



CHANGE IN CLASSROOM:
Promoting Innovative Teaching & Learning
to Enhance Student Learning Experience
in Eastern Partnership Countries

**External Quality Audit and Evaluation Report for the period from
15/10/2017 to 30/06/2019**

PRINTeL Project

co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

585760-EPP-1-2017-1-AM-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP

Led by Yerevan State University in Armenia

November 18, 2019

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Rationale

This quality audit / evaluation activity comes as part of promoting inter-project coaching between PRINTeL and E-TALEB Projects. The contact was initiated between both projects' coordinators in 2018:

-**Dr. Armen Budaghyan** Deputy-Vice Rector and Director of Quality Assurance at Yerevan State University (PRINTeL Project CHANGE IN CLASSROOM: Promoting Innovative Teaching & Learning to Enhance Student Learning Experience in Eastern Partnership Countries <https://www.printel.am/>)

-**Dr. Georges Yahchouchi** Provost at the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (E-TALEB Project - PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FRAMEWORK FOR EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AND LEARNING IN LEBANESE UNIVERSITIES). www.etableb.org

As external expert representing E-TALEB Project, Ms. Nathalie Bouldoukian Director of the Quality Assurance and Institutional Effectiveness Office at the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik was in charge of conducting this quality audit / evaluation activity.

Introduction

The main aim of this report is to present the results of the external evaluation (quality audit) carried for the activities implemented and deliverables produced within the framework of ERASMUS+ CBHE Project #585760 "PRINTeL" for the period of 15 October 2017 to 30 June 2019.

The methodology adopted to evaluate the Project progress and quality of interim or results included the following:

- Site-visit to the Project coordinator institution - **Yerevan State University (YSU)** in Yerevan
- Site-visit to the Project partner institutions in Armenia – **National Polytechnic University (NPUA)** in Yerevan and **Vanadzor State University (VSU)** in Vanadzor
- Review of project documentation and feedback received from the EACEA and National Erasmus+ Offices
- Evaluation Survey conducted with all the Regional and European partner institutions with the participation of 20 respondents from 14 out of 14 partner institutions (participation rate = 100%)

Outcome: **Audit/Evaluation Report** which highlights the following areas:

1. Project implementation
2. Partnerships between the Consortium members
3. Challenges faced during the first period of the project
4. Early indicators of potential success
5. Further ideas and suggestions

It is worth mentioning that this evaluation activity gave an importance to guide the implementation of recommendations stated by EACEA in its Project Implementation Report dated August 2019.

I. Project Implementation

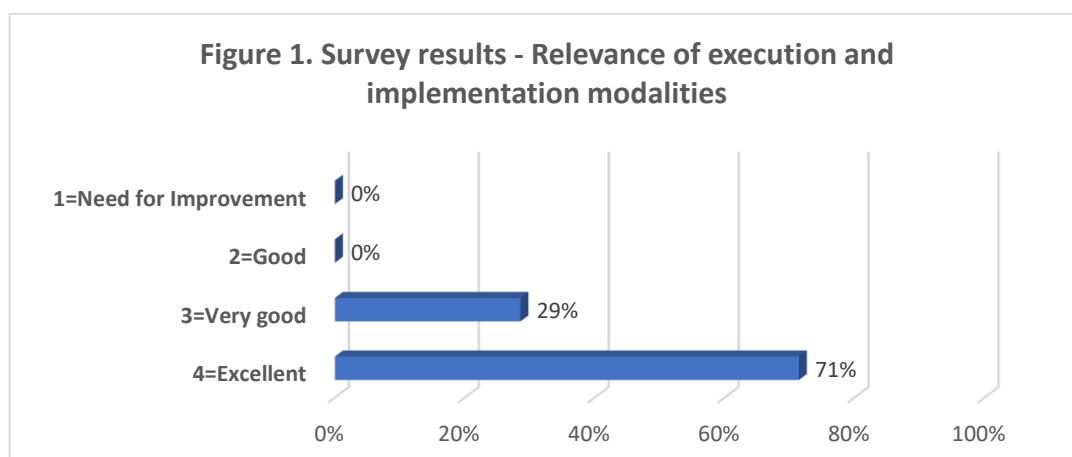
I.1 Relevance of execution and implementation modalities

PRINTeL project is addressing one of the main priorities in Higher Education which is nowadays **enhancing student learning experience through promoting teaching and learning excellence**. The project is in alignment with the EU and relevant regional countries agendas prioritising the quality of education and teaching, the induction to innovative pedagogical approaches and methodologies, the modernization of university services, the fast move towards the internationalisation of HEIs and the use of the concept of digitalization.

