

A Global Conversation on the Future of Language Education: Our Eaquals Online 2026 Takeaways

Ayşegül İnce & Büşra Nur Özer Musaoğlu
Sabancı University School of Languages
October 23 2026



AI-generated image

Attending Eaquals Online 2026 provided a valuable platform to explore key developments in language education and exchange insights with colleagues from around the world. Below are some of our key takeaways and reflections from some of the sessions over three days:

Session I: "Strategic Planning and Quality Assurance for AI-Responsive Education" by Vladlena Tcherkachina and Robin Foggo from MEF University

MEF University set a clear tone for its institutional ethos: *"Banning AI is banned—we are on a mission to use it responsibly."* Founded on flipped learning and project-based assessment models, the institution demonstrated how an established culture of innovation enables rapid adaptation to technological change.

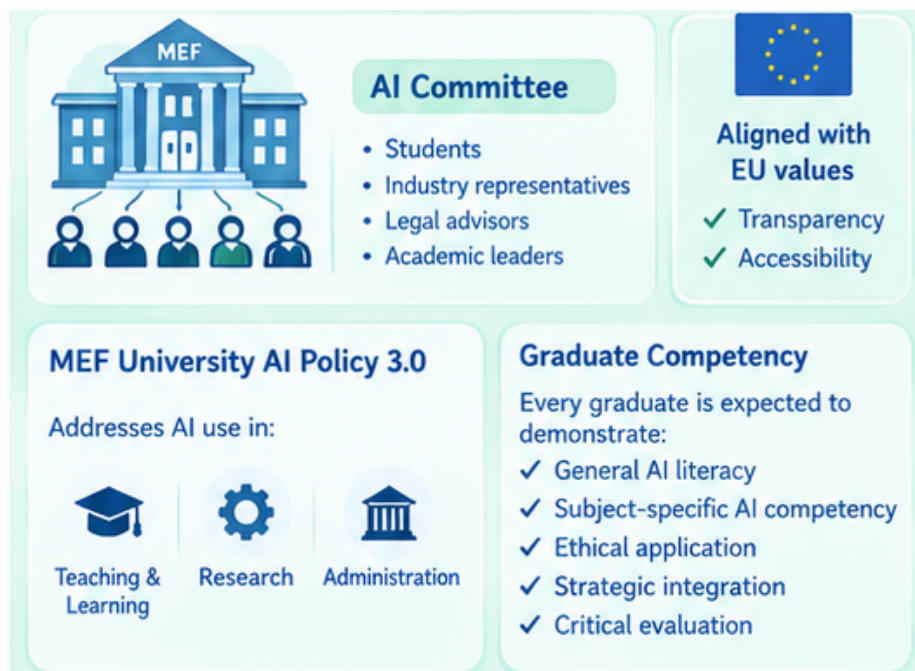
Rather than focusing solely on output, the presenters highlighted the importance of moving from final products to evaluating the entire learning process. The underlying principle guiding their curriculum design is simple yet crucial: student thinking first, AI support second.

Key Takeaways from the Session

1. Bottom-Up Classroom & Programme Adaptation

- **Curriculum & Assessment Shift:** MEF University shifted its focus toward live presentations and diagnostic writing to verify authentic student ownership in AI-supported work. Furthermore, AI literacy was added as a core component to the objectives, rubrics, and assessment. AI literacy trainings were provided both for students and instructors.
- **Project Design:** In multi-step projects (such as the Pre-Faculty Global Issues & AI Literacy Project), foundational stages remain AI-free to enable independent critical thinking, while later stages strategically integrate AI enhancement.
- **Ethics & Commitment:** AI ethics components are introduced right at induction. Students are also provided with effective prompting trainings, and a Student AI Library is created. Students sign commitment letters and submit evidence-based statements detailing exactly how AI was used in their assignments.

