



XIX INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE

LATVIA

100:

**EXPECTATIONS,
ACHIEVEMENTS
AND
CHALLENGES**

**2018.
19.04.**

XIX Turība University Conference

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AND CHALLENGES**

Rīga, 19 April 2018

XIX Turība University Conference

LATVIA 100: EXPECTATIONS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

Rīga, 19 April 2018

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ISSN 1691-6069

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DEVELOPING STUDENTS' LANGUAGE AND INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCES IN AN INTERACTIVE BLENDED-LEARNING LANGUAGE COURSE

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ABSTRACT

Due to the changing situation in Europe, Language and intercultural competences have become core employability skills in tourism and hospitality sector. The wide spread of different on-line courses and the specifics of Languages for Special Purposes emphasize the necessity for specific pedagogic approaches in developing on-line learning materials and courses. The current summative/outcome evaluation research analyses the main findings of the first two stages of Erasmus+ project 'Unity in Diversity' (2016–2018) – the interactive blended-learning A2/B1 language course in 16 languages and the intercultural B2/C1 English language course to promote tourism students' language and intercultural competence. The aim: to evaluate the efficiency of the methods and methodologies applied in the courses designed and single out the improvements required. The results of a questionnaire survey and essays of 97 Turība University students piloting the courses created are analysed in the paper. Quantitative data were processed and analyzed applying SPSS software (descriptive and inferential statistics tests), qualitative data – applying discourse analysis. The strengths and weaknesses of the course have been identified and suggestions on how to eliminate the flaws provided.

Keywords: language competence, intercultural competence, interactivity, blended-learning

Introduction

Contemporary world shows changes in employability patterns and skills needed in the future. Cedefop latest research on skill supply and demand highlights Europe's employment challenges till 2025, among them the service sector as 'the main economic driver', and a shift 'towards knowledge-based and other consumer services' (Cedefop, 2016, 6–8). Moreover, the latest information released by the UN World Tourism Organisation in July 2017 (UNWTO Tourism Organisation Highlights: 2017 edition, 2017) declares that currently tourism accounts for 10 % of the world's GDP providing 7 % of the world's exports as well as 1 in 10 jobs worldwide is in tourism and hospitality industry.

At this stage it is important to reconsider the skills importance in the industry as well as search for new, innovative ways of their development. Previous researches (Donina, Luka, 2014; Wang, Tsai, 2014; Millar, Park, 2013; Sisson, Adams, 2013; Prachanant, 2012) reveal the industry's demand for qualitative specialists, fluent in several foreign languages, able to act in a meaningful and creative way. Due to increasing tourism flows, mobility for study and professional reasons, global migration processes in Europe, language skills, intercultural and digital competences have become even a more vital necessity to survive than ever before. Communication in many languages is not any longer regarded as an aim but is considered as a tool for participating in socially meaningful activities in everyday and professional setting. Thus, language and intercultural competences have become core employability skills in tourism and hospitality sector.

'A European Roadmap for Linguistic Diversity: Towards a new approach on languages as part of the European Agenda 2020' (2015) sets forth four main directions that have to be strengthened, emphasizing the dominant role of languages in social cohesion, personal, social and economic development and mobility as well as the use of ICT for enhancing language learning, promotion and vitality of all languages.

This coincides with the new priorities for European cooperation in Education and Training (Riga Conclusions, 2015) wherein the need for 'more active use of innovative pedagogies and digital skills and tools' to develop VET (vocational education and training) learners' employability skills for the changing labour market and contribution to cohesive society are stressed.

The research conducted in the framework of the Erasmus+ project 'Key Skills for European Union Hotel Staff', Project No.: 2014-1-HR01-KA2014-007224, duration 2014–2016 (Luka, 2016; 2015; Smilga, 2016; Komarovska, 2015; Vaidesvarans, Malavska, 2015) pointed to the most required foreign language skills in the tourism and hospitality industry in the project countries – English, German, French, Spanish, Russian, Italian, Swedish, etc., and to inadequate levels of hospitality industry employees' language skills. The problem was also evident in VET and higher education (HE) sector, including in Latvia, wherein students had quite limited third language skills and English skills not very adequate for the management level. Moreover, the evaluation of the project outcomes, served as a stimulus for searching for new innovative ways for developing VET and HE learners' employability skills to be competitive in the changing labour market and contribute to cohesive society. This idea lies at the core of the current project 'Language skills and intercultural issues in the hospitality industry: Unity in diversity in the EU labour market', Project No. 2016-1-HR01-KA202-022160, the project period 2016–2018, which has been elaborating and putting forward the results attained in the first project and by attracting new partners and applying new methodologies bringing the results a step further.

Thus, the current paper analyses the course evaluation results done by the students of *Turiba* University and identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the interactive A2/B1 blended-learning language course designed, focussing on English and Spanish specifically as the main foreign languages learnt by *Turiba* University students, and the piloting results of the intercultural B2/C1 blended-learning English course, comprising eight on-line modules supplemented with industry and culture specific case studies and creative, contemporary face-to-face tasks.

1. Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework is based on the theories of developing intercultural language competence in an interactive blended-learning LSP (Languages for Special Purposes) course.

Nowadays, **Languages for Specific Purposes** have become an inseparable part of foreign language curricula worldwide. The history of this discipline may be traced back to the 1960ies – 1980ies and to the contribution of such prominent linguists in the field of English for Special/Specific Purposes (ESP) as T. Dudley-Evans, A. Johns, T. Hutchinson, A. Waters (Ramirez, 2015). Although approaches and methodologies of teaching/learning ESP and LSP have been developing in the course of time (Paltridge, Starfield, 2014), the main grounds still remain the same: meeting the specific language needs of non-native speakers of the language (Upton, Connor, 2012), creating the course based on a versatile needs analysis and specifically tailored teaching/learning materials (Laborda, 2011). Considering the current trends in foreign language teaching/learning, the hot issues of LSP are a variety of topics and methodologies, 'the specific contexts of classrooms, businesses, and online media' (Johns, 2013, 22), and intercultural issues.

The wide spread of different on-line courses and the specifics of LSP emphasize the necessity for specific pedagogic approaches in developing on-line learning materials and courses. According to Colpaert (2006) four approaches may be identified: the technology-driven, attributes-based, affordances-based, pedagogy-based approaches.

The pedagogy-based approach has been selected for creating the language teaching/learning materials in the current project which initially involved detailed needs analysis concerning language teaching/learning purposes in a specific context, then the most appropriate method was selected, and finally technological requirements to make it work were described. The methodology applied to develop the course: blended-learning with on-line and face-to-face stages incorporating case study approach and interactivity in task creation.

Blended-learning approach was selected analysing its advantages over purely on-line learning courses (Luka, 2016, 139–141), the main one being its integrative character, correspondence to constructivism learning theory, creation of optimum learning conditions and fostering student-centred learning (Kaya, 2015). In this research blended-learning is defined as learning facilitated by effectively combining different modes of delivery, models of teaching, and styles of learning (Heinze, Procter, 2004) in the form of combination of dominant on-line learning with interactive and problem-based face-to-face activities targeted at developing LSP competence.

In order to develop students' problem solving and critical thinking skills and decision making required for work in the tourism and hospitality industry one of the methodologies applied in the current project is a case study approach.

Case study is a presentation of a concrete situation taken from professional or everyday life, which is displayed through specific facts, attitudes and opinions, on the basis of which a decision has to be taken (Kaiser, 1983), an analysis of a problem in a given situation to which no single solution exists (Fischer, et al., 2008). But it has to be noted that, although applying case study approach in university studies is a popular and customary trend nowadays, language teaching/learning case studies date back to 1988 only (Fischer, 2005) and they have become more common in language teaching/learning in LSP courses in the last decade.

In the current research case studies are defined as by Stone, Ineson (2015) – a learning strategy through which learners are required to consider debate and offer possible solutions to the problem questions stemming from real-life or simulated business situations based on personal or 'second-hand' experiences, observations, research, etc. to develop students' language and intercultural competence, creativity, problem-solving skills.

However, it has to be emphasized that there exists a significant difference between applying case studies for most of the disciplines and the language learning course. According to Fischer et al. (2008), in other disciplines the topic and the content of the case are directly related to aspects of the syllabus or subject taught or assessed; the content is the key element of the case study, and correctness and details are stressed. In language case studies content is a tool and the language becomes the objective of the activity; therefore, content is normally less detailed and results are assessed mainly for their linguistic competence. Moreover, in designing a language learning case study several factors have to be taken into an account:

- 1) not only the case – the problem, but also the texts and the tasks shall be authentic,
- 2) the case has to be of interest for the learner,
- 3) the topic shall be stimulating, controversial and complex and
- 4) it has to be a new topic for learners (otherwise, they will not consult the reading and listening material of the case study). (Fischer, et al., 2008)

In many cases, a country-specific problem is more attractive for learners, although this might be less important for English, which has become the language of international communication.

The following types of language case studies may be applied in teaching/learning LSP (Fischer, et al., 2009; Fischer, et al., 2008, Fischer, 2005):

- 1) *Retrospective case studies* wherein students are dealing with a case in the past, for which a solution has already been developed and then they analyze the solution made;
- 2) *Decision-making case studies* wherein students are dealing with a case in the present, where a solution still has to be found;
- 3) *Open case studies* which do not contain all the information that students will need but include further search activities;
- 4) *Closed case studies* when all the necessary information is provided by teachers and students have the same information at hand when trying to solve the problem;
- 5) *Paper-based case studies* when students are taught to deal with a large amount of text and find relevant information in a large database within a limited time frame;
- 6) *Internet-based case studies* wherein reading material is normally presented in a more structured way, helping students to find their path through the material.

