Erasmus+ as a Tool for Developing Student Communicative and Intercultural Competence

From international mobility to the foreign language classroom: Examples of good practice and sustainable development workshops

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1. Summary & Rationale

International mobility projects funded by Erasmus+ provide an unprecedented opportunity to redefine foreign language teaching (FLT). By bridging international mobility and local classroom instruction, language teachers can transform passive linguistic learning into authentic, experiential, and communicative practice. This document presents a structured model of good practice based on a tri-national school partnership between Croatia, Austria, and Spain, focusing on sustainable development as a core thematic vehicle for English Language Teaching.

Why is Erasmus+ vital for foreign language teaching?

- **Authentic Communication:** Students shift from rehearsed classroom dialogues to solving real-world tasks with native and non-native English speakers.
- **Intercultural Learning:** Direct interaction fosters cultural empathy, tolerance, and open-mindedness across international teams.
- **Collaborative Learning:** International group work requires students to negotiate meaning, co-create deliverables, and resolve misunderstandings.
- **Experiential & Project-Based Learning:** Language is acquired naturally through hands-on tasks, field study, and workshop activities rather than abstract grammar drills.
- **Confidence Building & Autonomy:** Navigating real communicative needs boosts learner self-reliance and reduces foreign language anxiety.

Comparative Analysis: Traditional classroom vs. Erasmus+ mobility

Dimension	Traditional Foreign Language classroom	Erasmus+ mobility & Experiential context

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Communicative environment	Simulated role-plays and textbook scenarios.	Real-life situations with authentic communicative necessity.
Interlocutors & Dynamics	Familiar classmates and teacher; predictable responses.	International peer teams; spontaneous, unscripted discourse.
Language use context	Formal exercises focused on grammatical accuracy.	Multi-tiered discourse (formal presentations + informal social interaction).
Task structure	Predictable textbook tasks with predefined answers.	Unpredictable project challenges demanding creative problem-solving.
Evaluation & Output	Teacher-led grading and summative assessment.	Peer feedback, public presentations, and tangible eco-deliverables.

2. Partner countries & Sustainable Development topics

The project brought together secondary school students and educators from Croatia, Austria, and Spain. Each partner country led specific ecological modules that served as rich content areas for English language acquisition:

- **Croatia:** Sustainable nutrition, Healthy snacks, and Upcycling creative initiatives.
- **Austria:** Fast Fashion & Greenwashing analysis, Zero Waste strategies, Food Waste, and Microplastics.
- **Spain:** E-Waste management, Clothing Swaps, and Reusing & Recycling protocols.

In-depth focus: Unpacking 'Greenwashing' in ELT

Greenwashing refers to the deceptive marketing practice wherein a company, organization, or product presents an inflated or false impression of environmental responsibility. The primary goal is to capitalize on growing consumer demand for eco-friendly choices without implementing genuine, substantive operational changes.

> **Case Study:** *Example of Greenwashing: A commercial beverage company sells water in single-use plastic bottles while heavily advertising that the bottles contain 30% recycled plastic. Simultaneously, the company manufactures millions of disposable plastic units annually and invests*

> *nothing in structural waste reduction. Highlighting a minor 30% recycled content claim while concealing massive plastic pollution constitutes greenwashing because it misleads consumers into believing the purchase is ecologically sound.*

Key indicators of Greenwashing vs. Authentic Sustainability

- **Vague & Unproven terminology:** Widespread use of buzzwords such as 'eco-friendly', 'green', 'natural', or 'planet-conscious' without third-party evidence or clear definitions.
- **Visual manipulation:** Employing green color palettes, leaf motifs, and natural imagery on packaging to evoke environmental harmony falsely.
- **Selective disclosure (hidden trade-offs):** Highlighting one small 'green' feature while concealing massive negative environmental impacts elsewhere in the production cycle.
- **Irrelevant or irresponsible claims:** Advertising a product as 'free from' a specific harmful chemical when that chemical is already legally banned or never used in that product category.
- **Authentic Sustainability communication:** Distinguished by verifiable data, independent third-party certifications (e.g., Fair Wear Foundation, EU Ecolabel), and transparent disclosure of both successes and ongoing ecological challenges.