2. Top-Down Institutional Alignment



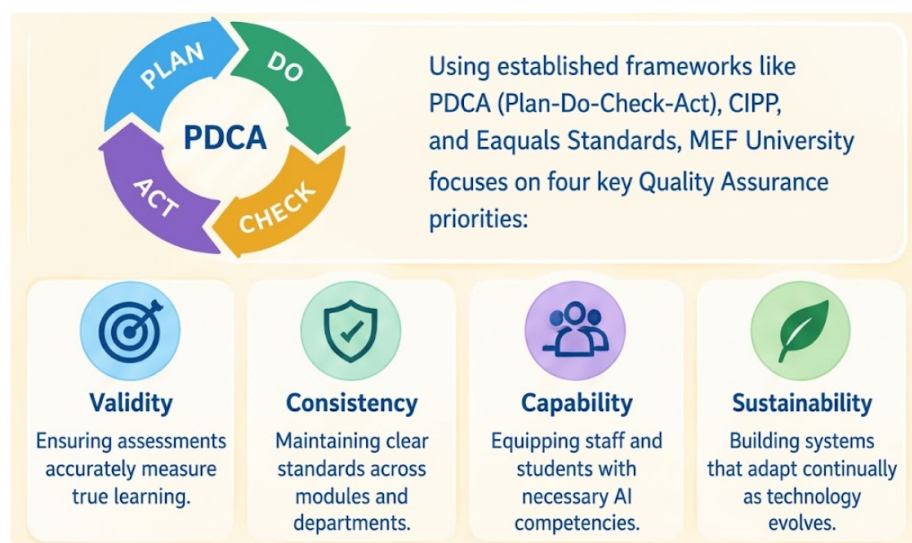
AI-generated image

3. Empowering Staff through Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

- **Beyond Tool Awareness:** It was noted that beyond basic AI tool awareness, educators require pedagogical and assessment competence to effectively guide and evaluate AI-supported learning.

- **Practical Support Initiatives:** To train instructors in AI use and enable them to test new tools, many institutional professional development opportunities such as external AI focused training days, weekly "AI Café" gatherings, and workshops are offered.

4. Ensuring Quality and Long-Term Credibility



AI-generated image

To maintain institutional responsiveness, the presenters highlighted using established frameworks like PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act), CIPP, and Equals Standards. They noted that the institution's long-term credibility relies on four key Quality Assurance (QA) priorities:

- **Validity:** Ensuring assessments accurately measure true learning.
- **Consistency:** Maintaining clear standards across modules and departments.
- **Capability:** Equipping staff and students with necessary AI competencies.
- **Sustainability:** Building systems that adapt continually as technology evolves.

Reflection

This session was a powerful reminder that we don't need to wait for top-down mandates to start integrating AI literacy into our teaching. By balancing bottom-up classroom and programme adaptation with top-down institutional planning, MEF University showed how AI can be used to strengthen human agency rather than replace it. Their holistic approach may serve as an inspiring example for all institutions.

Session II: “Addressing Inherent Needs: Teaching Pronunciation in Multicultural Classrooms” **by Dino Music**

This session explored practical approaches to teaching pronunciation in multicultural classrooms, focusing on how teachers can address learners’ inherent needs and help them become more confident speakers. The presenter discussed different techniques for teaching problematic sounds, highlighting the importance of moving beyond identifying which phonemes learners struggle with to considering how these sounds can be taught effectively. The session also emphasized the value of interactive activities, authentic pronunciation models, peer learning, and learner confidence. Below are some key takeaways and reflections from the session:

Key Takeaways from the Session

1. Understanding Learners’ Pronunciation Needs

- **Starting with Learner Needs:** The session highlighted that speaking was the skill learners felt they needed most. This finding underlined the importance of addressing pronunciation as part of helping students communicate more confidently and effectively.
- **Identifying Pronunciation Challenges:** Drawing on examples involving Portuguese, Spanish, and Mandarin speakers, the presenter encouraged teachers to consider learners’ linguistic backgrounds when identifying pronunciation difficulties. This also prompted reflection on the common challenges Turkish L1 learners may experience.
- **From What to Teach to How to Teach:** Knowing which phonemes learners struggle with is only the first step. Teachers also need to select appropriate techniques that make pronunciation practice meaningful, engaging, and accessible.

