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| **Practice** | **The E+ project "IRENE – Increase the empowerment of adults and migrants with specific learning disorders"** |
| **Source/Link** | www.irenelearning.eu |
| **Country/region/city** | Italy – Denmark– The Netherlands – Greece – Ireland – Spain - Austria |
| **Time frame** | 01/10/2018 – 31/12/2021 |
| **Sector** | ☐ VET<br>☐ School education<br>☐ Higher education<br>☒ Continuing vocational training<br>☐ Other (spec. _____) |
| **Target group** | The project's cohort are adults aged between 18 and 35 years who experience learning difficulties and are therefore discouraged to learn a foreign language. The project will support these adults undertaking a 'second opportunity' to learn outside the traditional school paths. Language teachers will be provided with didactic and methodological tools and will be trained to improve their skills when working with people with learning difficulties. |
| **Short description** | The IRENE project intends to fill the knowledge gaps through the production of three main outputs:<br>– Comparative research of existing teaching methodologies in the partner countries.<br>– Didactic approach introducing a model to develop learning content and guidelines.<br>– E-learning platform offering playful and stimulating modes for language learning. The platform will be structured in four separate sections: pronunciation; study; exploration and learning together. |
| **Methodologies and animation techniques used** | IRENE has developed a learning platform based on gamification techniques.<br>The learning platform is composed by 4 sections (each of them contain information and material from every partner in their native language and in English):<br>● PRONOUNCE: the learner will have the opportunity to learn and experience the pronunciation of individual words in order to come in contact with the sounds of the target language. They will also have the opportunity to test some of them and be given feedback. In order to accumulate the words for the "Pronounce" section of the e-learning platform, all partners must identify 500 of the most used words in their national language and populate a repository (the excel spreadsheet).<br>● STUDY: This section contains teaching modules on grammar and vocabulary via diversified media, real-situation dialogues, quizzes, and interactive exercises with focus on both comprehension and production. This section will be divided in five chapters, each of which includes five sections with a specific topic and certain goals. They will focus on different language elements and the learning outcomes for the platform users will also vary for every chapter. The linguistic material and elements that will be decided for the platform should cover topics concerning the introduction of oneself to others by giving personal information, the daily communication needed for everyday procedures, including shopping, ordering, asking for things and exploring a place, and ways to express an opinion on several topics of discussion, e.g., |

phrases, expressions etc. Accordingly, every chapter will be devoted to a certain environment in which dialogues will be developed by the main characters of the story in each case. It will include audio-visual material, rules and explanations of vocabulary and grammar content, exercises, and quizzes for the evaluation of the knowledge obtained. Every unit in the chapters will begin with the description of the learning objectives of the unit, then there will be a video with a conversation in the target language for the user to come in a first contact with the language. Continuing, educational material in the form of rules, tables and examples will be available, followed by exercises based on the educational content learned in the above part, and at the end of every unit there will be a short quiz for the user to take and thus assess his/her knowledge so far.

- EXPLORE: on the e-training platform which employs 3D reality, the learners will be asked to apply their language knowledge and skills acquired in the previous sections and solve given tasks. This kind of practice will be achieved through a story that will be created from every partner because it must include names, places of interest and generally cultural characteristics from every target country and language. A story is something that provides a context, gives a narrative character to the learning procedure, and provides hints to a culturally different environment in comparison to one's own. This story will take place and evolve in places where people move in their daily routine because the users must get in touch with informal verbal communication that serves certain operational purposes, as it becomes obvious from the categorization of the chapters and the material in every unit. The background of the story involves a main character that decides to go abroad on a one-week Erasmus+ exchange program.

- LEARN TOGHETER: a community with people who are interested in SDL, either as learners or as educators, will be created to communicate with other interested parts aiming at exchanging knowledge, experiences, and even resources. The "Learn together" section will have features aimed at building and managing a social network. This social network will consist of learners who aim at mutual knowledge and cultural exchange and desire to find a tool corresponding to their abilities and meeting their demands in the field of learning.

According to the needs of the target group, the course has been developed paying attention to functionalities and facilities that help adults with learning disorders to study a foreign language: short texts, fonts easy to read, attention to the phonetic aspects (through a voice recognizer to practice pronunciation).
Each partner customized the platform and the gamification to make the environment more communicative, easy to use and contextualized to each national context.

| **Digital solutions used** | VIFIN Course Creator (VCC) LEARNING PLATFORM to support the language course (theoretical sessions, exercises, games, evaluation, etc.): a LMS platform with speech recognition functionality. |
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| | GAMIFICATION – the EXPLORE section is built as a game (using UNITY platform): a virtual environment thought as a 3D game in which the trainee-avatar acts, in the language he/she is studying, as a protagonist of a story interacting and speaking with characters, making choices and solving problems within the city, using both game controls and voice. The trainee studies a language through a challenging game to obtain a final certificate delivered by Erasmo da Rotterdam. |

| Contents/issues on which methodologies and animation techniques are applied | From the existing research, we know that adults learning a FL need to be involved and to feel the possibility to apply the learning contents in their daily life. SLD adults learning a FL need above all to experiment positive learning experiences and success in what they are doing otherwise they feel disappointment and low self-esteem. They also need to learn coping strategies. Difficulties in perception, discrimination and production of sounds encountered in the mother tongue usually move into the study of a foreign language. In this respect, a suitable intervention takes into account the development and reinforcement of the learner's capacity to discriminate and produce sounds of a foreign language (FL/ L2). This is also true for the teaching of spelling which remains a major difficulty in dyslexic learners. As regards written language fonts, colour background and structure of materials must be adapted to suit the needs of dyslexic learners. Dyslexic adults reveal difficulties in the acquisition of an adequate vocabulary due to phonologic memory deficit and difficulties in word retrieval. Difficulties in learning a foreign language may vary depending on the specific features of mother language in comparison with the second language. SLD adults need to receive clear instructions. To decrease tension and create the best conditions for learning, an environment - where errors are permitted - is necessary.