In blended-learning case studies may include the alternating use of Internet-based and paper-based case studies, with homework activities in one situation and in-class activities in the other, combined with 'traditional' language learning activities, which gives the teacher a chance to alternately work with students in well-prepared and in spontaneous oral production, as in one case the students will have enough time to prepare their arguments or discussions in detail, and in the other they will have to present spontaneously with hardly any preparation (Fischer, et al., 2008). This gives an opportunity to vary the modes of teaching/learning, use in practice any of the above-mentioned case studies thus contribution not only to developing students' language and intercultural competences but also foster various employability skills, such as the skills of reasoning, decision making, lateral thinking, etc.

Interactivity is ensured by incorporating in the learning platform interactive tools (games, video tasks, interactive websites, dialogues, crosswords, embedding real-time data in learning, etc.) for language teaching/learning. These methodologies are technically implemented by using specially designed Moodle Learning Platform.

The aim of the current research is to evaluate the efficiency of the methods and methodologies applied in the courses designed and single out the improvements required.

2. Methods

Context

The study presents the results of the research conducted within Erasmus+ project 'Language skills and intercultural issues in the hospitality industry: Unity in diversity in the EU labour market' (Project No. 2016-1-HR01-KA202-022160; 2016–2018). Nine countries (Latvia, Croatia, the UK, Italy, Slovenia, Romania, Lithuania, Czech Republic and Turkey) have been collaborating on the project addressing the specific objectives of Erasmus+ programme in the field of education and training: 1) improve the level of key competences and skills (employability skills, language and intercultural competences), with particular regard to their relevance for the labour market (tourism and hospitality industry) and their contribution to cohesive society (providing better cultural awareness and increased language competence); 2) improve teaching/learning of languages and promote the EU's broad linguistic diversity and intercultural awareness (language teaching/learning courses integrating culture of European countries developed),

and foster creativity in language learning. The project targeted 16 languages: English, Italian, Croatian, Latvian, Slovenian, Roman, Hungarian, German, French, Russian, Spanish, Greek, Lithuanian, Swedish, Czech and Turkish.

Research Type and Research Question

The current paper analyses the results of the first two project stages – an interactive A2/B1 language level blended-learning course in 16 languages, focussing on English and Spanish, and an intercultural B2/C1 English course in Latvia.

In order to evaluate the efficiency of the courses created *summative/outcome evaluation research* was conducted (O'Leary, 2010) applying a students' survey and analysing students' essays.

The research question: has the pedagogy-based approach selected for the course creation been efficient and what are the main strengths and challenges of the created courses?

Sample

97 students (15 groups of students) were involved in the evaluation research. Students' profile: 73 studied *Tourism Management*, 8 *Events Management*, 7 *Business Administration* and 9 *International Communication*; 37 were local students, 60 international students; they piloted A2/B1 English course (59 students), A2/B1 Spanish course (13 students) and B2/C1 English course (62 students). Some students have piloted two or three courses created.

All 97 respondents have marked that they can speak English, but there are also Spanish (48 students), German (19 students), Turkish (16 students), French (15 students), Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Slovenian, Lithuanian, Swedish, Chinese, Ukrainian, Uzbek, Arabic speakers. 45 students speak Latvian (for 25 it is their mother tongue) and 68 students speak Russian (for 31 it is their mother tongue or the second official language of their country).

The sample is multicultural which corresponds to the student structure of the University. The students studied English and Spanish courses, so it is essential to see their language competence of these languages. As to the English language competence, 4 students had C2 competence level, 19 students – C1 level, 51 – B2 level, 15 – B1 level and 8 – A2 level. Concerning the students piloting the Spanish course, all students were beginners or false beginners; their language level was A1 and lower. However, they practiced some of the tasks created for the A2/B1 Spanish language course.

Research Methods

The course piloting lasted for 3 months. The students had an introductory workshop to learn the interactive learning platform, then they did on-line tasks independently, in parallel they had regular group meetings to do face-to-face tasks and case studies. After the course piloting the students filled in evaluation questionnaires and wrote essays on the topic.

The questionnaire comprised 97 questions including attribute and 38 Likert scale type opinion variables (Dillman, 2007). The questionnaire covered the evaluation of the learning platform, course content, methodologies and skills development.

Quantitative data analysis was done applying descriptive and inferential statistics methods by SPSS – frequencies, means, modes; to find significant differences between the groups due to not-normal empirical distribution Mann-Whitney test (for 2 groups) and Kruskal-Wallis Test (for <2 groups) (Walliman, 2016), qualitative data analysis – applying discourse analysis (Fawcett, Pockett, 2015).

The reliability coefficient shown in Reliability Statistics table displayed as a simple Cronbach's Alpha indicates very good internal consistency reliability for the scales with the given sample ($\alpha=0.946$).

Results and Discussion

Students evaluated the interactive learning platform created, the interactive A2/B1 language course – English and/or Spanish, the intercultural B2/C1 English course. As mentioned above, the evaluation was done by filling-in specially designed feedback questionnaires and writing essays wherein the students could express their opinion on the platform, and the courses created or simply leave their comments for the improvement to be done. Below the results attained are summarized and analyzed applying mixed-mode analysis approach – qualitative data (students' essays) are used to validate the quantitative data (questionnaire data).