2. Making Pronunciation Practice More Interactive

Practical Techniques for Pronunciation Practice

INTERACTIVE • ENGAGING • STUDENT-CENTERED

Better pronunciation, more confident speakers! ♥

1 Listening, Repeating, and Drilling with a Twist



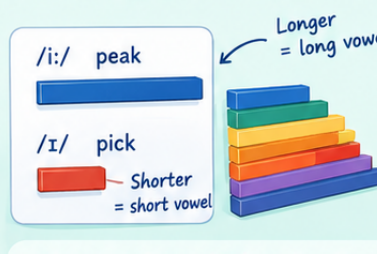
Instead of traditional whole-class teacher drilling, students work in multilingual groups led by a designated student “captain” who acts as the model and drill leader, while the teacher actively monitors for accuracy.

2 Interactive Phonemic Charts



Pairing targeted worksheets with digital, interactive phonemic charts allows students to explore problematic sounds collaboratively and take turns demonstrating correct usage.

3 Cuisenaire Rods for Vowel Contrasts



Using physical rods of different lengths helps make abstract phonetic differences tangible—such as using longer rods for long vowels (e.g., /i:/ in peak) and shorter rods for short vowels (e.g., /ɪ/ in pick). This tactile element injects variety into otherwise tedious minimal pair drills.

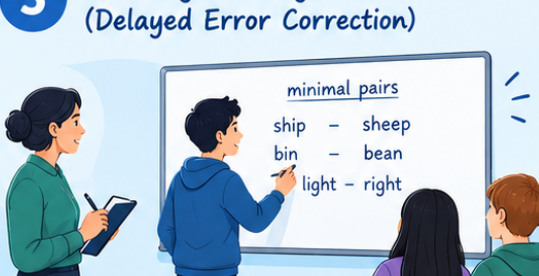
AI-generated image

4 Authentic Pop Culture Models



Utilizing short, engaging clips from media (supported by resources like YouGlish) to contextualize phonemic differences, guiding students through Notice → Practice → Create → Produce, culminating in roleplays highlighting how mispronunciations can lead to humorous misunderstandings.

5 Handing the Keys (Delayed Error Correction)



Following freer practice, the teacher notes common errors and steps back, nominating individual students to take the board, lead the class, and run the drilling.

AI-generated image

3. Promoting Peer Learning and Learner Confidence

- **Learning from Peers:** The session explored ways of involving students in modelling and practising pronunciation together. Teachers can monitor students during freer practice, take notes on pronunciation errors, and invite a student who demonstrates accurate pronunciation to lead a follow-up activity.
- **Building Confidence through Responsibility:** Giving students opportunities to share their knowledge and support their classmates can help them become more confident in their own abilities. However, teachers still need to ensure that the pronunciation models students provide to one another are accurate.
- **From Practice to Performance:** The session also highlighted the potential of activities that allow students to practise target sounds and demonstrate their learning through role-plays. Such tasks can provide a meaningful context for applying pronunciation skills.

4. Exploring Practical and Accessible Approaches

The session encouraged teachers to consider how pronunciation techniques can be adapted to their own classroom contexts. Although authentic materials offer valuable models, finding suitable examples can sometimes be challenging. The discussion also raised the potential role of AI in supporting pronunciation practice, prompting reflection on how technology might make some aspects of this process easier and more accessible.

Reflection

This session reminded us that identifying the sounds our students struggle with is not enough; we also need to think carefully about how we teach them. In particular, using Cuisenaire rods to help students distinguish between long and short vowel sounds stood out as an effective technique. Since students do not always enjoy traditional drilling, this hands-on approach could make pronunciation practice more engaging and memorable.

We also appreciated the idea of using authentic pronunciation models and giving students opportunities to learn from and support one another. Peer teaching can help students take greater responsibility for their learning and build confidence, provided that teachers ensure the models are accurate. Overall, the session encouraged us to explore more interactive and practical ways of teaching pronunciation and to consider how these techniques could be incorporated into our own classrooms.

Overall, attending Eaquals Online 2026 was an inspiring and enriching experience that offered a wealth of insights across diverse areas of language education. While we attended many valuable and thought-provoking sessions throughout the conference, we chose to highlight these two in particular, as their focus resonated most closely with our institutional context and provided practical, innovative takeaways that we can actively apply to our own classrooms.

Thank you for reading!