

NEW LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS in SWEDEN

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1. General Introduction

Traditionally, higher education in Sweden has been dominated by five universities (in Gothenburg, Lund, Stockholm, Umeå and Uppsala). During the last decades a number of new universities and university colleges have emerged all over Sweden, allowing a considerable increase in the number of students. Only during the period 1990-1999 the number of students has almost doubled.

Recent changes in higher education in Sweden, including the establishment of new university colleges and universities and the increasing numbers of students with great variation in social and ethnic background, age and prior knowledge are factors which in various ways have influenced the conditions for learning and teaching in higher education.

The major European languages are taught at most universities and university colleges, whereas courses in minor and lesser used languages are found at the old universities.

Lingcal, the Reference Group for Promoting the Use of Multimedia in Language Education at the Swedish Council for the

Renewal of Higher Education, has undertaken a survey of the net presence of Swedish language departments 1998-1999 (for more details: <http://www.hgur.se/lingcal/Departments/index.html>).

2. The role of New Learning Environments in language teaching and learning

The use of computers and information and communication technology in language teaching and learning has been steadily increasing during the last decade. In a nutshell, its role may be characterized as having changed from being an automatic teaching machine into a learning tool – and from being a tool into providing a wide arena, where sound, visual information, channels for interaction are simultaneously present and available to the student, independently of time and space (cf. Svensson & Ågren, www.informatik.umu.se/~poagren/rapporter/pedarena.htm)

It is interesting to note that ICT has been of particular importance in the sparsely populated Northern Sweden (<http://www.northsweden.org/english/Default.htm>). Institutions in this area have generally higher numbers of distance learning students. ICT-based language learning and teaching has been introduced even at schools in order to allow for equal opportunities compared to pupils in other areas. One example is a project involving the teaching of Spanish to children in the municipality of Jokkmokk to the north of the Arctic circle (<http://www.jokkmokk.selutbildningsspanskall.se>).

Policies underlying the integration of New Learning Environments

The importance of integrating information and communication technology into all levels of education is stressed in various governmental as well as institutional policy documents. The recent Committee of Enquiry of the Swedish Ministry of Education New conditions for learning and teaching in higher education (February 2001), in formulating the goals of higher education, states that "Further requirements are the ability to work and cooperate in groups, networks and projects, social and intercultural competence, oral and written skills in Swedish and English and the ability to handle ICT tools" (SOU 2001:13 30). The Committee proposes the development of an electronic "virtual university", involving both courses and entire study programmes at various higher education institutions in Sweden. Most recently (March 2001) another Committee of Enquiry of the Swedish Ministry of Education Adult learning and *adult* education

(SOU 2000/01:72) stresses the importance of lifelong learning and proposes a number of measures, including a training programme in the ICT area for teachers in adult education and the development of learning materials and distance learning courses for adults with sign language as their first language.

Another example is the National Action Programme for ICT in Schools, also initiated by the Ministry of Education, involving, among other things, in-service training in working with ICT for 70.000 school teachers (<http://www.itis.gov.se/english/index.html>).

In 1999, The Swedish Agency for Distance Education, *Distum* (<http://www.distum.se/>), was founded. Its main goal is to support the development and application of flexible distance education, primarily within the fields of popular adult education and post-secondary education.

Facilities for independent learning

The availability of computers and IT equipment is high. Both students and teachers have either their own computer or access to computers at the institution and at home. Each student usually has his or her own e-mail address. For instance, at Lund University, all students are provided with e-mail addresses, space on the university server for personal home pages and backup of papers, free access to the modem pool and free support (<http://www.student.lu.se/about/index.jsp?language=en>).

Language departments generally offer facilities for independent learning. A most comprehensive language learning lab common to all the language departments of the university – including Translation and Interpretation and Sign language – is Larosfudion at Stockholm University (www.larostudion.su.se).

Humlab at Umeå university (<http://www.humlab.umu.se/>) is a creative multimedia centre for study and research.