Evaluation of the Interactive Learning Platform

Students highly evaluated the interactive learning platform – the means ranging from 2.9588 to 3.6701 (max=4.0000), the modes mainly 4.00 and 3.00. Students found the interactive learning platform useful (mean=3.6701), visually appealing (mean=2.9588), interesting (mean=3.4639), interactive and creative (mean=3.3093), well structured (mean=3.0000), and they will suggest it to other learners (mean=3.4330).

In the essays students expressed their satisfaction with the learning platform. The keywords associated with the platform are *useful, good, liked, learnt*. Some quotations to illustrate this are provided below:

- This platform is structured very good and useful for the students in this field;
- It was a really good experience for me and it is useful for the students of Tourism and Hospitality field;
- I liked this learning platform. Now I know the level of my knowledge. I want to use this platform again and again. It showed my mistakes truly, and I checked my results immediately;
- I learnt some vocabulary and improved my reading and speaking skills. I liked an interface of this quiz.

Apart from only positive comments, students also indicated the issues that did not work well or even the mistakes they found. This feedback is very significant to eliminate the flaws, for example:

- I liked the creativity of the tasks. But there are no pictures;
- I liked it so much. The activities are very useful. It improves vocabulary. As I opened the 'Management Offices' the audio automatically started playing – I disliked it.

No significant differences were found between the opinion of local and international students (Asymp.Sig.2-tailed=0.063-0.848), except for the variable 'found the platform interesting' (Asymp.Sig.2-tailed=0.028), wherein the international students have a higher evaluation (Mean Rank=53.29) than the local students (Mean Rank=42.04). No significant differences were found by the students' field of study (Asymp.Sig.2-tailed=0.081-0.852), except for the variable 'found the platform useful' (Asymp.Sig.2-tailed=0.038), with a lower Mean Rank=31.25 for *Events Management* students. By the students' English language level: the higher the students' English language competence level, the more visually appealing they find the platform.

By the language courses done, the students piloting the Spanish course have found the platform less useful (Mean Rank=37.31) than those piloting both English courses (Mean Rank=50.81) wherein significant difference is confirmed (Asymp.Sig.2-tailed=0.035). They also found it more difficult to understand how to do the tasks (Mean Rank=35.27) than the students doing the English courses (Mean Rank=51.13) wherein significant difference is confirmed (Asymp.Sig.2-tailed=0.036). This might be

explained with a low level of students' Spanish competence (A1), but the course created is envisaged for A2/B1 competence level. However, in the essays the students admitted that the course '*was good but a little bit hard to use*'. But, they appreciated '*the creativity of the tasks*' and '*liked an interface of this quiz*'. Some students found the platform easy to use, for example, '*I liked this project, it is easy to understand and students can get useful knowledge from this project*' and '*everything was clear, easy to understand and really useful*' which points to the necessity for a language teacher to draw students' attention to the details of the interactive course in the pre-course workshop. It is also suggested to provide regular consultancy to students during the on-line learning phase.

The students doing A2/B1 English course found the learning platform more interactive and creative (Mean Rank=53.64) than those piloting other courses (Mean Rank=41.14), wherein significant difference is confirmed (Asymp.Sig.2-tailed=0.020). A significant difference is also confirmed (Asymp.Sig.2-tailed=0.031) concerning how easy it was to understand the result. The students doing A2/B1 English course had understood it better (Mean Rank=52.91 vs. Mean Rank=42.38) than others.

However, overall, the findings concerning the platform may be generalised (most of Asymp.Sig.2-tailed >0.05) – the platform is suitable to all learners.

Evaluation of the Intercultural B2/C1 English Course

As regards the B2/C1 intercultural English course the students found the tasks useful (mean=2.3505, mode=4.00), easy to understand (mean=2.2577, mode=4.00); the case studies – useful (mean=2.1443), interesting (mean=2.1546), creative (mean=2.0103); admitted having learnt vocabulary (mean=2.0722), developed reading skills (mean=2.0206), gained general and intercultural knowledge (mean=2.1237). *Table 1* provides a summary of students' feedback questionnaire.

Table 1

Evaluation of B2/C1 English Course (n=62; %)

No.	Variables for evaluation	Agree		More agree than disagree		More disagree than agree		Disagree	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	I found the online tasks useful	42	67.74	16	25.81	4	6.45	0	0
2	I found the online tasks easy to understand	35	56.45	22	35.48	5	8.06	0	0
3	I found the online tasks interesting	32	51.62	24	38.71	4	6.45	1	1.61
4	I found the online tasks interactive, creative	25	40.32	29	46.77	8	12.90	0	0
5	The online tasks took too long to answer	9	14.52	25	40.32	17	27.42	11	17.74
6	I had to go back to the text to find the answer	20	32.26	11	17.74	18	29.03	12	19.35
7	The information obtained has increased my knowledge on the topic	28	45.16	25	40.32	7	11.29	1	1.61
8	I learnt some vocabulary on the topic	29	46.77	21	33.87	8	12.90	2	3.23
9	I developed my listening skills	24	38.71	12	19.35	10	16.13	12	19.35
10	I developed my reading skills	25	40.32	23	37.10	11	17.74	2	3.23
11	I developed my grammar habits	22	35.48	19	30.65	12	19.35	9	14.52
12	I found the case studies useful	29	46.77	28	45.16	2	3.23	0	0
13	I found the case studies interesting	29	46.77	27	43.55	4	6.45	0	0
14	I found the case studies creative	24	38.71	26	41.94	8	12.90	1	1.61
15	I found face-to-face tasks useful	23	37.10	24	38.71	5	8.06	6	9.68
16	I found face-to-face tasks interesting	20	32.26	26	41.94	8	12.90	4	6.45
17	I found face-to-face tasks creative	22	35.48	24	38.71	6	9.68	6	9.68

