



## **BEST PRACTICES and RECOMMENDATIONS**

**With following examples I would like to present methods concerning the workflow within the project, the content creation and the actual teaching which proved to be successful. I also want to show, however, what could have been done to improve the outcomes of the project.**

### **1. Project planning and workflow**

The project was divided into 7 work packages with specific objectives, tasks and outcomes. In addition a responsible partner was designated to lead the work package and the number of staff days were allocated very detailed to individual partners, meaning how many work days for managers, teachers etc. In a way the structure seemed to be very clear and simple. This also worked fine as long as everything went like planned. The more differences of opinions arose and the more the timetable could not be kept, the more this structure felt like a too tight corset and sometimes the amount of hours of one partner did not quite reach the understanding of the other partner, struggling with not enough staff days.

The responsible partner changed from work package to work package, which seemed to be logical, but proved to be more harm than advantage. It is important that one strong project leader keeps a tight rein and is familiar with all the expertise concerning the project. This can of course also be a team of experts. Later in this project a steering group was founded as a kind of communication board for all responsible persons of all partners. This was a good idea coming too late. In the case that there are so many partners like in this project (9), this should have been done in the beginning. This steering group also should have to last word in the decision making.

In many ways the timetable designated to a certain work package proved to be an obstacle. Several things could have been developed simultaneously. In this project it was clear that the technical implementation will start when the content creation is finished. This is not a very good idea, because it is important to find out the limits

at once. A lot of work could have been used more efficiently to create other contents or find new ideas, if the technical possibilities had been clear in the beginning. It is recommendable that content creation and technical implementation goes hand in hand, in trial and error.

When the project's objective is to create a language course or language learning material, all partners should be able to understand this language. In this project a language course for Business German was developed and in spite of the fact, that at the same time a new technology was developed, it was not very useful for the outcomes that the technical developers did not speak German. The outcomes shows that still many mistakes are to be found and the instructions of the authors were misinterpreted.

Instead of big meetings small workshops in different compositions either within an expert group or overlapping (between groups) are essential. Several workshops were held among the authors, which proved to have been very efficient. But workshops between authors and developers were held too seldom, too late or not at all. Such workshops would have avoided a lot of work input going into the wrong direction. The constant communication between the partners must be guaranteed.

I would also like to mention one important fact for the successful implementation of such a project: commitment. This commitment should not only be bound to an institution but also to the persons involved in the project. Never should a person, who initiated a project, just leave it what ever reason he/she might have had. Newcomers at the last third of the project time really do not have it easy.

## **2. Problem solving**

When new technology is involved the constant exchange of experiences and the assistance of an IT specialist are of the utmost importance. In this project the piloters/tutors felt it very useful to exchange their views and experiences on a joint communication platform, called ConnectPro, which partner 3/HAMK normally uses for their students. The possibility to speak with one another seemed to be more effective than writing emails. Technical problems could sometimes be solved or explained immediately by the developers/technicians and the tutors could inquire further when

things did not at once become clear. During the piloting such a meeting was held once a week.

I would recommend for all kinds of project of such a large scale to establish a communication forum like this in the very beginning and to meet regularly at least on a monthly basis.

### **3. Task descriptions**

Working and learning on a mobile device is not very easy. The screen is very small and this has to be taken into account. It became obvious in the piloting that the task descriptions were too complicated; they should be much simpler and shorter. But this again was a result of the lack of communication between the authors and the developers. The idea of the authors was to have one instruction per screen picture, now all the instructions are together and the learners have to scroll to read all the instructions, which they will forget before they have finished the task. This means they have to go back and forth, which is not very inspiring. If the task says "listen to ...", then on the same screen should be a play button. If the task says "listen and fill in the gaps", the gaps have to be visible where the play button can be found.

### **4. Teaching methods**

The best results were obtained in Paris, where all students confirmed that they had improved their language skills. The teaching method the partner had chosen was a blended method; this means that the students had the possibility to discuss their problems with the tutor in the classroom. They also got all their instructions personally and so knew exactly what they should do. This seems to be the best way.