The project activities implemented so far, and the related deliverables are in alignment and consistence with the project application and recognised best practices:

- **Analysis of the needs** in terms of innovative & technology-enhanced T&L methods and instructional technologies;
- **Benchmark with Teaching Staff Development Centres (TSDC) Best Practices** and development of a report that offers a series of recommendations regarding the structure, functionalities, operation and teacher training programmes;
- **Development of TSDC operational plans at regional partner universities** whether these Centres were already existing or created within the framework of this project;
- **Development of Training of Trainers sessions** on innovative and technology enhanced T&L methods by EU partners;
- **Capacity building of trainers and faculty** in regional partner institutions based on the extensive experience of European partner universities (around 100 trainers have participated in the Training of Trainers offered by the European partners and accordingly 1700 faculty members have participated in the first round of the in-house trainings; there are new groups of faculty who will participate in the second round of the trainings);
- **Creating the Virtual Academy of Teaching & Learning (VATL)** as a complementary structure.

According to the interviews and surveys conducted, the consortium members consider that the project is executed and implemented very efficiently and that the related modalities are highly relevant. The planning for the next period's activities is already in force at the PRINTeL partner universities.

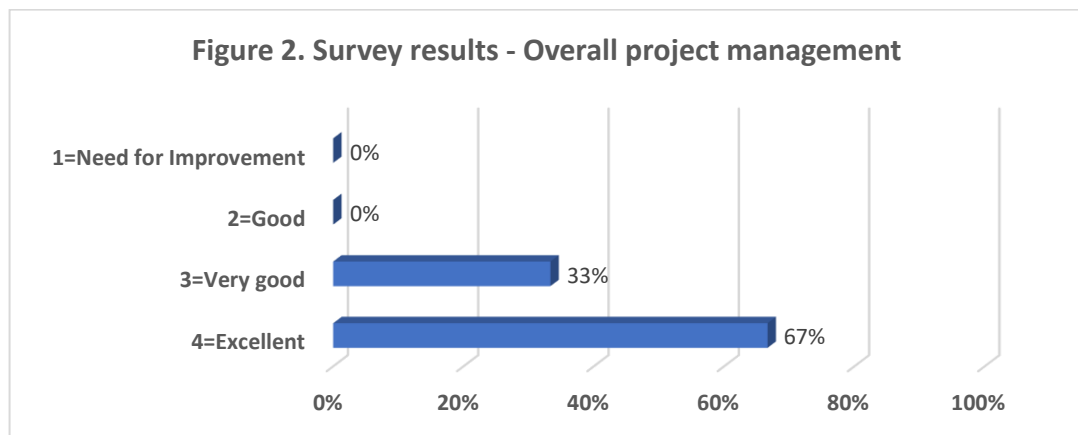


I.2 Project organisation and coordination, communication between the partners

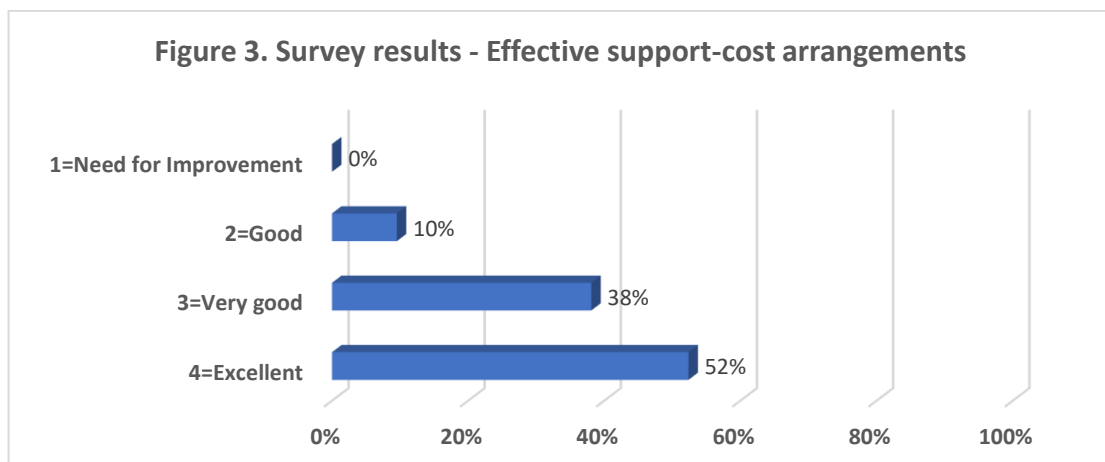
According to the partners, the **project organisation and coordination are very well managed**. It was stated that information between all partners is shared efficiently, and both the regional and the European activities have been very well organized.

