

**Multilingualism and Communication in Higher Education:
Institutional Policies and Cross-Border Cooperation**

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Abstract

The article explores contemporary approaches to multilingualism in the university environment, with an emphasis on the European and cross-border dimension of education. It presents strategic directions for developing students' and academic staff's linguistic competencies. As an example of effective collaboration in promoting multilingualism, the partnership between the Pedagogical State University “Ion Creangă” in Chişinău and the “Dunarea de Jos” University of Galaţi is analysed. The collaboration between the two institutions reflects a sustainable practice of internationalisation and linguistic diversity within the extended Romanian university space. The article contributes to the ongoing discussion on multilingual education by offering a practical model of institutional cooperation rooted in shared cultural and linguistic heritage.

Keywords: multilingualism, university, cross-border education, academic cooperation, internationalisation, linguistic competencies, intercultural dialogue, Republic of Moldova, Romania, academic mobility.

Introduction

In the context of global transformations, universities are redefining their missions by placing linguistic and cultural diversity at the heart of their strategies. Thus, multilingualism becomes a key component of academic innovation and social inclusion.

In an era marked by intensified academic mobility, knowledge circulation, and digital interconnectedness, multilingualism emerges not only as a linguistic phenomenon but as a cornerstone of educational transformation. Universities across Europe and beyond are increasingly recognising the strategic role of languages in fostering innovation, cultural awareness, and social cohesion. The ability to operate across multiple linguistic and cultural frameworks is no longer optional but essential for students and academic communities

preparing to face global challenges. In this context, multilingualism in higher education becomes both a reflection of and a response to the evolving needs of internationalised academic ecosystems. This reality calls for the development of coherent institutional language policies that support foreign language learning, the training of multilingual teaching staff, and the integration of the intercultural dimension into all aspects of university life.

In today's increasingly globalised and interconnected world, multilingualism, multiculturalism, and interculturalism have become key dimensions of higher education. Universities are no longer confined to monolingual or monocultural frameworks; they are evolving into dynamic spaces where multiple languages and cultural perspectives coexist, intersect, and enrich one another. Multilingualism refers not only to the presence of multiple languages in institutional settings but also to the competencies developed to navigate them. Moreover, modern universities are expected to provide an educational framework aligned with the demands of the global labour market, while also fostering democratic values and intercultural dialogue. Multiculturalism highlights the coexistence of diverse cultural identities within academic communities, while interculturalism emphasises dialogue, interaction, and mutual understanding between these cultures. Together, these paradigms form the foundation for inclusive and innovative educational approaches, particularly relevant in cross-border collaborations and in institutions that strive to internationalise their academic and social missions.

In the context of higher education in Romania and the Republic of Moldova, multilingual education represents a fundamental pillar of institutional strategies and cross-border cooperation. Several key developments illustrate the current state of multilingualism internationally and regionally.

National and International Policies

In Romania, Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca stands out for its multicultural and multilingual educational system, offering programs in Romanian, Hungarian, and German at all academic levels. This model supports integrating linguistic diversity into education.

In the Republic of Moldova, the Ministry of Education and Research has developed an Action Plan for implementing multilingual education, aiming to integrate ethnic minorities through education. This plan promotes instruction in Romanian and minority languages, contributing to social cohesion and the inclusion of allophone students.

Cross-Border Cooperation and Joint Projects

The Dunarea de Jos University in Galaţi and the Ion Creangă State Pedagogical University in Chişinău actively collaborate in multilingual education through joint projects and academic exchanges. For instance, the project “Multilingualism, Plurilingualism, Literature, and Interculturality in a Transdisciplinary Context” focuses on developing linguistic and intercultural competences among students from both countries.

Additionally, international initiatives, such as the Technical University of Moldova's role as the National Assistance Office for eTwinning Plus Moldova, facilitate the

development of bilingual and multilingual education policies and programs, promote the exchange of best practices, and support foreign language learning in multilingual settings.

