Lang. Teach. (2013), **46.3**, 281–315 © Cambridge University Press 2013
doi:10.1017/S0261444813000025

State-of-the-Art Article

# Applications of quality management in language education

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*This review examines applications of quality management (QM) in language education. QM approaches have been adapted from methodologies developed in industrial and commercial settings, and these are briefly described. Key aspects of QM in language education are the definition of purpose, descriptions of principles and practice, including various descriptive frameworks, and the place of reflective practice and action research. Quality descriptions for different aspects of language teaching – examinations and assessment, education for migrants, for young learners, in mainstream education – are summarised. There is an account of accreditation and recognition of language teaching institutions and a critical review of some of the contradictions and conflicts in the QM approach, such as those between accountability and trust, and between creativity and standardisation. The strengths and weaknesses of auditing and quality inspection methods are examined.*

## 1. Introduction

What is the justification for a state-of-the-art review on quality and quality management in language education? In the Valencia Declaration of Human Duties and Responsibilities (Unesco 2000: Article 12), education is recognised as a human right, which is understood to mean a universal entitlement to education: 'the right to education encompasses the obligation to rule out discrimination at all levels of the educational system, to set minimum standards and to improve QUALITY OF EDUCATION' (my emphasis). The issue is to define what – operationally – is meant by quality of education, what the minimum standards are and, crucially, how they can be achieved. The main emphasis in the review is on the concept and practice of QM, rather than theory and research, since there is very little hard research on, for example, how QM affects learner achievement or teaching practice. It concentrates mainly on applications of QM in Europe; developments in Asia, the USA and Australia are discussed on the basis of the literature, as these are outside the author's direct experience.

A review of quality in language education faces a number of obstacles and critical issues. QM and the related fields of quality assurance and quality control have been developed largely outside the domain of language learning and teaching, and the theories and practices related to QM are features of a general social phenomenon, which have been applied

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to education rather than originating in it. Generally, QM procedures have concentrated on institutions where in most cases languages are just one department, and – apart from schemes accrediting language centres and granting them quality labels – there are relatively few examples of specific quality criteria and standards for language curricula, teaching, learning or evaluation. QM has tended to be implemented from above by governments and other stakeholders and has been seen as challenging the intrinsic legitimacy of teachers, schools and universities and mutual trust between learner and teacher (Sims & Sims 1995). The procedures have involved a lot of bureaucracy, which has been widely seen as a diversion from the main purpose of teaching and scholarship. Nevertheless, issues of QM are having an impact on many aspects of language learning and teaching, in the context of a political concern with accountability not only in education generally but also, more specifically, with respect to language learning, teaching and assessment.

In this review I will look critically at some of the questions raised when applying quality procedures in language education:

- What criteria can be used to define quality in language education?
- What standards can be applied to curricula, teaching, teaching materials and resources, learning outcomes and assessment?
- What methodologies, resources and instruments are available for applying these standards?

## 2. The historical background of quality management

### 2.1 Its origins in industry

In order to understand the place of QM in language education one needs to know where it began. Historically, the quality movement arose in the field of industrial production, and was extended to service industries and subsequently to public institutions, including schools and universities, and to specific areas such as language teaching. In industry the goal was to improve productivity and efficiency; this was initially influenced by Taylorian principles (Taylor 1911), according to which production processes were split up into the smallest possible operational units, allowing production lines (like those in Chaplin's *Modern Times*) to contribute to the development of mass production, replacing custom-building. 'Quality' was achieved by systems of control carried out by 'inspectors' who checked for errors; putting defects right was typically a significant part of production cost.

Before and during the Second World War in the United States, and after 1945 in Japan, especially, QM principles were developed by a number of academics and consultants. Most of them were working in manufacturing industry, linked closely to the war effort in the USA, and to reconstruction of the economy in Japan. The best known of them is W. Ernest Deming (1900–1993), who developed a series of principles for the management of quality in industry, including an approach to management known as 'Deming's Wheel' or (from its initials) 'PDCA', a continuous sequence consisting of four steps:

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- Plan (establish targets, objectives and processes)
- Do (implement the plan and collect data)
- Check (study the results and compare with the plan, noting differences)
- Act (analyse differences, carry out corrective actions; if no corrective action needed apply the PDCA sequence to a wider range of actions).

Deming (1986) also developed a set of principles which have profoundly influenced the QM movement: an emphasis on leadership, on giving responsibility to workers, on the idea of production being driven by planned processes, on a systems approach, on the importance of data collection and of basing decisions on factual information. They are in direct opposition to previous Taylorian approaches. Deming claimed that by giving responsibility to small groups of workers, defects could be eliminated at the outset: 'get it right the first time, every time!'. Juran (1951) developed further the quality control applications of the approach, adding emphasis on human aspects of quality control and on rigorous analysis of processes.

## 2.2 Applications of QM in service industries

The application of QM principles to services saw the addition of a focus on the customer and of strategic approaches to quality. Feigenbaum (1961) developed the concept of TQM (Total Quality Management), emphasising the need for customer satisfaction underpinned by clear service standards. Since services, unlike goods, are not tangible, quality has been equated with customer satisfaction, with the adoption of slogans such as 'quality means meeting customer expectations' or 'quality means exceeding customer expectations' (Juran 1951). In the provision of services the contract between the provider and the consumer of services is a relational one and the quality of the service is often defined through the keeping of promises expressed in the form of customer charters or service guarantees. An essential element of quality in services is a clear description of what is offered: 'say what you do/do what you say you do'.

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO 2008) is the body which has the most influence on the implementation of quality approaches in services. In ISO 9001 it has developed sets of standards for products and services, based on principles derived from Deming and other QM gurus. In the applications of ISO 9001 the emphasis is placed mainly on the process and systems approaches. Rather than assessing the actual quality of a service or product, ISO in its initial versions was concerned to verify that (a) there is a system for delivering quality and (b) that there are procedures for establishing and checking that the processes generated by the system are being applied.

## 2.3 Clients and client satisfaction

An important feature of the development of quality approaches in the service sector was the integration of customer relationships at the centre of QM and the definition of the concept of the customer or client (Winder & Judd 1996). If the quality of a service is judged by the

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satisfaction of client needs or expectations, this raises the question of 'who is the client?' Is it the person who pays for the service, or the one who experiences it? For example, is the client of a school the learner in the classroom, the parents, the local authority, or society in general? To answer this question, various categorisations of 'clients' have been formulated, such as the primary client (usually the one who pays for the service) and secondary client, if the consumer of the service is different (Juran 1951). Another category is the 'unwitting' client, who may be affected by the delivery of a service, even though they have not initiated it. Some approaches to organisational development, including that of Juran (1951), have proposed the idea of the organisation as an interlocking system of mutual client relationships, in which everyone is both client and provider of services. This view distinguishes between external clients, who purchase a service, and internal clients, who have needs and expectations which they are entitled to have satisfied, but who are also accountable to others in turn for the satisfaction of their legitimate expectations.

## 2.4 QM in public institutions

The notion of accountability is especially important when QM approaches are applied to public institutions; it reinforces the idea of client relationships and has been especially influential in healthcare and education. Patients, parents, children and society in general are seen as having rights, and public institutions are accountable to them in the delivery of these rights. Such rights are often described in charters or guarantees: public statements of the specific promises for which institutions can be held accountable.

Another notion which has been applied principally, but not exclusively, to public institutions is that of FITNESS OF, AND FOR, PURPOSE, which includes the need to have valid objectives and to achieve them effectively. As Harvey & Green (1993: 9) put it: 'FITNESS FOR PURPOSE sees quality as fulfilling a customer's requirements, needs or desires. Theoretically, it is the customer who specifies requirements. In education, fitness for purpose is usually based on the ability of an institution to fulfil its mission or a programme of study to fulfil its aims'. This is an alternative way of expressing the slogan that quality is achieved by 'doing the right things' and 'doing things right'. It goes beyond the notion of customer satisfaction or meeting clients' needs, as fitness of purpose can examine notions of social usefulness – educational worth as well as individual satisfaction – and this makes it a suitable model for public educational institutions. In a study published in the collection of papers on the legitimacy of QM in higher education, Kohler (2007: 66) illustrates the concept as a 'quality spiral' which states that 'valid' objectives lead to a 'fitting concept', with 'true' implementation.

## 2.5 Summary of the historical background

From this historical background we can see that QM principles and practices cover a broad range of different concepts: concepts that are not necessarily mutually consistent. In industrial contexts the emphasis is on efficiency and productivity, through careful analysis of processes and the basing of decisions on observed facts. In services, these are complemented by the

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development of guaranteed service standards and the primacy of the customer and customer satisfaction. Public institutions have seen quality in terms of legitimacy and accountability and have developed the concepts of fitness of purpose and for purpose. When we examine how these are applied in language education, we will see that the different aspects are often bundled together, without distinction or clarity, as 'quality'.