A common standpoint is that all teachers involved with learners with special needs must adopt a holistic approach. They must take into consideration the environmental, educational, cognitive, social, emotional, economic, health, functional and vocational aspects of the learners. They have to create a positive learning environment, being inclusive and taking care of diversity in the classroom, collaborating with other teachers. Trends in FL teaching concentrate on the necessity to give attention to visual formatting.

ICT tools enable SLD students to work at their own pace, to achieve a higher accuracy in the work done and are found non-judgemental and non-threatening. On the other hand, sometimes cost and time remain two critical factors. ICT tools are used via visual, sensory, or auditory methods. Allowing a variation in the teaching methodologies that are suitable to the single learner and to individuals with special learning needs. They encourage learners to be autonomous. Dyslexic students seem to learn better when e-learning is mixed with more traditional approaches, with face-to-face interaction. Interaction in e-learning sessions may be guaranteed through the involvement of a human tutor who can give many kinds of instructions or demonstrate how to perform certain actions. As sessions progress, the tutor contributes significantly less as a result of the increased autonomy of the learner.

"Fil rouge" of the course is the acquisition of a language valorising the country culture: for each partner, real situations were created as a starting point, using significant places for each city. The lexicon (connected with each language) is contextualised on each specific culture: each partner identified the 500 most used words and the most difficult phonemes to use for a foreigner in learning a foreign language.

The testing phase involved each country: each partner tested the platform studying a foreign language. |
| Technical equipment | A PC with monitor and keyboard, headphones with a microphone. Broadband connection. |
| Experiences, findings, results, lessons learnt (Project internal view) | • The project design in 3 phases (research, content development and platform) worked and supported the development of the activities.<br>• The methodological choice to alternate playful activities with theoretical ones, self-evaluation tests, listening and of course gamification made the course effective. In general, mixing methods, tools and activities has positive outcomes in terms of engagement, attention and also learning process.<br>• The gamification makes the trainee the main character of his/her learning. It helps to practice the knowledge acquired in a protected environment like a real |

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| | one with a funny logic and out of the "traditional" learning settings. Nevertheless, findings suggest paying attention to use it because in the long run the videogame feature can be boring and repetitive. To be effective, the game experience must be short, contained and integrated with face-to-face teaching.<br>● The "speech recognition" tool works very well and has been appreciated: it is based on google speech recognition (Google Cloud Speech API) and allows you to listen to the pronunciation and correct it. Trainers appreciate a lot the pronunciation trainer, a digital support to the correction of pronunciation.<br>● The project has been carried out during the pandemic period and due to the consequences of the reduction of mobility, most of the activities have been designed and developed through remote meetings. The PS increased the ability to use digital tools to manage the project, to share docs, to work in groups and more effectively. For instance: Teams, Trello, Slack. |
| **Strengthen** | ● A platform that collects, under a common structure, different language courses (basic level) addressed to adults with learning disorders but easy to use also for different target groups.<br>● The digital solutions adopted let trainees able to learn a foreign language independently and organising on their own their learning time.<br>● The gamification included in the platform increases engagement and keep the trainees hooked on the course because make the course more dynamic.<br>● High sound quality in the recording materials (in comparison with other projects developed) |
| **Weaknesses** | ● The platform is usable only in asynchronous mode and individually. No interaction among trainees and tutoring is foreseen.<br>● The "LEARN TOGHETER" section has been poorly implemented.<br>● The game environment can be improved (graphic resolutions, attractiveness, and clarity). In comparison with previous projects, a greater innovative push would have been useful and appreciated.<br>● The testing phase was not so managed and based on the initiative and personal engagement of some trainers with a negative impact on the potential of the project<br>● The developing of "EXPLORE SECTION" requires specific skills and tools (i.e. 3D animation) that reduces transferability and customization.<br>● Lack of an impact assessment on the effectiveness of the project in reducing the difficulties of adults with learning disorders to study a foreign language.<br>● From an organizational point of view: two ongoing partnership changes affected the partnership's work.<br>● Regarding the whole project, the pandemic had a major and negative impact on some activities such as the debate with external stakeholders and the dissemination (this led to a certain self-referentiality of the project) |
| **Other relevant information** | |
| **Comments** | This practice is relevant because it uses gamification in integration with a learning platform and gamification solutions can be easily transferred in the practical and manual activity learning, especially in relation to the work processes and the professional tasks.<br>It confirms the relevance to mix different methods and digital solutions. The good practice is to mix tools to make lessons more dynamic. Digital tools do |

not replace physical presence of a trainers/teachers but enrich the practice because a trainer/teacher who knows and applies digital tools may have several tools to adapt to different contents, contexts and target groups and differentiating them inside a classroom.

This practice suggests that to teach practical and professional activities you can create virtual workplace settings in which a trainee can learn work processes, face problems typical to a profession, implement and simulate actions eliminating the risks of damage (for example security procedures).

**A contribution by**    *EnAIP Piemonte*