NEW LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS
in SLOVENIA

Teodor **Petrič**

University of Maribor

1. General introduction

The education sector in Slovenia is undergoing major changes in order to respond to the developments in the economic, social and political system in Slovenia and in an effort to adapt to the conditions in the better developed countries in the European Union. One of the strongest forces which has stimulated these recent developments has been the fast expansion of information and communication technology (ICT) which has caused urgent demands for lifelong learning and a better skilled, flexible workforce capable of greater labour mobility. This report takes recent developments in the field of language learning and teaching on a higher education (HE) level in Slovenia into account, on the one hand as a result of the introduction of information and communication technology in language learning and teaching (especially in the nineties) and on the other hand as a result of the increasing staff and student mobility.

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

2.1 The integration of New Learning Environments in language teaching and learning
* for language students
  for students of other disciplines
* as a preparation for professional life

New learning environments (comprising ICT and human resources) are only marginally integrated in language learning and teaching on a higher education level. Most language degree programmes at Slovene higher education institutions contain a multimedia component and an introduction to the use of ICT offered by non-language departments for all other departments of an institution. Compared to elementary and secondary education, ICT is − perhaps surprisingly – less integrated in language teaching and learning on a higher education level. In the nineties there have been several projects in Slovenia (for example the very well known Project RO − "Računalniško opismenjevanje" http:llro.zrsss.si, i.e. "Computer literacy") on promoting ICT in secondary and (especially) elementary school (in Slovenia the latter ends with the eighth grade). Meanwhile there have been established several Slovene websites (e.g. http://sio.edus.si, http://www.svarog.org, http:llro.zrsss.sil−vilienka) offering (amongst other contents) language materials for learning different language skills, mostly for English. For other more common foreign languages in Slovenia like German, French, Italian, Croation, Serbian or Hungarian there is much, much less to look for on Slovene websites (eg. for German http://www.s-gim.nm.edus.si/nemscina/gradiva_testi.htm). On a higher education level even English as the most taught foreign language in Slovenia is rarely represented in this respect. The authors of the language materials one finds for students on a higher education level often do not use the advantages of the more recent computer technology for the materials are quite often mere copies of texts formerly written down on a sheet of paper. But of course, the times are changing. Compared to five years ago many language students of Slovene higher education institutions are able to use computers as better typewriters or calculation machines, and the most recent student generations seem to have a much better command of ICT than the majority of their language teachers. In contrast to the implementation of ICT, staff and student mobility in the field of language study on a higher education level is much more intense than on elementary and secondary education level. At both universities (Ljubljana and Maribor) the number of outgoing Slovene students (and language teachers) participating in student exchange programmes like SOCRATES ERASMUS is quite satisfactory. At the moment less satisfactory is the number of incoming (foreign) language students at both universities.

2.2 Policies underlying the integration of New Learning Environments

There is a general agreement at various levels of decision making that ICT and exchange of human resources have an increasingly important role to play in language learning and teaching. According to various documents describing the national policy on the implementation of new learning environments, developments in new technologies are encouraged (e.g. in a document of the Ministry of science of technology of the Republic Slovenia published in 1994 – Program *spodbujanja tehnološkega* razvoja Slovenije do lefa 2000 "Programme for encouraging the technological development of Slovenia to the year 2000"). As a result of these policies various research projects studied the possibilities of introducing distance learning on different education levels (though mainly in non-language programmes). But the step from the research sphere to the sphere of actual use of distant learning systems has not been done in most of the Slovene education institutions. This is especially true in the field of language learning at the Slovene universities. So the actual moves in HE education based on these encouraging policies are quite small compared to some countries in the European Union. The universities (and their sponsors) founded special institutes and organizations for providing themselves and other institutions with ICT know-how and services. Some of the most well known organizations of this kind are the Cenfer za razvoj daljinskega *izobraževanja* pri *Univerzi* v Mariboru (CDED - http://www.cded.uni-mb.si; *Center* for the development of distance learning of *the* University of Maribor), the *Nacionalna projektna* enofa za *izobraževanje* na daljavo v Ljubljani (NCP - http://www.ef.uni-lj.si/ncp; Slovene national *contact* point for distance education in Ljubljani), the *Laboratorij za* felekomunikacije Univerze v Ljubljani (LTE - http://www-lt.fe.uni-lj.si; laboratory for felecommunication systems of the University of Ljubljana), the Ekonomska fakulteta Univerze v Ljubljani (EF – Economic faculty of the *University* of Ljubljana; http://www.ef.uni-lj.si/studij/dodiplomski/snd/stran0.html; www.ef.uni-lj.si). Until now these institutes have not received much public among language teachers at the universities. The link between the ICT service centre and the language institutes is still missing. And last not least, there is a discrepancy between the encouraging policies and the actual financing. Despite of the encouraging policies, the budget of a language institute at one of the Slovene universities still is much smaller than needed for such major changes in ICT. In the last two or three years there have been only smaller investments in the technical infrastructure of the language institutes so that they have been provided only with basic network facilities (for the teaching and administration staff) - in former years a domain of the institutes of natural sciences and technology.

