

SHORT TERM SCIENTIFIC MISSION (STSM) SCIENTIFIC REPORT

This report is submitted for approval by the STSM applicant to the STSM coordinator

Action number: CA 15221

STSM title: Perceptions / Applications of Continuous Professional Development of Language Teachers in Higher Education: A case study for language schools and higher education institutions as part of COST Action CA15221

STSM start and end date: 04.02.2019 to 09.02.2019

Grantee name: Başak Ercan

PURPOSE OF THE STSM:

The COST Action CA15221 aims at ‘creating synergy among the increasingly more specialized and centralized supports for four key higher education activities - research, writing, teaching and learning’. This Short Term Scientific Mission meets and supports the objectives of this COST Action proposing to establish a link between teaching, learning, research and writing in the frame of continuous professional development. Teachers engage in teaching, learning, research and writing as an inevitable part of their profession and it is of great importance for them to facilitate new opportunities which can lead a more effective learning environment for their students and institutions in general while benefit themselves improve constantly. The aim of this scientific mission is to examine the continuous professional development perceptions and applications of language teachers and their reflection in these four areas in the frame of organizational climate.

Professional development is important for anybody. Constant development and rapid changes in society and in social economical affairs have made it inevitable for anybody to develop to adjust themselves to these changes, which is the core of lifelong learning.

Professional development has undergone major changes in its form and content because of the developments in education, technology and pedagogy and thus it becomes continuous in its nature. ‘Learning to learn’ has become the motto of lifelong education and teaching / learning environments have started to be arranged as learner-centered ones rather than teacher-centered. In the area of English teaching, things are no different. Language teachers need to follow the pedagogical and practical developments in ELT (English Language Teaching). Being an instructor

English at School of Foreign Languages in a state university, this scientific mission will lead to the researcher to experience these changes and help develop interactive and reflective practices in ELT. The focus of this scientific mission is to specify the continuous professional development perceptions and applications of teachers at tertiary level

Overall, this STSM gave the applicant the opportunity to experience a different situation in another university in terms of continuous professional development and reflect and compare the perceptions and applications of the continuous professional development in another organizational climate with her Home institute and will terminate in a publication

DESCRIPTION OF WORK CARRIED OUT DURING THE STSMS

First of all, I was happy to have carried on an STSM at University of Latvia, which is one of the largest and most prestigious universities in the Baltic States, located in Riga and home to around 15,000 students. Established in 1919, the university has been rated four out of five stars overall in the QS Stars rating system, and achieves five-star ratings in the categories ‘internationalization’, ‘teaching’, ‘facilities’ and ‘innovation’. The university offers a number of international programs taught either partly or completely in English, including medicine and dentistry (<https://www.topuniversities.com/where-to-study/europe/latvia/guide>).

On the very first day of my STSM I had the opportunity to meet the dean of the Faculty of Education, Psychology and Art and had a discussion about the continuous professional development and exchanged ideas, comparing the organizational climate of the two countries. Then, I visited the university library and reached the many materials about the management of the foreign language teaching and learning.

As part of my research, I interviewed six teachers; two of them were also in the administrative staff, in the Faculty of Education, Psychology and Art about their perceptions and applications about continuous professional development

During my STSM, I was also given the opportunity to observe an English phonetics class and to meet the students and get their opinions about an ideal language learning environment, which is a very true reflection of the idea of continuous professional development in class.

The use of technology was good enough throughout the university; the classes were equipped with an interactive white board, a projector with internet connection. It caught my attention that

everybody inside the borders of the university has access to internet free of charge, which is not the case in my home university. After I made the interviews, I prepared a short report about the results and implications of them to be presented to the colleagues of the host country and discussed them together. It was very productive when we exchanged ideas about continuous professional development.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN RESULTS OBTAINED

Getting the opportunity to have discussions and interviews both with the administrative and teaching staff at the University of Latvia, I figured out that the University of Latvia is passing through a professional development process. The university has started to apply a competence based education as in Finland, having all systems of education reorganized starting from kindergarten. New standards have been worked out for all levels of education. It is planned that all subjects will be grouped in schools in seven fields. This new attempt requires the education of teachers to be reorganized as well. One of the implications of this is the teacher education for all levels, which will be launched in 2021. Now they are in the process of licensing and accreditation. The faculty of education is working to prepare teaching staff for the new programs. It is required that in masters programs, the staff will be allowed to work in the university if their foreign language level is C1 and they have publications in the fields they give courses about. Due to that, about 30 percent of the staff is involved in foreign language learning courses. Moreover, about 30 percent of the staff is involved in ICT courses.

To prepare new people / staff to work in university, post doc students are involved in reading lectures where experienced professors follow their working. They not only read lectures but also write teaching materials and they also have to do research and write articles, which is an important attempt for continuous professional development under the guidance of experienced professors. It allows to do the conclusion that there are great possibilities for young people in University of Latvia

Another aspect of this new tendency is that elderly staff is asked to go to schools to practice and to observe how everything is going on in schools.. The schools are paid as partners of this project. Teaching staff are free to choose the school according to their area of interest, the only requirement is that the school has to be involved in piloting of the new standards. The university also accepts foreign professors to read lessons in their system.

Concerning all these innovations throughout the university, language teachers also get their part in

it. They also need to improve their language teaching skills and methodology, meanwhile adapting themselves to the latest technologies required and inevitable part of today's language learning environments. Another issue is that throughout the university there are courses where you learn the didactics of teaching; it doesn't matter you are English teacher or not. In short, it is possible to say that everybody has to learn the foreign language and the use of modern technology because of this new project called 'School 2030' going on in the country.

As one of the results of the interviews, it could be said that younger teachers believe that professional development is under their own responsibility mostly as well as institutions and professional associations' contribution. On the other hand, elderly generation think that teachers don't need cooperation because they believe that a teacher needs to justify him or herself concerning the new tendencies. To accomplish this, they read a lot, go to conferences, write. However, it would be better if they passed their experience to young generations.

Overall, the utmost important aspect for teaching staff is to prepare younger generations for the requirements of the world we live in, which is part of educational environment which necessitates professionally developed teachers for sure and this coincides the primary aim of COST CA15221, focusing on research, writing, teaching and learning as key higher education activities.

FUTURE COLLABORATIONS (if applicable)

It is certain that this STSM created the opportunity to construct a bridge between the University of Latvia and Akdeniz University and both parties expressed their openness to do research and write a journal article. Therefore, the STSM grantee is thankful to COST CA15221 for giving her this invaluable opportunity.

The grantee also would like to give her special thanks to Prof. Ilze Ivanova for her invaluable ideas, support and welcoming attitude during her visit to University of Latvia, in Riga, Latvia and also for her review of the report. Prof. Ivanova is always welcome to be hosted by Ms. Ercan, representing Akdeniz University. Apart from that, being a PhD student at University of Latvia some years ago, this visit promoted her to go on and finish her research that is just connected with learning of the languages – listening, speaking, reading and writing - and managing of these processes.