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THE CHALLENGE OF ONLINE LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING: INCLUSIVE CONTENT AND MOTIVATION ENHANCEMENT

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Abstract. The pandemics of COVID-19 has reinforced online learning and teaching. Online learning and teaching are becoming even more common than contact learning and teaching. For many language teachers, it is becoming a challenge for the methodology they used to apply. The methods had to be converted from a teacher-centred approach to a student-centred approach. Even more of the study content had to be reoriented to student autonomy in learning.
The aim of the paper is to share good practice of four international projects and four online language teaching aids to contribute to an inclusive content and motivation enhancement of online language learning. The first example is the first portal is Smart svenska (Smart Swedish) developed as part of an Aalto Online Learning project (A!Ole) financed by Aalto University. The second portal is a multi-disciplinary and open-access digital language learning portal called Svenskstudier för högskolestuderande (Swedish for higher education), financed by the Finnish Ministry of Education. The third international project and platform of online activities is Erasmus KA2, "Interactive Digital Content Platform to Share, Reuse, and Innovative in the Classroom" (INDIE), financed by the EU. The fourth international project is Nordplus Nordinc Languages, "Multilingualism as a Key to Enhance Students' Employability", financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers. All the analysed learning environments have a common aim which is to encourage student autonomy when learning. The aim is to motivate students by giving them more responsibility and autonomy for their own learning, i.e. student empowerment.

Keywords: students' learning autonomy, inclusive language learning methods, online language learning and teaching, language learning motivation enhancement.

Introduction

Online learning and teaching is not a new phenomenon but the global outbreak of COVID-19 has led to thriving online learning and teaching, including the learning and teaching of languages. Nowadays, online learning and teaching are gradually substituting face-to-face learning and teaching. Thus, the challenge for teachers is how to make the content more inclusive and effective and how to switch from a teacher-centred to a student-centred approach. *The aim* of the paper is to share good practice experience examples of four national and international projects and four online language learning platforms to contribute to an inclusive content and motivation enhancement of online learning, including languages. *The subject matter of the paper* is the four online language learning platforms and how they contribute the students' language learning motivation. *The objectives* of the paper include a review of language learning and teaching methods at a theoretical level and a practical review of how the online language learning platforms created while implementing national and international projects might enhance students' online language learning motivation. The method of descriptive comparative analysis has been applied to reach the aim.

This paper discusses pedagogical aspects, links between theory and practice on the learning platforms. All the discussed learning environments have a common aim which is to encourage student autonomy in learning. Students are active content creators, not passive receivers of information. The aim of all platforms is to motivate students by giving them more responsibility and autonomy for their own learning, i.e. student empowerment. When planning these online platforms, their content and the individual activities and tasks, the authors had the following theoretical frameworks in mind: task-based learning (TBL), content-based instruction (CBI), flipped learning, blended learning, communicative language learning (CLL), as well as content and language integrated learning (CLIL).

The first part of the paper gives a short introduction to each theory, thereafter the connection between theory and practice is discussed with the help of concrete examples, and finally, the conclusions will be drawn.

Theoretical background

There are several pedagogical approaches involved in the platforms and online learning environments presented in the paper. It is noteworthy that the environments have been designed in different institutions and countries, and thus the pedagogical approaches might vary. The

approaches are implemented with student-centred activities. The central pedagogical approaches discussed are Communicative Language Teaching, Content-Based Instruction, Task-Based Learning, flipped learning and Content and Language Integrated Learning.

The foremost approach to be discussed is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) that aims to learn communicative competence. Students learn communicative skills necessary for the lives and, in the case of students in higher education, communicative competence for work life. In accordance with the principles of CLT, the goal is to prioritise

The students' needs and give the students the freedom to choose topics that are interesting and relevant to them. The central idea of CLT is that learning happens through peer input and in interaction with fellow students (Littlewood 1981). Communicative competence entails, among other things, knowledge of how to use language for different purposes, the ability to understand and to produce different types of texts (e.g. reports, interviews) (Richards 2005).

Content-Based Instruction (CBI) entails learning the target language through content. Learning is built around relevant contents not around linguistic syllabus (Basim, Yousif 2012). Hence, the language becomes rather a tool used to reach goals, not the goal of learning itself. Motivation is a significant factor in CBI, and the learners are provided with motivating tasks. Stimulating content is a key factor in motivating students. The tasks in the second portal Swedish for higher education, the students are encouraged to choose interesting and relevant perspectives and to seek information from different sources, which enables also learning a language for specific contexts. When students search for information and produce output, they have an opportunity to hear and read, write and speak the target language. The focus of the process is on the content, and language learning is a by-product.