2.3 New learning strategies: the introduction and promotion of independent learning

Especially in the nineties of the 20th century, independent learning has been widely promoted - at least on a theoretical level. Especially in the field of foreign language study it was always very obvious that the language students needed audio-visual material or (better) direct contact with native speakers to enhance their language skills in the foreign language. Therefore the use of different media and new learning environments is more common in teaching foreign languages than in many other subjects at all levels of education (except for IT and Engineering; cf. the Slovene website http://www.ris.org/news38a.html). The emergence of new learning environments (especially the emergence of computer technology and networks) permits the students and their teachers to a much greater extent to make the concept of independent learning become real. Independent learning requires the students to change their learning strategies. But many of the Slovene language students seem to have great difficulties in becoming autonomous learners. Despite of the theoretical knowledge of independent learning strategies they receive during their language study ("learning to learn"), many students do not use them systematically. This might be a (prolonged) consequence of the secondary school system where autonomous learning strategies still are not very common among the students. Most of the Slovene institution offering language learning facilities seem to treat self-access as something separate from the teaching curriculum.

2.4 Facilities for independent learning

Recent ICT developments show huge differences compared to the developments ten years ago (cf. for example the Slovene website http://www.ris.org/indexuk.html). Many individuals (including students and teaching staff) have multimedia equipped personal computers at their homes. All institutes of the Slovene universities use personal computers for their work and many of them have the necessary infrastructure to use the Internet (though the internet is still more often used for administrative work than for teaching). But nevertheless, it still is not common for the institutions of Higher Education in Slovenia to have (well-equipped) multimedia centres for

independent language learning. Most of the ageing language laboratories (phonolabs) have not been replaced by up-to-date multimedia centres due to budget cuts and differently set priorities of the universities and their faculties. But there are, of course, considerable differences between the earlier and the later founded faculties where languages are studied – the later founded faculties usually having newer equipment and a multimedia centre. The university libraries should provide some facilities (i.e. multimedia computers) for using WWW resources for independent language learning. At the moment, the National Library of the University of Ljubljana (www.nuk.si) and the Library of the University of Maribor (http://www.ukm.uni-mb.si) offer only possibilities to access the library system on computers. The libraries at the faculties should provide more multimedia computers for indenpendent language learning. For instance, each of the two faculties with several graduate and postgraduate degree language programmes (ie. The Philosophical faculty of the University of Ljubljana – http://www.ff.uni-lj.si – and the Faculty of Education of the University of Maribor – http://www.pfmb.uni-mb.si) – offer a "classical" phonolab (that can be used during lessons of the language institutes, but usually not independently by students). In some respects, the (younger) Faculty of Education was built more systematically. Therefore it offers a multimedia centre with a smaller video room and **gameroom /** playground (used for training puppeteering and similar teaching skills) within its library where the students can borrow CDs, CD-Roms, cassettes or listen to video and audio cassettes with language materials or music. In another part of the faculty building a smaller TV Studio is located which is mainly used for training pedagocial skills and performance. Though the number of ICT facilities at both institutions (in Ljubljana and in Maribor) is growing there still is a lack of multimedia computers that could be used by students for language learning at different times of the day. Another obstacle for accessing different kinds of learning materials more easily is that the computer rooms and the libraries are at quite distant places of the faculty buildings and that they cannot always be accessed both at the same time.

