

## **Interconnected Learning and Teaching.**

### **A Platform for Innovation and Exchange in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning**

#### **Editorial Foreword**

The concept of “Interconnected Learning and Teaching” emerged in 2023 as a response to the need for an open forum for discussion in the field of foreign language pedagogy. Initially conceived as a conference focused on German as a Foreign Language, the idea expanded rapidly to bring together a diverse array of experts and practitioners across educational levels and language specializations – from primary school teachers to university didactics specialists, and from English and French teachers to those specializing in Polish and Norwegian. This broad collaboration was born out of the necessity to face common challenges and evolving demands in education today, such as integrating new methodologies shaped by advances in neuroscience and psychology, adapting to rapid developments in computer science and artificial intelligence, and responding to the demands of a globalized world where foreign language learning remains crucial, and is likely to grow in importance.

A key objective of our project was to unite educators across all institutional levels so as to foster an innovative and educational forum, with particular emphasis on university didactics. While the teaching and learning of foreign languages are widely discussed internationally – addressed through various theories and perspectives – university didactics remains a less explored academic subject, with limited practical training available. We view this area as essential to the broader educational landscape, as universities hold primary responsibility for preparing future educators and language specialists. Consequently, the traditional lecture-based and seminar-focused model often creates a considerable gap between the training received and the practical teaching skills needed in professional careers. Education and teaching must therefore be viewed as a continuous cycle, in which each participant is actively engaged in ongoing development to adapt to the evolving challenges of today’s educational demands.

In an attempt to address these challenges, the inaugural “ILT Conference” was held in November 2023 in Iași, focusing on emerging trends and pressing issues within the context of the post-pandemic educational landscape. While the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the integration of technology and online platforms into

daily classroom practice, the post-pandemic period has revealed a retreat from media use in foreign language instruction. This shift prompted us to examine its underlying causes, leading to the inclusion of workshops and training sessions in the conference. These sessions were designed to build confidence and inspire innovative approaches to incorporating technology in everyday classroom activities. Additionally, we organized roundtable discussions that brought together representatives from various educational institutions and industry leaders – including private schools, multinational corporations, and local retail companies – to explore anticipated trends in the labour market and the competencies expected from graduates of foreign language programs. A second roundtable, involving both public and private educational stakeholders, focused on issues such as expanding the language portfolio in schools and universities and the integration of mandatory teacher training programs.

These discussions hold the potential for significant impact when openly shared, but they achieve broader visibility and influence through dissemination in published form. Building on the outcomes of our inaugural conference, we have compiled a selection of representative discussions from 2023 in an open-access international journal. The articles featured in the *ILT - Interconnected Learning and Teaching. International Journal for Foreign Languages* address topics of substantial relevance to researchers, practitioners, and policymakers engaged in international contexts involving foreign language communication and multilingualism. The journal publishes original, meaningful, and scientifically rigorous contributions across both initial and advanced education, encompassing studies on foreign language teaching (including policies, curricula, pedagogy, and assessment), specialized language and content instruction, CLIL, bi/multilingualism, as well as varied content and instructional environments.

The journal serves as a platform for scholarly discussions on emerging issues in the field, featuring original and rigorous analyses of the policies and practices related to preparing individuals for educational roles across various levels. The studies included in the journal are meant to examine the teaching of foreign languages in general (international perspective) or within specific national contexts (national perspective) or a certain type of education institution (institutional perspective), as well as research focused on the particularities of teaching individual languages such as English, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Polish, Norwegian, and Russian (language perspective). The journal does not limit itself to theoretical or conceptual studies but also includes qualitative and quantitative empirical research, such as the development and evaluation of didactic materials and the description of educational workshops.

As evident from the Table of Contents of this first issue of the journal, the papers featured cover a wide array of topics, including language teaching, teacher training, curriculum design, materials development, language learning, language testing, teacher education, neurolinguistics, bilingualism and bilingual education, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and pragmatics. While English is the primary language for publication, we welcomed and encouraged submissions in various foreign languages, provided the research addresses the specificities and unique aspects of the language in question (e.g. Italian or German).

