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NEOLAiA

Common Charter

on Language Policy and Staff Accreditation Criteria

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UNIVERSITÄT BIELEFELD · Universidad de Jaén · UNIVERSITY of NICOSIA · ÖREBRO UNIVERSITET · OSTRAVSKÁ UNIVERZITA

UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI SALERNO · USV Universitatea Ştefan cel Mare Suceava · université de TOURS · ŠIAULIŲ VALSTYBINĖ KOLEGIJA

NEOLAiA

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Preamble

NEOLAiA is a European University Alliance consisting of nine higher education institutions, widely spread across Europe. They are Bielefeld University (Germany), University of Jaén (Spain), University of Nicosia (Cyprus), Örebro University (Sweden), University of Ostrava (Czech Republic), University of Salerno (Italy), University of Stefan cel Mare Suceava (Romania), University of Tours (France) and Šiauliai University of Applied Sciences (Lithuania). We see our role in small and medium-sized cities with the potential to boldly transform the European higher education system and society, from the bottom up, bringing sustainable innovation for social and economic prosperity not only to our regions, but to the EU as a whole and beyond.

As NEOLAiA is dedicated to promoting plurilingualism as one of its main cornerstones, this Language Policy Charter is a declaration of values and principles in language education, intended to serve as a bedrock for harmonized language policies across our institutions and aligned with the *NEOLAiA Language Policy White Paper* and the *D&I NeoCharter*.

We wish to establish an open language policy charter, which proposes recommendations that can be implemented, sets forth lines of action that take account of the diversity of the contexts of our Alliance, and promotes a proactive language policy built on international scientific research in the field of Applied Linguistics.

We consider that the recognition and realization of plurilingualism is essential for our Alliance, as well as for Europe. In order to achieve this goal, our language policy realistically acknowledges the tensions and power relations associated with anglicization in the university and research contexts, and proposes, using the networks and programs already in place for the use of English in higher education, to facilitate expanding programs to other European languages. To this end, it sets forth 5 core principles and provides a *theoretical conceptualization and a practical operationalization* of each one, setting forth subsequently a series of clear-cut *recommendations for their application* across our Consortium.

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Principle 1

Developing an inclusive language policy that embraces and values the diverse language skills of university stakeholders

Theoretical Conceptualization

As part of the NEOLAiA Alliance's Charter on Language Policy, this principle highlights the essential value that different languages can offer to the educational community. Our Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are committed to recognizing and engaging with individuals' full linguistic and cultural repertoires as invaluable resources for meaning-making in diverse contexts and situations. This commitment is guided by principles of inclusion, the expansion of perspectives, and the prevention of discrimination and language insecurity, valuing the unique contributions that each individual's linguistic and cultural background brings to our community.

Practical operationalization

When addressing language instruction, it is beneficial to consider not only the languages used for teaching, but also the rich array of first-language experiences that students bring, including native, regional, migrant, border, and heritage languages. In line with the *NEOLAiA Language Policy White Paper* and the *D&I NeoCharter*, the recommendations to promote progress in this arena are as follows:

1. Encourage stakeholders to view linguistic diversity as an asset for academic innovation and intercultural dialogue.

2. Embrace the fact that this diversity opens the door to innovative pedagogical practices, as the Council of Europe highlights in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR).

3. Consider that approaches such as mediation, code-switching, and intercomprehension can enhance an inclusive learning environment and foster greater understanding among students.

4. Acknowledge the diverse needs of all stakeholders and strive to address any barriers that may limit the full participation of all individuals involved.

Recommendations for application

To facilitate the implementation of this Charter within NEOLAiA, the following actions shall be undertaken by each member as well as by the Alliance collectively:

1. Create accessible environments for all stakeholders: Working on institutional policies to reduce barriers, such as translating essential resources and promoting awareness campaigns that emphasize linguistic diversity as a fundamental aspect of the university's identity.

2. Integrate linguistic diversity into curricula: Providing workshops and resources to help educators create teaching strategies that use techniques like mediation and code-switching to enhance understanding in multilingual environments.

Principle 2

Promoting plurilingualism and cultural awareness for inclusive knowledge development

Theoretical Conceptualization

This principle underscores the collective commitment of partner universities to promote plurilingualism and cultural awareness as foundational elements for fostering inclusive knowledge development. By embracing linguistic and cultural diversity, the Alliance seeks to create equitable and innovative academic environments that transcend linguistic barriers and nurture intercultural understanding among all stakeholders—teaching staff, student body, and administrative staff.