2.5 Development of learning materials

The language institutes at the Philosophical faculty in Ljubljana and the Faculty of Education in Maribor offer only very few "homemade" sources for language learning over the Web. The University of Ljubljana (http://www.uni-lj.si) has introduced a very promising website, the so-called Virtual student (http://vstudent.fmf.uni-lj.si), which should provide the students with relevant materials for their study (common shareware or freeware programs, articles, links etc.), but the number of teachers contributing to the web archive still is very small, especially in the field of foreign language learning. Only the Institute for Slavonic languages, due to its status of studying the language of the Slovene nation, can offer some relevant materials for students learning Slovene as their native language (or possibly for advanced learners of Slovene as a foreign language) - mainly some older books of Slovene writers (similar to the Gutenberg project in America or in some European countries). Only one web page of this institute provides some information on the Slovene language for beginning students (namely for travellers coming to Slovenia). The web-pages of the Research institute of the Slovene language and the Research Institute Josef Stefan dedicated to computerlinguistics can be used as tool for linguistic studies (ie. the text corpora *Fida, Nova beseda).* At the Faculty of Education of the University of Maribor (http://www.pfmb.uni-mb.si), there is a great gap between the web-based learning materials offered by the Institute of Physics and computer science (with a lot of learning materials) and the web-based learning materials offered by the other institutes (including the language institutes). There are only few minor exceptions of learning materials that could be used for independent English literature (http://gean5.pfmb.uni-mb.si) and for some parts of German phonology and syntax (the Virtual library http://pfmb.uni-mb.si/programi/nem/Germanistik_files/virtuals.htm) though it does not fulfil the usual criteria for this kind of language learning. Until now the University of Maribor (http://www.uni-mb.si) has not developed and promoted an ICT system that could be used by all institutes in order to reduce redundant development efforts and costs. A lot of the web-based material of the language institutes of the Slovene universities that can be used for supporting independent language learning came about as the result of personal initiative on the part of individual educators. Some potential obstacles to a more widespread use of ICT support in HE teaching are: There is a great amount of personal effort necessary for developing and implementing ICT assisted programmes. Each faculty needs additional computer experts for establishing andlor maintaining the system. Though every institute now has its own web pages providing at least some basic information on the study programmes (in some cases a lot more), only few educators of the language institutes seem to fully believe in the need of ICT assisted teaching and only few educators have been involved in promoting the use of ICT (or other media) in teaching. There still is a lack of support for isolated initiatives and there still is a lack of dedicated financial backing for such initiatives on the Higher Education level.

2.6 Redefining the profile of the actors involved

One of the main advantages of the new technologies and the new learning environments is that language learners have unlimited access to different kind of resources and learning materials and more opportunities to contact native speakers of a foreign language (ie. e-mail groups, chatting). The new learning environments require the language learners to adapt a new learning approach (more responsibility, planning and monitoring of activities and progress) to become more autonomous learners. The learners should develop the ability to transfer learning techniques and known language material to real situations with authentic language material. But the students have to be trained to become autonomous for the majority of them is used to dominant teachers taking (nearly) all the necessary initiative in instruction.

The Slovene universities offer obligatory courses in which the students should learn how to learn, but it seems that these courses often are not taken very seriously. In the opinion of quite some students (and language teachers) these courses only to a minor extent offer relevant learning contents necessary for training autonomous learning because they often provide too much fact-based knowledge (e.g. on the history of science instead of learning research methods) or too much theoretic knowledge than "hands-on" practice. In the opinion of the majority of university language teachers, many of the language students show a distinguished lack of skills necessary when conducting a smaller research in the field of linguistics or literature or when preparing relevant study material for tests or exams. Becoming a more autonomous learner or creating more autonomous learners proves to be a difficult and long winding process for both sides − the learners and the language teachers. This process does not automatically result from theoretic knowledge or use of ICT, but it involves much more initial preparatory work (i.e. changing learning or teaching habits) than the participants were are to and willing to invest.