Responsibilities and tasks are clearly defined and transparent. Besides, a strong connection to the university management seems to exist at each partner institution, and central support seems to be provided. All partners have **increased their activities** to attract more people at their institutions to take note of the results so far, especially within the framework of in-house trainings.

“PRINTeL is one of the best Capacity Building Projects I have ever been involved: very strong leadership, very good communication and committed Partners.”, stated one of the consortium members.



As part of the grant management, the Project Coordinator oriented and guided all the partners towards the proper implementation of the CBHE rules. Special support was provided for the use of the various CBHE forms and the PRINTeL procedures and customized forms. Within the same concept and in order to promote effective support-cost arrangements, the Project Coordinator adopted a special procedure to purchase equipment for all the regional partner universities. This is a good practice although it might have led to a delay in the purchase of equipment and readiness of equipped TSDCs.

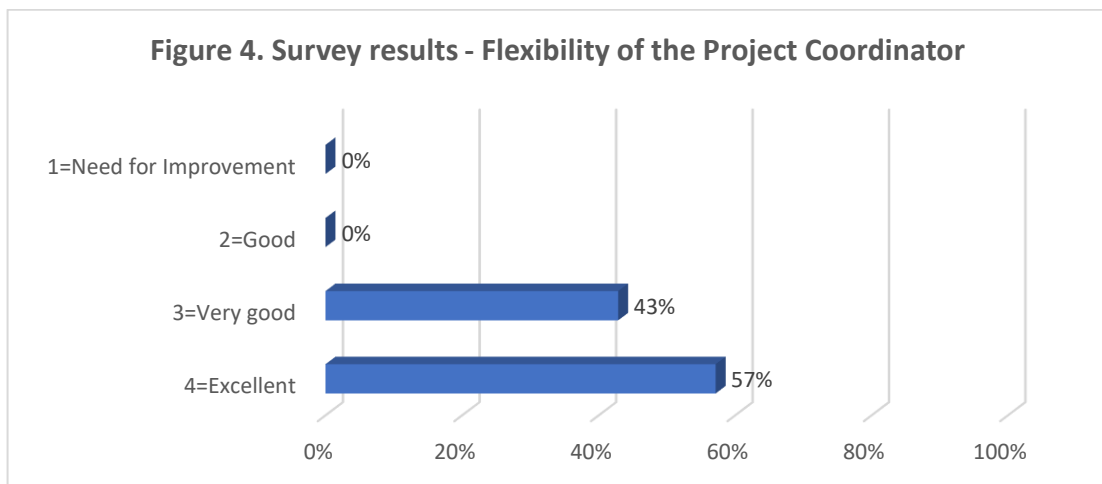


I.3 Flexibility of the Project Coordinator

The flexibility of the project coordinating institution is remarkable and **“much appreciated”** as stated in the Technical Implementation Report of the project released by EACEA on August 30, 2019.

