

# Teacher Foreign Language Competences in European Literacy and Citizenship Education

Dr. Ujlakyné dr. Szűcs Éva

Department of Foreign Languages and Further Education, Teacher Training Faculty,  
Kecskemét College, HUNGARY

**Abstract:** ELICIT is a Comenius Project which deals with the competences of European Union Citizenship education. During the past two years about 30 representatives of 12 European countries have been working on the framework of teacher competences which can make integration of EU-knowledge and European citizenship education successful in member states. The framework of competences, publications and the results of the Project can be seen on the ELICIT website. In this article the importance of foreign language competences, an integrated part of the Framework will be examined. In European citizenship education foreign language competences are a means of successful work in the educational process for teachers throughout the education system. The research results and an exploration of the Framework of Competences will be presented in this article, together with the module on EU citizenship education offered to students in four EU higher education institutions from September 2014.

**Keywords:** European citizenship education, framework of competences, foreign languages throughout the curriculum

## 1 Introduction

Between 2004 and 2007 teacher education institutions in 9 different European countries aimed to “develop the democratic, intercultural and pedagogical competences of European teachers by focusing on then social, cultural, political, economic, legal, ethic and pragmatic dimensions of citizenship” [1]. The name of the project ISTEPEC was Intercultural Studies in Teacher Education to promote European Citizenship [2]. Kecskemét College Teacher Training Faculty took an active part in the project which included student mobility modules in the participating countries. International pre-service teacher education groups worked on the project and their activities proved that it is possible to develop and enlarge European perspective both in theory and practice. One of the end products of the Project was a book which summarized the results of the project [3]. In the final chapter of the book Gomez Parra concludes that “this action plan needs to go a step ahead in the way Europe requires” [4].

In 2010 some teacher education partners, based on their fruitful co-operation in the ISTEPEC Project, started to work on the preparation of a new Comenius Project. From October 2010 ELICIT (European Literacy and Citizenship Education) was launched by 16 partner institutions from 8 EU member states. By the end of the project (2013) a Reference Framework of Competences to teach European literacy and the Portfolio of the European Citizen were created and a database of available resources was produced, together with a website, where all these documents and resources can be seen [5].

In the following pages, first the term ‘European literacy’ will be explained, then, a general description will be provided on the Reference Framework of Competences with special focus on foreign language competences. Finally, one of the teacher education results of the ELICIT Project, the Common Mention Programme, will be introduced. In the meanwhile, I would like to support the statements of the article with examination and discussion results, which we also made an integrated part of the final documents. During the project we organised several seminars and meetings (both home and abroad) to share our

ideas with practising teachers and discuss our plans with both in-service and pre-service teacher educators and trainees.

## **2 The ELICIT Reference Framework of Competences**

European citizenship has become gradually part of the life of the European Union member states in the past decade. The European Commission had recommendations towards the policy makers of the member states on teacher education [6] saying that European teachers can educate European citizens.

However, European literacy has been introduced into teacher education only recently. European literacy is “a sum total of operational knowledge about Europe past and present” [7]. European literacy is our common past and present without which we cannot build our common future.

Integrating European literacy education into teaching needs a knowledge base and relevant skills and competences. If European literacy and citizenship education is part of initial teacher education programmes and professional further education courses, teacher educators and school managements need tools to develop and improve their activities in this direction. The reference framework of competences is one of these tools. The competences are summarised under 7 domains (Curriculum design, European culture, Intercultural education, Motivation and personal development, Use of ICT, School Ethos, and Evaluation).

While working on the Reference framework, we needed to discuss our ideas with the representatives of ELOS network, as they had been working on a reference framework [8] for teachers of their ELOS schools. ELOS is an educational concept, which aims to integrate European and international dimensions in school education. The results of the discussion are built into the final version of the ELICIT framework.

The full text of the Reference Framework of Competences can be found in ten languages on the Project website [9]. The seven domains are elaborated in details and the areas of knowledge necessary and the desired outcomes are also enlisted. As the full text is available online, we are going to examine only our focus, the foreign language competences of teachers. Our main interest is how far the document goes in foreign language requirements and, how it connects national heritage and international values and whether the document looks at English as a lingua franca or considers it a language, which is the easiest to use in international projects.