The traditional role of a language teacher at the Slovene higher education institutions has changed only to a minor extent. Though practice work in multimedia laboratories with network computers has been included in the official curricula years ago, this has not automatically made the teacher a language advisor, tutor or mediator, encouraging a learner-centred approach to language learning. Though the conventional role of the teacher as the centre of the class and dominant component of language instruction is being more and more understood as an old-fashioned teaching style (e. g, the study courses of didactics of the foreign languages or seminars and exercises in the foreign languages are giving much more way to project work and continuous assessment), the language teacher at a Slovene university usually does not understand oneself as someone who should provide the learners with learning techniques and assist the students in finding their own particular learning style during foreign language acquisition.

Though self-directed learning and distant learning is official university policy (there are special institutes at the Universities of Ljubljana and Maribor promoting distant learning with web-based computer technology etc. and offering ICT related services to the faculties of the universities) there have been none or in some cases only minor efforts of the language departments to implement self-directed and distant learning in their study programmes. For instance, transferring essay writing to a virtual classroom, so that ICT is used alongside with traditionally designed programmes of classroom teaching and supervision, is very rare in language courses at higher education institutions in Slovenia (e.g. there are courses of computer assisted text analysis for students of German as a foreign language existing for more than five years at the University of Maribor). The process of restructuring language study courses on a modular basis (providing independent learning components) has only just begun. Older language study programmes are going through a partial restructuring process in order to conform to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) whereas new language study programmes (e.g. study programmes for early foreign language teaching at both Slovene universities) are already construed on a modular basis. Recently a portfolio for Slovene students has been officially introduced in order to help foreign language students and their teachers monitoring the language acquisition process and other achievements in this field. At the moment there are no official tutor programmes introducing language students as guides for incoming exchange students or "weaker" language students during the study process. Such tutor programmes could contribute to the process of educating learners who will be able to take more initiative and responsibility in language instruction (i. e. this could lead to the practice of creating language materials and didactic resources in co-operation with their language teachers).

2.7 Training programmes and courses for language teachers: in-service programmes, staff development

Nearly every year (in the first half of the nineties every year) the teaching and the administration staff of the Slovene universities had the opportunity to attend courses organized by their universities in order to improve the skills of their teaching staff in using the PC as a modern type-writer. But there are very few (and rarely coordinated) courses organized by the Slovene universities where the teaching staff would have the opportunity to improve its ICT related skills for teaching. With the integration of new learning environments into the curricula of the language institutes at higher education level the language teachers have to accomplish a lot of tasks they have not been prepared for during their own education: the teachers should use the computer technology as means for communication with their students, for providing their students with competent advice on the foreign language acquisition process and learning techniques, and for the development of learning software. Such courses are sometimes offered by other institutions or enterprises for teachers in primary and secondary school (which the teaching staff of the universities usually do not attend to). For many language educators at higher education level it is still a technical problem to use the major benefits of the ICT technology, and often they are not even capable to manage basic computer operations with ease (e.g. copying files, attaching a file to an e-mail, searching relevant contents in the chaotic Internet). Thus preparing language teachers for these new tasks will be absolutely necessary − perhaps with appropriate stimulation granted by the universities and / or faculty decision makers and / or with the introduction of a special study programme for language advisors becoming experts in new learning environments like one can find at British universities).

2.8 Measuring proficiency: assessment and self-assessment

The system of assessment of students' language proficiency is very traditional and measures knowledge in grades from *Insufficient* (1-5) to *Excellent* (10), but without systematically taking into account the language level of the student. Assessment is usually carried out through exams on theoretic issues and language tests (usually designed by the teachers themselves, rarely by groups of teachers). There is no general system of evaluation of exams. So usually it is difficult to compare the language proficiency of students from different higher education institutions in Slovenia. Uniform exams or tests (performed by the National examination centre of Slovenia) are used only for measuring the language proficiency of high school learners before entering the university. Computer programmes designed specifically to help language teachers create assessment papers which can include texts with videos, sound, graphics are available (for instance, as shareware programs), but rarely ever used due to the lack of a more appropriate network infrastructure and due to the lack of ICT related knowledge of many language teachers. There is no web-based or computer-based proficiency measuring system in Slovenia. Such a system could provide the citizens willing to study certain foreign languages with basic information on their language skills and could help them to find the best study possibilities. As an alternative, a first version of a language portfolio for Slovene students has been published recently in order to allow students and their teachers to evaluate language performance and progress.