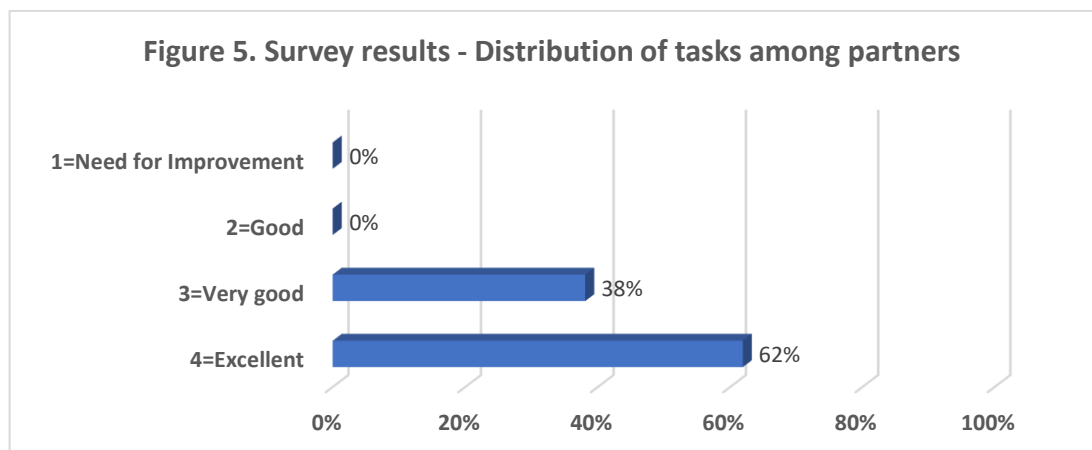
YSU succeeded to maintain a great balance between **‘initiative and expertise to coordinate the project implementation’** and **‘flexibility and follow up to push the project towards growing into a best practice’**.

Whenever needed, the Project Coordinator remains committed to rethink internal processes and experiment new mechanisms to overcome the shared challenges. Challenges are described in the part IV of this report.



I.4 Distribution of tasks among partners

The project involves all the partners from both partner and programme countries in accordance with the project proposal. Throughout their experience in providing the ToTs and sharing their best practices, the European partners developed the basis for structures and capacity building for regional countries. The Consortium composition highly contributed to the project accomplishments.

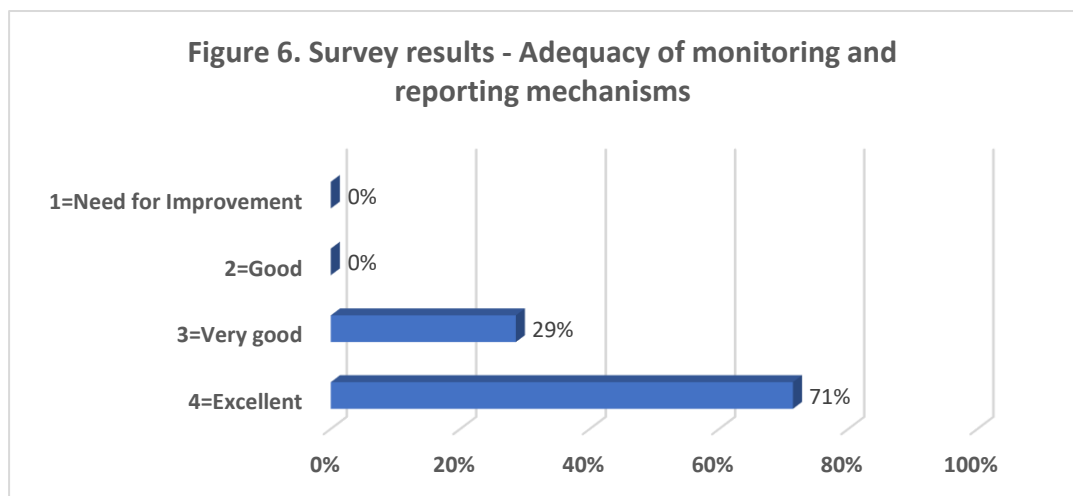


I.5 Quality Assurance and Monitoring mechanisms

The project has developed the Quality Assurance Plan (QAP) including several measures combining internal and external monitoring mechanisms. The partners consider that the adequacy of monitoring and reporting mechanisms are excellent.

While all the evaluation reports emanating from the conducted surveys, the progress study of different WPs and other mechanisms are developed and published on the website, currently there is no quick dashboard envisioning all these efforts done.

Furthermore, there is no written document tracking all the improvement actions taken to address issues, problems or recommendations. In the interim report presented to EACEA, this part might not have highlighted on the corrective actions taken throughout the first period of the project.