Comparing the results, it can be seen that the answers *agree* and *more agree than disagree* prevail which points to the high evaluation of the B2/C1 course. The reverse question 'the online tasks took too long to answer' also got quite a high evaluation as mode=3.00 and mean=2.4545, although this result is comparatively lower than for other questions which may be explained by the fact that most of the reading texts for B2/C1 English course were long and contained specific complicated professional lexis which might require a longer time to understand them as well as 'to go back to the text to find the answer' – mean=2.5 and domineering modes=4.00 and 2.00. This means that some students perceived the tasks as difficult and/or complicated.

The students' comments in the essays are also very significant in order to improve the course. Several students pointed out that the course is useful but not interesting enough, for example:

- I found the on-line tasks useful, but not enough interesting. The platform is interactive and creative. Simple questions but sometimes there are some mistakes. Design is interesting and looks easy to operate.

On the contrary, concerning usefulness and creativity of the tasks, mostly positive comments were received. The following adjectives characterise them: *interesting, creative, useful*. The students can see their benefits and will suggest the platform to their peers, for example:

- I think that these on-line tasks were really interesting and useful. I liked them and I suggest to everyone to do them. I developed my reading and listening skills as well as my grammar;
- I liked video in topics about different cultures. It was not only funny but also useful. I improved my vocabulary not only in English but also in other languages;
- I learnt how to behave in face-to-face interview and also I took many useful things from this platform. I learnt new words as well. I will use this platform in the future;
- This project is very creative and interesting. I think student can get enough knowledge via this project. It helps to improve IT skills also, not only English. Thank you!

The students also pointed to some technical problems, such as, problems with videos, audio tasks, '*some answers are too long and difficult to understand*', etc. One of the students admitted: '*I found it useful, although I am not enjoying doing tasks on-line. I prefer doing them on the printed paper.*' This has to be taken into consideration when selecting the language teaching/learning methods and tasks, providing students with some alternative options to choose from.

No significant differences were found between the local and international students (Asymp.Sig.2-tailed=0.074-0.947). By the specialisation significant differences were found for developing listening skills (Asymp.Sig.2-tailed=0.008), reading skills (Asymp.Sig.2-tailed=0.010), grammar habits (Asymp.Sig.2-tailed=0.022). The Mean Ranks are higher for the students of *Business Administration* and *International Communication*, which points to the fact that they benefited more in learning additional information in another field. By the English language competence level: the higher the students' English language level, the less useful they found the tasks (Mean Ranks for C1=17.50, C2=35.97 vs. B2=53.18, B1=51.87, A2=63.69; Asymp.Sig.2-tailed=0.006). Similarly, they found the tasks less interesting (Mean Ranks: C1=35.66, C2=18.00 vs. A2=63.25, B1=53.77, B2=52.76; Asymp.Sig.2-tailed=0.008), less interactive and creative (Mean Ranks: C1=36.24, C2=17.50 vs. A2=68.44, B1=49.50, B2=53.03; Asymp.Sig.2-tailed=0.004). Consequently, they have developed their language skills less than A2, B1 and B2 users (Asymp.Sig.2-tailed=0.001-0.016) and acquired less general knowledge (Mean Ranks: C1=36.05, C2=18.00) than the students having A2 (Mean Rank=62.13), B1 (Mean Rank=53.80) and B2 (Mean Rank=52.78) language competence level. The conclusion: the tasks might be too easy for C1 and C2 learners, the long C1 texts might seem boring, comprehension tasks not interactive enough.

As B2/C1 English course has been supplemented with case studies and face-to-face tasks it is essential to compare the results according to the 3 categories: on-line learning tasks, case-studies and face-to-face tasks. *Figure 1* depicts their comparison according to the joint three parameters: the usefulness of the tasks, how interesting the tasks are and their creativity.

