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Summary report

Christel Schneider

christel.schneider@icc-languages.eu

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0. INTRODUCTION

The pilot course contents were developed by the PELLIC project partners: Eberhardt Karls University Tübingen (EKUT), Germany, Florida Centro de Formació,(FLORIDA) Spain, University of West-Bohemia (UWB), Czech Republic, King's College, London (KCL), UK and ICC – the international language association, Germany. The courses were conducted simultaneously in Finland, Germany, Spain and Czech Republic and lasted 8 weeks, from October to December 2010, providing students with an opportunity to practice business communication by simulating a real enterprise.

During the 8 weeks training phase students were to practice skills in presenting their company, making and receiving phone calls, practice buying and selling, contacting customers, marketing and negotiating online. Apart from improving their English language skills students practiced their business skills such as compiling a business plan, studying advertising strategies and planning a company website.

The pilot courses were evaluated in various ways. After each unit students had the opportunity to assess the unit as regards to clarity of instructions, quality of material, workload and time management as well as their own performance. This feedback was collected and evaluated by EKUT, responsible for the VLE on Moodle.

Apart from the students' evaluation all tutors running the pilot courses also evaluated their courses, considering what worked well, what didn't work well and what suggestions for improvements could be given for future courses.

1 Pilot courses

Two courses were carried out in the participating countries in Spain, Finland, Czech Republic and one course was carried out in Germany.
The number of participants in the different courses varied from 4 (CZ), 13 (DE), 19 (FI) to 26 (ES). The age group of participating students was between 18 and 25 years. The level of English in all groups was supposed to be between B1 and B2, however, some students had a lower level of English knowledge.
The courses in Spain, Czech Republic and Finland were run at the universities of each partner organisation, in Germany the course was run at a vocational college.
The teaching experience of the tutors facilitating the courses ranged from 5 – 20 years in the area of language teaching and/or teacher training.
Technical skills as regards to working with Moodle varied from absolute expertise to getting along with it, which seems to be reflected in the feedback of whether the VLE was considered easy to access or whether challenges were encountered.

The set up of the pilot courses varied in the different partner countries. Some courses were carried out face-to-face in a language lab environment, equipped with computers to carry out the online assignments. In other courses a weekly 90 minutes face-to-face session was used to complement the e-learning parts of the course. In this case the face-to-face sessions were mainly used for reporting on tasks carried out during the week, preparation of upcoming tasks, as well as evaluating outcomes and focusing on language and style aspects.
It was reported from one of the tutors (EKUT) that the face-to-face sessions showed their best results when students were preparing for a complex task (distribution of responsibility, group discussion, e.g. about the business plan) and when tasks were performed during the session (e.g. an additional task about negotiating a subcontracting agreement between the two local companies).

1.1 Things that worked well

1.1.1 General aspects

In all courses piloted, teachers reported a high motivation curve at the beginning of the course. The students were generally very positive about the course and satisfied with their own work during the PELLIC pilot course (CZ). The students appreciated the possibility to work in an international environment as well as learning about running a small company. Those students being used to working with technology had no problems and were highly motivated to exchange information on the platform and use the applications provided. They worked independently and very well in their teams. Evaluation, self-assessment and individual feedback helped individuals and the group in their progress and the majority of students worked well on the course outside the classroom. Some found it more difficult than others to devote extra time to the course outside the scheduled classes.

The quality of contributions throughout the course was fairly good. The students' degree of involvement in the course was quite high as well as their level of interaction with the trainers. Peer support was given throughout the course and there was instant support from tutors throughout the course.

The completed assignments were submitted to the File Repository (Moodle database).

The course facilitators themselves also took the opportunity to interact with other tutors during the piloting phase and considered this as very useful.

1.1.2 Motivational aspects

Motivation is always a good trigger to engage students on a course. On this course the motivating factors were:
- getting involved with international student groups and
- receiving a certificate at the end of the course.

