



EDITORIAL

The second issue of *Research Papers in Language Teaching and Learning* celebrates the first decade of the postgraduate programmes in the teaching of English, French and German at the Hellenic Open University (HOU)¹, by publishing the proceedings of a conference held in May of 2009 for that purpose. The conference, which was organized by the HOU and co-funded by the Greek Ministry of Education, aimed at bringing together tutors and students of these programmes in problematising and discussing various aspects of distance learning at this postgraduate level. Such aspects involved, among other issues, research on graduates' perspectives with regard to the distance learning process, the strengths and weaknesses of the postgraduate programmes of the HOU for foreign language teachers, and the impact these programmes have had in their professional life. Interested readers will find information about the history and design of the programmes, as well as informed accounts of assignment writing, the distance tutor's roles as counsellor, feedback provider and assessor of students' written work, dissertation supervision, preparation, research, writing and evaluation, the development of distance learning methodology and teacher professional development.

The issue can be roughly divided into three sections. The first section comprises three papers, each dedicated to presenting an overview of the above programmes. The second section includes a total of 8 papers written by tutors of the English and French programmes. Finally, the last section consists of three papers, each written by a graduate of the English, French and German above programmes.

The first section opens with the paper by Papaefthymiou-Lytra and Sifakis, who present the findings of an extensive survey of graduates and students of the English programme. Issues addressed concern student expectations and the extent to which they are fulfilled, an appraisal of all the modules offered by the programme with reference to their impact on students' professional practice, in-service training and development, and suggestions for improvement. The authors conclude that the results of this survey were very positive and encouraging. The paper by Anastassiadi *et al* looks into a questionnaire survey targeted at graduates of the French programme. The main aim of this research was to explore the professional status of graduates in relation to the impact of their postgraduate studies at the HOU and, more importantly, of the skills they acquired during these studies. The paper concludes that graduates of the French programme are active in ongoing training, committed to honing their skills as teachers, and consider their studies at the HOU a crucial part of their personal and professional development. The section closes with the paper by Wiedenmayer *et al*, who document the reasons that led to the creation and structure of the German programme. They persuasively argue that the programme responds to the needs for

¹ For ease of reference, in the rest of the Editorial, these postgraduate programmes are referred to as 'the English programme', 'the French programme' and 'the German programme'.

high quality postgraduate studies for teachers of German as a foreign language and put forward suggestions for its improvement.

In the second section of this issue, Nikou and Pantazi are concerned with the possibilities and prospects of distance intercultural training for teachers of foreign languages (FL). They present the basic ingredients of intercultural education and discuss the toolset every FL teacher should be equipped with to respond to the many challenges that arise. Issues concerning the intercultural dimensions of language teaching are also raised in the paper by Fay and Androulakis, who look into the particularities and similarities of the modules that address these dimensions in the English and the French programmes. The authors explore the issue of appropriate methodology with a concern for the idiosyncrasies of each programme.

The paper by Zouganeli *et al* looks into teacher personal and professional development and argues for the impact HOU studies can have in promoting reflection and action research. The authors focus on the “Teaching English to young learners” module of the English programme and present the findings of a small scale research of students of that module with a view towards addressing these issues. In their own paper, Galani and Pateraki-Chatziantoniou review their own experience as distance tutors of the French programme and present the findings of a survey of students of the “Language skills in oral communication” module of that programme.

In the paper that follows, Calogerakou and Vlachos review the implementation of and present the findings of a research involving a telecollaborative, e-twinning project which linked two Senior State High school classes, one from Greece and one from Italy. The project involved learners in developing their writing skills with the use of films and blogs while at the same time promoting intercultural awareness and cultivating new literacies. Calfoglou *et al* problematise issues related to students’ academic autonomy. With reference to their experience as distance tutors of the “Language learning skills and materials” module of the English programme, the authors reflect on different aspects of written feedback on written assignments, put forward suggestions for appropriate written feedback and explore ways of supporting the role of the distance tutor as counsellor and assessor.

Kalouri and Antonopoulos discuss issues related to postgraduate dissertation writing. In particular, they refer to constraints that affect topic selection, writing, and evaluating, and draw conclusions regarding the supervising process. Their thoughts, which are informed from research in the French programme, contribute toward the development of a dissertation supervising, writing and evaluating culture. The usefulness of qualitative and quantitative research at dissertation level is further problematised by Kakari and Katsantoni, in the final paper of this section. The authors cast a critical eye on these issues with a focus on a sample of dissertations from the French programme and discuss the challenges and opportunities offered by different types of research for different types of dissertations.

In the last section of this issue, we have three papers that present different aspects of the HOU distance education experience from the student’s perspective. Koziouri, a graduate of the English programme, reflects on the impact of that programme in terms of teacher training and development. Then, Chrysanthopoulou draws on her experience from the French programme and discusses the role of the HOU as a distance education provider in Greece. Finally, Laina, a graduate from the German programme, offers a critical overview of

the HOU distance education methodology with a focus on the development of training materials, tutoring and assessment.

This issue is special as regards the choice of language of the texts included, which is closely linked, in most cases, to the M.Ed. programmes that the authors are affiliated to. This means that certain papers were written in English (5) and in French (1), whereas Greek is used in the majority of the papers (8) as the default language of the host institution. To enhance the readership of all articles, we have asked authors to write their abstracts in two languages.

It is worth pointing out that the papers in this issue should be seen as much more than an account of their authors' reflection on different aspects of the distance learning process as experienced in the postgraduate programmes for teachers of English, French and German at the HOU. It should not be forgotten that these programmes were among the pioneers that initiated the distance education 'story' in this country. It goes without saying, therefore, that, what these papers also portray is a hands-on understanding of the development of the HOU as an institution for distance education and, along with it, the steady growth of an entire culture of distance learning in Greece.

In this issue we add a new feature, with the book review section. Vally Lytra reviews S. Stefanidou's *Trilingual Picture Dictionary for Children: Albanian-Greek-English*.



We would like to dedicate this issue to the memory of Pavlos Pavlou, dear colleague of ours and member of the editorial board of our journal, who tragically lost the battle with cancer last year.