



[R13]

Results of the piloting and evaluation of the „product“

## **1. PROJECT MATRIX**

Project name: Just-in-time reBlending

Duration: 25 month

Overall objectives:

establish the need for mobile learning in small and middle sized companies and develop a platform for a learning environment, which takes into account the needs of learners, who do not have the possibilities to attend courses.

The developed product should

- users enable to go for long-life learning, whenever they feel the wish or need to do so in a self-guided, autonomic way
- offer the possibility to communicate with a tutor who guides and controls the learning process
- provide the users with work-related and communication-oriented language material (in the project's case the German language), which they can use in authentic work environments, such as a fair e.g.
- make the best use of new technological devices such as mobile phones (mainly smart phones equipped with UBS), PDAs, MP3-Players and of course notebooks, which make learning possible outside the traditional classroom environment and revolutionize the learning process and methods
- enable companies, vocational training facilities and language institutes to further develop the platform and the content to their own needs by providing them with an open-source platform

Outcome:

A pilot software for further development showing on the example of a language course in German the possibilities of the new mobile technology for lifelong learning.

## **2. STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF LO – THE WORK FLOW**

### **2.1 WP2 – “concept design”**

The design of the concept proved to be more difficult as expected. The different views as to what was needed first – the method of learning or the technical tools for content creation (knowing what is possible) – led to a serious crisis in the project group. The authors were overloaded with web links showing examples of e-learning methods and craved for a clear concept to be provided by the leading partner (HAMK) for the concept design, in particular what would the multiplatform for the e-learning environment look like and with what kinds of tools would the author/teacher be able to create the learning content? The statement that everything was technically possible proved to be too optimistic and the contents definition was too vague to start developing a course. At the time the concept was discussed (WP2) partner 4 (TAMK) spoke with an expert about the technical possibilities and the limitations of mobile devices.

Mainly 3 problems came out:

1. The screen is very small. -> The content must be reduced to the essential.
2. The keyboard is not very handy. -> The texts the student will have to write must be very short.
3. Until now drag & drop exercises cannot be made with most of the mobile devices. -> We would have to find other solutions for playful types of exercises.

This, unfortunately, was not taken into account and many proposals were rejected because of their “behaviourism” or not being “creative enough”. How certain skills can be trained in an effective way can – and this is my personal opinion - only become clear after the technical solutions are given. But the best way, of course, would be to work together step by step, in trial and error, especially in a new environment such as the mobile environment.

The partners decided, to concentrate on a specific topic the target group would need according to the need analysis. To limit the content to this topic, the partners further decided to create learning objects (later in the text often referred to as LO) for the separate phases of the chosen topic covering a whole learning process.

The chosen topic would cover the preparation of a fair participation and should consist of the following items:

- the preparations before going to the fair (collecting data, travel arrangements, invitations).
- the preparatory work on the fair location before the opening and the dealing with problems (trouble shooting concerning internet connections, missing objects, but also the use of fair services like a copy-shop or catering).

- Another important block of learning objects would deal with the close contacts of the exhibitor with the client/fair visitor (small talk, presentations, making appointments).
- A small part was to deal with the work after fair meetings (the follow-up).

In this context the partners agreed on the LO-types, mainly types of exercises which seemed sensible enough and adaptable for mobile devices. The work was divided among the partners and a time frame was established. As to the language level the partners agreed on B2 of the European Framework.

annex 1: Learning concept/process

annex 2: LO-types

## **2.2 WP 3 – “content creation”**

As to the content the authors aimed to create a good and covering package of learning objects, which meets the requirements agreed upon in the WP2.

### **2.2.1 The work of the authors**

In lack of authoring tools for the creation of LOs, the authors had to write their texts/exercises in Word- or Excel-formats with detailed instructions for the developers. These instructions had to be in English, because no one of the developers spoke German. This work had to be done very carefully and clearly, so that mistakes could be avoided as much as possible, because the developers were working on their own. These would turn out to be the major problems while implementing the LOs.

### **2.2.2 Instructions for developers**

The authors' instructions for the developer enclose the following data:

- Content of LO: - learning aim, task descriptions, the actual content and the solution of the exercise and the content of the intercultural pop-ups, pop-ups for external links and pop-ups for help e.g. vocabulary. For each of the listening exercises there was made a transcript.
- Technique: location of buttons for saving, recording, listening, sending (to tutor or server) data, of balloons for replicas or of pop-ups with e.g. intercultural contents.

annex 3: example for Word-format / Interessierter Besucher (customer visits stand writing + speaking

annex 4: example for Word-format/Firmenpräsentation (Daten sammeln/collect data)

annex 5: example for Excel-format /customer with invitation (instructions hidden, "add comments –function"; visible when cursor clicks the small red arrows)

This work was done with the outmost precision. The biggest problem for the authors was that nobody really knew which implementation was technically realistic. That is the reason, why the instructions were covering all thinkable solutions. (They were told by the developer not to bother with the technical implementation, "everything is possible").