## 3. The legitimacy and applicability of QM in language education

The application of quality management in education is not without areas of contradiction and tension. Teaching is (or can be) improvised and creative, it deals with deep issues of personal and cultural identity and interpersonal relationships, and success in educational achievement can be life-determining. These are not goals that are easily measured in terms of productivity and efficiency.

Education, except in the case of private education and language schools, is not a commercial operation, and legitimate questions have been raised about the validity of quality procedures and processes taken over from environments with very different values and priorities. Weber (2007: 19) claims that QM procedures in universities can 'sap dynamism and reduce their sense of internal responsibility'. One of the key characteristics of QM is that it operates within a market or 'quasi-market', accountable to customers or clients; in general, schools benefit from public trust and legitimacy, and there are difficulties in integrating the notion of client satisfaction with national education systems. Aloyo (2011) distinguishes between 'normative legitimacy', in which an activity generates trust because it conforms to an accepted set of standards, and 'empirical legitimacy', in which trust is based on people's belief that implicit standards underlie practice. Aloyo is writing about governance in general, but the distinction can be equally applied to education; some of the objections to the application of quality evaluation of state education arise from the fear that it will damage society's established trust in its educational provision.

Other issues relate to the roles of schools in society and the place of language education within these social concerns. In the current programmes of the Council of Europe, the right of all children to an 'education of quality' is linked to the development of plurilingual education, with a number of claims that language learning has a special part to play in building identity, in cognitive development and in acquiring academic competence in all subjects (Cummins 2000). Bialystok (2007) describes language as a cognitive instrument that provides access to concepts and meanings, serves as the logical system for problem-solving, and creates the organisational basis for thought; none of these fits well with mechanistic views of QM.

There are also problems in applying notions of client satisfaction to education. Education is what Nelson (1970) describes as an 'experience' good, one whose quality can only be assessed after it has been experienced. It can even be defined as a 'credence' good: one whose long-term value cannot be immediately identified even after it has been experienced. In most educational settings there is relatively little choice of institution for learners (except in the case of language schools, and, even here, courses are paid for in advance). Schwartzman (1995) considers that there is a fundamental mismatch between the concept of students as customers, requiring short-term satisfaction, and the long-term aims of education.

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As a consequence, a review of quality in language education must look at quality both at a micro level – how can we define, implement and assess good practice in language teaching and learning at classroom level where there are practical operational aims? – and at a macro political level – is this practice contributing to achieving the social and developmental aims of its educational environment, as well as those of individual educational development? And is it contributing effectively to the cognitive development of learners? It is not clear that procedures imported from management necessarily contribute to achieving this.

Nevertheless, it is possible to find a rationale for QM in language education. Like other activities, teaching operations can be improved by good management of resources and personnel; handbooks have been produced on the specific applications of management in language teaching (White et al. 1991; White et al. 2008). They describe explicit and implicit standards related to achieving efficiency and gauging stakeholder satisfaction. The development of different descriptive frameworks (see section 7 below) has contributed to the creation of a professional context in which practice can be assessed in relation to agreed principles, and learning achievement measured and compared to accepted definitions of level. A degree of professional consensus has been established around practices conducive to promoting improvement in teaching through approaches such as action research, reflective practice and peer observation (see section 5). The general awareness of quality as an issue in education has led to a more explicit commitment to promoting it, embodied in institutional charters and mission statements.

## 4. The scope of QM in language education

This section summarises the position of QA and QM in language education. In order to set standards there is a need to identify good practice and for there to be some consensus about what it is. In order to accredit quality we need reliable ways of measuring it. The scope of QM initiatives can range from major national programmes, such as the movement to establish national standards for foreign language teaching in the United States (Phillips & Abbott 2011) or the development of national curricula in China (Hu 2002), to applications in an individual institution or department.

### 4.1 Definitions and elements of quality in language education

The concept of quality is difficult to pin down and can be very subjective. 'In trying to grasp the concept of quality in education, one starting point is to look for a definition. Theoreticians have struggled and come up with a variety of definitions, including quality being defined by the degree to which set objectives are achieved, added value, fitness for purpose, and client satisfaction' (Thomas 2003: 232). The origin of the word is Latin *qualis* – 'what kind?' – and until relatively recently its use was neutral unless modified by an attribute such as low or high, so the concept was descriptive rather than prescriptive. The descriptive element of quality is crucial, as applications of systems for QM depend on being able to define what it is one is talking about.

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When we talk about quality, we are concerned with defining the nature of the thing described, the resources used to provide it, and steps taken to make it better, with the following phases in any quality initiative (Brown & Heyworth 1999):

- Purpose – Why are we undertaking this activity? Is the purpose a 'fit' purpose?
- Description – What is the nature of the thing we are talking about? What kind of thing is it?
- Comparison – What are 'good' instances of the subject? What is 'good practice' in a particular activity? What criteria do we use for this?
- Evaluation – How good an example of its kind is it? How does it compare with set standards?
- Management – What can we do to ensure that quality is maintained? How can we make it better? What standards do we apply to this?
- Guarantees – How do we know we can rely on the quality of a particular thing or activity? How can it be reliably accredited? By whom?

## 4.2 The purposes of language education

In addition to contributing to the obvious aim of acquiring communicative competence, QM in language teaching must have relevance to broader educational aims. These include the importance of language learning in cognitive development (Cummins 2000) and its role as a necessary element of successful learning in schools. It can also be a means of ensuring equality of opportunity for children of migrants and socially disadvantaged groups, and contribute to the acceptance of differences and respect for otherness. It can even be seen as a key factor in the exercise of democratic citizenship (Beacco & Byram 2007).

The aims of foreign and second (or third) language learning in academic settings differ from those of language education for migrants, as they do if languages are being learnt as part of school or university system rather than as a single goal in a language school or adult education.

## 4.3 Description, comparison and evaluation: models of QM

The concept of quality is concerned first with description – what kind of thing are we talking about? – as well as the practical means by which it might be improved. Comprehensive and systematic descriptions, such as the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Council of Europe 2001), and the associated frameworks of reference which have been developed from this model – for teacher education, for Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), for pluralistic approaches to language teaching, and for evaluating resources – are necessary points of departure for setting objectives and for comparing and accrediting quality.

Descriptions lead naturally to a need for comparison: how can we define good instances of a particular activity? What do we mean by 'good practice' or 'excellence'? Various audit systems have developed scales and grading systems for assessing the quality of institutions, and

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there are research projects which identify and describe good practice in different contexts, for example in the work of the European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz (ECML 2011).

The definition of what is 'good' raises the question of 'how good is it?' and the need for the evaluation of quality, which in turn requires the definition of what can be measured reliably and with validity. Classic quality theory in industry or services tends to be based on a mix of a number of different aspects (Heyworth, in Muresan 2007):

- Detailed management of processes in the three phases of design, implementation and outcome, with the aim of achieving 'zero defect' (i.e. fault-free operations) through inspection and control.
- Viewing quality as a feature of the relationship with the client, whose satisfaction is the measure of the quality achieved, and 'exceeding clients' expectations' is the goal.
- Measuring the results or outcomes of the processes – financial success for a commercial enterprise, growth for an economy, and examination results for a school.

Cheng & Tam (1997) cite seven models of quality in education: the goals and specifications model, the resources input model, the process model, the satisfaction model, the legitimacy model, the absence of problems model and the organisational learning model. They maintain that a combination of these models can provide a comprehensive approach to quality in education.

All of these models have been used as bases for the evaluation of quality in language education; school inspections have examined the processes by which curriculum is translated into syllabus, and how this in turn generates schemes of work and lesson planning. Assessment procedures involve a process from initial placement through progress testing to final evaluation of proficiency. In both state and private education, quality 'charters' or guarantees have been developed which define what the 'providers' of educational services promise to those who use them. In several countries league tables of examination results are used, with differing degrees of validity, to judge school performance. In England the inspecting authority for mainstream schools, Ofsted, makes these reports available to the public on its website (Ofsted 2012).

## 4.4 QM and accreditation

The proactive aspect in relation to quality seeks to give answers to the question 'what can we do to make things better?' and leads to QM. This is typically divided into quality assurance, carried out before and during an activity to make sure it is done well, and quality control, which checks the finished product. In language teaching activities, this covers a wide spectrum: the appropriateness and relevance of curriculum and syllabus, teacher performance, the quality of the resources used, the reliability and validity of assessment procedures, the amount and quality of learning which is achieved, and more general aspects such as the security and well-being of participants and the educational values of the school (EAQUALS 2010; British Council 2012). As a consequence of this, QM is concerned with features that apply to the whole of an institution, such as the way in which its leadership can create a culture of quality, often involving methodologies like action research, quality circles

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– in which small groups of staff meet to propose ways of improving quality – client focus groups, encouragement of innovation, and intensive use of class observations. It functions at an individual level, too, through the development of reflective practice and continuous professional development.