Demonstrating their products in the classroom and the provision of group- feedback not only helped to improve the materials students had produced, but encouraged students to lively discussions about the company advertisement and website for example.

Tasks such as writing a business plan collaboratively using Google Docs were considered as very helpful and encouraging by the majority of students.

1.1.3 Language aspects

In order to carry out the tasks students had to operate on B2 level in order to complete their written and oral assignments. Regardless of their language skills, all students of different levels were eager to contribute and helped each other. It is important to note that even though the language level of some students was below the expected level, they made use of English as lingua franca and despite their fluency barriers, those students provided fairly well written products.

1.1.4 Intercultural communication

The students were very eager to establish personal contact with their international counterparts and in some cases, students even made use of their personal e-mail addresses instead of using their PELLIC G-mail account everybody had been provided with. This way, they can carry on corresponding with each other even beyond the course life time, which some of the students already started doing.

An interesting highlight in the face-to-face sessions was looking at other groups' public material submitted to the introductory forum and discussing intercultural aspects as well as aspects of lingua-franca-use of English.

1.1.5 Activities

The students praised the practicality of the course, i.e. exchange of e-mails; marketing / advertising; searching for real/authentic information; working with real/authentic documents etc.. It was reported that the students never complained when they had to deal with complex tasks, such as writing a report or minutes which proofs that they were satisfied with the course contents. Collaboration seemed to be the key for students in the piloting groups. Several students mentioned in their course feedback that sharing responsibility was an excellent experience, but also that they realized how difficult it can be if members of the team don't do their work. Students also reported to have become more confident in using English.

1.2 Some Challenges

1.2.1 Finding the right time for communication and meetings

The interaction between the international groups was not as intense as it had been expected.

For some groups or individuals it seemed difficult to organise suitable times for an international meeting or to arrange phone calls on Skype. The interaction only seemed to work between some countries, but didn't between others.

Reasons given for the lack of interactions were that some students were two hours late for attending an online synchronous phone call, some students insisted on making the Skype phone calls during their language lesson which made it impossible for others to attend. Students were demotivated when they did not get responses to their emails. In some cases, students could not perform a specific task (i.e. sales meeting because of the lack or responses).
Another aspect was that the time allotted was too short considering the complexity and diversity of tasks given to the students. As a result further courses should stretch over a longer period (at least 3 months or more, see chapter 2: suggestions for improvements).

1.2.2 Technical issues and cultural differences

Some of the problems that occurred in setting up meetings and calls were due to cultural differences and were discussed in the national group as part of raising intercultural awareness.
However, the different timing of lessons, but also a different attitude towards the concept of time could have been the reason for almost no communication among some groups.
In spite of the above also technical difficulties might have been responsible for the lack of communication in some cases and dropouts in two cases.

In general those students who had been working on Moodle prior to the course had no problems with finding their way through the platform. Others, less familiar with virtual learning environments had difficulties with access, navigation and such.

Finally it was reported that the instructions were not clear enough regarding the outcome in Module D. Students would need more supporting materials for setting up a stand for the final exhibition.
The issues raised above were discussed in the national groups as well as in the project partnership and ideas for improvement were suggested to deal with similar challenges in future courses.

2 Suggestions for Improvements

All in all the feedback given by students on the pilot courses was very positive as their testimonials demonstrate. However, as a result of teachers' and students' course

assessment the following suggestions for improvement for future courses were considered to be incorporated in the teacher's guide and teacher's supplement:

- Some of the instructions need re-writing to make them clearer.
- Timing and workload should be well considered when designing students' activities
    o The time needed to complete each module should be specified and re-considered.
    o Giving more practice time for certain parts in the units would be helpful. For example: Writing formal business documents, memos, reports and minutes need a fair bit of time, especially for students who are not familiar with producing such documents considering it is not their mother tongue.
    o The time allocated for the course should be extended to 3 months or more.