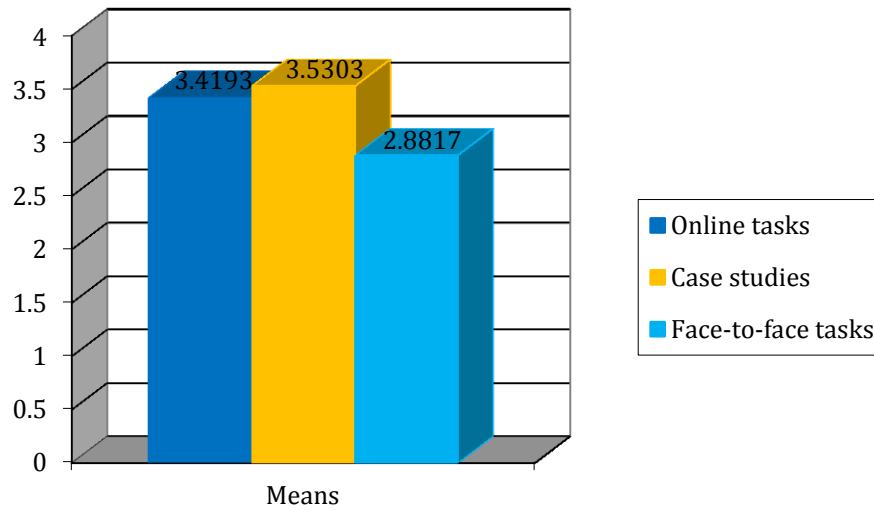


Figure 1. Comparison of online tasks, case studies and face-to-face tasks (max mean=4.0000)

As the results show a difference among the three categories, it has been decided to compare each of the issues separately (see *Figure 2*).

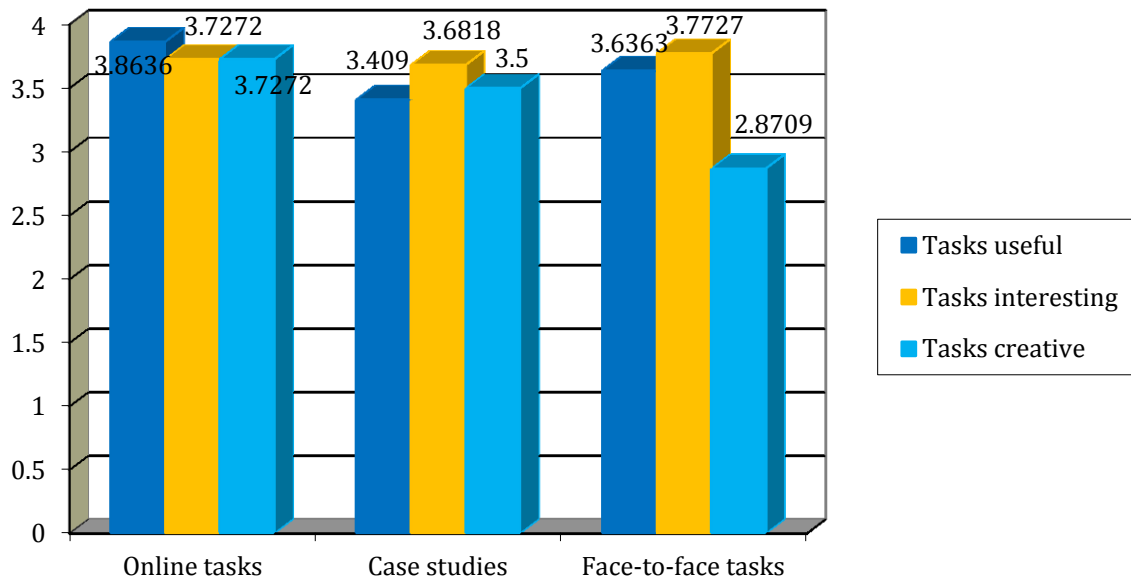


Figure 2. Comparison of on-line tasks, case studies and face-to-face tasks by their usefulness, how interesting they are and creativity (max mean=4.0000)

As it can be seen from *Figure 2* there is no difference between the parameters ‘useful tasks’ and ‘interesting tasks’ but for face-to-face tasks, disregarding the fact that lots of innovative elements have been added to the course, such as webquests, project work applying Internet-based research and fieldwork, the mean is comparatively lower for creativity (mean=2.8709) than for on-line tasks and case studies. This is a stimulus for further project ideas on working on more creative face-to-face tasks, indeed. A more in-depth study of various sources available shall be done in order to derive some ideas for creating more creative face-to-face tasks.

Evaluation of the A2/B1 Language Courses

Concerning A2/B1 courses, the students highly evaluated the usefulness of tasks (mean=2.2990, mode=4.00), found them easy to understand (mean=2.2887, mode=4.00) and interesting (mean=2.1237, mode=4.00), interactive and creative (mean=2.1237) and they acknowledged having learnt useful knowledge (mean=2.1237). Concerning other variables, the evaluation is comparatively lower than for the previously-mentioned ones (means ranging from 1.9691 to 1.3093).

In order to find problem issues, the analysis by the language courses (English and Spanish) was done. Below, in *Table 2*, the students' evaluation of A2/B1 English course is provided.