### **2.2.3 The content of the Learning objects**

The LOs that were created can be divided as follows:

#### **A. Vor der Messe (Before the fair)**

- Geschäftsinformationen sammeln (collect business data)
- Standaufbau (stand building)
- Reisevorbereitung (travel preparations)
- Einladungen (invitations)

#### **B. Auf der Messe (At the fair)**

- Messealltag (every day workflow)
- Standgespräche (fair business talks)
- Präsentationen (presentations)

#### **C. Nach der Messe (After the fair)**

- Terminvereinbarung nach der Messe (appointments)

### **2.2.4 The business content**

The learning content covers a wide field of aspects/exercises, which prepare the learners for a fair attendance. They can themselves (if they want) choose the items they believe to be essential for their work performance.

Actually there are two options of learning:

- **The self learning approach**, meaning that the learners work with the items they selected themselves and save those items in their proper portfolio that might come in handy in a certain situation. Therefore an intelligent tutoring system is needed, which due to the project's time limit could not be completely finished. The technical solution on the platform provides the learners with a transcript of the exercises which mostly consist of dialogues and emails/letters, but instant correction or feedback is not possibly at this point. Some of

the piloting learners used this method which proved to be a bit tiresome, because of the insufficiency of the intelligent tutoring.

- **The blended learning approach**, meaning that a tutor designates certain exercises to the learners; the learners send the written or recorded tasks to the tutor and receive a correction, feedback and/or pedagogical hints and in the ideal case have a certain amount of appointments with the tutor. This method was also tried out by most of the piloting groups.

### 2.2.5 Training all skills

The created content consists of very complex exercise types covering all kinds of skills required in language learning: reading, listening, writing and speaking. The idea of the authors was to offer the learners a full scope learning environment and this by taking advantage of the modern mobile technology. The new mobile devices offer all kinds of gadgets that make possible a lot of things, such as taking pictures, recording and listening to one's own voice, sending emails and surfing on the internet. Why, they asked themselves, not use all these possibilities in language learning or learning as such? The authors also had in mind the creating a portfolio in which the students could save all their works and important material that they would be able to consult at any time. This would be a new way of learning by using the technical possibilities of mobile devices.

### 2.2.6 The exercise types and their learning aim

The exercises consist of different kinds of tasks:

- **Vocabulary training:**

The data collecting in the LO-Type "**Forms**" represents a tool for vocabulary training. The learners can beforehand collect all the important data of their own or their client's company, the products of their own company or even facts about their competitors, save the data in their portfolio and use them whenever needed. Different pop-ups provide the learners with useful information concerning companies in Germany, with links to important websites and also cultural info such as the use of titles e.g.

annex 6: LO type "forms" – Das eigene Produkt

The LO-type "**Learning cards**" should enable the learners to make their own vocabulary lists by using all the possibilities of a mobile device (making pictures, recording and listening, writing). The learners can pick up words wherever they are, maybe even take a picture and so

document the word in its environment, fill out the necessary data, record the word by reading it and save it in their portfolio. They can come back to the word whenever they need it, they want to listen to it, read it or see it.

See the implementation on the platform:

Path on the platform: Under „Learningkit“ choose the folder „Aufgaben“ file: Standaufbau; exercise: Messestand Lernkarten

The LO-type **“Gap filling”** functions also as a vocabulary trainer. This is a writing, reading and listening exercise, because after having filled out the gaps, learners can listen to the correct dialogue. The effectiveness of vocabulary training lies also in the context binding. When learners can associate a certain word with with a context/situation they will remember it more easily.

annex 7: LO-Type “gap filling” – Die Firmenpräsentation

- **Listening comprehension:**

Many of the LO-type **“Dialogue”** are designed to function as listening comprehension with an extra task, like gap filling or writing. Thus the learners can work with the same exercise more than once (it is so reusable). They can listen to it as often as they need/want to, fill in gaps or a form at the same time or afterwards.

annex 8: LO-type “form and listening” – “Produktpräsentation” HV

annex 9: LO-type “listening and gap filling” – Produktpräsentation “Nachfolgemodell”

- **Speaking skills:**

The LO-type **“Telephone service”** is a kind of step-by-step exercise. The learners can only proceed, if they have understood the first task. This starts by choosing the right telephone number. If the learners choose a wrong number, they get an answering machine, if they choose the right one, they are connected to a person who answers the telephone. They can play their part. Only one voice has been recorded and the learners have to play the other part for which they get the necessary instructions. Afterwards they can listen to their own recordings and compare with the proposed solution. In the blended learning solution the idea is to record the dialogue and send it to the tutor. But a model dialogue is always available.

annex 10: LO-type “telephone service” – Wo ist das Ausstellungsstück? (Missing piece)

- **Writing skills**

Nowadays in the business world emailing belongs to everyday work tasks. Even if the communication does not stop because of some mistakes, you make a better impression if you can address your clients in a correct manner. For that reason the authors designed some writing exercises, so that the learners can train their writing skills.