The final aspect of QM is directed towards the clients and other stakeholders involved in the process. How can they make an informed choice (when they have one) from among providers of language teaching? What independent guarantees of quality can be obtained to build confidence and trust in the institution? Accreditation procedures are described in more detail in section 8 of this review.

## 5. The applications of QM in language education

Applications of QM in education generally, and in language teaching specifically, reflect the same distinctions as those found in industrial and commercial contexts. There are elements related to productivity and efficiency: the analysis of the processes needed to deliver effective courses, for example, involving a logical sequence from curriculum to syllabus to the planning and execution of individual lessons. Another aspect is the presence of systematic approaches to assessment with coherent applications of a sequence of placement and diagnostic testing, and both formative and summative approaches to evaluation. The efficiency of staff is fostered by the practice of regular performance reviews or appraisals in which individual professional objectives are set. There is also a degree of consensus about aspects of good practice which promote commitment to quality, to innovation and continuous improvement, to enlightened leadership and teamwork; these include regular observation of classes with peer observation as a feature of self-assessment, the institutionalisation of reflective practice and commitment to continuous professional development. These approaches seek to base action on fact-gathering with regard to practice and reflective analysis of what is done. In theory, though not always in practice, a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches to QM enables institutions to be more efficient without jettisoning educational values and individual professional fulfilment. The function of specific management techniques related to QM is to install procedures which ensure that the processes that generate substantive quality are applied. Sallis (2003) claims that in spite of drawbacks, 'Total Quality Management', with its emphasis on leadership and teamwork, can be a guiding philosophy for long-term improvement.

### 5.1 Methodologies for Quality Assurance

Quality Assurance (QA) is a concept that covers all policies and actions implemented within a quality system. It is a broader term than quality control (which often refers only to post hoc controls) and usually refers to the internal workings of an organisation.

Muresan et al. provide, in their volume *Qualitraining* (2007), an overview of the applications of QA in language teaching; in educational environments, approaches to QA have

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adapted general QA principles to an educational environment. The general methodologies are:

- the drafting and presence of MISSION STATEMENTS setting quality objectives
- the explicit development of A CULTURE OF QUALITY in an organisation
- the identification of different forms of LEADERSHIP and ensuring that these function in a way conducive to the creation of 'quality'
- regular QUALITY REVIEWS of how far quality objectives have been attained.

More specific mechanisms include:

- BENCHMARKING: choosing standards, often in relation to the general performance of other institutions in the same field, or to competitors against whom performance will be judged
- identifying INDICATORS which will demonstrate how far the standards are being met
- drafting CLIENT CHARTERS which state what the institution promises or guarantees to its stakeholders, and displaying these prominently
- procedures for OBSERVATION, DATA GATHERING, CLIENT SURVEYS and QUESTIONNAIRES as ways of verifying quality and assessing what indicators are showing about quality.

### 5.1.1 Good practice

There is a degree of consensus among language educators that certain features of present-day teaching represent 'good practice', including reflective practice and action research. Argyris & Schön (1978) and Schön (1983) regard reflective practice as an essential feature of the way professionals function and develop, and thus one of the key ways in which change and improvement are initiated in education. It is therefore an essential feature of QM, despite often being seen as an element of individual, rather than institutional, professional development. Richards & Lockhart (1996) argue that reflective teaching helps teachers to collect data about teaching, examine their attitudes, beliefs, assumptions and teaching practices, and use the information obtained as a basis for critical reflection about teaching – and, by implication, improve the quality of their teaching. Xu Qing (2009) suggests a number of procedures which can promote reflective approaches to teaching, including peer observations, written accounts of experiences, self-reports, teacher diaries, recording of lessons, teacher inquiry groups and collaborative action research. All of these are ways in which reflective practice can help teachers to link theory and practice and achieve 'professional growth'.

### 5.1.2 Innovation

Deming (1986) and other writers on QM emphasise the importance of innovation in maintaining and improving the quality of a product or service. For example, the European Commission (2012) awards the European Language Label to innovative language teaching projects; the Austrian Centre of Competence in Modern Languages (Kettemann, de Cillia & Haller 2001) studied the criteria for this award and found that it required a combination of a cooperative institutional environment involving all the stakeholders, systematic analysis of

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organisational variables (use of time, organisation of the learning space, the media applied) and, finally, interaction with the outside world and publicising of the innovations. Systematic innovation is related to quality within three areas: it influences the environment in which language education takes place, changes didactic and organisational variables and affects the outcomes and integration of quality into the working of an institution.

Readiness to innovate seems to be most effective when it emerges from perceived internal need rather than from top-down imposition. Marsollier (2002) describes a study of readiness to change and innovate carried out among a sample of around 100 French secondary school teachers. According to these teachers, the moments when they are most inclined to innovate are when they are dissatisfied with part of their work or are offered opportunities to work in teams. Innovations pushed by the Ministry of Education or by inspectors were less motivating.

### 5.1.3 Observation in QM

Deming (1986) also emphasises the importance of fact-gathering as a basis for decision-making in QM. The 'facts' of teaching are what happens in classrooms, yet teachers frequently work alone without systematic feedback, and mechanisms for consistent identification of areas which need improvement, or practical approaches to improving teaching, are rare. Detailed analysis of what happens in classrooms provides raw data for action to improve the quality of teaching and this can only be achieved through organised and regular observation. Muresan et al. (2007: 46–50) describes a number of different approaches to observation of classroom teaching. They include peer observations, 'buzz' observations (trainers, directors of studies, teachers visit all the language classes in a school for 15–20 minutes, not to assess individual teachers but to identify areas of good or less than good practice), and observation of individual teachers as part of quality control procedures or as a regular part of professional development. Good practice prescribes the use of a range of different observation methodologies as an underpinning for assuring the quality of teaching.

### 5.1.4 Action research

Action research is another key way of gathering data for QM and for basing decisions and strategy on facts. Nunan (2009) points out that 'action research is proposed as a procedure for ensuring that decisions related to teaching are based on evidence rather than impression; it is collaborative, contributes to professional development and in this way applies quality assurance principles to classroom teaching and allows theory and practice to meet'. Wallace (1991: 56–57) claims that 'action research is an extended version of reflective practices which can have a specific and immediate outcome which can be directly related to practice in the teacher's own context', thus contributing to improved quality.

## 5.2 Accountability management

The approaches just described – reflective practice, different forms of observation, action research and commitment to innovation – are all aspects of the processes through which QM can be practised in language education. They are more concerned with the internal workings

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of schools and teachers' experience than with outcomes, and their use in QM has often been an offshoot of concerns with professional development or teacher training.

Accountability management adapts the client satisfaction models developed in the application of QM in the service sector. Farmer (2006) argues that language teaching has been slow to develop practices that respond coherently to clients' needs and that research has been inward-looking rather than centred on issues related to client accountability. Language education could be considered as a 'service industry like any other requiring attention to the parameters set by a quality assurance programme' (Farmer 2006: 161). He cites a TESOL paper (TESOL 2000) which establishes quality indicators and performance standards for adult ESOL teaching programmes under headings which include programme structure, administration and planning, curriculum, instruction, retention and transition, assessment and learner gains, staffing, professional development and staff evaluation.

Farmer suggests that, although it is very difficult to establish objectively measurable indicators in an educational setting and elements of public trust and educational independence of judgment are important, too, QM procedures nevertheless need to take greater account of client needs. He suggests, for example (p. 166), that indicators for curricula could include 'setting goals, objectives, outcomes, approaches, methods, materials, technological resources and evaluation measures that are appropriate for clients' needs and goals'. Possible indicators for good programme structure include the presence of a clear mission statement and an organisational philosophy which encourages input from internal and external stakeholders. The notion of 'stakeholder' in language education is a complex one – stakeholders might be the learners in the classroom, parents, other educational institutions (i.e. school accountability to universities), employers or society at large. How can the needs of all these stakeholders be reconciled? How should long-term development needs be balanced against short-term wishes which affect motivation and engagement in learning? In service industries the notion of client and stakeholder is especially complex, with organisations seen as working within a system of mutual service provision, each department and category of staff having responsibility for meeting the needs of others and the right to claim efficient services from them.

Gottlieb & Nguyen (2007) examine the systems for accountability management in foreign language provision in schools in the United States and emphasise the need for data and assessment results to be made accessible to learners, teachers, school and state administrators over the full period of foreign language instruction. They propose a 'pivotal portfolio' as a means for doing this: a portfolio which gathers all the relevant data and is available to all stakeholders, its form differing according to need.

## 5.3 Programme evaluation

This is an approach which attempts an overall view of all the elements of QM as a way of judging the effectiveness and efficiency of an institution or a particular programme. It seeks to provide regular and reliable information to managers of teaching institutions on how far performance targets are being met. It is meant to enable institutions to ensure quality service to students, and, importantly, to demonstrate that they are doing this to the authorities or

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other bodies to whom they are accountable. To set up such a system requires the design of meaningful and useful indicators and the involvement of both the beneficiaries of the service and the teachers and other staff concerned.