3. Examples of good practice: Detailed workshop concepts

The following three workshop modules represent ready-to-implement lesson plans that integrate critical thinking, media literacy, digital skills, and English language development.

Workshop 1: Fast Fashion & Greenwashing

Target group	3rd and 4th grade secondary school students (CEFR B1+/B2)
Duration	2 school hours (90 min) + 3rd hour dedicated to structured debate
Thematic focus	Clothing & Fashion / Consumerism / Sustainable Development / Media Literacy
Learning outcomes	Students can define greenwashing, analyze garment cost breakdowns, identify manipulative ads, and articulate critical arguments in a structured English debate.

LESSON 1: Cost structure & The real price of clothing

- **Warm-up (5 min):** Teacher writes prompt on board: 'Would you buy a t-shirt for €7?' Brief class discussion on whether €7 is cheap or expensive, and how such low pricing is possible.

- **Activity 1 – The true price of a T-Shirt (20 min):** Students work in groups of 3–4. Each group receives a cost estimation grid for raw cotton, factory labor, overhead, transport, packaging, marketing, and recycling. Groups reference Fair Wear Foundation benchmark data, revealing that garment worker wages account for only 0.5% to 4% of total retail price.
- **Activity 2 – Group presentation (10 min):** Groups present cost breakdowns in English, identifying the most expensive components and reacting to worker wage disparities.
- **Wrap-up (10 min):** Guided reflection: Why is mass clothing so cheap? Who pays the real ecological and human price?

LESSON 2: Analyzing Greenwashing & Preparing debate

- **Video analysis Warm-up (15 min):** Screening of official European Commission animated video ('Measures against misleading environmental claims', ~1.5 min on YouTube). Video is viewed twice with pre-viewing predictions, while-viewing notes on visual symbols, and post-viewing critical discussions.
- **Activity 3 – Identifying manipulation (15 min):** Students analyze actual slogans ('Eco-Friendly', 'Green Collection', 'Planet-Friendly', 'Natural Materials') to identify missing third-party certificates and deceptive phrasing.
- **Activity 4 – Debate preparation (15 min):** Class is split into Pro and Con teams on the motion: 'Fast fashion corporations must be legally held responsible for environmental damage.' Teams compile evidence and structured opening statements.

Homework / Argumentative essay prompt

> **Assignment task:** *Write an argumentative essay (200–250 words) on the topic 'Fast Fashion'. Your essay must feature a clear introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion addressing:*
> *1. What role does fast fashion play in the daily lives of youth in your country?*
> *2. What are the main arguments for and against purchasing fast fashion items?*
> *3. If you had unlimited financial resources, would you buy exclusively sustainable clothing? Justify your personal stance.*

Workshop 2: Clothing Swap Fair (Sajam razmjene odjeće)

Target group	1st to 4th grade secondary school students (CEFR A2+/B2)
Duration	1 to 2 school hours (45–90 min)
Thematic focus	Circular Economy / Textile Reuse / Consumer Habits / Spoken Interaction

Learning outcomes	Students describe garments accurately, negotiate trades in English, justify second-hand choices, and design a sustainability infographic.