## **3 Foreign language competences in the ELICIT Framework**

In the first domain, Curriculum design, there are two areas of competences, which include foreign language competences, both of them are in connection with mobility. The inclusion of “mobility periods in the curriculum” means extended experiential knowledge, “the recognition and equivalence of the national curricula” would make teacher and student exchange programmes much easier, as their studies abroad could be recognised back home. Neither of them refers directly to English, but in practice the mobility language is usually English in EU projects. It is so, even if none of the participants is a native speaker of English. (This was the case in our international project as well, since there was no English speaking country among the partners and the common working language was either English or French.)

The second domain, European literacy, is more dependent on foreign language competences. “Raise and sustain students’ motivation, curiosity and interest in European issues (including languages)” or “Stimulate teachers and students to actively speak two

foreign languages” – directly refer to the necessity of an effective use of foreign languages in teachers’ everyday work. Then, in three further points such as an active participation in mobility projects (personally and with students), initiating, participating in and managing international projects and also supporting students’ collaboration at international levels are only possible if teachers speak foreign languages well. One of the most important points in this domain is helping students to access and process information about the EU. This definitely means that both students and teachers can speak more than one languages of the EU, as it is on the list of the desired outcomes “Students are able to process information about the EU in more than one languages” [9].

In the field of intercultural education (Domain 3), foreign languages also seem to be crucial. However, in the text, only the idea of the readiness to exercise knowledge and skills in international groups refers to the need of foreign languages. It is also important that part of the problems in intercultural encounters is the lack of proper understanding or simply the misunderstanding of the situation caused by insufficient language competences.

Students’ personal development and motivation is the next domain (No.4), which includes issues such as lifelong learning, study periods abroad, gaining information about job opportunities, realities of the European workforce market, etc. Giving students information and supporting their understanding concerning these questions as well as exercising in these fields demand high level of language competences.

The use of information and communication technology (Domain 5) speaks about Internet ethics and the ability of the proper use of on-line tools. Languages are not mentioned here, however, the great majority of online information is in English and if teachers and students use ICT for international communication (“international project work”), they need to be efficient user of English.

At first sight, Domain Number 6, School Ethos, does not have anything to do with foreign language competences. However, especially in Hungary, and maybe in other monolingual European Union member states, it is of highly importance that in the overall programme of the school European dimensions should appear not only in the Mission statement, but at curriculum level, too. This is how foreign language learning and teaching can become a relevant issue for everyone in the school.

In the last domain (Evaluation) a great emphasis is laid on national, European and international evaluation tools and indicators. Some of these are already part of the national curricula in teacher education programmes such as PISA, CEFR (languages) or EuroPass. All of them, both at education level and as a tool, are available mostly in English.

Examining the 7 domains of competences listed in the ELICIT Reference Framework, we can conclude that with different emphasis and explicitness, foreign language competences are definitely appear as basic requirements for teachers in each domain. As the document is for European teachers, it does not name any languages. However, in the examination we have always come across the fact that a lot of the background information and the working language of the programmes is English. It is also important to mention that the reference framework itself is available on the website in 10 languages, just like all the European documents, which can be found on-line in all the languages of the member states. Thus, we can say that English can be considered as a lingua franca in this document and the foreign language often mentioned in it is never named.

The framework of teachers’ competences in the field of teaching European literacy could have gone into the direction of recognising only international (EU) issues. In the document, we can read about “common European heritage”, “our common past, present and future”, and “European dimensions rooted in the local context”. These expressions reveal the starting point of the document: Students and teachers cannot be successful in the field of European literacy without being aware of their own national world as a reality. There is one

more aspect of this issue, which appears in the introduction of the Framework and in 4 other places in different domains. It is the concept of cross-curricular teaching. In several places we can see the remarks “in all subjects” and in the Introduction we can read “European literacy should permeate all subject and educational practices” [10]. European literacy, thus, is not considered to become a new school subject; on the contrary, it is based on our national curriculum requirements and provides our students with a European perspective.

## **4 The European Common Mention for Teachers**

Mailhos [11] in her summary and evaluation of the ELICIT Project, among the results of the Project, draws attention to the needs for the future. She says that modules and training courses need to be offered to teachers both in pre-service and in-service teacher education. One of these training courses might be an academic course named Common Mention for Teachers. The aim of the course is to enrich students’ professional and academic competences as well as to improve their intercultural, foreign language skills, their self-awareness and self-reliance [12].