Mackay et al. (1998) describe a system of programme evaluation set up in a language centre in a public sector institute for oil and gas technology in Indonesia. The first step in the process was to identify the key characteristics of the language centre as a prelude to determining key indicators. These characteristics would apply to most institutions: their environment, governance, the programmes they offer, their teaching and support staff and the teaching resources available. Mackay et al. argued that good performance indicators are:

- RELEVANT – addressing policies and practices related to established goals and specific responsibilities
- INFORMATIVE – providing information about factors which influence outcomes
- ACCEPTABLE – relating to goals which have been agreed upon and can be defined operationally, and used in training if necessary
- COST EFFECTIVE – can be implemented without excessive use of resources and time.

For innovation and quality measures to be successful, involvement in decision-making is important. There are many examples of unsuccessful top-down change, in which innovation is rejected because it is imposed without the involvement of those who have to carry it out. Fullan (1993: 163) points out that changes in schools will not succeed unless 'teachers become simultaneously and seamlessly inquiry-oriented, skilled, reflective and collaborative professionals' and that this is only possible if the school environment encourages this kind of involvement and collaboration. Karavas-Doukas (1998) describes how a major top-down introduction of communicative methodology in Greek schools was ineffective because it did not involve teachers, whose educational culture and mindset did not buy into the changes.

## 5.4 A culture of quality and leadership

A coherent approach to QM can only be achieved if the institution can introduce what Rose (2007) calls a 'culture of quality', requiring explicit statements of quality objectives and leadership and including regular reflective practice, with staff taking personal responsibility for the quality of their work and organisational procedures to recognise and reward it. The commitment to quality needs to be documented in mission statements, charters and strategic plans that are communicated to all stakeholders. Aims and objectives for the institution need to be set, making the values of the institution explicit, describing quality, identifying clients, both internal and external, and making commitments and promises which involve all those working in the institution. Muresan et al. (2007) includes examples of mission statements and charters mainly from private institutions and associations around Europe directly connected to language education.

Leadership is an essential feature of a culture of quality, but not just top-down leadership, as it can take numerous forms: moral leadership, grounded in personal and professional values; strategic, focused on policy and organisation; managerial, focused on function and tasks;

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and collaborative, based on democratic principles and encouraging the participation of all stakeholders. Interpersonal leadership centres on collaboration, interpersonal relationships and distributed leadership that engages a range of people in leadership activity; it extends the boundaries of leadership beyond delegation. 'Effective leaders will draw from a personal repertoire based on "fitness for purpose". Whatever the approach to leadership style, it is the leadership processes which underpin this that promote quality' (Rose 2007: 30).

Another qualitative aspect of educational leadership is related to the capacity-building of the institution. This involves the development not just of professional, technical competence but also of 'emotional capacity' and intercultural capacity. Timperley & Philips' (2003) study in New Zealand noted that teachers' feelings of self-efficacy had an effect on learner achievement and that learner achievement promoted positive attitudes in teachers. The authors (p. 639) discovered that 'a complex interplay of new knowledge, how to teach it and unanticipated changes in children's achievement helped to achieve changes in teachers' feelings of self-efficacy and in their expectations of students'. They conclude that teachers' 'beliefs and improvement in their practice need to be addressed simultaneously in order for professional development to have a lasting effect on the expectations and achievement of low income children'. Bartolomé (2002) describes how ideological and affective cultural changes in teachers' attitudes enable them successfully to bridge the cultural gap between them and learners from disadvantaged environments.

## 5.5 Identifying best practice and benchmarking

In benchmarking approaches to QM there is an attempt to identify best feasible practice and establish it as the target standard. The concept of best practice is widely used as a tool in QM, but it has been questioned. Aalto et al. (2011) set out to determine best practice in teaching the language of schooling as a subject (i.e. French in schools in France) in multilingual classrooms. They discovered problems with the concept of best practice: teaching and learning are so context-determined that what is best in one situation is often not applicable elsewhere, so they reduced their ambitions to a description of 'practice'. They found that successful practices are often successful because of the capacity for innovation, creativity and ability to collaborate of those who initiate them, and practice in complex situations cannot be simply transferred from one setting to another.

Rea-Dickins & Germaine (1992) list a series of evaluation activities to enable teachers to assess, for example, their use of materials or how to motivate learners. They also use reflective checklists to identify useful practice which could be adopted.

One of the uses of the CEFR has been the application of the levels as benchmarks either for individuals, classes, schools or national curricula. This has had a beneficial effect in setting clear aims, especially when linked to the use of portfolio and self-assessment procedures, but can also have a standardising effect, especially if learners are assigned to a broad level, rather than to a differentiated profile. Cambridge ESOL (2012) offers a language benchmarking service that uses a series of tests and assessment activities that are compared against international standards. Techniques such as diagnostic testing and linguistic gap analysis have been used in a number of countries as a way of setting objectives for their

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language teaching programmes. The European Language Survey – SurveyLang (2012) – has compared average levels achieved by learners in different countries and this data is likely to be used by governments to set benchmarks for learner achievement.

To summarise this section on methodology for quality assessment: there are established approaches to achieving good practice in QM in education. The process of establishing quality depends on a coherent implementation of regular long-term use of such tools as reflective practice, different forms of observation, action research as an instrument for change and innovation, to establish the involvement of all staff in an evaluative and innovative process. To implement this coherent approach requires leadership in the creation of a quality culture and a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches. In the context of language education, especially in schools, issues related to cultural and linguistic identity are crucial. It is probably fair to say that relatively few institutions manage to combine all the features described in this section; there is little emphasis on quantitative measurement of their effectiveness and almost none on measuring the link between the various approaches and learner outcomes.

## 6. Objections to QM approaches

Some of the objections to the applications of QM methods in language teaching are fundamental objections to the introduction of business methods and the imposition of standardisation on teaching. The objections are both ethical and operational. Kurtz (2005), Böttcher et al. (2008) and O'Day (2008) all warn that if standards are based on specific measurable competences rather than a more holistic interpersonal view of communication and culture, the potential educative richness of language education may be lost.

There are reservations about the legitimacy of assessing quality in terms of a competence-based model, external auditing procedures, and standardised outcomes. Kurtz (2011), for example, states that 'the price to be paid for injecting market pressure into secondary school education, for turning foreign language classrooms into arenas of competition for the best test results, for coating instruction with more and more layers of assessment, for reducing educational "quality" to a limited number of measurable performance indicators, and for conceiving of output or outcome as the linchpin of quality development, may be hefty and unacceptable'. Sahlberg (2007: 264) claims that promoting quality through trust in schools and teachers will bring more consistent results: '(In Finland) teachers and schools are responsible for their own work and also solve most problems rather than shift them elsewhere'. And he claims that 'The primary aim of education is to serve as an equalizing instrument for society'.

Weber (2007: 22) raises a number of arguments about QM accreditation in higher education. He claims that this is inefficient, because (a) it doesn't work – practically all institutions are accepted; (b) the cost–benefit ratio is unsatisfactory – it takes time and resources which could more profitably be devoted to research and teaching; (c) it encourages institutions to be bureaucratic – the need for objective criteria causes them to concentrate on measurable and observable details, rather than the important ones; and (d) the spread of QM and pressure to comply with it is turning QM itself into a non-productive business.

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These objections are made in a higher education context, but might equally be applied to language education. In inspection and audit systems there is a constant tension between reliability and validity issues: the quest for reliability leads to an emphasis on indicators that can be observed and measured, sometimes to the extent that they replace what they are supposed to be indicating. The difficulty of reliably assessing something as complex as teaching means that detailed class observation is avoided or skimmed over with no more than token gestures. There can be over-concentration on the summative, label-granting aspect of QM and much less on formative ways of helping the institution to change and improve. The approach can lead to a checklist mentality, in which the existence of a feature in the list of indicators takes precedence over its content and quality, with the result that the most important features of education are neglected.

A further objection is related to the snapshot element necessarily present in external quality control systems. Typically such assessments take place once every three or four years in a concentrated period of time, rarely more than a week. This can lead to schools putting on a performance designed especially to impress the auditors, though not usually to the extent of the language school – located in a variety of countries in QM folk myths – which employed a director of studies and teaching staff for a month before their inspection, and sacked them all as soon as accreditation was granted. Experience does show that there can be a tendency to let procedures slip in the period between audits, with hasty reorganisation when the next review comes round. Thomas (2003: 234) describes this as the 'wet paint syndrome' and points out that 'the dynamics of change in any institution will not be incorporated into the picture gained during the visit; in the same way, many of the weaknesses may not be revealed because the school is proficient at covering them up'.