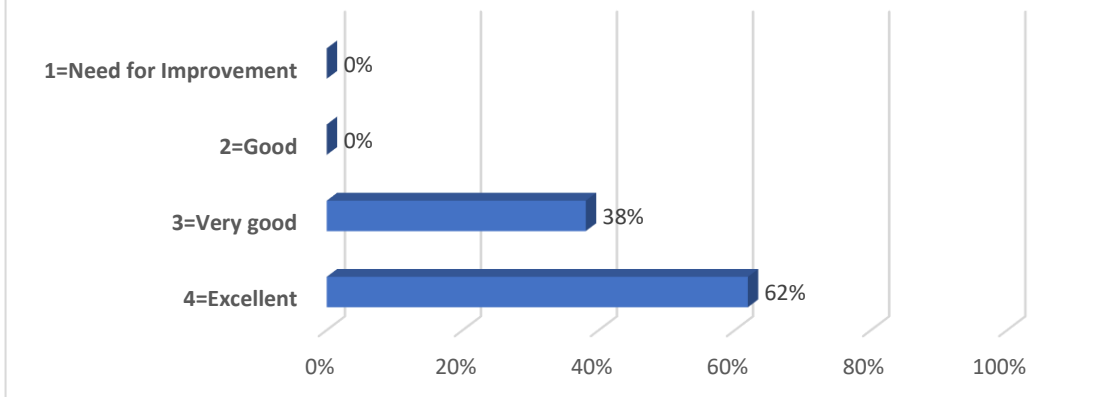


I.6 Dissemination and Sustainability

The project has a high level of dissemination through various means: project website, presence in social media mainly Facebook and YouTube, presence in the media, project links added to the different partners institutions websites, publications, conference, etc.

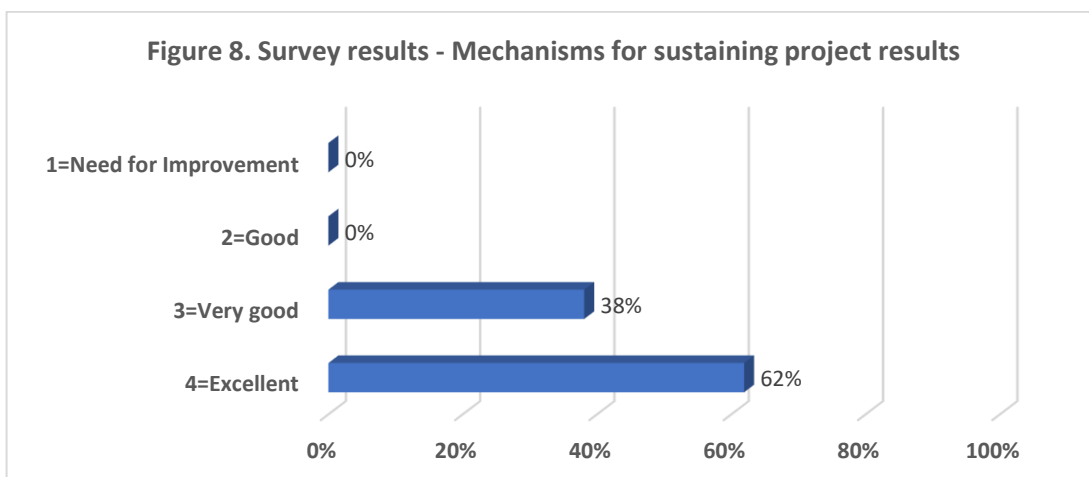
Furthermore, all the regional partners created a basis for their TSDCs and widely offered trainings to their faculty. The project will highly contribute to the development of faculty qualifications through the public content of courses and trainings. The multiplier-effect on project results is remarkable with the huge number of trained faculty.

Figure 7. Survey results - Multiplier-effect of project results



While the TSDCs and the VATL are a good foundation for the project sustainability, there is no clear indications on the dissemination of project results nationwide in each of the regional partners. During the second lifetime of the project, the sustainability plan will be a focus point integrated within every undertaken activity.

Figure 8. Survey results - Mechanisms for sustaining project results



II. Partnerships between the Consortium members

The project activities allowed the members to establish a solid collaboration between all the partners across the various countries (regional and European) bringing the diverse concepts of improving teaching and learning in HEI.