Practical operationalization

Recognizing the pivotal role of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in promoting internationalization and academic mobility, NEOLAiA institutions should view English not as a competing force, but as a supportive foundation upon which to build robust plurilingual and intercultural competences, enriching the educational experience for all stakeholders involved. Thus, EMI should be considered a stepping stone for developing plurilingual and intercultural competencies, thereby aligning the goals of internationalization with principles of inclusivity and diversity.

1. Expand Multilingual Course Offerings.

- Increase the number of courses, programs, and degrees offered in multiple languages, starting with EMI and progressively incorporating other languages in addition to local and regional ones.
- Provide tailored language training for international students and staff to facilitate both academic and social integration.

2. Strengthen Language Development.

- Enhance teacher training programs, starting with EMI methodologies, to ensure high-quality instruction while promoting the use of multilingual strategies during teaching.
- Foster collaborative training initiatives that combine subject expertise with advanced linguistic skills, encouraging educators to integrate other languages in their pedagogical approaches apart from English.

3. Preserve Linguistic and Cultural Diversity.

- Recognize local and regional languages as valuable tools for contextualizing and deepening academic knowledge.
- Promote the use of local languages in academic work, especially within the Humanities and Social Sciences, while still using EMI to reach a wider audience.

4. Embed Intercultural Competence in Academic and Administrative Practices.

- Develop events across the NEOLAiA institutions that promote cultural awareness and understanding, fostering meaningful interactions between stakeholders from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.
- Facilitate intercultural training for academic and administrative staff to enhance their capacity to support international students and programs effectively.

5. Foster Multilingual Research and Collaboration

- Encourage research initiatives that embrace linguistic diversity, including publications and presentations in multiple languages.
- Encourage researchers to engage in multilingual outreach, highlighting the value of diverse linguistic perspectives in academic research.
- Bolster language revision programs (of academic texts, final reports, contracts, patents, project applications, research outcomes, and any other documents related to teaching, research, or knowledge transfer) and incentivize publishing in English and other foreign languages in order to boost the international production and dissemination of research.

Recommendations for application

In order to incorporate this principle within NEOLAiA, the following actions shall be undertaken:

1. From the start of the Alliance, it will be essential to develop a strategic roadmap to gradually increase the number of multilingual courses and degree programs, beginning with EMI (English as a Medium of Instruction) and progressively integrating other languages.

2. The organization of intercultural events, workshops, and seminars within Alliance institutions will promote meaningful dialogue and enhance understanding among students, staff, and faculty members.

Principle 3

Developing English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) programs to promote internal mobility and attract non-European students

Theoretical Conceptualization

Acknowledging and promoting Europe's plurilingual and pluricultural repertoire is as important as understanding that, unlike in other regions of the world, on our continent, we do not speak the same language. Across history, *linguae francae* have been used by peoples who, despite speaking different vernaculars, sought mutual understanding: Koiné Greek was used as a trade language in the Mediterranean during the Hellenistic period, Latin was used by the Romans and well into the Middle Ages, French was used as the language for diplomacy and international relations from the 17th to the 19th century, and English is used nowadays for international communication. Thus, the use of a common language should not be seen as opposed to our wealth of languages but rather as another competence for those Europeans who aim to communicate among themselves and with the rest of the world.

Although languages such as Spanish and Chinese are growing in popularity, English is still the lingua franca of the world. While we should be cautious as regards the exclusive use of English in teaching, research, publishing, and networking in Higher Education, developing EMI programs will be key for mobility and internationalization within Europe and for the attraction of students from outside our continent.

Practical operationalization

In line with *NEOLAiA's White Paper on Language Policy*, for the development of EMI programs, the members of the Alliance should:

1. Strengthen the methodological competence in EMI of their teaching faculty (by facilitating training, job-shadowing, or supporting materials design).

2. Facilitate the linguistic upgrade of lecturers by zeroing in on interactional academic competencies and discipline-specific literacies.

3. Promote higher levels of linguistic competence among students and staff so that the former feel more confident to apply for mobility programs and the latter are able to assist students from any country.

4. Offer support and guidance to those Faculties and teachers who seek to set up or expand degrees or subjects in English or another foreign language.

Recommendations for application

To incorporate this principle within NEOLAiA, the following actions shall be undertaken:

1. Dispel the notion that EMI courses are a burden for pluricultural and plurilingual competence. These should be conceived by lecturers as a means to reach wider audiences through academic excellence and as a way to connect students with global opportunities.