It is very difficult to explain technical issues in writing, the better way is to have the device in the hand and look together with the tutor or an IT-expert of the institute for a solution of the problem. On your own and at home it could get frustrating. But this also means that the structure of the platform, the introducing information and task descriptions have to be as clear and good structured as possible.

The blended learning course should start with a classroom lesson explaining the technical details and helping to install the software,

and then the students should get some tasks which they prepare at home for the next classroom session.

Another solution could be a good platform with forums and chat groups.

## **5. Content creation**

For an efficient content creation authoring tools, which enable the authors to create language exercises or any other content without technical help are required. This is an important requirement especially in projects like this one, where the IT developers are not specialists in the matter to be taught (in this case the German language). Content creation in language teaching does not mean uploading files (texts, audios or pictures). Content creation means creating online exercises and for that, authoring tool like e.g. Hot potatoes are required.

## **6. Learning with mobile devices**

The results of the piloting show that the students liked to listen to the audios which can be easily downloaded and used. This is understandable, because using headphones the students can listen to the audios whenever they please, whether they are biking, jogging, waiting for a plane or driving in a car. There are no limitations. Although the audios in this project were done by the teachers and developers themselves, it is recommended to use professional speakers for that matter.

Gap filling exercises also seem to work well. The gaps must not be too big and concentrate on one issue which the learner should accomplish, either on deepening vocabulary or repeating grammar structures. It is also absolutely necessary to provide the possibility of saving the data on the phone, to a server and especially to the own portfolio.

In this project help in Grammar issues was only given through links to grammar websites. Basically this idea can be accepted and efficient, because there are a lot of good websites on this matter already existing. On those websites the learners find good explanations, examples and there are nowadays also a variety of websites providing all kinds of exercises. Unfortunately, many of the features are not yet compatible to work on a mobile phone, which

means that only those website links are working which contain explanations, but those containing exercises only can be used on the PC.

This brings us to another important issue: the platform. On the phone screen we have to deal with a tiny little space, which means the platform should not be overloaded. That is why the developers ideas are very good and user friendly. On the other hand, this does not apply to the work on the PC or laptop. There the screen is large and can contain many features. For that reason, the authors had proposed another kind of structure for the PC platform (see annex). This proposition contains a clear structure with an index on the left side so that the learners can find easily all contents and features. The middle of the page should be the working area and this should also be the area, where the student works on the LOs. This is not guaranteed with the Emulator solution, which I strongly recommend to be revised.

During the piloting it became obvious that the use of advanced mobile devices as smart phones is not yet widely spread. This calls for a process of rethinking/revising. On the one hand, the technical implementation of the learning objects should be more playful and colourful. This would mean that simpler devices are excluded. On the other hand, there also simpler devices offer a variety of features which could be used for language learning. During the content creation an example for learning using SMS was developed. The idea was to send every day or week a grammar structure or a vocabulary to the learners first, which the learners memorise. Week by week the structures become more complex e.g. sentences or small situations/dialogues, which the learners try to solve and to send back to the tutor. This idea was rejected as too behaviouristic.

## **7. The cultural impact**

The cultural differences between countries within Europe are often neglected or understood to be self-evident. But this is not always the case. Therefore language teaching should be combined with the development of a certain feeling for cultural behaviour. Mostly the small cultural input in form of audios was appreciated by the learners and seen as a valuable add-on to the other learning material. It was interesting to read one comment of a Swedish learner saying that the cultural input is not up-to-date. I agree that even cultural behaviour can change, but sometimes this applies to certain vocational or social groups. In Sweden the use of first

names is recognized in every situation in life. So, when a German business partner offers the use of the first name at a very early stage of the relationship, this might mean that he knows about that fact and feels it to be an advantage when doing business with Swedes. If the learner interprets this as change of cultural behaviour in the German society and applies this new experience the other way round, he might stumble on disappointing reactions. Therefore it is very important to develop certain sensitivity for cultural behaviour.

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