- **Introductory description (10 min):** Each student brings an unused garment from home and prepares a brief pitch detailing color, fabric, size, style, condition, and origin (e.g., 'This is a black cotton hoodie. I bought it two years ago. It is comfortable and still in excellent condition.')
- **Activity 1 – The Swap Market (20 min):** Students circulate around interaction stalls, engaging in authentic peer-to-peer conversations using target English questions:
  - Where did you buy it?
  - Why don't you wear it anymore?
  - How often did you wear it?
  - Would it fit me? Why do you recommend it?
- **Activity 2 – Reflection & Discussion (15 min):** Debriefing on second-hand culture: Would you buy pre-owned clothes regularly? How does swapping combat fast fashion waste?
- **Digital extension task (Canva Infographic):** Students create a digital poster titled '5 Steps to a Sustainable Wardrobe' featuring: (1) Catchy header, (2) Shocking statistic (e.g., 'The average person throws away 30 kg of clothes per year'), (3) 3–5 Actionable advice steps using imperatives, and (4) Call to Action ('Swap, don't throw away!').

Workshop 3: Healthy Snack Challenge

Target group	1st to 4th grade secondary school students (CEFR A2+/B2)
Duration	1 school hour + home project + 1 presentation hour
Thematic focus	Food & Nutrition / Healthy Lifestyle / Carbon Footprint / Digital Publishing
Learning outcomes	Students analyze nutritional content, calculate caloric values, document culinary processes in English, and co-create a class digital cookbook.

- **Lesson – Nutritional analysis (45 min):** Students discuss dietary habits and analyze healthy snack recipes in groups using the digital 'Nutrition Facts Search Tool' database to calculate macronutrients and calories. Teacher introduces food footprint concepts (local produce vs. imported goods).
- **Home project phase:** Individually or in pairs, students prepare a healthy snack or energy bar at home, photograph/video the preparation steps, record ingredients, and calculate nutritional stats.

- **Presentation hour:** Students showcase their creation before the class in English, covering 6 key points: (1) Product title, (2) Ingredients, (3) Preparation steps, (4) Nutrition table, (5) Health benefits, and (6) Ecological Sustainability rationale.
- **Class deliverable – Collaborative Digital Cookbook:** Using a shared Canva Cookbook Template, every student formats one standardized page containing snack name (e.g., 'Power Energy Balls'), dish photo, ingredient list, step-by-step instructions using sequence adverbs (First, Next, Then, Finally), nutrition panel, and eco-sustainability commentary.

4. Student Competence Development Framework

Integrating Erasmus+ methodology into local English language teaching systematically develops seven core key competencies essential for 21st-century learners:

1. **Communicative Competence:** Transitioning from passive grammar mastery to active, functional discourse across formal presentations and spontaneous peer interactions.
2. **Intercultural Competence:** Developing empathy, global perspectives, and appreciation for diverse socio-ecological realities across European school partners.
3. **Digital Competence:** Utilizing multimedia tools (Canva, Nutrition Facts Search Tool, video editing, digital cookbooks) to present language learning outputs.
4. **Collaborative Skills:** Negotiating tasks, distributing roles, and co-creating deliverables within international and local peer groups.
5. **Critical Thinking & Media Literacy:** Deconstructing commercial greenwashing, evaluating cost structures, and questioning fast fashion marketing.
6. **Autonomy & Self-Reliance:** Taking ownership of independent home projects, research tasks, and peer assessment.
7. **Creativity:** Designing upcycled clothing, original healthy recipes, and compelling promotional infographics.

5. Guidelines & Recommendations for ELT Colleagues

To successfully adapt Erasmus+ good practices for standard English language curricula, ELT practitioners are encouraged to follow these four implementation guidelines:

- **Integrate Cross-Curricular Topics (CLIL):** Use environmental sustainability, ethical consumerism, and nutrition as rich thematic vehicles for language acquisition rather than isolated grammar topics.
- **Prioritize Task-Based & Project-Based Learning:** Structure units around concrete deliverables (e.g., clothing swap market, digital cookbook, debate) that provide real purpose for language use.

- **Leverage Authentic Media & Data:** Incorporate real-world resources such as EU Commission videos, Fair Wear Foundation cost statistics, and nutrition databases to foster critical media literacy.
- **Embed Peer Assessment & Reflection:** Encourage continuous formative assessment through peer feedback rubrics, group self-reflection, and public showcases.