- For Modules B, C and D it would be helpful to provide more support material.
- The use of G-mail accounts for intercultural communication may need to be re-considered.
- Trade fair exhibitions in Second Life should be implemented as one of the options in Module D.
- Teachers/tutors should decide and agree with other international teams at the beginning of the course whether a fair or just a presentation should be prepared for the end of the course and where the exhibition or presentation should be carried out.
- The date of the fair or presentation needs to be set up at the beginning of the course.
- Students should be motivated to work outside the class, especially when it comes to arranging international Skype calls.
- It needs to be clearly stated in the modules which of the tasks are obligatory for all course participants, which are optional and which of them can be used as self-study tasks.
- Specific tasks on intercultural communication should be included in the training.
- It is important to make students who are less familiar with business practice are provided with resources and extra support.
- Experience on the pilot courses have shown, that oral interaction does not always happen automatically, it needs additional guidance and extra support by the tutor(s), stimulating and providing opportunities for oral interaction.
- When exchanging e-mails or contacting their foreign counterparts through Skype, students will naturally be exposed to other cultures. However, future courses should provide more opportunities to work on intercultural issues including specific tasks on raising cultural awareness.

3 Summary

3.1 Students' comments on the Pilot Courses

The majority of the students on the pilot courses commented fairly positively on the course as the following quotes demonstrate:

'According to the workload from different school or work activities it was quite a lot for me. On the other hand if you want to improve your business communication you must use business English a lot so it was not "overloaded". (Czech Republic)'

"It's a whole different experience sending an email in English to a business partner abroad – from just writing a letter at home that only the teacher will ever see." (Germany)

"The project helped me in several ways: working in a team over a longer period, distributing tasks just like in a "real" company, taking responsibility - and also the consequences, if team members haven't done their "homework"." ." (Germany)

"All tasks were explained so that I understood them easily and there was also lots of examples for more difiicult tasks. " (Finland)

"My confidence in using my English has increased as a result of the course.
Due to the lack of telephone calls I couldn't increase confidence in using English orally. In written form it definitely did. " (Germany)

"The course really helped to use the English language more confident. I lost the fear of making mistakes as this is more than human especially in using English as lingua franca."
(Germany)

"I have used English quite a bit in past couple of years and during this course then language came again in my mind." (Finland)

"The course helped me in becoming aware of differences in the way people use their English internationally (e.g. between the different countries)". (Germany)

"It was really interesting and good to know that despite the differences conversation worked so well. " (Germany)

"I didn't have chance to speak or communicate with somebody from Spain or Finland. They didn't respond to my mails." (Czech Republic)

The main points gathered from the feedback were that people were encouraged to use English as lingua franca in order to communicate with people from other countries and felt comfortable in doing so. Even though not everybody had the opportunity to communicate with people from all participating countries it was extremely useful to get such feedback. The points raised will be taken into consideration by the PELLIC project partners when developing further PELLIC courses. Suggestions for alternative activities to foster intercultural communication will be found in the teacher's guide.

3.2 Conclusion

All in all the pilot courses worked extremely well. The participants were satisfied and happy with the outcome of the courses even though the final product as suggested in Module D could not be presented in a desirable way.
The pilot courses highlighted strengths and weaknesses in the course design. As a result course tasks were re-written, according to students' and tutors' feedback and experience with the tasks. New and optional modules and tasks were added. One of the additional modules is dealing with intercultural training, the other with integrating portfolios into language learning.
More training activities and alternative sessions were collected and added to the teachers' Guide for further reference including suggestions on how to explore material and find further resources as well as suggestions on how to change or improve future courses.
The teachers' Guide also contains suggestions for a good blend in addition to strategies to avoid pitfalls.

Annex 1 Teacher's Evaluation Sheet

PILOT COURSE EVALUATION

This questionnaire is addressed to the Language Teachers and Trainers of the PELLIC Pilot Course:

SECTION A: PERSONAL DETAILS

Name of Teacher: (optional)

Country:

Sex: ☐ Male   ☐ Female

Age Group: (optional)   ☐ 18 – 25   ☐ 26 – 35   ☐ 36 – 45   ☐ over 46

Mother tongue:

SECTION B: PROFESSIONAL DETAILS

Area of expertise: Online Training ☐ Teacher Training ☐ Language Training ☐
                            other ☐ please specify……………………………………………………………………………….