Such issues can, however, be addressed: a number of audit systems make class observation the central part of their procedure and include detailed descriptions of classroom practice combined with professional advice on possible improvement. A distinction is made between 'requirements' – what must be done in order to comply with standards – and 'recommendations' – advice on possible pathways to change. To draw this distinction requires confidence in structured, subjective professional judgment and training based on real evidence and cooperative assessment in order to develop a good degree of reliability in impressionistic judgments. The 'snapshot' danger can be mitigated by audit systems which check quality control procedures, such as observation reports and action taken in consequence, over a long period. A process-based approach to QM, with insistence on continuous professional development, regular institutional self-review and innovation, a range of different kinds of observation and consistent data-gathering can generate genuine improvement in quality and learner outcomes.

## 7. Standards for quality in language education

Coherent and comprehensive descriptions are a prerequisite for QM. In order to decide whether we are doing something well, we need to know what it is, what it is for, and its place in the environment. In this section there is a brief review of different international frameworks which are being used as sources for the design of quality systems and standards in different

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areas of language learning and teaching; many of them are also reflected in national, regional and institutional curricula.

## 7.1 Criteria and standards for quality of curriculum, learning and teaching

The CEFR has several features that are relevant to quality definitions and to QM systems. First of all, the wide acceptance of the CEFR levels as the basis for curriculum design, materials production and examinations means that there are objective standards for comparing achievement in different learning environments and for different languages. It enables benchmarks to be set for the target levels of achievement and the amount of time devoted to study; it allows international comparisons of attainment to be made and helps schools to map out their curricula more coherently. This broad acceptance can also have drawbacks, however, with the CEFR levels used for political aims such as the imposition of rigid national curricula. The French education system, for example, sets CEFR level B1 as the aim for the first foreign language in the Baccalauréat, without any reference to the profiling of individual skills proposed in the CEFR.

Although the CEFR claims that it does not wish to 'tell practitioners what to do, or how to do it' (p. xi), the 'model' is in fact widely quoted, and an emphasis frequently placed on the notions of action orientation and learner-centredness both to inform didactic approaches, and to act as implicit quality criteria. Language schools in France use the term '*l'approche actionnelle*' as the counterpart to the 'communicative method' or 'approach' in English-teaching environments. The description of language learning as the activation of competences – defined (p. 9) as 'the sum of knowledge, skills and characteristics that allow a person to perform actions' – to accomplish social tasks is widely accepted.

The CEFR also implies a privileged position for language teaching in curricula, as a vehicle for the development of personal and cultural identity, the exercise of democratic citizenship and the acquisition of autonomy and learning skills which can be applied to other domains. In general, the CEFR and its comprehensive descriptions have a major part to play in any applications of QM in language education, especially those related to assessment. There are, however, pitfalls in thinking that CEFR 'compliance' – a term often used – is the answer to all quality issues in language education. The CEFR does not, for example, say very much about cultural aspects of language learning, nor do the descriptions of an action-centred approach address the need for learning and teaching to be informed by a coherent learning theory, or sets of learning theories.

Another framework produced by the Council of Europe – CARAP-FREPA, a Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Language Learning and Teaching (Candelier et al. 2011) – addresses issues of plurilingual and intercultural approaches to language learning. At its core is a set of descriptors which start from the view that language learning necessarily involves at least two languages – the target language and the learner's language – and can usefully involve more than two. The authors maintain that these aspects are an essential element of efficiency and quality in language education.

In the United States, the National Standards for Foreign Language Education (2005) set quality standards for language teaching that put the emphasis on what students can do as the

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outcome of their learning, identifying cognitive development and intercultural competences as well as communication skills.

These three examples of scales and standards for teaching indicate that QM should relate not only to the development of communicative competence, but to a wide range of educational and social purposes.

## 7.2 Descriptions of the quality of teachers

What do we mean by 'good' teachers and 'good' teaching? How much of this aspect of quality is common to teachers of all subjects and how much is specific to language teaching? In order to establish quality criteria and standards we need descriptive frameworks. There are a number of descriptions of quality requirements both for teachers in general, and for teachers of languages specifically. Typically they are based on a competence model, with competence defined generally as a combination of values (or attitudes), knowledge and understanding and skills.

### 7.2.1 Some general examples of standards for teachers

#### Professional Standards for Teachers (UK)

These standards, produced by the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA 2010), can serve as a self-assessment tool for teachers on general aspects of teaching, as well as a source for the design of pre- and in-service training, and potentially for quality auditing. They describe the teacher's career as going through a series of stages: QTS (qualified teacher status), core, post-threshold, excellent teacher and advanced skills teacher, with definitions of each area of teachers' work, from relationships with children and young people to team working and collaboration. Each standard is categorised according to attributes, knowledge and understanding, and skills. The standards are cross-referenced and enable users to compare the requirements across the different career stages.

#### A Competency Framework for Teachers (Department of Education and Training Western Australia 2004)

This is a tool to enable classroom teachers to reflect on their professional effectiveness, to determine and prioritise areas for professional growth, to identify professional learning opportunities and to assist their personal and career development planning. Its competence model is slightly different from that of the UK, defining competence as the skills and knowledge required to provide learners with quality education. Its intention is to provide 'teachers, teacher educators, teacher organizations and professional associations with a description that establishes agreed dimensions of effective teaching and offers a common reference point for professional reflection, discussion and action'. The key words here are 'agreed dimensions': a necessary basis for standard setting. The framework also includes

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descriptors for teachers' attributes, including collaborative, committed, reflective, ethical, innovative, communicative, and positive attributes.

### New Overarching Professional Standards for Teachers, Tutors and Trainers in the Lifelong Learning Sector (UK) (TDA 2010)

This document (Sector Skills Council for Lifelong Learning 2007) sets out professional standards which detail the 'values, knowledge, understanding and professional practice expected of all teachers in the lifelong learning sector in England'. It is intended as a basis for the design of subject specific teacher qualifications and applies the TDA professional standards approach to the teaching of literacy and ESOL to adults. It describes six domains, among them professional values and practice, planning and assessment, which summarise the basic competences.

Specific standards are set for each of the domains; for example, one of the standards for teachers of language and literacy specifies that teachers should: 'Use approaches to teaching language and literacy which take into account the range of learner backgrounds, histories, learning goals, preferences and cognitive styles'; indications are given with regard to teaching strategies and methods to be used and there is equally detailed description of knowledge areas related to language teaching. The standards are linked to 'commitment statements', which are meant to ensure that specific skills are linked to values and attitudes.

## 7.2.2 Descriptions of standards for teachers of languages

### European Profile for Language Teacher Education (Kelly & Grenfell 2005)

This profile was prepared in the context of a European Union project designed to contribute to the EU's ambition that all European citizens should have competence in their L1 and two other EU languages; its intention is to provide a framework for teacher training programmes. It can also be used as a checklist for institutions with longstanding strengths in language teacher education, and as a reference document providing guidance to institutions with plans to improve their language teacher education programmes.

Like other frameworks, the Profile divides competence into knowledge and understanding, strategies and skills and values, but adds to these the notion of the need for a structure to ensure quality in teacher education. The first four parts of this structure are:

1. A curriculum that integrates academic study and the practical experience of teaching
2. The flexible and modular delivery of initial and in-service education
3. An explicit framework for teaching practice (stage/practicum)
4. Working with a mentor and understanding the value of mentoring.

In the section on 'Values' the Profile includes a number of features related to the educational role of the language teacher: the need for training in social and cultural values, linguistic and cultural diversity and European citizenship. It places teacher education within the mainstream

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of education and points out its contribution to cognitive and affective development: 'In relation to education theories, areas dealing with LINGUISTIC AND COGNITIVE DIMENSIONS can be taught alongside the humanistic and affective implications of real learning situations. Trainee teachers can synthesise these areas through peer observation and self-evaluation' (p. 5). The framework recommends that approaches to QM be implemented as part of teacher education, including action research, peer observation and collaborative team development.

## The European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL) (Newby et al. 2007)

EPOSTL was a project in the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe. Its initial intention was to provide a self-evaluation tool in the form of a portfolio for students in pre-training as language teachers. Its influence has been extensive – it has been translated into a dozen languages – and it has been used for in-service training and as a curriculum framework for teacher education courses. It includes in its introduction an overview (p. 8) of what teachers do that places self-assessment at the centre of teacher development, influenced by the context, by methodological principles and the resources available, which determine the approach to the teachers' tasks: planning, conducting lessons, assessment and promoting independent learning. Each of these aspects is the subject of self-assessment questionnaires which can be used as an individual quality mechanism.

## Professional Standards for Teachers – English as a New Language (ACTFL 2005)

This, like EPOSTL, is designed as a reflective tool for teachers. It sets detailed standards in 'preparing for student learning, advancing student knowledge, supporting student knowledge' through reflective practice, contact with families and professional leadership. It is based on five 'Cs' – Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparison and Communities – with an emphasis on the role of languages as a basis of social cohesion as well as an operational skill.