Table 2

Evaluation of A2/B1 English Course (n=59; %)

No.	Variables for evaluation	Agree		More agree than disagree		More disagree than agree		Disagree	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	I found the tasks useful	44	74.58	13	22.03	2	3.39	0	0
2	I found the tasks easy to understand	46	77.97	10	16.95	3	5.08	0	0
3	I found the tasks interesting	38	64.41	18	30.51	3	5.08	0	0
4	I found the tasks interactive, creative	29	49.15	26	44.07	4	0	0	0
5	The tasks took too long to answer	7	11.86	13	22.03	20	33.89	19	32.20
6	I had to go back to the text to find the answer	15	25.42	22	37.29	11	18.64	11	18.64
7	The information learnt increased my knowledge on the topic	31	52.54	24	40.68	2	3.39	2	3.39
8	I learnt some vocabulary on the topic	28	47.46	16	27.12	12	20.33	3	5.08
9	I developed my listening skills	20	33.89	15	25.42	11	18.64	11	18.64
10	I developed my reading skills	28	47.46	18	30.51	9	15.25	3	5.08
11	I developed my grammar habits	26	44.07	17	28.81	9	15.25	6	10.17

In the essays the students expressed their comments on the course. Overall, they enjoyed the course, for example, *'I really liked the module. It is a different way of learning while testing your knowledge by giving certain answers'*.

The students also suggested definite proposals for improving the course. Most students found listening tasks useful and necessary, e.g., *'It was interesting and useful to listen to the tasks and answer the questions', 'I like everything in this testing and it is very beneficial to increase your listening skills. It is a very good way to learn something new and more technique of study'*, but they also pointed out how to improve listening tasks:

- Listening tasks should be more attractive and maybe there should be some illustrations as well;
- The video of listening task was not working and I couldn't complete the task and left it blank.

One of the students liked matching tasks, but disliked gap fill. They also suggested that in matching tasks they would prefer a change: *'It would be more comfortable for me if the variants, I've chosen, became unavailable, so I don't have to waste my time on rereading (when there are "arrow down" questions)'*. The students also complained that in some questions the right answers had been indicated as wrong as well as that some answers were grammatically incorrect. It has to be assumed that the tasks have to undergo rigorous check to eliminate such flaws. One of the students who has done international collaboration quiz enjoyed it but also admitted that it is really time consuming. To sum up, the students recognized the interactivity and creativity of the tasks: *'I liked the creativity of the tasks. Right now I do not have anything which I did not like'*.

Two groups piloted the Spanish course – 13 students, altogether. The students piloted the modules in the class workshop with their Spanish teacher, as the groups had just some Spanish language competence

(A1 level and lower). One of the groups was the first year *Tourism Management* students, a group of 7 international students studying Spanish for the second semester and they did the module *Restaurant*. Although the students had studied Spanish for two semesters only, they liked the platform and they found it 'a different way of learning'. They evaluated the tasks as 'interactive', 'creative', 'interesting', but half of a group also admitted that they needed a lot of time to do the tasks. So, this is evident that for A2/B1 level more prior knowledge and language skills are needed.

The second workshop was held for another group of the first year *Tourism Management* students, a group of international students studying Spanish for the first semester. Six students were present and they did the module *Restaurant Kitchen*. Although the students were of A1 level only, they were able to do some tasks and found them 'clear, easy to understand and really useful' and they also liked 'an interface of this quiz'.

Table 3 provides a summary of the students' feedback questionnaire.

Table 3

Evaluation of A2/B1 Spanish Course (n=13; %)

No.	Variables for evaluation	Agree		More agree than disagree		More disagree than agree		Disagree	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	I found the tasks useful	8	61.54	3	23.08	1	7.69	0	0
2	I found the tasks easy to understand	6	46.15	4	30.77	2	15.38	0	0
3	I found the tasks interesting	10	76.92	1	7.69	2	15.38	0	0
4	I found the tasks interactive, creative	8	61.54	3	23.08	1	7.69	0	0
5	The tasks took too long to answer	2	15.38	2	15.38	4	30.77	4	30.77
6	I had to go back to the text to find the answer	3	23.08	3	23.08	3	23.08	2	15.38
7	The information learnt increased my knowledge on the topic	7	53.85	3	23.08	2	15.38	0	0
8	I learnt some vocabulary on the topic	8	61.54	3	23.08	1	7.69	0	0
9	I developed my listening skills	5	38.46	3	23.08	2	15.38	2	15.38
10	I developed my reading skills	8	61.54	2	15.38	2	15.38	0	0
11	I developed my grammar habits	6	46.15	4	30.77	1	7.69	1	7.69

In the essays most students gave positive evaluation praising 'creativity', 'clarity', 'usefulness' of the course. However, at the same time they acknowledged that 'it was good but little bit hard to use it' and 'I liked it very much but sometimes tasks did not accept the words that were translated correctly'. It has to be added that the students were beginners of Spanish and most probably they have selected other synonym for the word required.