2.9 Action research on the implementation of New Learning Environments

The importance of new learning environments has been widely recognised. Research on the its possible advantages is being performed and encouraged. Most of the research projects on introducing ICT in language instruction so far concentrated on language learning at primary and secondary education level (for instance, the project RO mentioned above; http://ro.zrsss.si). Accompanying research for the integration of new learning environments at higher education institutions is being occasionally conducted by university teachers for foreign language didactics and included in their research projects (for instance, Lingua), but usually by university teachers of computer science and multimedia techniques (for instance, the center of computer science at the Faculty of Edcuation in Maribor http://www.pfmb.uni-mb.si/crimi2 or ICT labs at the University of Ljubljana mentioned above). The research of the latter group of university teachers is only in some cases concerned with language acquisition processes. The aim of all these research efforts is to use the innovative potential of ICT for autonomous learning material to a greater extent and not just for the integration of computer assisted material in traditional learning environments.

3.   Promoting multilingualism and cultural diversity

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

Multilingualism is one of the aims of the European language politics. Citizens of the European Union have the right to work in any of the member states provided that they have the appropriate language knowledge. This is the reason that not only widespread languages like English should be taught at various education levels (including the universities), but also the less taught languages.

At Slovene universities the modern languages that are being taught to students are English, German, French and Italian. Other languages (e.g. Serbian and Croatian, Hungarian, Russian, Czech, Polish, Spanish, Japanese, Chinese) are also being offered for certain study programmes but only to a smaller extent. Students of non-language departments are being most often taught English, rarely any of the other widespread foreign languages.

Slovenia is one of the European countries that wishes to join the European Union. The conclusion that can be drawn from the above described foreign language situation is that the diversity and intensity of the less taught European languages at Slovene universities should be increased in order to provide Slovene citizens with better chances for working in different countries of the European common market. This can be managed by the intensification of existing language and cultural contacts (for instance in bilingual regions in Slovenia along the Austrian, Croatian, Hungarian and Italian border, but also through contacts between Slovenes and incoming students and teachers), whereas in the case of more distant less taught languages this can mainly be managed by using modern computer technology.

On the above described background it is only obvious that Slovene which is one of the less widely used and taught languages in Europe should be promoted as well. Therefore one would expect to be able to enrol for courses in Slovene as a foreign language and to find learning materials for non-native speakers of Slovene in book stores or even multimedia or web-based materials for non-native speakers. In Slovenia one can find only comparatively few such examples of learning materials for Slovene as a foreign language, for instance Slovene for travellers – a short web-based dictionary on common Slovene words and phrases (Department for Slavonic languages at the Philosophical faculty of the University of Ljubljana; http:llwww.iis.silliffoddel.html), otherwise non-native speakers have the possibilities to use books and cassettes. Some web-sites outside of Slovenia provide some information on the structure of the Slovene language and some genuine text examples (with an English translation) and the like. In Slovenian book stores it is possible to buy (multimedia) courses or audio-cassettes with learning materials for some of the other less taught languages in Europe or other parts of the world (Dutch, Swedish, Russian, Chinese, …). Courses of Slovene as a foreign language are regularly offered to incoming exchange students by the Slovene centre of the University of Ljubljana (http://www.ff.uni-lj.si/center-slo/default.htm). At the University of Maribor such language courses are offered to incoming exchange students as well, but unfortunately less regularly and usually on a smaller scale.

3.2   Promoting cultural understanding and intercultural awareness

Language and culture cannot be separated one from another. Language programmes have to include cultural environments and vice versa. It has often been claimed that native speakers working as language teachers and the exchange of students and teaching staff contribute to the promotion of cultural understanding and intercultural awareness. Though the number of native speakers (of German, English, Hungarian, Italian etc.) that are employed as teachers of foreign languages at the Slovene universities and the number of incoming and outgoing exchange students usually is very small, their (direct or indirect) influence in promoting cultural understanding and intercultural awareness is very important. The existing staff exchange programmes are usually more short-termed and have therefore less impact in this respect. There are some interesting projects aiming at increasing cultural understanding and intercultural awareness: for instance, a recently published book on Slovene, British and American habits and culture written by a British university language teacher who has been living in Slovenia since the early eighties and a Slovene sociolinguist who has been experiencing America on several occasions from inside. Besides the internet as a vast (and free-of-charge) resource of culture relevant material, one can purchase CD-Roms I videocassettes on the culture of Slovenia and other countries (though often only in English).