Teaching Experience: 1 - 5 years☐   6 - 10 years ☐   11 - 15 years ☐   more than 15 ☐

Language(s) taught:

Where do you work?

☐ Secondary School   ☐   University ☐ Adult Education   ☐ In-service training   other ☐ please specify

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Comments:

Section C: COURSE DETAILS - PILOT COURSE(S)

Date of Training:

Number of courses: 1 ☐   2☐   3 ☐

Number of participants :   Course 1 …………..   Course 2 …………..   Course 3 …………..

Age of participants (average)   ☐ 18 – 25 ☐ 26 – 35 ☐36-45 ☐ 46 and above

Participants' Level of English: below B1 ☐   B1 ☐B2 ☐ above B2

Section D: EVALUATION OF VLE

Working on a VLE: Was it the first time you used a VLE ? ☐Yes ☐No

If yes, please describe the initial difficulties (if any) as well as the first impact of learning in a virtual environment.

………

Working on Moodle

Please tick one of the numbers below where 1 = strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree

The purpose of learning in a VLE was clear: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

The Moodle course was well organized : ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

The VLE was a suitable learning environment: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

There was no problem with accessibility
 to the different sections of the course: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

The tasks were perfectly suitable for the VLE: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Section E: EVALUATION OF COURSE PART I

Please tick one of the numbers below where 1 = strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree

A great amount of pre-course communication took place: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Students on the course were highly motivated: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

The quality of contributions throughout the course was excellent: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Students' initial expectations were met during the course: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

The students' degree of involvement in the course was fairly high: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

The level of interaction with the trainer(s) was very high: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

The level of interaction with other trainees was fairly high: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

The communication between the international groups
 could have been better: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Comments:

Section F: EVALUATION OF COURSE PART II

Please tick one of the numbers below where 1 = strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree

The community building in the national groups was excellent: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Time management was a problem: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Activities and group work were carried out with enthusiasm: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Some tasks appeared too difficult: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Evaluation and feedback helped individuals
and the group in their progress: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Peer support was given throughout the course: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

There was instant support from teachers throughout the course: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

The learning pace was considered as too fast at times: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Your involvement in the course was very demanding: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Task management and outcomes were excellent: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Interaction between international groups was
not as intense as expected: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Comments:

Section G: FINAL COMMENTS

Questions:
1.   What worked well with your course? Why?
2.   What did NOT work well with your course? Why?
3.   What unexpected issues did you come across?
4.   What would you improve with regards to your answers to 1, 2 and 3 above.
5.   What would you be interested in exploring further in future courses?
6.   Any other comments?

Course aspects you may want to consider

Participant recruitment
Pre-course communication
Learning aims and objectives
Technical aspects
Social aspects
Community building
Interaction on the Moodle platform
Interaction in face-to-face sessions
Communication between the international groups
Activities and group work
Participation
Time management
Pace of learning
Task management
Peer support
Teachers roles
Teachers expertise required
Assessment
Evaluation and feedback

Questions:

1.   **What worked well with your course? Why?**

Summary statement:

2. **What did NOT work well with your course? Why?**

Summary statement:

3. **What unexpected issues did you come across?**

Summary statement:

4. **What would you improve with regards to your answers to 1, 2 and 3 above.**

Summary statement:

5. **What would you be interested in exploring further in future courses?**

6. Any other comments?

Annex 2   PELLIC COURSE ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Course outline

The project aims to provide a virtual learning space where students can practice business communication skills in English.