2. Provide the necessary resources to develop both EMI and plurilingual courses.

3. Create a quality assessment framework to gauge the functioning of EMI and plurilingual courses, with clear indicators that allow those subjects, courses or degrees that attain them to obtain official recognition.

4. Due to the diverse nature of the members of the Alliance and their historical relation with English as a language of instruction, each university should reflect on the balance between courses taught in local languages, those taught through EMI, and programs taught in more than two languages. NEOLAiA members who already have well-established plurilingual programs which favor mobility and attract international students may prefer to focus on the development of courses in local languages, whereas institutions that still seek to reach wider audiences may prefer to focus on the development of EMI courses.

Principle 4

Strengthening the intercultural and plurilingual experiences of all stakeholders

Theoretical Conceptualization

Language is a device that can communicate culture, identity, and ideas. Languages are intrinsically and extrinsically diverse and varied. They are not static and their usage, lexicon, and meanings evolve with the users and context. Acknowledging these ideas is fundamental for achieving inclusion and equity in education as part of the European Pillar of Social Rights (European Commission 2017), and it is also essential for encouraging intercultural awareness, tolerance and empathy. With this in mind, NEOLAiA Universities are committed to enhancing intercultural and plurilingual experiences within their university environment, as well as together in the Alliance, to foster relationships and act as a bridge between the different university and national cultures.

Practical operationalization

In line with the *Language Policy White Paper* and *D&I NeoCharter*, the following areas are recommendations for each cohort for the achievement of this principle:

1. Increase opportunities for teaching staff and students to partake in bi-/plurilingual courses or degree programs. The anchoring of internationalization in curricula is essential for this idea to have any chance. This means we will also need to develop multilingual and intercultural training methods and expand course offerings in English and other languages (at all levels: Bachelors, Masters, and PhD) that also have opportunities to emphasize diversity, tolerance, openness, and inclusion.

2. Deepening and broadening institutional partnerships and exchanges. Increase the opportunities available for staff (academic and administrative) and student mobility, both in physical and virtual formats, which include but are not limited to international teaching stays, linguistic training abroad, Blended Intensive Programs (BIPs), as well as tailor-made courses for the student body to enhance linguistic and cultural competencies.

Recommendations for application

In order to act upon the implementation of this Charter within NEOLAiA, the following actions are recommended to be taken by each member and also by the Alliance as a whole:

1. By the end of the NEOLAIA Project, the number of subjects/strands/ full-fledged degrees taught through EMI and/or another foreign language will have increased and the range of courses taught in different languages will be diversified. This also requires the support and guidance to those Faculties who seek to set up or expand degrees in English or another foreign language.

2. Throughout the project, the number of mobility programs that offer training abroad will be increased and diversified to offer courses in English as well as other languages, and methodological training for instructors teaching in a foreign language.

3. During and after the project, linguistic immersion courses for students will be offered which provide students opportunities to take language courses abroad. These same programs will be also created and promoted for administrative staff.

4. This project will also bolster language revision programs and incentivize publishing and presenting research in English and other foreign languages.

5. Funding is a major point for any of these programs to succeed. Therefore, it is critical to have accomplished by the end of the project ways to facilitate funding for all stakeholders.
● For teaching and administrative staff– Funding for linguistic and methodological reskilling courses, as well as financial support for the purchase of materials and resources in the foreign language. Another important point is to provide, where possible, a salary increase for those teachers involved in bi-/plurilingual teaching.
● For students - Prioritize students in bi-/plurilingual degrees in access to Erasmus+ mobility for study and for practical training, and other international mobility programs. Institutions should also offer support to increase the teaching of foreign languages by combining students from various study programs in financially efficient groups to take courses in languages other than English.

6. Support will also be provided for students who embark on bi-/plurilingual degrees, in the form of initiation courses as well as linguistic support practices.

7. Universities will facilitate a student-organized program for linguistic tandems between foreign and local students with language and cultural exchange activities, and promote the celebration of the International Mother Language Day and the European Day of Languages.

8. Further promotion of intercultural contact will also be accomplished through the exploitation of already-existing international mobility activities, such as Staff Weeks in the Erasmus+ program.

Principle 5

Establishing a common, harmonized, and explicit system for staff accreditation across NEOLAiA institutions

Theoretical Conceptualization

In line with the *Language Policy White Paper*, NEOLAiA explicitly vouches for consistent benchmarking for language proficiency, common methodological accreditation criteria, and harmonized quality assessment frameworks in order to provide a unified, top-down push to accreditation issues across our institutions and thereby increase the plurilingual/intercultural competence and adequate preparation of *teaching faculty*, *student body*, and *administrative staff*.