The LO-type "**Drag and drop**" provides the students with ready emails or letter models. They have to complete a letter with the missing words, which is a very traditional exercise. The important issue here is the content.

annex 11: LO-type "drag and drop" – Writing an e-mail

The LO-type „**Guided writing**“ is a more complex and challenging way to train writing skills. The learners write an email/a letter in a kind of step-by-step procedure. They read the first instruction, write their sentence(s) and click "ready", then they get the next instruction and write the next sentence and so on. In the end they have written a whole email/letter, which they can send to their tutor or compare with the model.

annex 12: LO-type "guided writing" – Einladung an den Messestand

## **2.2.7 The role of the Chambers of Commerce**

To reassure the accuracy of the business situations, the partners of the different Chambers of Commerce helped with their expertise and commented the created LOs. This was a great help and a good example of project cooperation.

## **2.2.8 The cultural link**

In addition the Chambers of Commerce provided the authors with small texts about cultural behaviour, which the learners can find under small pop-up windows, if they would be in need of help or advice. This cultural component becomes an ever so important issue in doing business in a foreign language. Many good intentions end up in failure because of cultural misunderstandings. The aim here was to create sensitivity for other cultures by giving good and usable examples. These small texts have been recorded and can be found on the platform as mp3-data. The cultural link can also be found in the dialogues that show which replicas are suitable, and which are not. The authors tried to create an awareness of different speaking levels and environments one has to act in. This was one of the important learning aims of the authors.

annex 13: "Kulturelle Tipps" – recorded on the platform

In summary, the produced learning material is well thought through and covers all necessary skills and possible scenarios for the participation of a fair. The language level meets the needs of the target group. The exercises are partly very demanding, but their content can be used in authentic situations. Unfortunately it should be noticed that the technical implementation of the designed LOs does not meet the expectations and ideas of the authors and can be seen as the weak link in this project.

### **3. THE MOLE – THE MOBILE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

The MOLE – the mobile learning environment is the basis for the interaction between the student and the tutor. It functions as a kind of reservoir for learning material the tutor has installed there, but it also enables the student to add own learning material, for example by uploading files or adding interesting web links. In this way the students can act autonomically and direct their learning. This also means that the tutor/teacher has less influence on the learning process as such and the LOs provided by the tutor/teacher need to be embedded in an authentic learning process the students recognise.

The project's MOLE, designed by the partner MKFC can be accessed on the mobile device via <http://www.reblending.se/mobile/login.php> (username: Learner; password: Learner) and consists of the following features:

HOME – this is the homepage of the platform, from where the students have access to the so called "learning kit" and the portfolio as well as to the communication tools and a tool for personal information.

LEARNING KIT – contains several folders with exercises, audio-material (dialogues, small intercultural texts and training material for numbers), web links to fair planning and grammar sites. The planned phrasebook has not been installed yet. Most of the material (for example all audio recordings and web links) can be accessed directly, but the exercises have to be downloaded on the phone and installed there before they can be used. They are java operated.

COMMUNICATION – has 2 tools for the communication with the teacher/tutor. The students can get into contact with the tutor via SMS or e-mail. In an address book they can store telephone numbers and e-mail addresses.

PORTFOLIO – is the place for the students' private storage of learning material. The students can also add new folders and upload files, pictures, video clips as they please.

The tutor/teacher, uses the same platform which is accessible via <http://www.reblending.se/login.php> ; username: Tutor; password: Tutor) with some minor differences. He can add new users and does not have a portfolio. He can also add new folders to the Learning kit and upload new files. The only

problem is that without Java knowledge the tutor/teacher can not add new learning material, because to make the material accessible for the phone one needs a Java application. This shortcoming is also being criticised by the authors. It automatically raises the question: "Do we always depend on a developer to implement our exercises?" If this were so, it would not be very efficient and certainly not many teachers would opt for such a system.

The need to have authoring tools which enable the teacher to create new material and put it on the platform is obvious. In this matter the developers have failed, but it should also be noticed that the project's time was indeed too short to create such sophisticated software. I also would like to add a comment from our colleague from partner TAMK, Mrs Daems, who participated at this year's Online Educa in Berlin. "Looking around what others have to offer in this field, our product seems to be quite far developed." Maybe the father of this project (HAMK and Mr. Silander) and with him everybody else had too high expectations in the beginning. It would not be fair to say that the project failed, but rather that time has run out. It should also be mentioned that Mr. Silander left the project at a crucial moment and his successor was just not up to this job given such a short time left.