In the framework of an on-going project researchers at Uppsala University and Mid Sweden University are developing a language learning lab on the net, *LingoNet*, with an additional focus on methods for evaluating ICT-based resources for language learning.

(www.mitt.mh.se/LingoNet/).

Development of learning materials

At many institutions special units have been created for the development of ICT related learning materials, where teachers are provided with the equipment, technical assistance and are offered relevant courses and tutorials. The Centre for Educational Technology at Umeå University (http://www.cut.umu.se/index_eng.html) and the Center for IT in Education (CITU) at Lund University (<http://www.citu.lu.se/english.html>) are examples of such units. All teachers have access to *LUVIT* (Lund University Virtual Interactive Tool), a tool for making web-based courses without knowledge of html programming (<http://www.luvit.com/>).

Lingcal (<http://www.hgur.sellingcall>) is a reference group for promoting the use of multimedia in language education, initiated by the Council for the Renewal of Undergraduate Education. It offers a collection of resources for language teachers; tutorials and reports, but also funding for projects related to the use of multimedia in language education. Some recent projects are listed in the Appendix.

Redefining the role and profile of the teacher and learner

Many research projects and experimental settings (cf. list in the Appendix) aim at changing the learning situation and thereby the roles of the teacher/learner, for instance, by transferring essay writing to a virtual classroom, so that IT is used to create an electronic essay-writing seminar alongside with the traditionally designed program of classroom teaching and supervision. Another interesting example of language learning in 'cultural simulation' is presented in the project 'Virtual Weddings and a real wedding of linguistics, literature and cultural studies' (Dept. of English, Umeå University).

Training programmes and courses for language teachers

In face of the rapid development in the field of methods for language teaching and training, there is a wide range of courses for continuing education for language teachers in different types of education, in particular with a focus on computer applications.

Courses are offered at learning labs and computer centres and centres for continuing education. An ambitious course programme is offered for university teachers of Modern languages at the Division of Continuing Education at Uppsala University.

Theory and practical applications of CALL is taught in the course Computer Aided Language Learning (7 ECTS), at the Dept. of Linguistics at Uppsala University

Measuring proficiency: assessment and self-assessment

There are recurring problems with low participation in traditional types of examination within distance and flexible learning. The multidisciplinary research project FLEX (Flexible learning – learning examination) at Gothenburg university addresses this question. Forms of examination are suggested to change in direction of a "learning examination" (www.science.gu.se/utbildning/flex/ansokan.html). Another ongoing project aiming at a development of webbased forms of examination is run by Bertil Roos, Centre for Educational Technology, Umeå University.

3. Promoting multilingualism and cultural diversity

Ethnic diversity and multiculturalism in Swedish higher education are issues of great concern, as reflected in the proposals of the Committee of Enquiry *Mångfald i hogskolan* (Diversity in higher education, SOU 2000:47). Measures are proposed in order to increase the recruitment of students as well as staff with diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Promoting the learning of the less widely used and less taught languages

Distance and flexible learning is a medium that is well suited for the dissemination of less widely used and less taught languages. For instance, the Sami language and culture is well represented in distance learning courses. The *Sami* Educational Centre offers a number of courses relating to Sami culture, including language courses (<http://www.samernas.nulit-projekt/>). Likewise, Umeå University includes courses in the Sami languages and Sami culture and society among their distance learning courses (<http://www.umu.selsamiskalpresentationlinnehall.htm>).

Promoting cultural understanding and intracultural communication

The Internet is widely used for exchange of information with students from countries where the target languages are spoken. The project Cooperative reading and writing using e-mail correspondence between Swedish and Portuguese students (Dept. of Spanish and Portuguese, Stockholm university) is one example of this.

Accessing authentic resources and materials

Reading newspapers on the internet, using large corpora are widely used methods in language learning. This fact is reflected in a number of projects listed in the Appendix.

4.

