

Project

Training teachers in the Use of ICT and Teaching Greek as a Second Language in Cyprus: the design, pilot and initial evaluation of a blended teacher training curriculum, part of European Socrates, Comenius 2.1 ECNTLT project

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Abstract

The European Curricula in New Technologies and Language Teaching (ECNTLT) programme (Socrates, Comenius 2.1 Action, 2003-2006) dealt with the development of teacher-training curricula for the use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) in language teaching. Participating teams came from teacher training European institutions from twelve European countries. The main aim was to enable language teachers of different European languages, most noticeably of the less widely taught and spoken ones, to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively implement new technologies in their own classroom. The objectives were to produce European curricula leading to internationally recognised certificates in new technologies and language teaching. Within this European programme and based on the needs analysis carried out, the participating Cypriot team developed a curriculum which aimed to help teachers of Greek as an L2 in Cyprus acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to teach Greek as an L2 and at the same time implement new technologies in their own classroom. This paper presents the theoretical framework, and a description of the development, the pilot study and the initial evaluation of this curriculum.

Key words: Second language; teacher training; new technologies.

1. Introduction - Theoretical Framework

Second language teaching, learning and teacher training have been conducted through centuries through traditional methods, mainly with the use of printed material followed by visuals and sound (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The technological revolution and particularly the one in the area of information and communications technologies came to add to that repertoire in extraordinary ways with new tools, independent of time and place (Christensen and Rice, 1996; Lam, 2000; Papadima-Sophocleous, 2000). Developments in L2 teaching have made it more than vital to keep professionals abreast with new material, approaches and tools, including the use of New Technologies. The European Union has sensed this need and has organised programmes to cater for such needs. One of them is Socrates, Comenius 2.1, *European Curricula in New Technologies and Language Teaching* (ECNTLT). Its aim was to develop modules to train L2 practicing teachers in the area of new technologies. Intercollege (University of Nicosia Cyprus as of September 2007) was one of the twelve partners of this project (Netherlands, Germany, Portugal, Spain, Italy, UK, Belgium, Lithuania, Hungary, Greece and Bulgaria.) The aim of the Cyprus team was to explore the needs of teachers teaching Greek as an L2 in Cyprus, establish their needs in ICT and develop teacher-training modules to cater for them.

2. Theoretical and practical suggestions for training second language (L2) teachers

In theory, there are some basic techniques in L2 teacher training. We looked at and tried to incorporate Hirst's (2005) suggestions in the project, i.e. skill transfer, teacher-trainees' profile, knowing the aims, planning, implementation, keeping a balance of activities, material development, trainees' participation. Moreover, we looked at the suggestions of many experts in teacher training in various countries, who have recorded different topics they cover in teacher training (Doff 1988, Wallace 1991, Harmer 1991, 2001, Nunan 1991, Ur 1996, Carter and Nunan 2001, Richards and Renandya 2002) in order to determine which ones would suit our audience and aims. These included areas such as theories about language, language learning, and L2 learning, aims of language teaching, approaches, methods and techniques, psycholinguistics, bilingualism, sociolinguistics, the world of English, the students, the teachers, classroom management, student-teacher rapport, language description, educational technology and other educational material, pre-planning, planning and developing curricula, textbooks, lessons, weekly teaching, management, class dynamics, feedback, lesson content (curriculum, materials, topics, planning, development), marking (correcting mistakes), assessment (principles and techniques, characteristics, writing and marking tests and examination papers), self-assessment, further training, just to mention a few. The above topics dealing with L2 teacher training gave us an idea of the plethora of the areas needed to be dealt with in L2 teacher training. It was therefore important, when we planned the teacher-training curriculum to take them into consideration and select those which dealt with the specific needs of the programme in question and fitted within the time given for the training.

3. Theoretical and practical suggestions for training teachers who use New Technologies in L2 teaching

Language teaching with the use of New Technologies presupposes a certain amount of knowledge of language teaching methods and good knowledge of the potentials of New Technologies, and the ability to link the two in a way that would serve L2 teaching and learning. In other words, New Technologies take L2 teaching and learning a step further from where the rest of the language teaching materials (printed, audio and visual) can lead us to. Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is based on and has been evolving in parallel to modern L2 teaching methods (Warschauer 1996). The aim is not to use technology for the sake of using technology but for improving and serving L2 teaching and learning, taking into consideration the current theories and practices in L2 learning. Moreover, it is very important for the teacher to constantly keep abreast in CALL because developments happen continuously and very fast.

