

Language for Work

New approaches to work-related language learning

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Language for Work Network

<http://languageforwork.ecml.at/>



Language for Work network

Learning network for professionals supporting work-related second language development for adult migrants

120 members from 29 countries

Sponsored by **European Centre for Modern Languages**, Council of Europe

Aim Share expertise, resources to enable effective local responses

Current project

‘New approaches are emerging across Europe. Some adapt established methodologies. Others are wholly innovative, focusing on non-formal and informal learning.’

Project aims to make approaches more widely available

What are work-related language skills?

Language skills to

- **Find suitable employment:** Job-search, CV writing, job applications, interviews, etc.
- **Make a positive contribution at work:** Job-specific tasks, health and safety, team working, quality management, customer care, employment processes, rights, responsibilities
- **Progress and develop:** Formal workplace training, informal on-the-job learning, further vocational education and training outside the workplace

Why focus on work-related language skills?

1. Key enabler of labour market integration: employment, skill utilisation

‘Across Europe, most migrant groups have lower employment rates, and a greater tendency to be overqualified for their jobs, than non-migrants.’

Stirling, A. (2015), *Employment outcomes for migrants in European labour markets*. London: IPPR.

2. Over-reliance on pre-employment, generic language courses

‘Generic language courses suffer from two central problems. [They combine] students with mixed educational levels (and thus varying levels of literacy and cognitive ability) ... and they contain little employment-related content.’

Benton, M. (2013), *Maximizing Potential: How countries can address skills deficits within the immigrant workforce*. Washington DC: Migration Policy Institute.

3. Significant opportunities to broaden support for labour market integration in cost-effective ways

Why do language courses for migrants fail to develop work-related language skills?

Skills are highly **context-specific**, i.e. depend on

- Vocational area, level
- Communicative demands
- Technology in use
- Work-organisation, job design
- Workplace practices



Courses would need to focus on specific vocational area – but which?

Teachers would need specialist knowledge of vocational areas

Also **language level required is quite high**

? **CEFR level B1** *‘able to communicate essential points in familiar contexts’*

= Minimum ‘safe’ level to work autonomously in low-skilled job = ?300-500 hrs study

Which migrants are most in need of support?

Migrants with limited language, limited financial resources

Arrives → needs income, support network **immediately**

→ Seeks work, friends (support network) **immediately**

→ Work = *job for person with limited language skills*

= *low-paid, low-skilled job*

= *long hours + problems of low income*

→ Friends = *people who speak migrant's language(s)*

Migrant starts language/integration course → finds job, friends → stops course

No time, energy, money, etc. + no need: is working, has friends

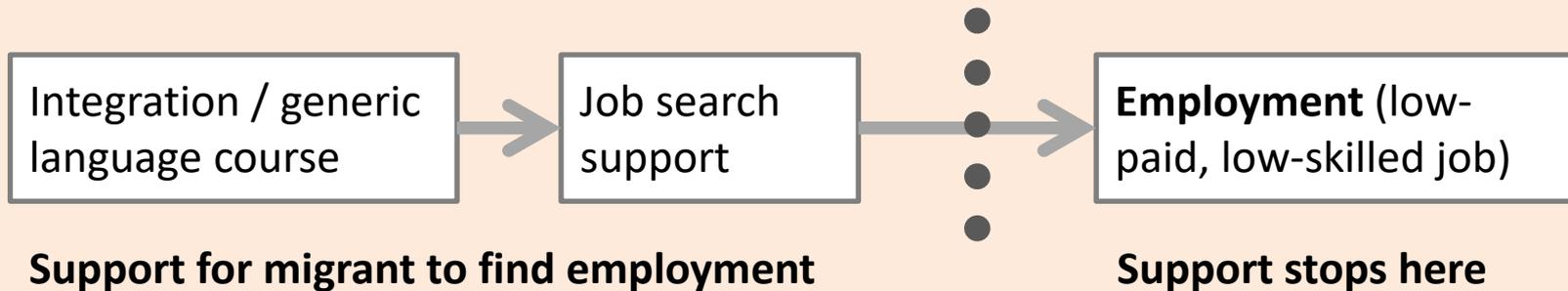
Result = **low-pay, limited-language trap**

→ Limited exposure to language at work, at home

→ Study in **non-working hours** difficult, unattractive

How can we extend support for migrants?

What happens now



Opportunities to extend support

Language learning outside of work

- Vocational courses
- Employability courses for job seekers
- Web-enabled self-directed learning

Opportunity with biggest potential impact

Language learning **at work**
for migrants in low-pay, low-skilled employment

Different perspective: learning (not teaching)

How do adults **learn** another language?

By **using it** for **real-life communication** over an **extended period of time**

- Environmental + personal factors affect how **well** adults learn the language
- **Instruction** can be helpful, but most language learning is **informal** + **self-directed**

What does the workplace offer?

- **Structured opportunities** for **real-life communication** linked to role & task, team work, customer service, safety & quality management etc.
- **Established systems of support** e.g. management, supervision, teamwork, training, etc.

Question How can we realise the potential of work for language learning?

New approaches

Approaches focus on building **sustainable** (i.e. effective, affordable, scalable) systems of support for workplace communication

Some examples

Sweden ArbetSam approach: Two new roles created for staff (reflective discussion leader + language champion) to support language development for all staff (migrant + non-migrant)

UK Learning through Work: Guided learning materials focused on workplace communication to support on-the-job coaching and mentoring

Germany Sprachpaten (Language godparents): Informal language learning support at work from German-speaking colleagues

What can we learn from these new approaches?

Possible to extend cost-effective support into workplaces via employer systems, based on support for workplace communication

Employer involvement is essential – initiatives must support workplace goals (i.e. safety, quality) and respect workplace constraints (e.g. work pressure)

Make support as inclusive as possible: all low-educated workers will benefit from language development, whether migrant or not

More generally

Formal instruction is not the only way to support language learning

Share social responsibility for migrant language learning as widely as possible

Digital technology is opening new horizons

More information, support

Language for Work network

Join the network as an individual

<http://languageforwork.ecml.at/>

Council of Europe: LIAM programme

Help for member states to develop **inclusive language policies**

www.coe.int/en/web/lang-migrants

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