There are descriptive comments on each of the standards, which are formulated in terms of quality outcomes of teaching rather than the process. There is little coverage of methodological issues, but fuller statements of social and cultural commitment, relating to, for example, the complementary guiding principles of equality of opportunity and differentiation of learning approach. It uses the concept of 'accomplished' teachers and explicitly describes high quality practice:

> Accomplished teachers know how to engage groups of students to ensure a disciplined learning environment and how to organize instruction so as to meet the schools' goals for students. They are adept at setting norms of social interaction among students and between students and teachers. They understand how to motivate students to learn and how to maintain their interest even in the face of temporary setbacks. (ACTFL: v)

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### EAQUALS Framework for Teacher Training and Development (EAQUALS 2012)

This framework is part of a current project, the starting point for which was a one-page professional profile of teaching qualifications and competences prepared by North & Mateva (2006) for EAQUALS (Evaluation and Accreditation of Quality in Language Services) as a support for its quality control inspections, now referred to as the 'European Profiling Grid' and part of a European project. This has been extended into a framework (EAQUALS 2012) which could be used as a set of quality standards for assessing teacher training courses. It identifies three phases of teacher development – 'competent replicators', 'aware practitioners' and 'expert facilitators' – and defines competence in terms of values that are common to all the phases, together with knowledge and skills. The phases are not seen as separate units but as ways in which teachers progress in different areas.

The EAQUALS framework differs from the other descriptions of language teacher competences described here in that it includes the idea of progressive development during a professional career, and thus provides an agenda for both pre- and in-service training activities. It also provides guidance for institutions on finding a good mix of teaching staff at different levels.

There are now a number of comprehensive descriptions of teacher competences; this was not the case ten years ago. There is a good deal of overlap between the descriptive categories used, the definition of competence and the ways in which they can be used in professional development. They all emphasise the importance of self-assessment and reflective practice. However, the frameworks produced specifically for language teachers do not fully reflect the educational and social values embodied in the more general descriptions for teachers; issues related to methodology are perhaps given too much emphasis. Komorowska (2011: 33) points out that until very recently the training of foreign language teachers took little account of skills common to all teachers and that aspects such as facilitating negotiated interaction, contextualising input and ensuring social relevance were neglected. In future developments one would hope to see greater integration of the general educational descriptions with specifically language-based descriptors and, in particular, more attention paid to general learning theories.

## 7.3 Quality of examinations and assessment

The most obvious quality criteria for examinations are those of reliability, validity and practicality (see, for example, Genesee & Upshur 1996). ALTE (the Association of Language Testers in Europe) has, in addition, developed a set of quality standards for examinations to which all members of ALTE adhere (Saville 2005). In its code of practice all members are committed to meeting the standards in examination development, as well as in interpreting the results, striving for fairness, and providing information for examination takers. It sets minimum standards for the development of examinations as part of an auditing system which aims to be developmental, impartial and supportive (Saville 2005). Criteria of quality in test construction include:

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- examinations based on a theoretical construct, such as a model of communicative competence
- description of the purpose and context of use of the examination
- criteria for selection and training of test constructors and expert judgment
- comparability of parallel examinations in terms of content, stability, consistency and grade boundaries
- evidence of claims that the examination is linked to an external reference system such as the CEFR.

The Council of Europe has produced a manual (ALTE 2009) for the alignment of examinations and tests to the CEFR. It provides a methodology for constructing examinations and combines descriptions of the language learning and teaching model of the CEFR and considerations of reliability, validity, fairness and ethics in testing. It points out (p. 11) that there can be no single standard for doing this and that it is important to gather multiple kinds of evidence to support quality standards in examinations. A project called RELEX (Noijons 2010) from the European Centre for Modern Languages produced guidelines for applying the manual in local situations.

The European Association for Language Testing and Assessment – EALTA –has produced a similar document: 'Guidelines for good practice in language testing and assessment' (Erickson & Figueras 2011), translated into 35 languages and complementing the ALTE standards: 'members of the association are committed to adhering to principles of transparency, accountability and quality'. The guidelines are all in question form and include standards for training of teachers in testing and assessment and for approaches to assessment in the classroom as well as more formal aspects of test and examination construction. The 14 questions on quality control ask assessors to specify aspects such as piloting of testing, double-marking as routine practice and statistical data-gathering.

The ALTE and EALTA guidelines have broad international application and adapted forms of these are used by the *Goethe Institut* for German, the *Instituto Cervantes* for Spanish and the *Centre International d'Etudes Pédagogiques* and the *Alliance Française* for French.

## 7.4 Quality aspects of resources

In 1998 the European Commission produced a 'Quality guide for the evaluation and design of language learning and teaching programmes and materials' (Lasnier et al. 1998). Its emphasis was more on materials than programmes, and it formulated a set of nine quality principles – relevance, transparency, reliability, attractiveness, flexibility, generativeness, participation, efficiency and socialisation – integrated into a guide and CD-ROM which provided a self-assessment tool to help in the design and implementation of materials and in judging the outcomes.

In 'Approaches to materials design in European textbooks: Implementing principles of authenticity, learner autonomy and cultural awareness' (Fenner & Newby 1999), materials design and the way materials are used are examined, first, from the point of view of authenticity, which includes the use of 'real' texts, authentic activities in relation to the

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input in the materials and what Newby calls 'personal authenticity'. This refers to the fact that materials should encourage the learner to become personally involved in the way s/he uses language to express authentic feelings or communicate authentic opinions. The second principle is that of learner autonomy, and states that materials should provide opportunities for learner choice (of the level of text, for example), learner self-assessment and reflection on objectives, progress and use of the language. Many recent coursebooks for children, in particular, include portfolio-inspired activities with self-assessment checklists and opportunities to reflect on preferred learning styles. The third principle is that of the need for learning materials to promote cultural awareness.

These principles are reflected in good practice in materials production and publishing, though there is perhaps less emphasis on authenticity of text in ELT materials than in those for French, Spanish and German teaching, in which the defence and propagation of national or language area and cultural aspects are given greater importance. Many major publishers declare a commitment to conformity with CEFR levels as one of their quality standards; others use additional aspects of resource management such as modern technology with resources for interactive whiteboards, web links to books, and iPhones and iPads as supports for resources.

## 8. Quality in different educational sectors

### 8.1 Higher education

Most QM applications in higher education are part of the quality policy of the whole institution; there are tensions, however, between academic freedom and increasing demands that universities should be accountable. A Council of Europe report on Higher Education Governance (cited in Weber & Dolgova-Dreyer 2007) recommends that universities should avoid micromanagement and that quality assessment should be built on trust and be internal rather than external. The Lisbon declaration (European University Association 2007) proposed over 100 quality indicators for higher education. Kok (2004: 43) pointed out that the very proliferation of these tended to make them self-defeating.

As a result, the literature on QM in university contexts tends to be methodological and procedural, rather than content-based. Costello (2007) describes the process as one of finding the answers to four questions: What is the institution trying to do? How is the institution trying to do it? How does the institution know it works? What can the institution change in order to improve? This assumes a certain legitimacy for the institution and implied trust in its mission and operations.

There have been initiatives to provide standards for language centres in universities. CercleS is an association of 34 university language centres in 12 countries which have produced the Wulkow Memorandum (2010). It expresses their commitment, though without any auditing system to check it, to QM procedures – internal and external reviews and cross-European benchmarking frameworks – to further their aims of 'fostering and developing not only linguistic but also transferable professional skills such as

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- The ability to communicate across cultures and to work in inter-cultural teams
- The strategies for life-long learning
- The ability to transfer academic skills to new working environments
- The ability for self-reflection on and self-evaluation of communicative behaviour
- The ability to negotiate communication effectively in different working environments'.

## 8.2 Education of migrants

The purposes of language education for migrants are social and political as well as linguistic. For the children of migrants the dominant theme is effective integration into the school system; for the migrants themselves, social insertion and the practicalities of life in society are paramount. This area is one in which it is easier to identify bad practice than good. In a number of countries there is a tendency to see the children only as 'problems' for the school system and their language difficulties often lead them to being placed in classes for those with special needs. Until quite recently there was a practice to discourage the use of the L1, both at school and at home, with negative consequences for the development of social identity.