The MOLE can also be accessed on the computer via <http://www.reblending.se/mobile>. (same usernames and passwords) The users get the image of a phone and the folders can be opened and altered as on a mobile device, but to work on the exercises the students have to download a so called Emulator, a software simulating the mobile device. This solution for a platform on the computer proved to be very user unfriendly. The Emulator being very unstable and difficult to handle has as a consequence that many students who were in for piloting gave up (problems with viruses, problems with IT restrictions in the companies, problems with downloading files, opening files etc).

I would suggest a platform like Moodle for learning with the computer. This type of platform is being used widely and has in addition possibilities such as chats and forums, which could be a nice add-on for the dialogues with the tutor or even fellow students.

#### **4. THE PILOTING PROCESS**

The piloting process within the ReBlending project consisted of three parts – the first step consisted of the initial preparation of the process as a whole, the

second step of the piloting by the piloters and the third step was the actual piloting conducted by selected learners on involved markets.

Phase 1: Preparation of the piloting process

Phase 2: Piloting by the piloters

Phase 3: Piloting by the learners

Since the piloting was conducted in several countries, the process had to be adapted to the specific situation in each market. Thus, the piloting had to be prepared as a multi-market activity and the explicit piloting had individual shapes in the different target markets.

The countries, where the piloting was conducted, were Estonia, Finland, France and Sweden. Generally, the piloting partners were the German Chambers of Commerce (P6, P7, P9). In addition, the Goethe Institut (P2) and the Finnish language school Lingonet (external partner) took part in the piloting process on the Finnish market. MKFC (P8) and HAMK (P3) supported the piloting process concerning technical issues.

#### **4.1 Phase 1: Preparation of the piloting process**

Since the piloting was conducted through external contacts which had not been part of the project, the piloting had to be well prepared in advance. Also, as mentioned before, the piloting process had to be adapted to the specific market situations in each of the selected countries.

Thus, guidelines on how to conduct the piloting were prepared both for the tutors and for the learners. This material was compiled by HAMK and very practically oriented with pictures (showing an emulator) explaining the different steps on how to enter the platform and how to go through the test course. Concerning the tutor's guidelines, information on how to add new users to the course and how to create individual passwords for these users was included.

The guidelines concerning the tutors consist of the following topics:

1. Requirements
2. Download Learning Objects before the course
3. Using computer during the course
4. Description of action characters
5. Login to the platform
6. Navigation
7. Description of the topics
  - 7.1. Home
  - 7.2. Communication
  - 7.3. User details (incl. information on how to add and delete new users)

## 7.4. Logout

The guidelines concerning the learners consist of the following topics:

1. Requirements
2. Download Learning Objects before the course
3. Using computer during the course
4. Description of action characters
5. Login to the platform
6. Navigation
7. Description of the topics
  - 7.1. Home
  - 7.2. Communication
  - 7.3. User details
  - 7.4. Logout

The original language of the material was chosen to be English. To make the piloting process smoother for the learners, the guidelines were translated into Estonian, Finnish, French and Swedish.

The preparation phase of the piloting was very much technically oriented. A lot of details had to be adjusted before the actual piloting, both concerning the tutors and the external learners, could be started. Thus, during this first phase a lot of interaction between the technical partners of the project and the piloting partners occurred.

The first phase of the piloting process also contained the definition of the target group in each country. Every country adjusted the piloting group to be chosen to the specific market situation.

## **4.2 Phase 2: Piloting by the pilots**

In order to get the essential information for being able to introduce the external learners to the platform and the test course, the pilots, this means the project partners that were responsible for the piloting, had to get an introduction themselves. This education on technical aspects, form and content of the platform was mainly carried out by HAMK. Also MKFC assisted concerning the technical part of the education.

During this phase, an intense discussion that was initiated during the first piloting phase among the pilots from the different countries as well as between the pilots and the technical partners continued. The education, that could be seen as a test of the test (before the actual external piloting started), detected several areas where the system and the platform had to be adjusted. A concrete example in this connection is the form of the LOs. It was not possible to use zipped files on the mobile version, since most of today's mobile phones do not contain programmes that can unzip and open up this

kind of files in the specific mobile device used. As a consequence, each learning material (LOs) was transformed into two separate files, one JAR-file and one JAD-file.

All the piloting partners (P6, P7, P9, P2, Lingonet), the technical partners (P8, P3) and the management (P1) tested the platform and the test course during several weeks. Questions and required adjustments concerning technical aspects were discussed with the technical partners, who took care of these adjustments and implemented them into the system.