European and Regional Initiatives

The Erasmus+ program supports student and faculty mobility, promoting the learning of foreign languages and cooperation among European higher education institutions. In the 2021–2027 period, at least 34.6% of the program's total budget is dedicated to higher education.

Moreover, the European Commission has proposed creating a common European diploma to deepen transnational cooperation among higher education institutions. This initiative seeks to harmonise educational standards and ensure mutual recognition of diplomas within the European Union.

Methodology

This article is based on a qualitative case study approach, analysing institutional documents, conference materials, and academic exchanges between UPSC and UGAL from 2021 to 2024. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with academic coordinators and students involved in joint activities to understand perceptions and impacts of multilingual practices. Additionally, the outcomes of joint projects and participant feedback were examined to identify the tangible impact of multilingual activities on the educational process.

Named after the renowned Romanian writer and educator, the Ion Creangă State Pedagogical University stands out as a higher education institution with a strong identity, committed to academic excellence, teacher training, and the cultivation of intercultural and linguistic values.

The article placed strong emphasis on the dynamics of collaboration and multilingual practices between the "Ion Creangă" State Pedagogical University and the "Dunarea de Jos" University. The analysis of institutional documents and academic exchanges provided valuable insights into how these practices shape the development of multilingualism, thereby making relevant recommendations for advancing multilingualism in the university environment.

Results and discussion

In the context of globalisation and the consolidation of the European Higher Education Area, multilingualism has become an essential dimension of academic and professional training. It is no longer seen merely as a functional linguistic competence but as a strategic component in the development of active European citizenship, inclusion, and social cohesion. In this regard, universities play a fundamental role in promoting linguistic diversity, becoming key actors in the implementation of European policies on multilingual education. By adopting inclusive language policies and encouraging multilingual pedagogical practices, universities help reduce educational inequalities and enhance access to knowledge for students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

This phenomenon is particularly evident in the collaborative efforts between partner institutions such as “Dunarea de Jos” University of Galați in Romania and Ion Creangă State Pedagogical University in Chișinău, Republic of Moldova. Both universities have embraced multilingual and intercultural approaches not only as a reflection of their geographical and historical contexts, but also as strategic tools for enhancing academic mobility, mutual understanding, and educational innovation.

Through joint programs, research initiatives, and curriculum development, these institutions actively promote linguistic diversity and intercultural competence among students and faculty alike, serving as models of cross-border academic cooperation in the broader European and regional educational landscape.

University multilingualism refers to the presence and valorisation of multiple languages in teaching, research, and academic communication activities, through the integration of foreign languages into the curriculum, the encouragement of international mobility, support for language lectureships, and the stimulation of intercultural collaboration. This approach supports not only the

development of students' and academic staff's communication skills, as well as institutional internationalisation, pedagogical innovation, and equal access to knowledge.

In this article, we aim to explore the main approaches to multilingualism in the university environment, with a focus on the importance of cross-border collaborations between institutions from culturally close but institutionally distinct spaces. A relevant example in this regard is the active partnership between the “Ion Creangă” State Pedagogical University of Chișinău and the “Dunarea de Jos” University of Galați. This collaboration outlines a model for sustainable promotion of multilingualism, based on the exchange of best practices, continuous training, and intercultural dialogue.

Multilingualism is established as a fundamental value in the educational policy documents of the Council of Europe and the European Union, being recognised as an essential factor in promoting social cohesion, intercultural dialogue, and academic and professional mobility. The CM/Rec (2008)7 Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member states emphasises the need to include a plurilingual and intercultural dimension in education as a means to form active and responsible citizens in a democratic society.

In this context, university multilingualism is not only an empirical reality but also a strategic objective that involves transformations at the institutional governance, curricular policies, and teaching methods levels. Modern university strategies integrate the linguistic component into internationalisation plans, recognising the importance of plurilingual competences for graduate employability, international scientific cooperation, and strengthening institutional profiles on the European stage.