Experts in L2 teacher training (Squires, 1991; Pennington, 1996; Boswood, 1997; Levy, 1997; Felix, 1998; Warschauer et al. 1996, 2000; Dudeney, 2000; Wendeatt et. al. 2000, Buttler-Pascoe and Wiburg, 2003, Egbert, J. 2005) in many countries suggest and/or incorporate in their CALL programmes a selection of topics, which derive from theoretical suggestions in this area. Some of these are: Introduction to CALL, Communicative CALL, Using Technology to teach oral communication skills, Using technology to teach reading and writing, Culture, Community and Diverse Learners, Teaching writing in a language workshop, Projects with the use of Multimedia, The use of Internet, Electronic Mail, and conferencing in L2 teaching and learning, CD-ROM and website review and evaluation, website creation, cooperative learning and New Technologies, Using WebQuests, Wikis, Blogs, Web 2.0 technologies in language learning, Multimedia creation programmes and L2 teaching, L2 teaching and learning electronic material development, use of New Technologies in language marking, assessment, testing and evaluation.

4. L2 Language - Greek and ICT teacher training curriculum

Following the principle that "teaching a language is not talking about the language but speaking the language", (and as an extension to that, "training how to use ICT in L2 teaching is not talking about it but using ICT to train"), the approach of the Cyprus project evolved around using Greek as the language of communication, using language teaching methods as the techniques for teacher training, and using ICT in L2 teaching

and teacher training to teach how to use ICT in L2 teaching. For this reason, we had to decide on two things: the content of the curriculum and the means of delivery.

The programme was developed based on the specific needs of the teachers teaching Greek as an L2 in Cyprus and on the literature about L2 and CALL teacher training. It focused on theories and practices in L2 teaching and learning and the use of ICT in L2 teaching and learning (Richards & Rodgers 2001), with specific reference to teaching and learning Greek (Papadima-Sophocleous 2000). Theoretical issues which constituted the basic background of current practices in L2 and ICT/CALL were to be explored and at the same time, trainees were expected to be involved in activities and projects which would give them the opportunity to apply various theories through the creation of teaching and learning exercises, activities and material, relevant to their own needs and teaching realities.

5. Trainee profile

Teachers of Greek as an L2 in Cypriot schools (mainly government schools but also from private and afternoon schools) were the target group of this training project. According to the needs analysis carried out by Dr. Antroula Papakyriakou (2004), these teachers had Greek as their first language (L1), were philologists, and had been trained in teaching Greek as an L1. Most of them were graduates from Greek universities, and holders of four-year degrees from departments of Greek philology, without training in teaching Greek as a foreign or second language. This was mentioned many times as a problem during the interviews. The need to teach Greek as an L2 emerged suddenly in the last decade or so and as consequence, the system was not prepared to offer teachers training in this area. Teachers teaching Greek as an L2 used the communicative approach, as this was reflected in the teaching material prescribed by the Ministry of Education, however, they did not have any proper or systematic training to do so. At the same time, the majority of those teaching Greek as an L2 did not have satisfactory training in the use of ICT in language teaching. Although the technological infrastructure existed in schools in the form of Language Labs., a project initiated in 1996, according to a needs analysis, very few teachers used new technologies. According to data collected by the Ministry of Education and Culture, it was clear that there was a need for training teachers to incorporate ICT in their teaching.

6. Learning outcomes

The main objectives of *The use of ICT and Teaching Greek as a Second Language* curriculum were to enable teachers of Greek as an L2 to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to combine current teaching and learning practices in L2 and CALL, in other words the use of ICT in Greek as an L2. At the completion of the curriculum, the teacher-trainees were expected to develop awareness and the necessary skills in teaching Greek as an L2 with the use of ICT in their specific context.