The activities take place within the interactive, simulated business life environment of Practice Enterprise pedagogy. In the virtual learning environment, learners can set up and run companies. Main areas of the course are:

- Writing a business plan and starting up a company

- Planning a company website
- Developing a marketing plan
- Advertising and marketing products
- Making arrangements for meetings, sales visits and exhibitions
- Sales presentations and negotiations
- Sending business letters and e-mails
- Making and receiving business phone calls
- Running and participating in meetings
- Writing reports, minutes of meetings and other business documents
- Video presentations
- Online negotiations

Course assessment

The assessment is conducted via:

- A Development Portfolio (DP)
- A written reflection on progress in learning throughout the course, and implications for further professional development
- Self-assessment in form of 'can do' statements
- Reflections and sensitivity towards different cultural background and intercultural differences
- Observation of collaboration with peers

The assessment will be a mix of formative and summative assessment.

Formative assessment: providing students with feedback in order to improve their performance on current or subsequent tasks ('can do' statements).
Summative assessment: providing students with assignments they will be awarded/ graded for.

The Development Portfolio (DP) counts for 40% of the overall mark, and provides the learner and trainer with a record of learning progress throughout the course. It is essentially a collection of work the learner undertakes. Reflections and self-assessment count for 40% of the overall mark and collaboration counts for 20% of the overall mark. At least 80% of the work must be completed in order to fulfill the minimum submission requirement.

The types of activities and areas expected to occur at this level of exchange are (also compare with the European Vocational Qualifications (Languages) Standards EVOQs):

- Writing a personal profile for introductions (alternatively record a personal profile on video or audio)
- Write emails
- Meeting invitations
- Writing an agenda
- Writing meeting minutes
- Developing a business plan
- Reporting on a survey and presenting advertising strategies
- Creating a Company website
- Advertising the company
- Planning for a sales situation
- Writing a needs analysis
- Making offers / sales
- Carrying out sales calls
- Negotiate online
- Completing booking forms
- Designing a plan for a conference stand
- Inviting for a VIP reception
- Organizing travel itinerary (flight, hote, etc)
- Recording a presentation

Note: The assessment of language performance in regard to oral production, listening, reading and writing is based on the Common EUROPEAN Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

Christel Schneider, ICC 30/09/2010

ANNEX 3 STUDENTS' SELF - ASSESSMENT

PELLIC Self - Assessment:

Please write (or record) a short evaluation of your work in this unit, considering:
1. the progress you feel you have made, including what you learned or experienced, whether you enjoyed it or not, and what use this learning will be to you;
2. problems you experienced when working on this unit, including anything that tended to inhibit your study

_____

Feedback Questionnaire:

Please response in a scale 1 = totally agree, 5= totally disagree

1. The course on the Moodle Platform was easy to access

1	2	3	4	5

comments

2. The navigation on the VLE is straight forward with no problem.

1	2	3	4	5

comments

3. The content of the units is clearly set.

1	2	3	4	5

comments

4. The tasks are clear and easy to understand.

1	2	3	4	5

comments

5. The resources and materials presented were very useful for the unit

1	2	3	4	5

comments

6. The vocabulary needed for the unit was easy to access.

1	2	3	4	5

comments

7. There were no problems solving the tasks

1	2	3	4	5

comments

8. Sufficient support was given by the trainers to fulfil the tasks

1	2	3	4	5

comments

9. The group worked well together

1	2	3	4	5

comments

10. It is hard to cope with the workload in the unit

1	2	3	4	5

comments

11. Interaction and Collaboration on the course works well

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1	2	3	4	5

comments

12. I am pleased to have achieved my goals in this unit.

1	2	3	4	5

comments

13. My goals for the next units are:

comments

Can do Statements for self assessment

	I can…	require support
1. introduce myself and give a short profile	☐	☐
2. exchange emails with colleagues and business partners	☐	☐
3. find the resources to look for vocabulary	☐	☐
4. invite a business partner to a meeting	☐	☐
5. set up the agenda for a meeting	☐	☐
6. write the minutes	☐	☐
7. draft a business plan	☐	☐

Christel Schneider, ICC