and improve the career opportunities for foreign language teachers.

At last in 1997 the Hungarian government has initiated several programmes which will ultimately change this so far unsatisfactory system. Plans for MEd degree courses, as well as compulsory pedagogical professional exams, will ensure a possible career structure for teachers in state education, by offering a clear-cut structure of degrees and certificates and the values attached to them. Teachers who strive for even higher degrees and professional competencies are eligible for a number of Ph.D. programmes in applied linguistics, which shows the acknowledgement of the profession of foreign language teaching at the highest academic level. In addition to this, a number of Hungarian language teaching professionals involved in all levels of teacher education have registered for and completed MEd. or MA courses at foreign universities, thus ensuring an international perspective on both foreign language teaching and teacher education.

Plans to offer teachers a menu for nationally accredited and certificated, but not necessarily university- or college-provided INSETT courses and programmes, have been finalised to take effect from September 1997. The main aim of this new scheme is to involve the largest possible number of teachers in long-term professional development, thus ensuring that the ultimate beneficiaries of teacher education, i.e., learners, are provided with a higher quality of foreign language teaching.

Reference

Medgyes, P. (1996) Chapter 1. Foundations. In Malderez, A.& P. Medgyes (Eds.) *Changing Perspectives in Teacher Education*. Oxford: Heinemann.