Also, the piloting partners, the technical partners and the project management once a week held virtual meetings through the Internet based communication platform "ConnectPro". These discussions were very valuable for the whole project team, since the different partners were located in different countries and regions and the possibility to meet in person was limited. During the meetings, the piloting partners could present their questions and problems. Often, problems could be solved very quickly during the meeting since several partners within the team might have encountered similar problems. Also, the technical partners often could give practical and valuable input. The meetings were usually moderated by HAMK, which was very good, since HAMK could assure that required steps to solve technical problems were taken directly after the meetings.

### **4.3 Phase 3: Piloting by the learners**

Due to several technical adjustments that had to be done during the piloting of the piloters, the second phase of the piloting process got much longer than expected. After having finalised this second step, the actual piloting through external piloters could start.

As mentioned before, the target groups in the selected countries were defined in different ways, adjusted to the local market situation.

The target groups in the selected countries were:

- Estonia: Students from University in Tallinn and German-Estonian companies
- Finland: Students of the Goethe-Institut and HAMK and the tutor at the language school Lingonet
- France: German-French companies that are students at the GFCC.
- Sweden: Students from the Swedish-German Language Fond which the GSCC administrates. These students are professionals in German-Swedish companies.

The piloting conducted by the selected external contacts was administrated and coordinated independently through the different piloting partners in the

individual countries. Thus, this third step of the piloting process had different shapes in the involved markets.

Although the nature and shape of the piloting process differed between the countries, it was very valuable to continue with regular virtual team meetings via "ConnectPro". Also in this phase of the piloting process, HAMK coordinated the meetings and provided the platform.

#### **4.4 Comments on the piloting process**

The piloting of the platform and its content was, as mentioned above, carried out in four of the five partner countries. The piloting could not be carried out in Germany. Because of a shifting of tasks the University of Reutlingen had not enough resources left and so took not part in the piloting. Originally the piloting was planned to be carried out on a much larger scale, but due to the late technical implementation of the LOs and their readiness for piloting with clients, the actual piloting had to be postponed several times. Mostly this was caused by the instability of the whole system. The tutors and the evaluators constantly provided the developers with detailed feedback, which only partly led to fruitful results.

annex 14: Comments to malfunctions and mistakes in "Standaufbau"  
annex 15: Comments to malfunctions and mistakes in "Präsentationen"  
and "Einladungen"

Another obstacle put in the way of a satisfactory result was the fact, as previously mentioned, that the developer did not speak German. This resulted in a lot of orthographic mistakes which – although brought to attention by the evaluator repeatedly– were only partly corrected. A third factor was the insufficient training of the trainers/tutors, also due to the late technical implementation. This meant that we had to renounce the planned testing of larger groups at vocational institutes in Finland.

## **5. RESULTS – EVALUATION AND CONCLUSIONS**

This chapter presents the results of the piloting process. Through combining these overall results with explaining comments from the responsible project partners for this project phase (P2 and P9), the piloting is evaluated and conclusions are drawn.

## 5.1 Experiences of the piloters

This paragraph shows an overview of the results of the external piloting process from the piloters' point of view. The information is listed according to the four markets where the piloting was conducted. Aspects concerning the different target groups, the language skills of the learners, the procedure of the piloting and the most evident problems that arose during the test course are presented.

### Estonia

- **Students:** 15; partly students of the Technical University of Tallinn and entrepreneurs of German-Estonian companies
- **Language skills:** very good
- **Procedure:** Had fixed a week for the piloting (week 42). Teacher at University had even cancelled the lesson, so that the students would have enough time to work on the exercises. Students got user/password and the Learners guide in English (translation in Estonian was not ready at that time). Tutor had added instructions in Estonian especially for the installation of the Emulator.
- **Material:** the tutor chose the exercises, she thought useful for her students. Following items were chosen: 1. Asking for catering offer; 2. Invitation to stand 3. Product presentation. Students were supposed to send written exercises via normal email to the tutor.
- **Problems that occurred:** no one of the participating students had a suitable mobile phone, which meant, that all the exercises had to be done on the PC. The work on the PC only works via Emulator, a software package simulating a telephone. Many problems arose with the installation of the software (too complicated, viruses or restrictions by the company). Many complained about the English version of the instructions.
- **Comments:** good content for exercises; technical implementation not user friendly enough; content should not be restricted to certain mobile phones, some items should be accessible for older models; the access to the computer version should be easier, not via Emulator, a normal platform, the installation of the Emulator is just too complicated.