5. The role of New Learning Environments in continuing education

The use of information and communication technology plays a central role in continuing education and lifelong learning.

Language courses are organized by a number of organisations, where instruction usually is a combination of ICT materials and one or two classroom meetings. The Swedish National Institute for Distance Education (SSVH, <http://www.ssvh.selenglishindex.htm>) is a central school for adult education that offers

nationwide distance learning courses, including language courses. Some other organisations are Folkuniversitetets Internet-based Language education and Centrum for livslångt lärande (Centre for lifelong learning, (<http://www.c31.com/>)).

A collection of pedagogical and other resources are found at Folkbildningsnätet (<http://www.fbn.empir.se>).

6. Using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for promoting European Co-operation

One project aiming at a development of a 'virtual distributed campus' is EUNITE, a collaboration in ICT based education between Lund University as the Swedish partner and Aalborg Universitet, Universidad de Granada, FernUniversität Hagen, Tekniska Hogskolan i Helsingfors, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, University of Strathclyde, Universiteit Twente.

(<http://www.eunite-online.org/>)

7. Needs in the area of New Learning Environments

Seen in relation to students with special educational needs

Progress has been made in adapting achievements in information and communication technology in order to facilitate learning processes for students with special educational needs. h@andikapp.se is an association for the promotion of ICT in use for the handicapped. The Special Needs and Distance Learning *Network* (SNDL, <http://www.spedex.com/text/research/sih/sih.htm>) encourages students with disabilities that they have much to gain by using new technology and new media. The network for continuing education Folkbildningsnätet and the portal *Funka.nu* (<http://www.funka.nu/>) provide a forum for students with special educational needs.

Cerfec at Lund University is a research department for "IT and Learning" in a disability context.

(<http://www.cerfec.lth.se/english/Research/index.html>)

Institutions of higher education in Sweden allocate 0,15% of their funding for undergraduate education to meet the needs of these groups. However, students with special educational needs are proportionally underrepresented in higher education and much remains to be done. In both the above mentioned Committee reports from the Ministry of Education New conditions for learning and teaching in higher education and Adult learning and *adult* education measures for students with special educational needs are set out in the area of information and communication technology.

8.

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APPENDIX

Examples of ICT related projects

For more information about these projects, please consult the Lingcal **website**

(<http://www.hgur.sellingcallDatsprindex3html>)

- Corpusbased learning of English (Dept. of English, Stockholm University)
- English vocabulary database (Dept, of English, Gothenburg University)
- Computeraided language learning of Swedish as a second language (Dept. of Scandinavian languages, Stockholm University)
- Cooperative reading and writing using e-mail correspondence between Swedish and Portuguese students (Dept. of Spanish and Portuguese, Stockholm university)
- Interactive exercises in Russian (Dept. of Slavonic languages, Uppsala University)
- Grammar. French 1-20 p.. Tutorial and repetition. (Dept. of the Humanities: French, Vaxjo university)
- Tax: German syntax (Dept. of German, Lund University)
- German on the Internet (Dept. of the Humanities: German, Orebro university)
- Computer Modelling of the Speech Communication Process (Dept. of Phonetics, Umeå University)

Further examples of ICT projects are found at the website of the Swedish Council for the Renewal of Higher Education

(http://hgur.hsv.se/activities/projects/index_projects.htm).

- Modular Programs for Computer Based Language Tuition (Department of East Asian Languages, Lund University)
- Thematic Teaching and Flexibel Examination of German at University Level (Department of German and Dutch, Goteborg University)
- Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) for Students of Spanish (Dept of Romance Languages, Lund University)
- Virtual Weddings and a real wedding of linguistics, literature and cultural studies. (Umeå University)
- Academic writing in electronic seminars on essay writing (Stockholm University)
- Flexible teaching and examination in Scandinavian languages (Dept of Scandinavian Languages, Stockholm University)
- New Methods for Teaching French at University Level Including the Use of the Videotechnique (Dept of Roman Languages, Lund University)