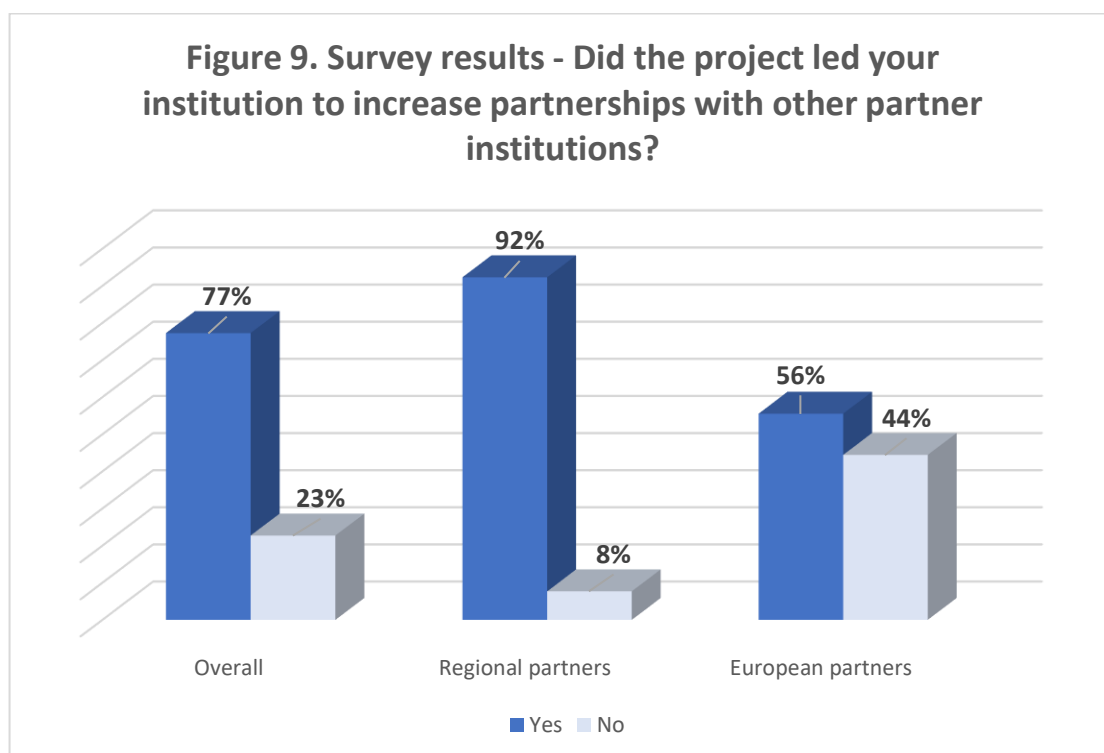
The level of collaboration varied among the PRINTEl project's regional partners in terms of:

- Getting along with new universities in the region and across Europe
- Sustaining relationships with partner universities in the region and across Europe through other CHBE projects and International Credit Mobility (ICM)

According to the interviews and the conducted survey, overall 76% of respondents stated that they increased partnerships with consortium partners. Participants stated that meetings / activities within the framework of the project allowed them to make fruitful personal contacts, giving them the opportunity to establish potential partnerships aside of the project activities and/or after the end of project.

The collaboration among partners is expected to be further expanded and maintained through the common on-line platform that is developed and implemented to share the experience and materials developed in the partner universities.

It is important to mention that beyond PRINTEl, the Project Coordinator is keen to establish collaboration with other Tempus and Erasmus+ projects contributing to the enhancement of teaching and learning. A special link "Related Projects" is created on PRINTEl website to bring awareness about these projects.



III. Challenges faced during the first period of the project

As a result of the remarkable project management, PRINTeL did not mark significant challenges or obstacles during the first period of the project implementation. This was also evident in the interviews and survey results that focused on the challenges summarized below:

Cultural differences: It is not always easy to find common ground with people from eight different countries, especially when communication and business practices seem so different from each other.

Conscious of the different cultural contexts, partners cooperated and communicated with the project manager and their peers to overcome these differences and to prevent its affecting factors especially at the level of preserving the project timeline and agreed deadlines.

So far, none of the PRINTeL project's regional partners (Armenia, Georgia and Belarus) have encountered any cultural difference. As for the European partners, 3 out of 9 survey respondents stated that they have encountered cultural differences.