In the specialised literature from Romania and the Republic of Moldova, researchers such as Doina Spătaru (2022) emphasise that multilingualism at Moldovan universities is closely linked to the region's historical heritage and multiculturalism, which are essential for the development of students' intercultural competences.

Likewise, Livia Păun (2019) argues that, in Romania, university multilingualism should be approached not only as a response to European labour-market demands but also as a pillar of democratic education oriented towards inclusion and mobility.

Universities thus develop foreign language centres, international lectureships, interdisciplinary modules, and study programs in foreign languages. Moreover, the inclusion of courses taught in widely spoken international languages (such as English, French, Spanish, or German) is increasingly common as part of adapting to the standards of the European Higher Education Area. Academic staff become active promoters of multilingualism, both through participation in training and international mobility and by applying innovative teaching methods that valorise linguistic diversity in classrooms.

At the same time, curricular policies are gradually adopting an integrative vision in which multilingualism is no longer an educational “adjunct” but a core component of university education. This approach supports not only academic performance but also social inclusion, promoting equitable access to educational resources in multiple languages and encouraging active participation of international students.

Universities in Romania and the Republic of Moldova have taken an active role over recent decades in promoting multilingualism in line with European policies on internationalisation of education.

This trend is manifested through the diversification of educational offers in foreign languages, the development of language centres and lectureships, participation in international programs (such as Erasmus+), and numerous extracurricular activities aimed at developing intercultural competences. These efforts are complemented by institutional strategies that prioritise the creation of a multilingual academic environment, fostering not only linguistic skills but also global citizenship and a strong sense of European identity.

In Romania, many higher education institutions offer bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral programs in English, French, or German, especially in fields such as engineering, medicine, international relations, or economics. The “Dunarea de Jos” University of Galați (UGAL), for example, offers optional courses and modules in international languages, as well as linguistic support for Erasmus students and research mobility participants.

In the Republic of Moldova, the “Ion Creangă” State Pedagogical University of Chișinău (UPSC) promotes multilingualism by including foreign languages in the core of initial teacher training programs, through active French and English language lectureships, and by participating in international projects aimed at training competencies for teaching in multilingual contexts.

According to researcher Cristina Tănase (2022), “Romanian universities can and must play an essential formative role in building solid intercultural competence through exposure to plurilingualism, dialogue, and collaborative practices.” Likewise, Moldovan researcher Ecaterina Soltan (2020) states that “intercultural education in higher education must become a transversal dimension of all specialisations, not just a niche of linguistic or humanistic studies.”

Through these initiatives, universities in both spaces contribute not only to the development of functional linguistic competences but also to the consolidation of a European consciousness based on respect, diversity, and dialogue. Thus, multilingualism becomes both an educational and social resource.

The collaboration between the “Ion Creangă” State Pedagogical University of Chișinău (UPSC) and “Dunarea de Jos” University of Galați (UGAL) represents a

consolidated example of a multilingual educational partnership, centred on promoting languages, culture, and academic mobility in the Romanian and European space.

The Department of Language and Communication plays an important role in this collaboration within the Faculty of Philology and History of UPSC, which, since 2021, has developed scientific and teaching partnerships with the Cross-Border Faculty of UGAL.

These interactions aim to strengthen the linguistic competencies of students and professors through a series of joint projects, including:

- Bilingual thematic workshops and international conferences such as Interculturality and Plurilingualism in Higher Education (2022–2024), organised alternately in Chişinău and Galaţi; Multicultural Education – a Formative Space for Values Education (2023–2024), Chişinău.
- Teaching and pedagogical training sessions held online and in a hybrid format, with participation of both academic teams.