All the articles included in this first issue explore diverse and innovative approaches to education, each addressing contemporary challenges and opportunities in various academic fields. Covering mostly the field of university didactics, Vega María García González' article examines the shift to virtual teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on the adaptation of the Syriac language instruction through the Flipped Classroom model, highlighting how teaching methods can evolve with technology. In line with university teaching, Anne D. Peiter's article deals with literature didactics, taking on the challenge of teaching about genocidal atrocities, particularly the Shoah and the Rwandan Tutsicide, thus emphasizing the importance of comparative education that not only commemorates past events but also fosters critical thinking aimed at prevention. In the realm of language learning and translation studies, Eva Seidl discusses in her article the concept of mediation in Translation- and Interpreting-oriented Language Learning and Teaching (TILLT), exploring the way in which this emerging sub-field can incorporate mediation without undermining the unique skills and ethical concerns of translation professionals, especially in the light of debates sparked by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Dealing with the didactics of Romanian as a foreign language, Irina Marinela Deftu's article shifts the focus to intercultural identity development, analyzing the way in which foreign students in Romania navigate the complex dynamics of adapting to a new cultural context. The article addresses internal struggles faced by foreign students learning Romanian, and the negotiation between maintaining one's cultural identity and adjusting to a new environment, particularly as students encounter challenges like "personal shock" and the prioritization of cultural tolerance over respect for the host culture.

In the realm of pre-university foreign language didactics, Roxana Nicola's article advocates for alternative assessment methods in young students' education, such as the example provided by the author, namely the use of the phrase "not yet" instead of failing grades. Grounded in Carol Dweck's theory of growth mindset,

the article aims at demonstrating how a focus on progress, rather than fixed evaluations, could motivate students, improve academic outcomes, and reduce dropout rates, suggesting broader applications for educational reform, particularly in systems with high course requirements. Also in the field of pre-university didactics, Alina Podaru's article introduces the concept of storytelling as a creative teaching tool for Italian grammar, illustrating how an imaginary story world (*Articulandia*) could make learning more engaging and interactive for young students, since the method known as "storification" has the potential to encourage greater participation and interest on behalf of the students; at the same time, this method can foster collaborative sharing of pedagogical resources among teachers and educators.

The journal also features the category of Project Description, which contains two articles dealing with practical aspects of teaching foreign languages for specific purposes, a field in which didactics should focus on developing transversal skills, such as the use of specialized terminology in the foreign language, but also intercultural awareness and communication. The first article signed by Cornelia Amălinei, Anna Diaconu, Irina Gheorghiu, Carmen Antonită, Simona Hultoană, Mădălina Tvardochlib and Andrei Daniel Timofte, discusses a European Union-funded project applied in the case of medical students. Starting from a specific medical field, namely Histology and Histopathology, the project, drawing insights from testimonials provided by teachers and students involved, examines the potential use of multilingual virtual slide libraries and translanguaging strategies to improve the students' reading comprehension. The second project description, signed by Elena Velescu and Oana Cogeanu-Haraga, implies a collaboration between universities, institutions and academic partners from several countries. The project seeks to develop artificial intelligence tools to improve the teaching of veterinary medicine terminology in various languages (French, English and Romanian), thus helping both students and educators in the field.

Altogether, the articles included in this first issue of the *ILT – Interconnected Learning and Teaching. International Journal for Foreign Languages* advocate for flexible, innovative, and student-centered educational practices that respond to the evolving needs of both learners and educators across disciplines. They emphasize the importance of technological adaptation, critical thinking, inclusivity, and ethical considerations in shaping the future of foreign language didactics.

*The ILT International Journal is published in collaboration with "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University Printing Press and welcomes contributions from scholars all over the world.*