

CHAGAL and its influence on society –

“Is that the artist you are talking about?”

“No, I am referring to the ‘CHAGAL curriculum guidelines’ which have been developed to improve the situation of international students at European universities.”

CHAGAL and international students – a driving force for change

The CHAGAL project is based upon the hypothesis that international students enrich European universities. Their knowledge and linguistic richness enable universities to evolve both on a multilingual and an intercultural level. The acronym “CHAGAL” corresponds to the project title “European curriculum guidelines for access programmes into higher education for under-represented adult learners”. The document “Curriculum guidelines”, which has been translated into 8 languages, includes, in a summarised form, 12 principles for curriculum building. These guidelines are the result of a process, which was initiated in 2002, launched with the support of the European Commission programme “Grundtvig 1”. CHAGAL focuses on two main objectives:

- 1- supporting international students entering university
- 2- disseminating the “learner-centred approach”

Initially, CHAGAL targeted groups of students who were either from developing countries, members of ethnic minorities or refugees. The “learner-centred approach” evolved through the project, which no longer focuses only on students from the aforementioned groups, but has also extended to other learning contexts.

Putting the “CHAGAL curriculum guidelines” into practice

Within the framework of the ECML’s 2nd medium term programme, the project CHAGAL- Set Up principally aims to collect examples of “good practice”. These examples concern the implementation of the “curriculum guidelines” within European institutions open to foreign students. In April 2005, around thirty experts in this professional context, from over twenty European countries met at the ECML. By focussing on their specific projects, the participants described how they had been able to put the “curriculum guidelines” into practice in their institutions. One of the methods used in language teaching which was presented in the framework of examples of “good practice” was the individualisation of the learning process through **the analysis of learner’s resources, needs and expectations**.

The contribution of plurilingual students at universities

The “CHAGAL curriculum guidelines” promote the analysis of international students’ concrete needs. The studies carried out on the target group could also provide a precious resource in curriculum adaptation and development. It was in this context that the results of an empirical study on “Plurilingualism at university”¹ were presented. One outcome of the qualitative interviews with plurilingual students was that certain university contexts favour the use of several languages. In addition to their linguistic contribution, the international students enrich the university environment and academic life. This “enrichment” still seems to be underestimated when considering the process of internationalisation at universities. Moreover, this aspect could perhaps be integrated into the process of the construction of a European Higher Education Area.

The results of the CHAGAL Set-Up project will be published on a CD-Rom, which will be available from the ECML from December 2005.

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¹ This is an empirical study carried out within the framework of a doctoral thesis at the University of Vienna (cf. Isabelle Mathé, *Mehrsprachigkeit an der Universität – Eine empirische Untersuchung mit plurilingualen Studierenden an Wiener Universitäten*, forthcoming in 2005.)