3.3 Accessing authentic resources and materials

Using authentic resources and materials becomes more and more important. The internet is the easiest way to obtain relevant materials. The number of teachers using the web-based resources and materials surely is increasing (as one can gather in conversations with other language teachers). Language students more and more often use the authentic resources and materials for seminar and diploma work in linguistics and literature. There are some Slovene Web-based systems with text corpora that can be used for language research by students (e.g. *Fida* – http://www.fida.net/slo/index.html , Nova beseda –http://bos.zrc-sazu.si/a beseda.html, corpus linguistics of the Josef Stefan Institute in Ljubljana – http://nl.ijs.si/elan). Some of the web-based text corpora are restricted (for commercial reasons) and accessible only as demos for potential clients. European web-based systems (on other languages) are accessible by many people in Slovenia (using their PC at home). This is especially important as a high percentage of language teachers prepare their course materials themselves.

3.4 Student and staff exchanges

Cultural understanding can be very effectively promoted through exchange programmes. Both universities in Slovenia have joined several European exchange programmes (Socrates Erasmus, Thematic Network Projects, Tempus, Ceepus, Lingua, …), and are introducing study courses on a modular basis and ECTS. The number of exchanged students is rising. Often it is difficult to achieve exchange balance of incoming and outgoing students – language students from other countries can not be easily motivated going to Slovenia instead of going to some of the bigger and better known European countries. The majority of language teacher exchanges (and of other staff) is done through regular bilateral exchanges (ie. project work etc.).

4. The role of New Learning Environments in training programmes for language and language related professions

4.1 New Learning Environments and the training of language teachers

In training programmes for language teachers the processes of teaching and acquiring a foreign language have to be made more aware. Modem computer technology should become an integral part of the curriculum because it can assist these processes more vividly and in the long run more efficiently than traditional means. On one hand, the integration of the new learning environments (ICT and exchange of teachers) contributes to the development of the intercultural communicative competence of the teacher candidates, on the other hand it works as an ideal model for their professional activity in the future.

With the exception of introductory multimedia courses (comprising an introduction to computer systems), new learning environments based on ICT are not integrated into the regular process of training programmes for teachers or students at Slovene universities - neither in the curricula nor in actual teaching, The integration into the training programmes mainly depends on individual teachers. There are also some initiatives coming from the non-language departments and the ICT institutes (see above) addressing language departments and language teachers to use the expertise of these departments and institutes in the field of new learning environments. The effective use of new learning environments in language teaching presupposes that the university teachers have to be trained in a technical and a didactically▌pedagogical sense.

4.2 New Learning Environments and the training of translators and interpreters

Modern computer technology has begun to make its way into the training programmes of translators and interpreters. The only institute of translation studies at the University of Ljubljana and the translation courses at other higher education institutions integrate at least basic activities on the basis of computer technology such as becoming acquainted with different automatic translators, using electronic spelling checkers, thesauri and dictionaries, grammar correctors, etc. Like all language students these students are also made aware of all the resources available on the internet such as multilingual dictionaries and specialised glossaries. There are a few minor web-based dictionaries developed at Slovene universities and accessible by students of translation study programmes and other language students. Despite the use of the above mentioned means, one cannot claim that ICT has really become an integral part of their training programmes.

5. The role of New Learning Environments in continuing education programmes or courses

Continuing education programmes or courses have been recognized as important components in life long learning and are therefore regularly offered at different institutions: at the universities usually for former graduates and post-graduates of language departments and at (private) adult education centres ("Ljudska univerza") mostly for different target groups. The study programmes at the adult education centres are very diversified and usually include the use of multimedia devices. At the universities the use of modern computer technology usually does not play any important role with the exception of courses on teaching techniques.