Debaene (2010) carried out a comparative study of the education of Polish migrant children in France and Ireland and identified a number of areas of good practice. Acknowledgement of the children's L1 and encouraging them to use and develop it seems to contribute to successful integration into the school. Providing language support in close complement to mainstream teaching seems to work better than providing special and segregated classes; encouraging children to produce creative work in the L1 and then to translate it enables children to use their cognitive capacities instead of being restricted because of their limited language capacity. The work of Cummins (2000) has had enormous influence in developing these approaches: he states that they have been successful for migrants in Canada. A whole-school approach which encourages multicultural and plurilingual education for all pupils, not just children speaking immigrant languages, also contributes to successful cognitive development for all. Systematic vocabulary development in classes with bilingual children in the Cambridge (UK) area was also found to have beneficial effects for mother tongue children from socially disadvantaged families (Alexopoulo & Katsos 2011). Aalto (2011) describes effective practices in integrating other cultures into the teaching of the language of schooling as a subject, again with an emphasis on the importance of establishing links between the home culture and that of the school and its social environment.

The French version of the Threshold level, the *Niveau Seuil* (Coste et al. 1983), added language activities specifically related to the needs of adult migrants to the more travel-related descriptors of the English Threshold version. These included practical aspects of dealing with bureaucracy, understanding regulations and form-filling. Rossner, in a 'Thematic Study' on a Council of Europe project on language education for adult migrants (2008: 5), states that 'adult migrants have some of the most urgent language learning needs of any language learner. The range of pressing practical concerns about day-to-day life may, however, make it hard for migrants to give language learning the priority it requires'. To meet these needs he proposes a system of QM inspired by those established in other sectors (specifically the model developed by EAQUALS). Standards would ensure that appropriate curricula were developed taking account of CEFR levels as well as the intercultural needs of migrants.

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There is a need to introduce standards for the quality of teaching methods, staff, the quality of providers and course delivery, which would, ideally, include specific accreditation for migrant education and a code of practice referring to international standards, self-assessment and training guides for managers. These standards could be embodied in charters which would include commitments related to integration, citizenship and social cohesion, human rights (including the right to education) and equality of opportunity.

## 8.3 Young learners

There is not a great deal of literature dealing specifically with QM aspects of language teaching for young learners. Nikolov & Curtain (2000: 12) regard the following criteria as common aspects of successful language teaching in primary schools across a range of countries: 'the importance of focusing on meaning, the integration of language instruction with the mainstream curriculum, a task-based and content-based approach, the need of fun and success in the classrooms, and the learning to learn element leading to the autonomy of learners in early language programs'. McKay (2000: 225), writing about primary foreign languages in Australia, considers the purposes of primary language teaching to be the fostering of intercultural relationships and a contribution to the future learning of all subjects: specifically languages. One problem is how to achieve coherent continuity with secondary education. 'Pleasant early classroom experiences and initial success are later influenced by other important variables learners encounter, for example the lack of continuity, different methodology, and how useful they perceive the target language at a later stage of their studies' (ibid.).

In a number of countries the teaching of languages has been complemented by the development of '*Eveil aux Langues*' (called 'language awareness' by Hawkins 1987, but now generally translated as 'awakening to' or 'discovery of languages'). Perregaux (1994, translated by the author), in an account of the application of the concept in Geneva, identifies its aims as acceptance and legitimacy for the languages of all the children in school, raising awareness of plurilingualism as an aspect of the immediate and general environment, and a structuring of knowledge about the world and others.

The approach has been widely used in primary education in France, Switzerland and Spain and is a key aspect of the Council of Europe's approaches to plurilingual education, as described in 'A platform of resources and references for plurilingual and intercultural education' www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/langeduc/le_platformintro_EN.asp? (Council of Europe 2011).

The descriptions of the different purposes, objectives and standards for language teaching and learning in the various sectors makes it clear that there cannot be a single approach to QM for languages, and that the requirements of an 'education of quality for all' must be defined in relation to each specific educational environment – at national, regional, institutional and, perhaps, even classroom level.

## 8.4 Institutional quality accreditation

The range of different possible approaches to accrediting quality are well summarised by Kohler (2007: 65) who identifies six possible criteria for applying QM to higher education

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institutions. He lists excellence, fitness of and for purpose, compliance with standards, compliance with directives (e.g. curricula), client/customer satisfaction, value for money/time invested (efficiency), individual enhancement and (institutional) capacity for change. In fact, QM programmes have often suffered from trying to fit quality into a single concept – all of the above approaches are relevant in different ways.

In the next section we will describe various ways in which quality control, recognition and accreditation schemes are designed and implemented. In most cases these criteria are not made explicit and tend to combine client satisfaction criteria with those related to compliance (with CEFR levels, for example), together with notions of excellence (which are not always clearly defined).

## 9. Accreditation and guarantees of quality

A number of terms are used in this area: certification (by ISO), recognition (in the past it was the British Council who recognised language schools in the UK) and accreditation. Specific accreditation of quality in language education is most highly developed in the private language school sector, especially English language teaching. There are a number of reasons for this. Accreditation of mainstream schools and higher education institutions tends to be generic for the whole of the institution, and state schools are by definition accredited. Language schools are competing for students in a market, with identifiable commercial channels – the agents – and enrolment in a school is a matter of personal choice rather than fulfilment of an obligation for schooling; a language course, especially if one is travelling abroad, involves considerable expense. Educational courses are 'experience' goods – you cannot really know what it is like until you are in the school and the classroom, but you have to commit yourself to it, and to paying for it first; and you can only judge the success and the outcome when you come to the end of your course. All of this means that there is a strong need for the reassuring of clients – often parents or employers, as well as the actual participant in the course – with guarantees of redress if the service does not meet their expectations. In the case of courses abroad there is a need for additional guarantees related to safety and welfare, of standards of care and supervision for young learners, and for their travel arrangements. National authorities also have an interest in quality accreditation: on the one hand, language travel is a not inconsiderable source of income and is supported by national tourist agencies; on the other, there are concerns related to the control of immigration and anxiety about language schools as a channel for illegal immigration. Language school agents have encouraged the development of accreditation schemes as a criterion for client choice when they buy courses abroad. For language schools located where the students live there is an equal need for accreditation – for competitive advantage and for respectability – though certain marketing requirements may not apply to such schools, since they can be visited by potential clients, can offer trial lessons and can rely on word-of-mouth recommendations.

It would be wrong to think of accreditation as simply meeting an externally imposed need. External verification, combined with professional advice, is an essential step in the QM process, complementing internal QM processes. The process of preparing for a periodic inspection, of making sure procedures and documentation are in order, of reviewing practice,

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and of collecting supporting evidence of achievement of aims are all useful contributions to maintaining quality. The external recognition of the value of work done – usually as a result of concentrated team effort by the institution – can be a powerful motivational factor for staff.

The quality accreditation of language schools in Britain has a long history. From the 1930s to 1980, schools were inspected by the Department of Education and Science (the name changed from time to time). When the Department ceased these inspections, the British Council and ARELS (the Association of Recognised English Language Schools, now 'English UK') set up a system which has been known by various labels – 'recognised by the British Council', 'English in Britain' and now 'Accreditation UK'. The British Council has been a major agent in the development of quality accreditation for schools. The scheme is run under an agreement between English UK and the British Council, and accredits schools teaching English in Britain. It inspects all the aspects of a school's operations: teacher qualifications, the teaching itself, accommodation, supervision of minors, safety of premises, and the accuracy of publicity materials (British Council 2012).

There are similar accreditation schemes in other countries where English is taught, including Australia, Canada, Malta, New Zealand, Ireland, South Africa and the USA. In France, three ministries – Education, Culture and Foreign Affairs – have established a quality label for private and public language centres teaching French as a foreign language; it is managed by the *Centre International d'Etudes Pédagogiques* in Sèvres and has official recognition. In Spain accreditation is carried out by both the *Instituto Cervantes* and CEELE (*Calidad en la Enseñanza del Español como Lengua Extranjera*). The cultural agencies such as the British Council, the *Goethe Institut* and the *Instituto Cervantes* have their own internal quality audit schemes for their language centres.

In 1991, EAQUALS was founded with the aim of providing quality accreditation for language providers which was not – unlike most of the then existing schemes – limited to one language or one geographical area. It accredits language schools offering study abroad courses and local language centres. In contrast to the accrediting bodies described above, it is an association of schools and its accreditation activities are complemented by research and development. A number of national associations also combine pedagogic activities with local accreditation schemes; these include Quest in Romania, Optima in Bulgaria, PASE in Poland, NYELZE in Hungary, and other associations in Croatia, Serbia and Macedonia. There are specialised accreditation or recognition bodies for different areas of language teaching. ACTDEC provides standards for distance learning; ALTE has an audit scheme for examinations; the European Union offers a Common Quality Assurance Framework for VET (Vocational training: CQAF 2010).

## 9.1 ISO certification

By 2009 over a million organisations held one of the ISO's 18,000 different certifications. ISO 9001 is a certification extensively used in educational organisations; its full title is 'Quality management systems – Requirements', which is why you can find the 'label' displayed almost anywhere, including public toilets, motorway service stations, and on the back of vans. ISO

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9001 is designed generically and emphasises procedures rather than content, guaranteeing that such procedures have been properly documented, and that systems are in place for controlling quality, communicating with stakeholders and managing resources. There is a full description on the ISO website, www.iso.org.

