

EALTA Special Interest Group on Migration

Thursday, 6 June, 2024, 14.00–15.30

Time	Outline
14:00-14:10	Welcome and introductions
Migrant Learners	
14:10-14:35	The Challenges of Assessment in a New Language Program for International Protection Applicants in Dublin <i>Stephen P. O’Connell</i>
14:35-14:45	Break
Language Requirements for Migration	
14:45-15:10	“They are right to worry”– the emotional impact of language requirements for permanent residence and citizenship on LESLLA learners <i>Cecilie Hamnes Carlsen</i>
15:10-15:30	Closing discussion

ABSTRACTS

The Challenges of Assessment in a New Language Program for International Protection Applicants in Dublin

Stephen P. O’Connell, Consultant for Dublin Northwest Partnership

The challenges of assessment increase when a language program is new and when the learners face uncertainty in their residency status, such as with international protection applicants (IPAs). This talk summarizes assessment challenges faced by a non-profit organization in Dublin when developing and implementing a language program in just such a context.

In 2023 Dublin Northwest Partnership received funding to address a need in their catchment: providing language support for IPAs with varying levels of English proficiency who did not yet have permission to work legally in Ireland and who therefore were limited in what trainings they could avail of. Further, IPAs who did not struggle with everyday communication in English did not feel they needed basic language support or see the relevance of traditional forms-focused language instruction.

The grant was used to develop a course based on Task-based Language Teaching principles (Long 2015; Van den Branden 2022) to ensure that classroom activities were drawn from language use tasks that the learners were facing (e.g., conduct job searches, draft CVs, speak in job interviews). During the design phase, placement and progress assessments were seen as priorities, with summative assessment being less so. The program was run in two iterations with 39 total participants and efforts at doing placement and progress assessment had mixed results. This talk will summarize what was tried, what seemed to work and what didn't, and what changes need to be made to be more successful with assessment for learners in this context in the future.

“They are right to worry”– the emotional impact of language requirements for permanent residence and citizenship on LESLLA learners¹

Cecilie Hamnes Carlsen, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences

Learning a new language as an adult is not merely a considerable cognitive task: It is also a highly emotional endeavour, potentially evoking a wide range of feelings, from desire, enjoyment, and satisfaction to anxiety, stress, fear, and shame. Existing research into possible causes and effects of emotions like language anxiety and language enjoyment however suffers from significant limitations in terms of both learner groups and contextual factors covered, as the research focus has been primarily on university students learning foreign languages in the US, while (foreign and) second language learning in other countries, by other learner groups, and in other contexts, like the context of forced migration in particular, have been little explored to date.

This study employs thematic analysis of 20 semi-structured interviews with teachers of LESLLA learners to investigate the emotional impact of formal language requirements as part of migration and integration policies on LESLLA learners (RQ1). Knowing that learning a new language as an adult literacy support is more challenging for low-literate learners (LESLLA learners) than for literate learners with a strong educational background, LESLLA learners are especially vulnerable when such requirements are introduced. We conducted interviews with teachers from five European countries with varying language policies in this area: Sweden and Ireland, which do not have such requirements, Norway which has relatively lenient requirements, and Austria and Denmark which have the strictest requirements in Europe. This comparative approach aims to explore potential differences in opinions and experiences between teachers from countries with diverse language policies (RQ2). Finally, the study examines how the policy of requirements affect both teachers and their teaching (RQ3).

¹ The study presented is part of the larger research project, IMPECT (2021-2025) anchored at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences (HVL) and financed by the Research council of Norway/HVL. This presentation is based on a book chapter with the same name co-authored with Lorenzo Rocca, Elana Shohamy and Jeanne Kurvers (under review). The presentation is given on behalf of and in agreement with the co-authors.