7. Curriculum description

The *ICT in Teaching Greek as an L2* curriculum, consisting of 3 modules, combined both L2 methodologies and ICT technical and methodological skills in order to meet the teachers' current needs in teaching Greek as an L2 and the use of ICT. It involved learning about theories and practices in teaching and learning an L2 and the use of ICT in L2, with specific reference to teaching Greek as an L2. Teacher-trainers were expected to explore theoretical issues which form the background knowledge of current practices in both L2 and ICT/CALL and then involve themselves in activities and projects that would enable them to explore such theories and put them into practices, relevant to their teaching needs and realities. Tables 1 and 2 briefly summarise the content of the curriculum.

MODULE 1	MODULE 2	MODULE 3
<p>Introduction to Teaching Greek as a Second Language (L2) and to the use of ICT in L2 Teaching</p>	<p>Extension of knowledge and skills in teaching Greek as an L2 and the use of ICT in L2 Teaching and Evaluation of Printed and Electronic materials for the Teaching of Greek as an L2</p>	<p>Exploring L2 Curriculum development; Printed and electronic L2 Curriculum Development for the Teaching of Greek as an L2</p>
<p>L2 Current Theories and Practices in L2 Teaching. Language Levels. Basic knowledge and skills in Teaching L2: needs analysis (characteristics of setting, students, teachers, etc.) teaching speaking, listening, reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar, culture, planning lessons, etc.</p>	<p>L2 Criteria development for the evaluation of L2 printed material. Evaluation of printed material for the teaching of GK as an L2. Deeper knowledge and extended skill development in teaching Greek as an L2.</p>	<p>L2 Theories and Practices in L2 Curriculum Development. Development of printed materials for the teaching of Greek as an L2 which would include teaching and practicing speaking, listening, reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar, culture, etc. language</p>

Table 1: Greek L2 content per module.

MODULE 1	MODULE 2	MODULE 3
Introduction to Teaching Greek as a Second Language (L2) and to the use of ICT in L2 Teaching	Extension of knowledge and skills in teaching Greek as an L2 and the use of ICT in L2 Teaching and Evaluation of Printed and Electronic materials for the Teaching of Greek as an L2	Exploring L2 Curriculum development; Printed and electronic L2 Curriculum Development for the Teaching of Greek as an L2
<p>ICT</p> <p>The use of ICT in general and in L2 in particular: historical overview.</p> <p>Basic knowledge and skills in the use of ICT in L2: hardware, software, saving, memory, networks, basic computer use, file management, and software in L2 (word processing functions as an L2 teaching and learning tool; very basic knowledge of Email and Internet functions and their use in L2 teaching and learning.</p>	<p>ICT</p> <p>Criteria development for the evaluation of L2 electronic material</p> <p>Evaluation of electronic material for the teaching of Greek as an L2: CD ROM , web pages, etc.</p> <p>Use of various software such as word processing, email, websites, multimedia, etc. and how they can be used for the benefit of language learning.</p> <p>Further Internet use: research, electronic mail, etc. in the teaching of GK as an L2.</p> <p>Use of presentation software in the teaching of GK as an L2.</p>	<p>ICT</p> <p>ICT in the teaching of L2 in practice.</p> <p>Development of electronic material for the teaching of GK as an L2: planning and implementation: creation of an educational website, etc.</p> <p>Class record management with the use of software programmes such as Excel.</p>

Table 2: ICT content per module.

8. Curriculum organisation

Each 3 x 60-hour module consisted of eight weekly face-to-face training sessions at a school or at the training institution, alternating with eight weeks of individual work at home, which consisted of individual, collaborative and online work. Teacher-trainees were expected to perform activities such as reading relevant information and literature, writing assignments, exploring resources, and putting theory into practice by carrying out relevant tasks. Each module started with an introductory session and ended with a final meeting in which the activities were presented to other colleagues and the school management.

9. Information and Communication Technology curriculum support

For both theoretical and practical reasons, the training was supported online through the use of ICT. On the programme website, trainees could find the curriculum description and the three modules alongside links, materials, instructions, and a list of participants' names and email addresses. Trainee-trainer and trainee-trainee would communicate via email and other electronic devices. In that way, they would put into practice what they learned in both L2 teacher training and the use of ICT in L2 teaching. The trainees could directly use the activities they would develop, for their immediate teaching needs. They could also share them. The intention was to upload them so that all trainees could have access to them.