The benefits of ISO 9001 for efficient management are significant, and institutions which have obtained certification have usually found it beneficial. However, many complement it with more specific educational or language education accreditation, as it cannot help much with the content of decisions on curriculum content or teaching methods and does not provide specific standards for these. Its emphasis on customer and stakeholder relationships is useful but leaves aside all the other issues related to educational purpose and values. It has sometimes been criticised (see Seddon 2000, for example) for being overly bureaucratic and not contributing to real quality.

The *Conseil Européen de Normalisation* (CEN) has recently drafted standards for language travel, after wide consultation with the language travel profession. It drafts minimum standards for customer information and supervision of minors in schools and during travel to and from the school, as well as basic standards for course information and the conduct of courses.

## 9.2 The methodology of accreditation schemes

There are many similarities between the approaches of the different accrediting and recognition bodies. Their standards are embodied either in a checklist (more usual in the case of accrediting bodies) or in a public statement, such as the charter of an association or commitment to a certain number of guarantees for customers. The purpose of the audit/inspection process is to verify that the institution is respecting the relevant standards or charters. Matheidesz (2010: 37) describes standards for auditing/inspection systems as 'inclusive, comprehensive and complete, evidence-based, tangible, non-prescriptive, reliable, developmental and flexible'. The process is usually organised in a series of phases:

1. An institutional self-evaluation is carried out, often using checklists designed by the accrediting organisation. In the audits carried out by the Accrediting Council for Continuing Education and Training (ACCET: 2012), self-assessment is at the core of the process, and the visit to the institution is to verify the accuracy of the self-assessment. The 15 *Goethe Institut* schools in Germany work on a three-year QM cycle, with an institutional self-assessment in the first year, an internal mutual audit in the second year carried out with one of the other schools in the group, and an external audit in the third.
2. The submission of documentary evidence is a key feature of accreditation schemes. Schools are usually asked to submit a substantial amount of documentation of academic and administrative evidence. The French quality label has a list of 85 indicators, all of which must be supported by documentary evidence; checking these against what actually happens is a major aspect of the audit. A good indicator of the fit between the accreditation process and the actual working of the schools is how many of these documents have to be specially prepared for the audit and how many are useful in the day-to-day workings of the institution. An audit visit to the school is usually carried out by at least two

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auditors and typically lasts two days or more, according to the size of the school. The visit includes physical inspection of the site, observation of classes, interviews with academic management staff, inspection of security and safety arrangements, meetings with teachers and with course participants, and relevant inspection of host families. Some audit schemes try as far as possible to observe all teachers and all course types present during the inspection visit, usually with brief 15–20-minute visits to each class. Others rely more on documentary evidence, with a relatively small sampling of the actual teaching. Most inspection systems finish the visit with a feedback session with the institution's management, in which they summarise their main findings.

3. The accrediting visit is followed up by a written report which can vary in length; in some cases it can be a short ticking off (or not) of checklists of indicators; in other schemes the report includes substantial description and assessment of the auditors' findings. Almost all accrediting bodies have some kind of moderating committee which accepts or modifies the proposed verdict of the auditing team. Good practice recommends that this should include representatives of both user groups and independent experts. Accreditation UK, for example, has representatives from the British Council, English UK and outside advisers. The French accreditation results are confirmed by a commission composed of the accrediting ministries and the various professional associations involved in the scheme. In most systems there is a right of appeal on the result.

A number of methodological issues are raised by the practice of language teaching accreditation, some relating to the legitimacy of accrediting bodies. This is not an issue when they are national ministries or bodies mandated by them, but is a concern when they are private associations or commercial accrediting bodies, which is the case with ISO, for example. There is currently no formal evaluation of accrediting bodies, although a new association, IFCES (the International Forum for the Certification of Educational Services), with nine members from Europe, North America and Asia, has been formed with the mission 'to contribute to the improvement of quality in the provision of learning services by developing international expertise to support certification against ISO 29990 and related standards' (www.ifces.org). In general, legitimacy depends on a combination of voluntary acceptance and the perceived values and transparency of the relevant institutions.

Further methodological issues relate to the impartiality of inspectors. It is not easy to combine the requirements that auditors should be completely independent, and at the same time informed and professional. Most accrediting bodies have developed training schemes and codes of conduct for auditors, and there are increasing numbers of freelance auditors with relevant previous experience. Another issue is differentiation of quality assessment. A number of accreditation schemes have tried to do this. Accreditation UK has experimented with publishable statements, the French quality label has a series of one to three stars and EAQUALS identifies 'areas of excellence'. None of these has provided a complete solution: the star system tends to devalue the one-star schools and the positive aspects of being accredited. There are also problems in drafting meaningful and accurate publishable statements.

Reliability of assessment is another issue. School environments are very context-specific and diverse, an especially relevant consideration in international accreditation schemes, and objectivity in the assessment of, for example, lesson observation is difficult to achieve. The

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various schemes declare that they do not wish to dictate didactic approaches or methodology, but there is nevertheless a perception on the part of schools that inspectors are looking for specific features such as group and pair work; sometimes the teaching is planned to provide what schools think the inspectors are looking for. Various schemes have developed ways to improve the reliability of grading: using audit reports (edited for anonymity) as case studies, for example, or using videoed lessons for joint grading sessions in auditor training activities. There are, however, genuine difficulties in the assessment of quality: how to come to a reliable overall assessment on the basis of a number of lesson chunks from different teachers at different levels, and combating observer fatigue after long intensive periods of observation. There is a danger of applying minimal general standards of acceptability in this area.

There is a choice to be made between holistic and checklist assessment; in order to achieve a high degree of reliability it is important to have measurable and observable indicators, so there is a temptation to create long checklists that contribute to the reliability of the schemes but can encourage teachers to concentrate on inessentials. A more descriptive and holistic approach demands the creation of an appropriate mode of discourse, and considerable professional confidence, but it offers more opportunities for formative assessment and real integration of accreditation as part of a coherent approach to QM.

## 10. Conclusion

QM does not provide a panacea for the problems of language teaching, and there are objections to it on the grounds of both principle and efficiency. A report commissioned by ACTFL on 'A Decade of Standards' (Phillips & Abbot 2011) concluded that over a ten-year period, the introduction of the 'five Cs' as standards for foreign language instruction had increased professional awareness, encouraged innovation and reformed syllabuses and curricula, even though there are still large sections of the profession either unaware of or resistant to the standards. There is, however, very little hard research evidence to support claims of this kind, and writing on the subject of quality tends to be either ideological or anecdotal.

One of the problems in suggesting possible lines of research lies in the very broad nature of quality issues. The introduction of QM procedures is intended to increase 'quality', but this is both difficult to define and composed of a large number of variables. Serious research would require an analytical approach in which specific aspects of QM and the consequences of applying them could be analysed. Hughes (2007), in a doctoral thesis, studied the perception of quality indicators by teachers, learners and parents in secondary schools in Spain. It would be worth carrying out similar studies of how initiatives to promote quality, such as the introduction of formative approaches to observation in an institution, influence teachers' perceptions of their work and how far they contribute to improved teaching performance. The existence of agreed levels of proficiency provided by the CEFR makes it possible to measure the effectiveness of action taken to improve teaching and learning. Research of this kind can be either large-scale or based in an institution. The 'First European survey of language competences' (SurveyLang 2012) provides a comparative study, based on a combination of

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testing and questionnaires, which identifies the percentage of learners attaining different CEFR levels of achievement in the first and second foreign languages learnt in secondary schools in 14 European countries. This global information could provide a starting point for measurement of the effect of changes in national curricula, class size or teacher education on overall learner attainment. Research on a much smaller scale is feasible, too. In a school in Geneva where I work as a consultant, a project designed to improve the quality of language teaching through specific measures – increased use of the target language, more formative assessment, the use of portfolios to develop learner autonomy – has set the measurable goal of raising the level of proficiency in German at the age of 15 from B1 to B2. In a report on the SurveyLang study, Jones (2012) identifies levels of motivation as a key factor in language achievement and the study of the effect, positive or negative, of QM procedures on learner and teacher motivation would be another area for research.

I think it is evident from this review that the concept of 'quality' is very general and that it is often used to refer to very different aspects of educational activity. It would be helpful if we learned to be more specific in differentiating quality initiatives. Steps taken to improve the efficiency of procedures are different from those relating to stakeholder responsibility, learner motivation or improvement in examination results. Clearer definition of quality objectives would allow them to be more focused and permit more valid and reliable assessment of their consequences.

Nevertheless, my subjective view of the way language teaching has developed over the last thirty years would suggest that a concern for quality and high standards can, provided that legitimacy is seen to be underpinned by transparency and accountability, contribute to language education in its fullest sense as an instrument for social cohesion and educational development.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444813000025 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444813000025 Published online by Cambridge University Press