

Apofil Language Learning Programme

ITALY Language Training



Good Practice Executive Summary

Apofil Language Learning Programme has been carried out since 2004 as part of a wider VET programme of the Potenza Province.

The programme originated to support the local labour market policy and respond to the growing demand from young people on the regional territory, willing to ameliorate their skills in a foreign language through a system of formal and internationally recognized certification.

In addition to that, a strong presence of immigrants in the local territory and their language-related needs fostered the implementation of the programme.

The language learning actions also aim at the presentation and enhancement of innovative methodology based on practice and personalization of items through an integrated and systematic approach to languages and skills.

As regards the external language certification of applicants to our services, we signed an agreement with some international examination boards and precisely with Trinity Certification Board for the English language and, for the last two years, with CILS Certification Board for the Italian language test as a second language.

The relevant actions were carried out by Apofil head branch and then transferred to all Apofil territorial branches on the provincial territory.

Since the programme started (2004) an overall amount of 1723 applicants has taken a Trinity certification and about 130 immigrants have taken a CILS certification according to the CEFR for languages.

Applicants are asked to undergo a placement test prior to the beginning of the courses which have an average length of 150 hours and a maximum of 15 participants per class.

Both English and Italian Learning programmes are characterized by the following elements

- 1) They are based upon a complete up-to-date needs analysis
- 2) They are focused on the acquisition of competences identified on needs analysis
- 3) Their objectives are realised in terms of comparison between needs analysis/skill levels acquired and needs analysis/numbers of applicants certified
- 4) They are based on an updated didactic framework
- 5) They incorporate elements of retroaction
- 6) They take into account a maximal number of constraints: absence, diversity, time and place.

- 7) Programme can be easily transferred both to national level and multinational EU regions level; they have been designed and planned according to CEFR for languages and Lisbon strategy.

Phases of the Apofil Language Learning Programme

Phase 1	Initial promotion of the language activity	Actors: All Apofil branches
Phase 2	Definition of the entry level and the assessment tools	Actors: for English courses: English mother tongue teachers and Italian teachers of English For Italian courses: teachers of Italian language, tutors.
Phase 3	Selection of the participants	Actor: Apofil Potenza
Phase 4	Language training courses	Actor: for English courses: English mother tongue teachers and Italian teachers of English For Italian courses: teachers of Italian language, tutors
Phase 5	Final assessment for the language skill acquisition	Actor: for English courses: English mother tongue teachers and Italian teachers of English For Italian courses: teachers of Italian language, tutors
Phase 6	International Language Certification	Actor: Trinity College London, CILS examination board

Apofil Potenza head branch was in charge of coordinating and monitoring the process phases. The staff was composed by language teachers, specialized mother tongue teachers and computer technicians.

The projects has been successfully carried out for several years and it is a good example of capacity building action as regards language training at territorial level and as a valuable support to university students, disadvantaged people and immigrants, in order to facilitate their social integration.

1. The needs analysis is based on a complete, up-to-date conceptual framework.

The needs analysis was carried out during the Phase 3 “Selection of the participants” in the form of a written placement test (Attach 1) and an oral interview based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as a tool to make competences recognisable and comprehensible across Europe.

The agreed minimum exit level was A2 both for English and Italian language, although applicants with the right pre-requisites have been given the chance to be certified at higher levels up to B2 of the CEFR.

2. Training is focused on the acquisition of the needed competencies identified through the needs analysis.

Apofil Language Learning Programme reflects the Council of Europe’s concern as to the protection and promotion of linguistic and cultural diversity, it aims at the development of plurilingualism as a lifelong process and the development of the capacity for an independent language learning process.

The proposed learning methodology has been designed to fit the needs of the learners according to the age, learning purpose, context and cultural background. While encouraging the proactive learner’s self-assessment, which is usually combined with teachers assessment, participants in this project are led to assessments by educational authorities and examination bodies.

Syllabuses have been arranged to respond to the language descriptors of CEFR, but also to give users a sort of language tools to be used in their future jobs and in view of a mutual understanding among citizens in Europe.

This strategy allows the acquisition of language skills to be immediately used in everyday life followed by the validation of competences by means of a recognized system of certification

3. Training objectives are realistic within the timeframe.

Objectives were attained within the specified timeframe. Taking into account the initial and the target level of trainees both in Italian and English language along with the number and frequency of training sessions, the planned length of 150 hours per course resulted in being an adequate timeframe to achieve the language goals of CEFR levels.