The development of the content was carried out bearing in mind the type of teacher trainers who would participate. The website interface (Shneiderman 1997) aimed at providing a logical, useful and easy interactive learning environment. The use of other communication tools was integrated in a friendly and useful way, demonstrating at the same time ways they can be used for language teaching and learning. Every effort was made to select the hierarchical material and interface menus presentation, organisation of services and an appropriate user glossary and icons in a way that would facilitate not only teacher training but an awareness and understanding of how ICT can be used in teaching in a friendly, supportive, interactive and fruitful way.

10. Assessment

The teacher-trainees were expected to receive continuous work assessment throughout each module and grades on completion of each module and the entire curriculum. Continuous feedback was to be given from the trainer on weekly tasks during the whole duration of the programme in person and through email or other electronic communication devices. The final mark for all three modules would be the average of the final marks of all three modules.

11. Programme External Evaluation

An independent reviewer from the School of Modern Greek Language at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki evaluated the curricula and modules based on a questionnaire, common to all ECNTLT project participating teams. The rating scale was 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, from Poor to Excellent :

- Overall Quality of design: she found that all three modules and the curriculum show an excellent (5) structure of didactic progress.
- Curriculum coherence: she found that all three modules constitute an excellent (4) coherent curriculum.
- Clarity of instructions and presentation: she found that in all three modules, it was very clear (4) what trainees were supposed to do.
- Effectiveness: she found that all three modules and the curriculum achieve the stated aims in an excellent (5).
- Up-to-dateness: she found that the modules contain very good up-to-date information (4).
- Effectiveness: she found that the modules and the curriculum achieve the stated aims very well. (4)
- Appropriateness for target group: she found that the modules and the curriculum address the needs of the target group in an excellent manner. (5)

Total marks: 105 out of 110.

She accepted module one with minor moderations. These mainly had to do with the request to clarify the differences of the definitions of "mother tongue", "first", "foreign", and "second language". She accepted modules 2 and 3 and the curriculum as a whole as they stood.

12. General comments

In her general comments she mentioned that four teachers in Thessaloniki were given access to the programme material in order to give their input. The technology knowledge of these four teachers varied from zero to full. They found the programme fully satisfactory. In one occasion, it was noted that there was a need for more detailed, supplementary instructions. According to their opinion, there were answers to all questions they may have had, which related to the curriculum, the theoretical knowledge, the information and the possibility it provided for their training in areas of pedagogy and methodology. Suggestions included the following:

- Parallel training in the conventional way (how much time will be decided), which would answer to the particular needs of the audience.
- The development of notes or a textbook related to the training topics.
- Organisation of many workshops on various topics.
- Clearer link of language and culture covered in the material

The external examiner noted that the programme was pioneering in the area of teaching Greek as an L2/FL (an area which has hardly been touched so far), and in the area of suggestions to problems facing all those who teach Greek to both students of Greek background who live overseas or to students of non-Greek background.

13. Pilot

The Greek as an L2/FL and ICT curriculum was presented to five female teachers of Greek as an L2 at a private high school in Limassol, Cyprus. Participants were given a pre-questionnaire to complete before attending the presentation. Section A of the questionnaire sought basic biodata, section B and C information relating to their educational background as teachers of Greek as an L2, and their use of ICT in teaching.

Four participants were of Greek-Cypriot background. The fifth one stated that she was of Greek-Cypriot-Australian background. All of them had a Bachelor of Arts degree and two of them had a graduate diploma. One was studying for her Master's degree. All of them had Greek as their first language. When they were asked to evaluate their knowledge of Greek, four of them said they had an excellent knowledge of Greek in the areas of speaking, listening, reading, writing, one with excellent knowledge of Greek (listening and reading) and good (speaking and writing):