Practical operationalization

Dovetailing with the *NEOLAiA Language Policy White Paper* and the *D&I NeoCharter*, the following recommendations are set forth to advance in this arena:

1. Language proficiency benchmarking: Establish common linguistic baseline requirements for teachers to be able to implement subjects through a foreign language (ideally, a C1); recommend a minimum level of language proficiency for students to access and/or obtain a Bachelor's, Master's, or PhD degree (ideally, a B1, B2, and C1, respectively); and contemplate the possibility of including a compulsory linguistic requirement (B2 or C1, depending on the service provided) to access or promote within administrative posts.

2. Accreditation systems of baseline levels: Ensure that this baseline language level is adequately accredited for all three cohorts through commonly acknowledged official institutions (e.g., Cambridge, Trinity, ACLES, APTIS), cutting back on the other mechanisms heretofore established to accredit language level (except for being a 'native' speaker of the language).

3. Increase and diversification of the language offer:

- Diversify the range of courses taught in languages other than English via the Modern Language Centers associated with each NEOLAiA university (where they exist), favoring multi- and plurilingualism. Ensure equitable access to these courses by all three cohorts, following the values and action areas set out in the *D&I NeoCharter*.
- Increase the number of subjects/strands/full-fledged degrees (at all levels: Bachelor's, Master's, and PhD) taught through a foreign language and gradually expand the number of languages through which these subjects/strands/degrees are offered beyond EMI.
- Step up the percentage of credits devoted to language proficiency within official study plans. Establish, where possible, compulsory courses, subjects, or semesters in English and/or other foreign languages within official degrees.

4. Safeguarding national languages: Safeguard, promote, and strengthen the national languages, striking a balance with the promotion of study programs in English and other foreign languages.

5. Establishing common methodological accreditation criteria: Articulate a common accreditation certificate (CoACe) across NEOLAiA, which encompasses not only general linguistic, but also academic language, as well as theoretical, methodological, diversity-sensitive, and evaluation aspects which teachers need to master in order to be able to implement subjects through a foreign language. Attuning materials to accommodate diversity and fostering intercultural dialogue will play a prominent part in two of its modules, in line with the *D&I Neo Charter*.

6. Articulating a multilingual quality assurance framework: Create a quality assurance system to guarantee the correct functioning of bilingual subjects/strands/degrees by validating a series of indicators that will determine their adequate implementation, guide inexperienced teachers in the initial development of their subjects, and allow the attainment of a quality seal in cases of full realization of those criteria.

Recommendations for application

In order to act upon the implementation of this Charter within NEOLAiA, the following actions will be taken by each member and also by the Alliance as a whole:

1. By the end of the NEOLAiA Project, each member of the alliance will have set up an official language policy based on the NEOLAiA White Paper and this Charter, flexibly attuned to each context-specific reality.

2. By the mid-term completion of the NEOLAiA Project, Alliance members, via their Vicerrectorates for Internationalization, will have discussed common official mechanisms for language accreditation.

3. After the initial piloting of the CoACe, its modules will continue to be offered (e.g. through yearly BIPs, favoring their stackability) and stock will be taken at each NEOLAiA university of the members who have completed each module in order to move towards their compulsory completion in order to teach through a foreign language within NEOLAiA.

4. Each year, the Alliance will commit to offering a new online language course by drawing on the different NEOLAiA Language Centers.

5. A task force will be created within the Alliance to start articulating a multilingual education quality assurance framework (MEQAF), whose basics will be set in place by the end of the Project.

Conclusion

The NEOLAiA *Charter on Language Policy and Staff Accreditation Criteria* presents a comprehensive and forward-thinking framework for fostering plurilingualism and intercultural understanding within university settings. By advocating for inclusive policies that recognize diverse linguistic repertoires, promoting effective plurilingual approaches in teaching and research, acknowledging the value of EMI, emphasizing the intercultural dimension of language, and setting forth staff accreditation criteria, the Charter aims to redefine language policy in higher education. It stresses the importance of moving beyond monolingual biases, ensuring that linguistic diversity is an asset rather than a challenge, and embracing language as a tool for cultural exchange, social justice, and global citizenship. Through these principles, the Charter seeks to create a more inclusive and equitable academic environment aligned with the aims and values of the European Union and the Council of Europe Language Policy Portal.