### Finland

- **Students:** 2 from the evaluating partner P2 and 2 from the developing partner P3; P2 had willing students among his clients (computer experts and engineers) to test the new method and P3 asked students of the own vocational institution to just try out and test the product from a technical point of view.
- **Language skills:** the students of P2 had level B2 and part of the students of P3 had no German knowledge at all.
- **Procedure:** the acquisition of the test persons of P2 took place during the traditional course time. The students were told about the project and its idea and asked for their help. When the testing time came the students were informed by an email and given all the instructions including the Learner's Guide. During the weekly teaching sessions all technical procedures and arising problems were discussed and solved on the spot (thanks to the advanced IT-knowledge and equipment of the students). The students worked on the LOs individually and at their own pace. The tutor recommended those LOs that were the most developed and useful for them.
- **Problems that occurred:** mostly problems had to do with the unzipping of the LO-files until the students found the unzip software on their mobile devices, which is different for every device. The participating group could have been bigger, if the installation of the Emulator had not been such a big problem. For now those students who had only simple mobile devices could not participate.
- **Comments:** the technical implementation must be clearer. It is still too complicated for the students to find all features without the help of a tutor. For the work on the PC the platform has to be altered and made more user-friendly. Important functions such as saving data should work properly.

## France

- **Students:** 25; the students came from partner companies of the Chamber of Commerce and had attended a German course at the French-German Chamber of Commerce. The training took place in companies or in the vocational institution of the Chamber
- **Language skills:** at least B1 of the CEFR
- **Procedure:** The tutors got a pedagogical and technical training in the practices of the piloting, the access and use of the platform, the installation of technical supports, the procedure of downloading LOs and the different methods of using the LOs. The tutors also went through the different stages of the procedure and tested the exercises. The students got instructions on how to use the platform and how to work with the LOs during their German course; this

means the blended learning method was used. In addition they got the Learner's Guide. Four of the students tested the material on an individual basis without lecturer, using the instructions in the Learner's Guide.

- **Comments:** the numerous meetings on the connectPro platform were highly appreciated. They helped to solve some technical problems and provided a useful platform for the exchange of experiences with the new method.

## Sweden

- **Students:** 23; almost all of the Svensk-Tyska Språkfonden (Schwedisch-Deutsch Sprachfond), which the German-Swedish Chamber of Commerce (GSCC) administrates
- **Language skills:** intermediate
- **Procedure:** The GSCC sent an introduction and the instruction guide(s) to the learners that had shown interest in joining the course. The learners were asked to check the platform, to test the system and the information they could access through the platform/system. They were also asked to do this by themselves and at their own pace. Whenever they should encounter problems, they were to email to the GSCC. The GSCC would then try to answer the questions – with the help of the IT-department at the GSCC and MKFC. The piloting took two weeks.
- **Problems that occurred:** it was difficult to keep the time schedule, since the learners could not easily enter the platform – this delayed the learning and piloting process (see below). MKFC could help with these technical questions. The learners felt that they needed more guidance through the platform and course. They also felt that the piloting course did not give them concrete added language skills.
- **Comments:** The help of a professional technical partner, in this case MKFC, made the actual piloting easier, because the partner could explain the actual problems in the students' mother tongue.

## 5.2 Experiences of the learners

This paragraph summarizes the experiences of the learners that took part in the piloting and presents comments on these from the project partners' point of view. Thus, this section of the report gives a good insight in the results of the piloting process.

In order to get a neutral feedback on the quality and usability of the platform and the system, a questionnaire for the external learners was developed. The questionnaire was put together with input from the whole project team during a transnational meeting. It was very positive for the shape of the

questionnaire that both the technical and the language partners were part of the creation process. This ensured that all parts of the project, the platform, the system and the test course, were evaluated in a professional way.

(The answers of the learners are to be found in annex 16: Webropol – results of the questionnaire)

Originally the questionnaire was created in English. In order to make it easier for the learners in the different countries where the piloting took place, the questions were translated into Estonian, Finnish, French and Swedish.

The questionnaires were then transformed into an electronic version by HAMK and the piloting partners in the selected countries sent them out via email to the learners after having finished the test course.

Unfortunately, the number of answers was not what we had hoped for. In France the number of questionnaires returned was very high. Also in Estonia the number of respondents was good, but in Finland and Sweden the number of answers was disappointing despite several reminders to the learners. A reason for this could have been that the target group consists of business people that have very limited spare time and, since the questionnaire was rather extensive, answering the questions could have been too much time consuming. Another aspect is the timing. The piloting and the sending out of the questionnaire was conducted in a very work intense time of the year.

When analysing the answers from the external learners one has to be aware of the limited number of answers that reached the project team.

The total amount of questionnaires returned was 28.

France – 14

Estonia – 7

Finland – 5

Sweden – 2

### **5.2.1 Demographics**

More than 60% of the respondents were female, most of them were between 25 and 35 years old and 75% were employees.

The answers reflect that most of the external learners had studied German both in primary and secondary school, but also that almost half of the learners had joined company training courses. This shows that the main part of the target group are business people that are both eager to learn on a regular basis and that speaking the German language seem to be of importance to them also professionally. Only in Finland the participating trainees had no knowledge of German. In this case they were students of Partner 3, who is

also responsible for the technical implementation. The idea then was only to test the technical functionality of the system and not the content of the LOs.

