

Transforming Language Access in Multilingual Ireland: Blended Learning as a Sustainable Model for Lesser-taught Languages

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Abstract:

Ireland's growing linguistic diversity is creating both opportunities and challenges for language education. While multilingualism is increasingly recognised as an important educational, cultural, and economic resource, access to lesser-taught languages can still be limited, particularly for students who do not have access to local language provision. In response, government strategies such as *Languages Connect* have created opportunities to implement more inclusive and flexible approaches to language learning within post-primary education.

This presentation explores the development of a blended learning model for Leaving Certificate Polish delivered through a collaboration between Post-Primary Languages Ireland (PPLI), Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board (CMETB) and H2Learning. The case study offers insights for policymakers, educational leaders, and language educators seeking sustainable ways to support linguistic diversity and equitable access to language learning across geographically dispersed communities.

The model was developed in response to practical challenges often faced by lesser-taught languages, including geographical isolation, limited student numbers within individual schools, and difficulties in accessing qualified teachers. Combining online lessons, independent learning, and local in-school support, the programme aims to create more sustainable and accessible pathways for students studying Polish at Leaving Certificate level.

Using Polish as a case study, the presentation reflects on how blended learning can help ensure that access to lesser-taught language learning is not determined by geographical location or by the number of students interested in a particular language within an individual school. Particular attention is given to the relationship between national language policy and classroom practice, and to the ways technology-supported learning can help bridge some of the gaps between rural and urban language provision.

Drawing on five years of programme delivery, the presentation considers both the opportunities and the ongoing challenges involved in developing new models of access for lesser-taught languages within mainstream education. More broadly, it invites discussion on how education systems can respond to changing linguistic realities and ensure that language learning opportunities are not determined by geography. In this context, blended learning is explored not simply as a technological solution, but as part of a wider move towards more flexible, inclusive, and sustainable approaches to language education.

Keywords: multilingualism, blended learning, lesser-taught languages, language policy, Leaving Certificate Polish, language education, Ireland, equity, rural access