6. How to use Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for promoting European co-operation?

6.1 Using ICT for co-operation in the development of programmes

The co-operation of the European higher education institutions in the development and use of learning software or web-based study programmes for specific subjects would be advisable. This kind of co-operation would help to unify different approaches and experiences and would contribute to the effectiveness and authenticity of foreign language and cultural material. Internet-based communication forms (e. g. Chatting, discussion forums, e-mail etc.) enable teachers to participate in discussions on different subject (for instance, on discussions on autonomous or distant learning with ICT assistance or integration). At the moment the majority of the language teachers at the universities do not make much use or any use of this kind of exchange of experience though all of have personal computers and access to the internet so that they can use e-mail to communicate with fellow colleagues in Slovenia and other European countries.

6.2 Using ICT for co-operation in the delivery of programmes

No information on the use of ICT for co-operation in the delivery of language study programmes between higher education institutions of Slovenia and other institutions has been obtained.

7. Needs in the area of New Learning Environments

7.1 Seen in relation to language teaching and learning

Some of the needs in the area of new learning environments seen in relation to language teaching and learning are that the Education authorities in Slovenia should guarantee that funding is available to set up co-operation projects at local and at European level to promote language learning, to encourage the development of software and web-based learning materials and language resources for teaching and autonomous learning, and to constantly maintain and up-date the necessary technical infrastructure (appropriate computer configurations, ICT equipment appropriate for language learning, libraries should be extended by generally accessible multimedia and self-access centres). More efficient dissemination of information and achievements from other institutions and regular training courses for teachers (in a technical and pedagogical sense) could help stimulate ICT "abstinents".

7.2 Seen in relation to the promotion of multilingualism and cultural diversity

Additionally to 7.1, one of the needs in the area of new learning environments seen in relation to the promotion of multilingualism, cultural diversity, learning of less known languages and intercultural understanding is to create more possibilities for individual and group contacts through institutional initiatives.

7.3 Seen in relation to the promotion of European co-operation

Additionally to 7.1, one of the needs in the area of new learning environments seen in relation to the promotion of European co-operation is to make information on (financial) possibilities, initiatives, projects, programmes etc. accessible with greater ease, e. g. on some of the well-known European web-sites.

1.1. Seen in relation to the provision of language learning to students with special educational needs

Additionally to 7.1, one of the needs in the area of new learning environments seen in relation to the provision of language learning to students with special educational needs is to form smaller groups of learners.

8. Measures to be taken to meet the needs identified

8.1 At institutional level

At institutional level the implementation of an ICT system for the whole institution, constant support of the system and appropriate stimulation of teachers using new learning environments would be a good starting point.

8.2 At regional level

At regional level research on the needs of the region the higher education institution is located in has to conducted: What can be done more efficiently with the use of new learning environments to fulfil the needs of potential users in the region?

8.3 At national level

At national level the financial support for the implementation of ICT in (language) teaching (necessary for the needs stated in 7.1) should be increased and autonomous learning strategies should be given more prominence at all levels of education.

8.4 At European level

At European level encouragement and financial support of equal development of the European countries in the implementation of ICT and the creation of well-accessible European ICT services (learning material & study modules supplied from all European institutions on a standardized basis and free accessible language resources for research on language - with financial stimulation for the creators of such materials and resources) would be very helpful – especially to European countries with less developed economies.

9. Examples of good practice

Examples of good practices are still rare in the field of language teaching at the Slovene higher education institutions so far. Some of these cases have been mentioned above, for instance:

- the so-called "Virtual Student" system (institutionally supported by the University of Ljubljana; http://vstudent.fmf.uni-lj.si) is a good starting point though it not used by the language teachers of this institution so far;
- some non-language institutes provide at least some of the relevant learning materials for foreign languages (mainly English) in the Internet, for example the Faculty for organizational sciences of the University of Ljubljana in Kranj (http://come.to/izpitna.stran);
- Web-sites with study materials brought into life through individual initiative (for example: for English and American literature at the English department (http://gean5.pfmb.uni-mb.si) of the University of Maribor and for German phonology and syntax ("Virtual library") at the German department at the University of Maribor; http://www.pfmb.uni-mb.si/programi/nem/Germanistik_files/virtuals.htm) are promising starting points but will need collective and institutional support.

These examples and some of the other above mentioned examples show that the benefits of new learning environments are recognized and that modern computer technology is gaining ground as an important component in language teaching and autonomous language learning even at higher education level.