Below are some of notable expressions stated by partners in this regard:

- *We learned to understand the differences and we increased the trust between the partners.*
- *Cultural differences may be a barrier at first, but when understood and overcome are very enriching.*
- *It has mainly to do with differences in management style, due to some cultural context. The only way out is 'keep on talking to each other'.*

Language issues: The Project Consortium had a very efficient way to avoid language issues mainly at the level of Training of Trainers. In fact, the faculty from regional partners who participated in the ToT were selected based on predefined selection criteria among which the good command in English with translation skills to their own language. For instance, interviewees in YSU, NPUA and VSU voluntarily translated the training materials provided by the European partners (Austria, Belgium, Portugal, Spain, Sweden) to Armenian in order to fulfil the local needs and contexts and to easily share the knowledge and skills learned in Europe.

As a result, no major language issues were marked despite the challenging efforts and time spent on translating materials.

Local constraints: No major local constraints were noticed expect for one regional country from which two partners explained that the local constraint was mainly due to the difference in laws in their country. In fact, there are special approval procedures by national authorities such as registering a project and approving the list of purchased equipment. The partners mentioned that these issues that might be sometimes time-consuming remain at their country level.

Regional constraints: Among the regional constraints hindering timely implementation of some activities was the need to adopt a procurement legislation concerning the purchase of goods by Armenia resident organization for non-residents located outside of the country. To resolve the problem a petition was sent to the Ministry of Finance seeking multi-country procurement for this special case.

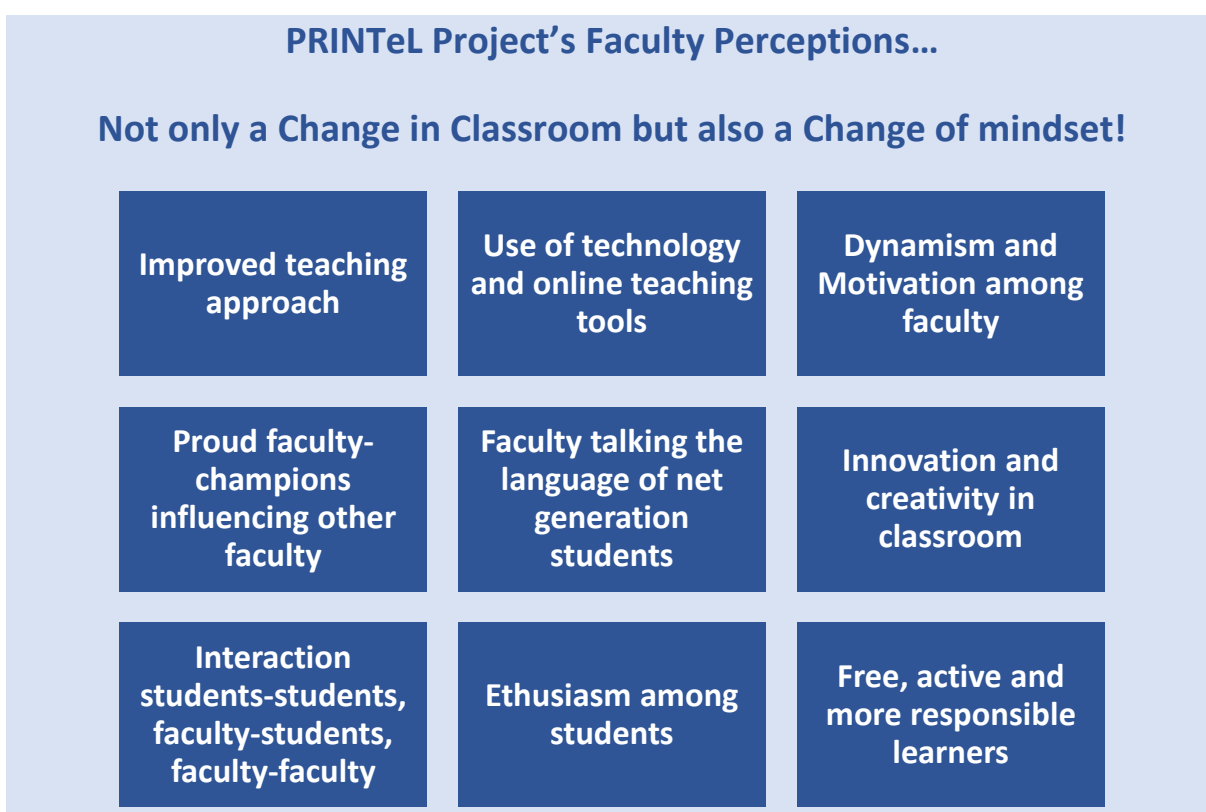
Other constraints: One partner stated having constraint at the institutional level with changes occurred in the top and middle levels management.