There is a rather great diversity concerning the length of the German studies. Most of the learners have studied German 5-7 years in secondary school. Some of them have even studied German at university. Concerning the company training courses, some courses have endured some months, others even several years.

### **5.2.2 General Comments**

Most of the learners expected the test course to improve their language skills (39,3%). Almost the same percentage of respondents thought that the course might improve their efficiency in every day's work (35,7%). One quarter of the learners hoped that the course could improve their competitiveness of their business / company (21,4%). These main aims stated by the learners correspond wonderfully with the intentions of the project's overall purpose, namely to provide the learners with a programme that enables them to improve their language skills, their work efficiency and competitiveness.

At the same time, the answers also show that more than 20% of the target group had no specific expectations before starting the piloting. One individual comment concerning pre-piloting expectations was to get a possibility to study the shape of modern language courses.

An interesting observation is that only 3,6% of the learners saw the improvement concerning cultural behaviour as an important aspect. The answers could give a hint on the dilemma concerning the link between language skills and cultural behaviour. There is always a risk that business people do not see and thus not stress the importance to study both parts. The language skills are almost always regarded as something much more important. Observing the cultural aspects when confronting a new foreign market is not always as self-evident. When companies start business on far away markets, the cultural differences are evident. But concerning markets within Europe, this is often neglected. This is not seldom a reason for business cooperation to fail. It is sad to get this thesis confirmed through the answers of the questionnaires and it gives a sign to stress the cultural components in language courses even more in the future.

Unfortunately, the answers also show that more than half of the learners only felt partly satisfied after having finished the course (57,1%). This means that the mentioned expectations could not be fully fulfilled. One reason for this overall impression by the learners could be that they did not see the system as a prototype. The piloting partners might not have been clear enough when communicating this fact. Or the system looked already that professional that

the learners forgot about the prototype character when conducting the course and got surprised when there were technical problems.

Another reason for the learners being only partly satisfied can be found in the defective working of the system. Many of the participating external individuals had enormous problems to get the system started, especially those who had to use the PC/laptop/notebook for the testing (and this was mainly true for the French target group that represents half of the questionnaire answers that were returned). A lot of problems occurred when installing the so called Emulator which moreover proved to be very instable. It is obvious that somebody with a full time job has no spare time for such a time consuming process. There needs to be an easy accessible platform for the work on the computer.

But, it should also be mentioned that more than 30% were satisfied and almost 4% were totally satisfied with the product. In this context, one has also to remember that the way of answering a questionnaire is very dependent on the individuals' cultural background. In some countries it would not be possible to choose the answer "Totally satisfied". In order to evaluate the actual level of satisfaction one should have the knowledge on which answers came from which country and also, to analyse the answers better, one should have a deeper understanding of all the different cultures included in the overall target group.

Even though there seemed to be several individuals that were not fully satisfied with the test course, more than half of the target group found their language skills to be improved after having joined the course (57,1%). Since this was the main and most important expectation stated by the learners before starting the course and the main purpose of the project as such, this is very positive for the evaluation of the piloting phase and the whole project.

The learners liked the learning method and concept as well as the content best. The technical implementation and the platform was not as popular among the learners as the two areas mentioned before. Almost half of the students think that the learning concept is working efficiently (46,4%). 32,1% would only agree partly to this statement.

Most of the learners think that the reblended kind of learning method fits into their working / studying environment in a good way (63 %). Only 7,4 % stated that the method did not fit into their working / studying environment at all.

Although almost all students agreed that this learning method is suitable to their learning habits (53,6 %) and is very likely to add value to traditional learning (82,2 %), almost non of the learners thought that it could substitute traditional learning fully (96,5 %). This indicates that the modern reblending learning method should be developed further in close cooperation with other

traditional learning methods and be linked to these language courses as a complement. In this context, we have to bear in mind that the tested version of the platform is a rather unrefined prototype of software, which is not very user friendly and not yet ready for serious marketing actions (no colours, no game like exercises etc). Possibly, a refined version could improve the evaluation of the users and improve the status of this new language learning method further.

None of the learners spend more than 8 hours per week on the test course. This is not a surprising answer, since the target group are busy professional employees that have fulltime jobs.

Almost all the problems that the learners encountered during the piloting process were technical issues (96,4 %). These answers verify the feeling that the piloting partners had before the piloting started. The technical questions had dominated the first and second phase of the piloting process were the team shared their own practical experience with the platform among each other. The technical partners made a lot of adjustments during these two phases, but not all issues could be solved before the actual external test course was started. It is only natural that if most of the time spent on the test course is wasted on technical problems, no learner will clearly see the full benefit of this kind of learning. On the other hand, the questionnaires show that almost no learner had any problems related to the content, the vocabulary or the comprehension. This is a very good evaluation concerning the language and cultural input to the platform and thus the course as a whole.

