



Original Contribution

**THE COURSE PORTFOLIO – A PROFESSIONAL INSTRUMENT FOR
FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS
IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

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In the last years, the concept of portfolio is considered more and more as an opportunity for **evaluation, documentation and individualisation** of not only the process of language acquisition but also of the extension of qualification of primary teachers who teach a foreign language (FL) where its influence is rather **supporting and developing**

The substantial language knowledge is of utmost importance to the teacher who teaches a foreign language. It is valid even more for early language teaching. The primary teacher, who teaches a foreign language, comes across the main challenges that may be defined in the following way at the present stage:

1. The requirement of some authentic language behaviour in the school environment.
2. The necessity to have flexibility in methodological decisions because education has to take place in the pedagogical realia of primary school, which requires high levels of both language and pedagogical competence.

These requirements are not always met in daily life and that is why we should search for ways of education and qualification of primary teachers so that they cope with the above-mentioned challenges.

“Goethe Institute”, Germany, has worked out a language video course, “LE – LiU”, on the basis of interviews with German primary school teachers and scenes of their practice. The course aims to:

- introduce in the daily language, what is specific to the profession of teachers;
- form vocabulary on the theme: “School and pedagogics”;

- train the comprehension in listening and looking;
- set the importance of culture study as a prerequisite;
- set means of expression as a prerequisite for an authentic and various-in-respect-to-language organisation of teaching German language as a foreign language; the organisation also characterises with flexibility and is pedagogically grounded;
- create opportunities for discussion on methodological and multicultural topics.

13 primary school teachers worked in the Department of Information and Qualification of Teachers – Stara Zagora, for two weeks with the first part of the language course LEHRER ERZALHEN and the results were more than positive. With regard to this, we were willing to give to the participants in the course an instrument, which would help them to examine, document and reflect on the process of studying and their own results – the language portfolio. Presenting of the worked out instruments was performed as presentation.

What does the portfolio contain?

Since the purpose of portfolio is to accompany the process of education characterising not only with language aims and contents not limited to the classic i.e. language dimensions, it suggests also platforms for documentation and reflection in the fields of **qualification, culture study and intercultural communication**.

The main parts of portfolio are as follows:

1. Experience of qualification activities up to now;
2. Experience as German language learners;
3. Level of language knowledge in the beginning of the course;

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4. Knowledge about Germany;
5. A course register;
6. A four-column dictionary;
7. Fulfilled aims at the end of the course;
8. Own products in the course and written homework;
9. Important dates;
10. A list of reference literature;
11. A list of addresses.

Experience of qualification activities up to now:

At the beginning of the course the participants are motivated to document briefly the acquired experience and knowledge because for most of them it is not the first qualification activity. They write down the dates, topics, the duration of the attended seminars and **the global evaluation** (either positive or negative) of their quality as well.

Acquired experience as a German language learner – school / university:

Education is a process accompanied with a number of emotions and is connected with situations both within and out of school. An important aspect of the self-evaluation in the beginning of the course is namely the generalisation of the acquired experience as a German language learner.

- What did I like/hate?
- What did I miss?
- What was difficult to me?
- What did I learn with no efforts?
- Situations that I have remembered...

The participants describe the actual status of **their language competence** on the next sheet of paper. The description is not detailed but rather general. In case there is a necessity for a more detailed description, the criteria of the “European language portfolio” (<http://www.sprachenportfolio.ch/>) may be used.

The acquired experience and knowledge connected with Germany are of importance. Here global topics are not included, but rather the contents **in connection** with the seminar – for example, the German educational system, types of schools, position of teachers. An essential moment is the issue of the **origin** of cultural knowledge and namely if it is from a formal source (books, press, radio, television, Internet) or informal (visiting German-speaking countries, from friends and familiar people).

A course register:

The actual progress in education and the newly acquired experience are

documented in the course register. Since it is an intensive course, in the beginning a lot of things are new to the participants and because of the compact form of the seminar, they would not have the time, capability and routine to immediately structure and document all information, impressions and newly acquired experience. In order to be facilitated, they have to write down only the most general impressions during the first two days.

On the third and fourth day the documentation gets more detailed and differentiated. The participants have to take notes in the form of **asociogram**.

From the fifth day the portfolio is completed in **a table**. For every day a page is set to be fulfilled, which aims to make participants get used to concentrating on the most important things by means of filtrating, sorting and reflecting on the acquired experience.

A dictionary:

The participants are additionally offered the opportunity (a table) to write down unfamiliar words and expressions in four columns – the unfamiliar word/expression is written down in the first one, a detailed context – in the second one, the third column is for a semantic margin or synonyms/antonyms, and the fourth one is for the meaning in Bulgarian.

Evaluation of the achievements:

The participants make evaluation at the end of the course both in connection with their progress in respect to language and in regard to the acquired cultural knowledge and skills for an intercultural comparison.

The acquired experience is likely to have encouraged them to keep on working to improve their professional profile. For that purpose they would visit other qualification activities or they would intensively communicate with the other participants in the course to exchange experience.

Record:

Important or particularly successful for the participant are products from work in the course or homework which are applied in the form of record in the following part.

There follow further pages of information containing important gatherings, addresses and reference literature.

How can we work with the portfolio?

The course portfolio is not a notebook and neither is it a pile of written sheets of paper or a folder that is compiled by the

instructor of the course; it is equally not given to colleagues in order to fulfil one's own documentation. It is not a test or certificate, but is rather an instrument for individual work. Besides, it has a purely particular character.

After the principle of individuality, there should be observed the principle of volunteering, too. Nobody should feel obliged to have a portfolio.

We recommend that the participants be introduced in the techniques of work with a portfolio in the beginning of the qualification activity and to be allocated time for consultation as well.

According to the participants...

The experience shows that almost all participants in the course enthusiastically welcomed the idea of work with the course portfolio and they worked with commitment and diligence. We had positive attitudes to the activity of this cognitive instrument when the work of the course was evaluated. A great deal of the participants share that the course portfolio helped them to select the most significant of the acquired experience and information and to structure, reflect and document it for a long period of time.