Thus, thematic conferences organised by the “Ion Creangă” State Pedagogical University play an essential role in promoting multilingualism and intercultural education. The 2023 and 2024 events titled Multicultural Education – a Formative Space for Values Education gathered specialists from the Republic of Moldova, Romania, and other countries, representing a relevant academic platform for debates on the role of multilingualism in education and for consolidating democratic and European values in the university space.

The conferences addressed themes such as integrating cultural and linguistic diversity into the educational process, developing students’ intercultural competences, and training teachers to manage plurilingual educational spaces. Through interactive sessions, scientific presentations, and applied workshops, these meetings stimulated institutional collaboration, facilitated exchange of best practices, and consolidated research networks in multicultural education.

The impact of these events is evident in the growing interest in innovative teaching approaches and in joint projects between UPSC “Ion Creangă” and its partners, such as UGAL, thereby contributing to the affirmation of a common educational space based on mutual respect, linguistic pluralism, and European values.

Moreover, the collaboration includes active student involvement in joint editorial projects (publishing articles in the scientific journals of the two institutions), collaborative translations, and intercultural activities (online and physical cultural events).

The impact of this collaboration is remarkable. For students, it offers the opportunity to learn and communicate in multiple languages, access diverse educational resources, and interact with diverse academic and cultural environments.

For academic staff, the partnership supports continuous training, access to interdisciplinary research, and exchange of best practices in multilingual contexts.

Beyond the practical dimension, this collaboration contributes to building a common Romanian and European educational space, where the Romanian language, alongside other international languages, is promoted as a vehicle of research, knowledge, and inclusion. Through joint initiatives, the two institutions affirm the importance of cross-border academic

cooperation as a vector for modernising higher education and strengthening cultural identity in the European context.

In the current context of internationalisation in education and academic mobility, multilingualism can no longer be perceived merely as a functional competence but as an essential means of cultural, professional, and social openness. In the university environment, this reality translates into integrating foreign languages and intercultural dimensions across all levels of teaching, research, and international cooperation.

The examples provided by the collaboration between the “Ion Creangă” State Pedagogical University of Chişinău and the “Dunarea de Jos” University of Galaţi demonstrate that cross-border university partnerships can play a significant role in promoting an inclusive and intercultural educational culture grounded in dialogue, pluralism, and mutual respect. Joint projects, mobilities, and multilingual curricular initiatives contribute directly to the development of linguistic competences but also to shaping flexible academic identities capable of responding to the challenges of global society.

Looking ahead, developing plurilingual competences in higher education is not only an educational objective but also a strategic investment in the future of a Europe united through diversity – a Europe where universities become meeting places of languages, cultures, and shared values.

Approaches to multilingualism in the university context are an essential pillar for building open, inclusive educational spaces that are adapted to global challenges. Partnerships such as that between the “Ion Creangă” State Pedagogical University and the “Dunarea de Jos” University of Galaţi demonstrate that intercultural dialogue and cross-border cooperation are not only theoretical ideals but viable and beneficial practices for developing linguistic and cultural competences of students and academic staff.

Conferences and joint projects, such as Multicultural Education – a Formative Space for Values Education, create a bridge between tradition and innovation, supporting the affirmation of cultural identity within a broad European framework. Thus, multilingualism becomes a strategic vector for internationalising education and promoting an academic culture based on diversity, respect, and excellence.

By cultivating multilingualism, universities not only train linguistically competent specialists but also global citizens capable of actively contributing to the building of a more tolerant, innovative society connected to cultural diversity.

Thus, multilingual approaches become not only an academic necessity but also a civic commitment that prepares future generations for the challenges of an increasingly interdependent world and to actively contribute to shaping a European knowledge society where linguistic differences serve as bridges for communication rather than barriers. In this light, the mission of universities transcends the transmission of knowledge and extends into the spheres of cultural diplomacy and societal transformation. By integrating multilingualism into their institutional DNA, universities affirm their role as agents of dialogue, understanding, and peace in a world where borders are increasingly symbolic and collaboration essential.

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