IV. Early indicators of potential success

PRINTeL Project Consortium members all together consider that there are many early indicators of potential success that could be witnessed by the enthusiasm and eagerness of the participants whether they are the project coordinators in their own institution or faculty participating in the Training of Trainers sessions followed by a preparation of in-house trainings and contribution to sharing their knowledge and skills with other colleagues in their home institution.

Among the major indicators of potential success is that the change happened in the classroom!

All the interviewees and survey respondents mentioned and repeated the fact that the project changed their mindset and improved their teaching approach. We have summarized all the interviewees' expressions through the following testimonials.



Few statements as written by survey respondents:

“YES, there are early indicators of success! the training of trainers courses were conducted very successfully at the European partner universities; the trainers in turn conducted the in-house trainings at their home universities; results were successfully discussed & analysed at various conferences & training plans adapted accordingly; we are totally in line with the Workplan of the Project”.

“The enthusiasm for and the effectivity of spreading the competences acquired by the participants in the TOT courses is a strong indication for success of the project in the partner universities. Early reports on the introduction of active learning methods are giving proof that specific project goals will be reached.”

“Early signs of potential success can be noted. For example, our teachers have studied with interest in new teaching methods. And they successfully began to put it into practice. For example, post their courses on the Internet on appropriate platforms.”

“The smooth and in-time going progress of the project's activities together with the intermediate outputs/results, are the best indications to guarantee the final success.”

“The project has a lot of potential to be a success, it's on the right track.”

“University management is interested in continuing the implementation of project objectives.”

“The scale of the project continues to impress me. I am very much in awe of all the work that participants have put in into implementing local courses for teachers.”

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Consortium is praised for the achievement of all the expected project outcomes (until today) with quality and high-level accountability, transparency and visibility. All the PRINTeL Consortium institutions' coordinators and participating faculty, "PRINTeL Champions", should be applauded for their dedication, motivation and enthusiasm.

In few words, PRINTeL could be described as the drive for bringing:

- ENERGIES for teaching staff by the creation / sustaining units for staff development that work in collaboration with other units
- A comparative MODEL of teaching and learning in Armenia, Belarus and Georgia
- SYNERGIES by cross-(university) border cooperation and development
- An eye for leaving a permanent and everlasting mark

Few recommendations are listed below and subject for follow up during the second external evaluation:

- Need to translate the Quality Assurance Plan into a dashboard that gives a quick view to all the quality assurance and monitoring mechanisms. Although these mechanisms exist and the results are published through detailed reports, the dashboard might be useful to show the progress towards targets in a more straightforward way. The dashboard could be called "PRINTeL Quick Facts and Figures".
- Need to draw a list of improvement actions taken along with the issue source, pertaining dates, related WP, involved people, etc. This will highly contribute to a better description of 'Previous recommendations/follow-up' in the project's final report.
- It would be beneficial to involve other well-established universities who already know a little bit about the topic, and then on the long-term other universities could also join. This is highly recommended because at a later stage, while the outcomes of the project would be adopted at the nationwide, the universities who were not part of the project would be familiar to the project and thus, less reluctant to adopt its outcomes.
- High necessity to develop the sustainability plan that describes the strategy as well as the measurable quantitative/qualitative indicators and targeted audience whether they are students, teachers, partner universities, non-partner universities, labour market, local authorities, etc.
- Need to draw a matrix of cooperation agreements signed between all PRINTeL Consortium members.

- Need to reflect on how students and labor market will be involved in the remaining period of the project (An online course or awareness session through VATL would be recommended).
- Need to conduct a survey to learn about the teaching transformations occurred in the field as result of this project.
- Make sure that TSDCs are well equipped and that the faculty are trained to use the equipment installed.

Nathalie Bouldoukian

November 18, 2019