

DECLARATION FOR MULTILINGUALISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

While acknowledging that this document has no legally binding effect, it declares public commitment to contributing actively and constructively to the development of policies for multilingualism in HE. The Declaration is open for signature by those concerned with multilingual literacies and epistemologies, linguistic diversity, and respect for linguistic rights, and specifically by: (a) research/academic units, organisations, federations, associations (with or without legal entity), (b) individual persons, in their capacity as members of academic units and other social bodies actively involved with languages in education.

PREAMBLE

Internationalization policies, which are of interest to an increasing number of higher education institutions (HEIs), as well as to national and supranational policy agencies, aim – or so they claim – at enhancing higher education quality, in an increasingly interconnected world. In the case of the EU, internationalisation policy initiatives are meant to achieve greater equity among higher educational systems in the context of the ‘European Education Area’, promoting transnational cooperation, partnerships among HEIs and collaboration among EU Member States to succeed in creating “inclusive national education and training systems”. However, internationalisation has increasingly led to the use of English as a ‘lingua academica’, to English Medium Instruction (EMI) and to the ‘Englishisation’ of HE. Despite the mounting evidence regarding the drawbacks of the exclusive use of English in teaching, research, academic publishing, and networking, it is increasingly supported by national authorities and policy makers presuming that English is a means to economic development, modernization, and global communication. However, the use of English at the expense of the official/national language(s), as well as regional or minority languages, may lead to domain-specific abandonment and the repudiation of linguistic rights. Moreover, the use of English at the expense of other languages with or without significant cultural capital has consequences for linguistic and cultural diversity, leading to impoverishment of social and epistemological knowledge.

GENERAL STATEMENT

The signatories of the “Declaration for Multilingualism in Higher Education”, drafted by the European Civil Society Platform for Multilingualism (ECSPM), support the basic principles of the “Helsinki Initiative on Multilingualism in Scholarly Communication”¹, and agree to commit to contributing to policy-making decisions and practices which are in line with the Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)1, adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, on “The importance of plurilingual and intercultural education for democratic culture”². With regard to HE in particular, the signatories commit to:

¹ Here is a summary of the Helsinki Initiative on Multilingualism (<https://www.helsinki-initiative.org/en>):

(1) Support dissemination of research results for the full benefit of the society by making sure that: a) researchers are merited for disseminating research results beyond academia and for interacting with heritage, culture, and society, and b) equal access to researched knowledge is provided in a variety of languages; (2) Protect national infrastructures for publishing locally relevant research by making sure that: a) not-for-profit journals and book publishers have both sufficient resources and the support needed to maintain high standards of quality control and research integrity, and b) national journals and book publishers are safeguarded in their transition to open access; (3) Promote language diversity in research assessment, evaluation, and funding systems by making sure that: a) in the process of expert-based evaluation, high quality research is valued regardless of the publishing language or publication channel, and b) when metrics-based systems are utilized, journal and book publications in all languages are adequately taken into account.

² <https://www.coe.int/en/web/education/-/new-council-of-europe-recommendation-on-the-importance-of-plurilingual-and-intercultural-education-for-democratic-culture>

- safeguarding and supporting the use of several languages, in addition to the official language(s) of HEIs in governance, research and publications, teaching-learning, and communication
- securing and fortifying plurilingualism particularly in teaching and learning, transnational research collaboration and
- relying on the use of language technology tools for services for teaching and learning that facilitate the use of different languages.

AWARENESS RAISING

The signatories of the ECSPM Declaration for Multilingualism in Higher Education commit to contribute to raising their university authorities' awareness, as well as the cognizance of those responsible for language policies, linguistic management and curricula development, directors of research units, scholars, researchers, students, teaching and administrative staff, as civil society that:

- 1) Being proficient in one's official/national language, home/heritage or any other language learnt does not secure epistemological literacy in that language, which entails very different discourse practices than vernacular literacies. However, both are important for the construction of meaning in educational contexts, by both students and teachers.
- 2) When teaching or learning in a language other than one's own, they cannot/should not be expected to produce a nativized variety of this language.
- 3) It is important for university students and staff to be encouraged to make use of all the languages and language varieties they have in their repertoires for meaningful communication in different contexts of their academic life.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The ECSPM Declaration for Multilingualism in Higher Education signatories make the following recommendations to be adopted by policy makers, transnational, national or state organisations, agencies, universities, research institutions, research funders and researchers:

1. Provide opportunities for different languages (not just English) to be the medium of instruction in programmes, courses, modules, alongside the official language of the institution.
2. There are many "unseen" languages in all educational institutions and there should be room for those languages to become visible and to come to be recognised.
3. Provide preconditions for language selection to ensure quality of education.
4. Make sure that instructors offering courses in languages other than the official language(s) of the institution have epistemological proficiency in those languages.
5. International students should be helped to integrate into the academic community and therefore offered opportunities for support and intensive language classes.
6. Avoid exclusively monolingual/monocultural educational experiences (e.g. provide bibliography, language technology tools, videos in different languages).
7. Research groups across universities should be encouraged to decide on the language(s) they will be using at different times (during interaction, dissemination of research outcomes, publication of results).
8. Encourage translation and parallel use of languages and invest in language technology tools.