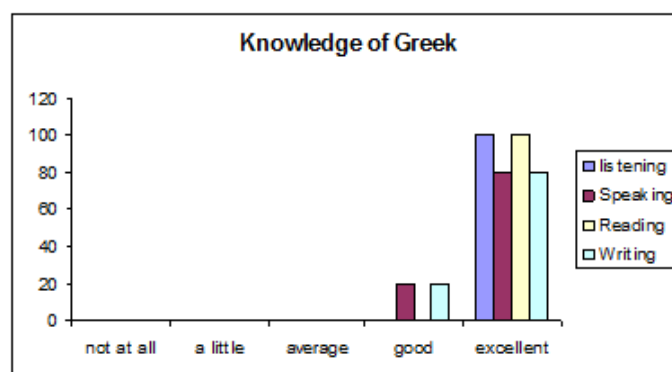


Figure 1: Knowledge of Greek.

Much literature in L2 teaching and CALL is in English. For this reason we wanted to establish the participants' language competence in English. Therefore, participants were asked to evaluate their knowledge of English. Three of them had excellent listening and reading skills, and one had excellent writing skills. Three of them had good speaking and writing skills and two had good listening and reading skills. Two participants had average speaking skills.

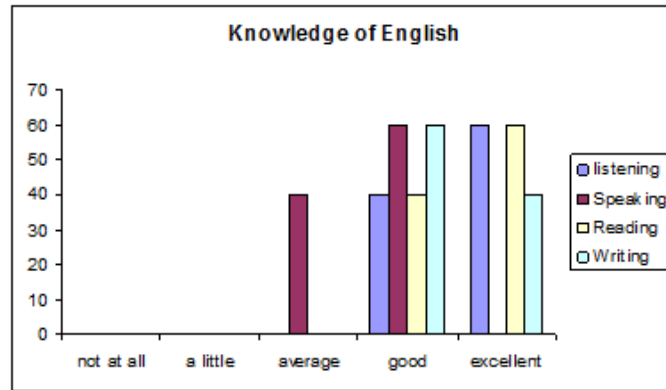


Figure 2: Knowledge of English.

Participants were also asked if they knew any other languages. One participant said she knew French: (listening average, speaking and writing a little).

Section B - Greek as an L2/FL

Four participants did not have:

University Training in teaching an L2/FL in general and

University Training in teaching Greek as an L2/FL in particular.

Seminars in teaching an L2/FL in general

Seminars in teaching Greek as an L2/FL in particular.

Only one participant had been trained in all four areas when she lived, studied and worked in Australia although the training had taken place a long time ago. The five participants did not have any training in teaching Greek as an L2 using the Communicative Method.

Then they were asked how much they included the following in their teaching: listening, speaking, reading, writing, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, culture, other. Only the person trained in Australia responded to this question (grammar and writing: a little; reading comprehension and pronunciation: average; listening, speaking, vocabulary and culture a lot. She was also the only one who indicated what types of texts she included in her teaching: letters, novels, reports and sport or other event coverage: a little; news, wishing cards, emails, poems, stories, jokes and films: average; songs and myths: often; dialogue and discussion: very often. She was again the only one who indicated the topics included in her teaching: family, house, neighbourhood, town, country: average; school, sports, music, customs, theatre, environment, painting, prominent Greeks: often; history, dancing, animals: very often.

Section B – Use of ICT in teaching Greek as an L2

Two out of five participants said they had some training in general and seminar training in ICT. All the participants said they did not have any university training in ICT in general or any seminar training in CALL. Participants were also asked if they did any of their studies online. Only one participant said she studied online (she was doing her Master's degree in that mode.)

Participants were asked how often they used various types of software such as word processors, PowerPoint, Excel, Access, Front Page Internet, e-mail, chat, audio or video conferencing, e-mail lists, news groups, image or audio editors. The most commonly used programmes were word processor, then the Internet and then e-mail (Figure 3).