More than half of the target group stated that they would like to continue with a full course with the rebled language learning method (57,1 %), which is very positive and gives a solid base for continuing the development of the platform and system. The learners that would not like to continue with a similar full scale course mainly refer to the technical problems and the lack of time. In connection with the comments on the technical issues, which the project team already knew about before the piloting started, these comments further stress the future possibilities for this kind of modern learning method.

Another positive evaluation is that almost all the learners stated that they would recommend this kind of learning method to others (78,6 %).

An overall result is that the learners improved their language skills through joining the test course. If the time the learners used to solve technical problems during the piloting could be converted into real language learning the result would even be more than satisfactory.

### **5.2.3. Content**

The most popular content parts of the course were the telephone calls. 70,8 % of the learners mention this kind of learning material as their first choice. Also, listening comprehension (62,5 %), gap filling exercises (54,2 %) and speak and save replicas (33,3 %) were popular learning material.

An interesting result from the questionnaires is that even though the learners found the telephone calls and the listening comprehension to be the most efficient learning types, the popular exercises gap filling and speak and save replicas were only partly seen as being efficient. This shows that the popularity and efficiency of different learning types not always go hand in hand as one might think.

Since there were problems when the students tried to save their data or record their own voice, these technical issues could be a reason for why some of the types of exercises were being listed as inefficient. The recording is still a problem and can only be done off the platform with the normal recording tool of a mobile device, which does not prove to be very handy as the student has to leave the platform or the exercise undone and come back later. The saving of the data e.g. from filled out gaps must generally be doable, since this function would be one of the main advantages of the course. Without the saving tool the students will not be motivated to make the exercise, moreover it is necessary for a meaningful use of the portfolio. So it is no wonder that most of the learners thought that this type of exercise was not very useful and efficient.

Most of the learners thought that the language level of the course suited them (70,8 %). On the other hand, as much as 45,5 % of the students would only agree partly that they understood the task description without any problems. This shows that the instructions might need some further improvements and be clearer.

One of the reasons for the misunderstandings concerning the task description could have been the lacking correspondence between the task description and the actual technical implementation. Due to misinterpretations of the authors' script some of the technical implementations were done wrongly or not according to the original plan. Some of the tasks cannot be carried out due to technical insufficiencies (e.g. save documents or record ones own voice). It is also difficult to transfer the audio tasks back to the platform.

Also, the answers show a great variety concerning the learners' perception concerning how easy it was to get help when they got stuck. Half of the students thought that there was no problem to get help, but the other half did not agree on that. Since the learners had different levels of technical knowledge concerning their mobile devices used for the test course, this might be a reason for the diversity of the answers in this respect. Also, the individual tutors / pilots had different levels of technical knowledge and the

actual help was different in the involved markets. Despite of this possible explanation, the answers should give a sign that the learners support line and back up should be improved in the future.

The questionnaires show that the learned material can be used in real live environment and in every day's work. This is mainly true for the content areas which contain communication strategies/skills such as dialogues at the stand and telephone dialog / problem solving (65 % each). Also the areas writing emails (35 %) and presentations (20 %) were evaluated as well adapted to real live environment. Gathering data of the own company and filling out formularies were not as popular.

Interestingly, most of the students regarded conducting the test course enhanced their competitiveness (68 %). This is a very positive judgement, since the target group are business people for whom this kind of result from a language course is of great value. Regarding the extremely limited time of the test course, this is a very positive outcome of the piloting and project.

Less than a third of the learners used the extra features (27,6 %). One has to keep this in mind when analysing the answers concerning which features were used the most. The features that were most popular were the listening text (100 %), the reading text (85,7 %) and the culture info (71,4 %). Over 80 % of the students that uses the extra features did not use the grammar links at all. The main reason for this was that there were technical problems to enter this part of the platform. But, these answers also confirm the character of the target group. The individuals that joined the test course were all eager to get to know a new more modern kind of language course. And grammar, especially German grammar, is something that is intimately linked to traditional language courses. Unfortunately, also the cultural info was not used at all by almost 20 % of the learners.

Almost all the participating learners thought that the cultural tips and information were useful (81 %).

#### **5.2.4. PLATFORM / TECHNIQUE**

Most learners used the computer as testing device (57,1 %). 46,4 % used their telephone and 7,1 % used their PDA. This result is closely linked to the fact, that most of the respondents to the questionnaire were French learners. On the other markets the main testing device was the telephone.

The answers show that almost all of the learners thought that the platform and technique did not work without problems (96,2 %). There were problems when moving around on the platform. On the other hand, the text visibility was regarded as good and the text was easy to read. Most of the learners thought that the audio quality was good and that they could understand the

dialogues without any difficulty (83,3 %). Even though the audios were “home made” and the voices were not those of professional speakers, the audio quality was regarded as being acceptable. On a whole, the technical implementation requires further improvements.

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