In 2013, as a result of an initiation by the University of Cordoba, a consortium, was founded by the University of Córdoba, the University of Western Brittany-IUFM, the University of Stockholm and Kecskemét College. They decided to launch a course around ELICIT core competences. The motto of the 30-ECTS course (one semester) is “Sharing a Degree to Share Europe”. They are planning to make up at each participating higher education institution an international group of 20 (5 students from each partner institution). The programme will foster teachers and students with permanent exchange and network.

As our focus is foreign language competences, only one course as an example will be mentioned here. Foreign Language Teaching in Early Childhood will explore approaches to teaching foreign languages to young learners and its potentials in EU literacy education. Student on the course will plan and implement EU content into existing foreign language curricula. They will discuss topics like European literacy education in the national curricula, cross-curricular possibilities, projects on the EU and teachers’ portfolio.

## **5 Conclusion**

In this essay the role of foreign language competences and skills in the ELICIT Project has been examined, focusing on the Reference Framework of Competences for teachers. Exploring the foreign language content and requirements both directly and indirectly appearing in the document, we can say that teaching European literacy throughout the curriculum demands minimum B2 level (CEFR) of English or other EU languages, especially if teachers want to communicate, cooperate and network with teachers in other EU countries. Teachers need to support their students to take part in international projects, exchange programmes and networking. This means that students also need at least B2 level foreign language competences. We have also found that the document does not suggest increasing number of lessons, but dealing with ELICIT content within existing school subjects in the target language. In the continuation of the ELICIT Project, Common Mention also follows these principles.

Both in the field of developing language competences and European literacy, the focus is on indirect learning or “learning by doing”. Students and teachers need to experience and try themselves in the seven domains enlisted. One condition that is necessary for this is good target language communication skills.

The ELICIT Reference Framework is an instrument which teacher trainers can use in order to ensure that teachers can develop European literacy education. However, this document might provide ideas for school leaders, who aim to develop their schools towards Europe. When they are doing so, they have to consider the foreign language competences of their staff and students.

## References

- [1] Résumé du project ISTEPEC:<http://bretagne.iufm.fr/relat-internat/RI-20052006/istepec.pdf>
- [2] [www.istepec.eu](http://www.istepec.eu)
- [3] Mailhos, M. (ed.) Learning to Teach Europe ISTEPEC n°119121-CP-1-FR-COMENIUS-C21 Kecskeméti Főiskola Tanítóképző Főiskolai Kar (2007)
- [4] Gómez Parra , M.E. Integrating European Citizenship in Initial Teacher Training In: Mailhos, M. (ed.) Learning to Teach Europe ISTEPEC n°119121-CP-1-FR-COMENIUS-C21 Kecskeméti Főiskola Tanítóképző Főiskolai Kar (2007) pp.267
- [5] <http://www.elicitizen.eu>
- [6] [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/principles\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/principles_en.pdf)
- [7] ELICIT Improving Education in Europe, ELICIT Booklet <http://www.elicitizen.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/ELICIT-Booklet-EN.pdf> p.2
- [8] ELOS CFEC [http://europeesplatform.nl/elos/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2013/07/Microsoft\\_Word\\_-\\_Common\\_CFEC\\_May\\_2010.pdf](http://europeesplatform.nl/elos/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2013/07/Microsoft_Word_-_Common_CFEC_May_2010.pdf)
- [9] Reference framework of competences for teaching European citizenship literacy <http://www.elicitizen.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/RF-2013-EN.pdf>
- [10] Reference framework of competences for teaching European citizenship literacy <http://www.elicitizen.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/RF-2013-EN.pdf>, p. 2
- [11] Mailhos, M. Elicit Project and Results. Presentation of the project and its results, in English, at the Kecskemét City Hall on Friday, 27 September, 2013, for the closing ceremony: <http://www.elicitizen.eu/en/elicit-project>
- [12] ELICIT Improving Education in Europe ELICIT Booklet <http://www.elicitizen.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/ELICIT-Booklet-EN.pdf> p.7

## Author data

Dr. Ujlakyné dr. Szűcs Éva; Institute of Foreign Languages and Further Education, Teacher Training Faculty, Kecskemét College 6000. Kecskemét Fecske u. 3. Fsz. 2. Hungary; [ujlakyne.eva@tfk.kefo.hu](mailto:ujlakyne.eva@tfk.kefo.hu)