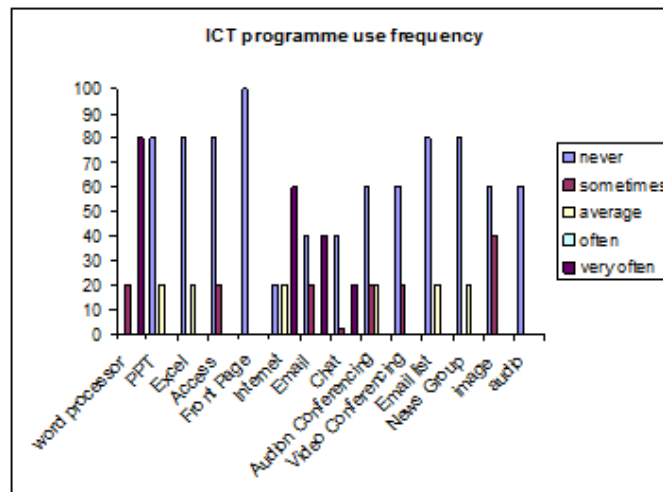


Figure 3: ICT programme use.

Participants were asked how comfortably they felt using these software programmes (Figure 4). Most of them were comfortable with the word processor, then the Internet and then e-mail.

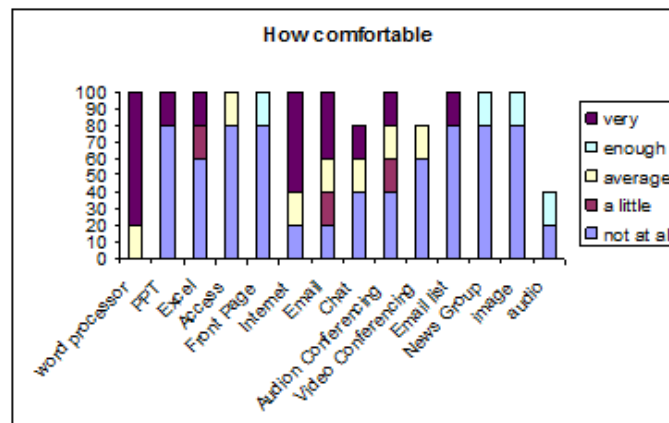


Figure 4: ICT programme use.

The participants were then asked which of these programmes they use in their teaching of Greek as an L2/FL and which ones are used by their students as learning tools. Most of them did not respond to these questions. One mentioned the word processor and the Internet were used very often by her students and another participant mentioned the word processor and Excel as being used by her students moderately and the Internet often.

Curriculum and 3-module presentation

The curriculum and the three modules were then presented to the participants online. After that they were given a post-presentation questionnaire to establish their impressions and future intentions. All of the them were interested in participating in such a seminar and stated that such a programme would be part of their professional development. Participants were also asked about their expectations regarding the programme if they were to follow it. Three of them stated it would help them very much in general terms and two, that it would help them very much in their teaching. Two responded they would learn very much and two, much of what they need in teaching

Greek as an L2, and one did not respond. Three responded that they would learn a lot in relation to teaching Greek as an L2 with the use of ICT, and two did not respond (Figure 5).

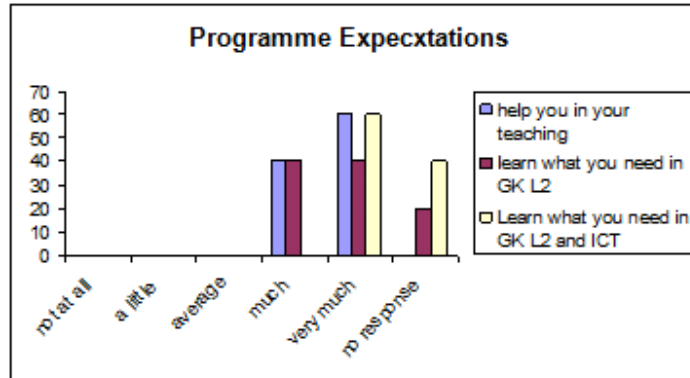


Figure 5: Programme Expectations.

Participants felt the programme design, content presentation, online delivery and presentation were good or very good (Figure 6).