Concerning A2/B1 course evaluation, no significant differences were discovered in terms of the students' English language competence level (Asymp.Sig.2-tailed=0.083-0.897), but significant differences were found for all the 11 variables evaluating A2/B1 language courses in terms of the students' field of studies (Asymp.Sig.2-tailed=0.001-0.008). In all the variables the students studying *International Communication* have given a significantly lower score compared to the students of other fields, wherein the Mean Ranks differ 2-3 times. This may be explained with the fact that A2/B1 courses were initially created for tourism and hospitality industry employees and therefore they are industry specific. Another reason for a comparatively lower evaluation could be caused by the fact that one of the groups had used mobile phones for the workshop and they could not learn the platform in detail as the course is primarily intended for e-learning, not m-learning. However, the findings of the B2/C1 course piloting done by the students of *International Communication* were opposite to those gained at the A2/B1 course piloting. As discussed above, the students of *International Communication* admitted having learnt

more than other students. This confirms the cognitions of the theory (Lu, Chang, 2016) that the materials have to be very carefully designed considering the authenticity and the professional context. Thus, in order to evaluate the possibility of using A2/B1 materials for the students of other fields, a thorough prior needs analysis has to be performed. As argued by Dudley-Evans (2001) it has been an essential prerequisite of a successful language course since the dawn of ESP. The needs analysis shall involve the target situation analysis (the objective needs), the learning situational analysis (subjectively felt needs), the present situation analysis (the investigation of learners' weaknesses), and the means analysis (analysis of the learning situation within the teaching institution) (Dudley-Evans, 2001). However, in practice a contradiction is observed therein as the course syllabi were created when preparing the curriculum for licensing in order to be granted the rights of enrolling the students into the curriculum. The syllabi created are being updated every year considering the situation in the field and the stakeholders' needs but it has to be emphasized that this process takes place in spring when the teachers have not had a chance to meet their potential students. Such are the requirements of an academic calendar and planning processes. As a solution to improve the existing situation, when starting the new academic year the language teacher conducts a needs analysis of the target group to define their language competence level so that appropriate language teaching/learning materials may be selected. Tailoring one's own language teaching/learning materials is a very time-consuming process, therefore, the teacher is provided an opportunity to use the materials of the current learning platform but a scrupulous selection is required, the same as when selecting the language teaching/learning course books and other materials.

Conclusions

To sum up, students acknowledged having learnt professional lexis and developed their language skills. The majority of them found the tasks useful, interesting and easy to understand. Although the students denied lots of time needed for doing the tasks, the teachers' observations showed that the students disliked reading long, demanding texts as they are used to reading short texts very fast. On the second thoughts, exactly these texts provided them with additional professional knowledge in the field which the students highly evaluated. The same refers to Intercultural module, where the texts for reading are quite demanding but the students highly evaluated the knowledge acquired and language skills developed when doing this module.

The respondents found the Learning program useful, interesting and attractive. Most of them would be glad to use it for their independent studies and improving their language competence as well as recommend it to others. The students pointed to certain issues that still have to be improved in the course. Their feedback is very significant for improving the course. The piloting results are also helpful in other future projects in the language teaching/learning field.

Considering the students' feedback provided in the questionnaire and essays and the language teachers' observations during the course piloting phase, the following strengths may be identified:

- The curriculum created is flexible for implementation, as the course consists of a certain number of modules which may be acquired separately or even focussing on some of the tasks within a module only, thus the course may be adapted for using not only for Tourism and Hospitality industry students but also for the students of other fields;
- The Moodle learning platform, having received a high evaluation from the students, is attractive, modern and flexible, and can easily be adapted for different target groups and various needs;

- The multilingual character of the course (similar A2/B1 course developed in 16 languages) enables learning the same phrases in several languages and, if needed, finding an adequate phrase in another language which is especially useful for the future Tourism and Hospitality industry employees as well as for anyone who is in direct contact with foreigners at work or when travelling;
- The case studies created for the B2/C1 English course and for C1 country modules enable students preparing for specific problem situations in their field and, as admitted by the students in feedback essays, the case studies help understanding different cultures and increase their cultural awareness consequently preparing them for their future professional career. The same concerns the 'Intercultural module' which the students highly evaluated both in the questionnaire and essays.

The challenges identified:

- Certain technical problems were discovered with audio tasks and gap-fill tasks which have to be eliminated, although it has to be added that this is one of the drawbacks of on-line learning tasks as it is not possible to predict all the options of providing the correct answer to the task. Therefore, it is essential to provide students with an opportunity of receiving a language teacher's consultancy during all the learning period as well as select appropriate pedagogic approach in developing on-line learning materials;
- According to the students' survey and essays, it is evident that creativity and originality of the B2/C1 tasks is still a question under debate. Although certain improvements have been done in this respect, not all the students find this course creative enough. This is a further challenge to decide what kind of learning material shall be included to convert the B2/C1 course more creative and up-to-date.

As the research shows, implementing the pedagogy-based approach (Colpaert, 2006) which postulates the necessity of creating a course based on the results of a detailed needs analysis of language teaching/learning goal in the specific context, selecting the most suitable methods and then defining the technological requirements for the on-line learning platform to be created, has been successful in the case under the investigation.

Acknowledgments

The current research has been conducted within the Framework of the Erasmus+ project 'Language skills and intercultural issues in the hospitality industry: Unity in diversity in the EU labour market', Project No.: 2016-1-HR01-KA202-022160, the project period 2016–2018. The project has been funded with the support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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