4. Training is based on an updated didactic framework.

Trainees were given the chance to benefit from good quality didactic training and time constraints were adequately dealt with to satisfy the users' needs.

A good portion of teaching time was dedicated to check the trainees' work, comments and adjustments. Reinforcement activities were also carried out for the weakest who had some difficulties in achieving the scheduled language goals.

Half term interviews, and mock exams took place for the trainees to build confidence and master the skills acquired and consequently check and assess the class level.

New technologies were used to strengthen the teachers' teaching skills, lessons were alternatively held in multimedia labs with specific language software.

From a didactic point of view both mother tongue and Italian teachers based their lessons on the most recent language learning theories; learning by doing, natural approach.

Lexical syllabus was based on the most useful and high-frequency words and an integrated and systematic approach to language and skill was adopted and adapted according to the class needs.

Learners were given the chance to practice the foreign language in meaningful, interesting and personalized context.

5. Training incorporates some element of retroaction.

Apofil Language Learning Programme included some monitoring actions while the programme was in progress and at the end of the courses.

Monitoring addressed to students in terms of evaluation of competences acquired, but also to teachers in order to check the real effectiveness of the planned activities.

Half term interviews and tests were administrated by mother tongue teachers in order to evaluate, in advance, competences to be potentially acquired by the end of the course.

In this way trainers could easily suggest the right grade to enter international certifications coherently with CEFR.

As already stated the international language examination boards chosen by Apofil were Trinity College, London for the English language and CILS for the Italian language. An overall amount of 1723 applicants took a Trinity certification and about 130 immigrants took a CILS certification according to the CEFR of languages.

6. Training takes into account a maximal number of constraints: absence, diversity, time and place.

Taking into consideration the diversity of our target users groups in terms of culture, level, gender and learning style, in fact classes were made up of university students, unemployed people, young people from the age of 18 to 25, workers and immigrants, the courses were organized in order to meet the trainees' needs and allow all student to attend lessons. Consequently some courses were held in the morning, others in the afternoon, three times a week.

English lessons were integrated with the use of a network language learning software English Plus by DIDAEL. This tool was used in laboratories and gave trainers the possibility to organize self-learning modules and adapt materials according to the students' different needs, especially when reinforcing weak abilities was needed.

These activities were co-arranged by teachers who alternated between practical work, lessons in theory and self-study in laboratories.

7. Transferability assessment

7.1. Evidence of transfer

As far as the English language the project model has been transferred to all Apofil branches all over the territory of the Province of Potenza and to some local schools: primary schools and high schools. As regards the Italian language courses and CILS exams, the model has only been repeated and transferred to Apofil branches.

Procedures regarding initial selection of the students, language contents, timetable of language learning activities, objectives, final assessment and recognition of all international external certification has become the standard of reference for the Agency, for the local school system of training credits, and local employers.

Furthermore, considering that the programme refers to international recognised standards, it can be easily transferred and applied to the whole Italian territory. Our programme involved 1853 trainees, 90 courses, 7 mother tongue teachers and 50 teachers and tutors.

Apofil Language Learning programme can be considered an example of capacity building action as regards language learning process.

7.2. Innovation

The innovation of the policy can be identified in the attempt to standardize the acquisition of language skill for a wide range of users: university students, school students, workers, adults, children from primary schools, immigrants; all willing to acquire skills in a foreign language, or to be supported in the process of language learning and certify their skills regardless whether acquired within or outside formal education. Innovation can be also identified in the major purpose of the project to start spreading the “culture of language learning”, in terms of communicative competences to be owned by the speaker of a second language, expressed in the “can-do” statements of the CEFR level descriptors.

7.3. Dependence on political context

The action we carried out addressed to a variety of group targets closely related to the Italian continuously changing political and social context. In fact trainers involved in the programme were university students, students from high school and primary schools who needed to face the innovation of the university and school reform that sees the English language as a compulsory subject; immigrants in great need for inclusion and integration; workers and young people in general willing to ameliorate their language skills to become better European citizens and an active part of a wider process of globalization. In this sense the vocational training system for lifelong learning plays an important role.

7.4. Flexibility

Although the programme developed within a specific context it had some elements of flexibility since the above described goals were strongly linked to the European strategy outlined in Lisbon in 2000, therefore it can be widely recognized at a European level. However, adjustments might be made in order to better adapt the programme to a wider extent of flexibility.

7.5. Multi-region transfer

The programme presents all elements to make it transferable to a multiregional level within Europe and to be taken as a standard model to apply to the national vocational training system for lifelong learning.