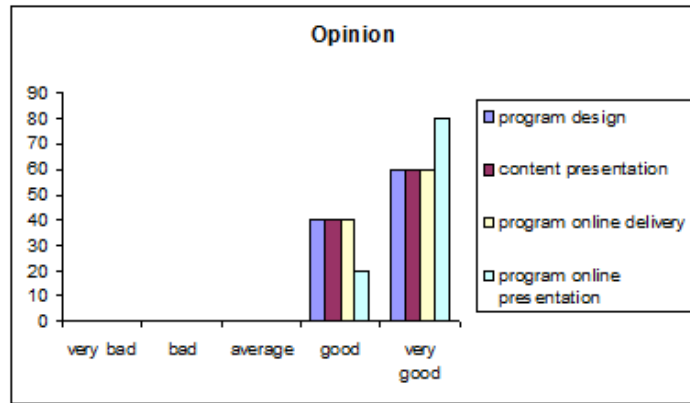


Figure 6: Opinion.

The majority of the participants felt that the programme could achieve its aims and within the planned 180 hour-time frame (Figure 7).

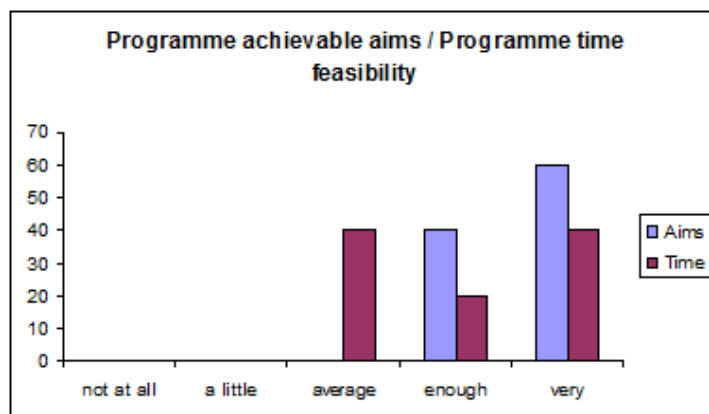


Figure 7: Programme aims.

Most participants felt comfortable or very comfortable with the on campus/online delivery mode. Their overall programme impressions were good or excellent (Figure 8).

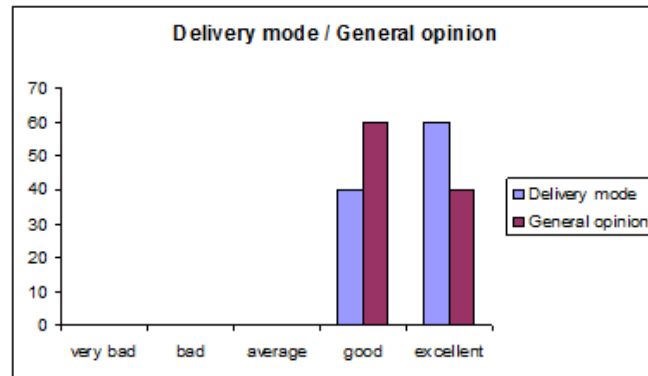


Figure 8: Delivery mode.

To the Open-ended question "Would this seminar cover your needs?", three participants said most definitely, one said she would like to see the details of what was briefly presented in the presentation and another one said she would like to see similar, more general seminars, so that they could cover other subjects. As we can see from the information above, there is a clear need and an interest on behalf of the teachers to be trained in teaching Greek as an L2 and ICT.

14. Possibilities for programme implementation in Cyprus

In Cyprus teachers of secondary education have to attend a certain number of officially accredited training courses before they become tenured. Up until recently, the Pedagogical Institute has the exclusive privilege of offering the courses that are recognised as accredited for the pre-service training as well as for the stage before becoming tenured. The Government University of Cyprus has recently been asked to offer such courses as well. Several teachers have already expressed their interest in our programme. The University of Nicosia would aim to offer these modules as part of the official accredited teacher training scheme.

15. Conclusion and future directions

Every effort was made to combine theory and practice in L2 teacher training and the use of ICT in the delivery of this ECNTLT teacher-training programme, tailored for the specific needs of teachers teaching Greek as an L2 in Cyprus. We believe that the application of theory during training makes trainees feel more comfortable with it, and more prepared not only to accept it, but also to implement it in their everyday practice. The next step is to trial the programme at a larger scale, and evaluate it. Some changes may need to be introduced as a result of that and as a result of the constant changes arising in both L2 and the use of New Technologies in language teaching and learning, before starting to implement it.

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