Task-Based Language Learning (TBLL) is a category under the concept of Content-Based Instruction (Ellis 2003). If not referring to applied linguistics, a task can be anything concrete that someone does, such as painting a wall, doing groceries or buying a flight ticket. When an applied linguist refers to task-based learning, it means completing something by using the target language as a tool of communication (Toivola 2017); it could be booking a train ticket or visiting a doctor. Evidently, there is a clear difference between a task and exercise. An exercise can be drilling one aspect of language, like grammar or pronunciation, but it does not fulfil the description of a linguistic task. The platforms consist of tasks that students do individually, in pairs or in groups. The tasks can be done regardless of time and space, and they can be completed at the learner's own pace.

Flipped learning is further an approach, and language learning theory applied in the environment presented. A central concept of flipped learning is promoting student autonomy in letting the student take more responsibility for the learning process. On the other hand, flipped learning sees learning as a social event (Talbert 2017). In flipped learning courses, students work on their own with certain topics and materials before coming to class (Great Schools Partnership 2013). This can be regarded as familiarising with materials the instructors have recommended. Such materials may be texts, videos or audio files as well as information search tasks. The processing of the information commences before contact or online classes, and then, in the class, students discuss and present their findings. Talbert (2017) emphasises that flipped learning is more than techniques, and he sees it rather as a methodology (ibid.). Notably, the tasks available on, e.g. the Swedish for higher education platform, are all suitable for flipped learning because the idea is that the students work on various tasks at home and then present and discuss then discuss them with their peers and instructor.

The process involved in flipped learning is also typical for Blended learning, which means that students do part of the work individually online and part in contact classes (Maxwell 2016). It is vital that students have control over when and where to work and at what pace. The fact that students are more in charge of their own learning and able to control it is an important aspect of blended learning—this fact distinguishing it from technology-rich instruction. Tasks in blended learning enable the students to do part of them by working online. The task instructions are available online and encourage to use online sources in information search. Finally, students present their outcomes in face-to-face or virtual class and discuss them with their peers.

The approach of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) focuses on content and language where an additional language is used for learning both (Teaching with Technology. Online workshop series 2012-2013). CLIL often involves a teacher team comprising of content and language teachers, but it may be implemented in various ways. The parameters of CLIL are cognition, culture, content and communication. Learning takes place in specific contexts starting with 1) the content and focusing then on 2) communication, 3) cognition and 4) culture. Learning is enabled via integrating the subject matter to language learning with communication and culture. Content is learnt

by acquiring subject knowledge and re-constructing it to own understanding. In this process, content, i.e. subject matters, are analysed linguistically. Interaction is important also in CLIL as learning takes place in a social context when students negotiate. Culture plays a role in specific culture related language use situations in, e.g. process descriptions but also in communication within and across various disciplines as the practices and socio-cultural communication patterns might vary (Dale, Tanner 2012).

Motivation, student-centred and relevant tasks are vital in CLIL and any questions posed need to be realistic. According to Dale and Tanner (2012), Bloom's new taxonomy is a useful framework for creating tasks for CLIL learners. The six steps of Bloom's new taxonomy are: remembering, understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating and creating. This framework is beneficial for the cognitive process and provides context for learning a language for higher-level thinking. The CLIL approach provides a link between subject matters, teachers and students, and the benefits are that CLIL often increases motivation levels. Furthermore, learners benefit cognitively from the use of an additional language as their analytical language skills develop. This approach offers language learners possibilities to practice analytical skills such that the higher levels in Bloom's new taxonomy might involve. Cognitively the benefits of CLIL lie in that learners often remember the learning activities that required challenges.

Case Analysis

This chapter discusses the connection between theory and practice in the learning platforms and environments. The first case and good practice example is a portal called Smart svenska (Smart Swedish) developed as part of an Aalto Online Learning project (A!Ole) financed by the Aalto University, Finland. The pltform *Smart Svenska (http://smartsvenska.aalto.fi/sve/)* is created for learning Swedish in higher education and mainly aimed at business, arts, design, architecture and technology students. The portal has open access for anyone wishing to learn Swedish and it is in Swedish. The *Smart svenska* portal comprises of three sections called *Input*, *Process* and *Output*. First, students seek information about specific topics, then they process the information and finally present it to others.

The portal input section consists of links to authentic material such as websites, branch-specific journals, blogs, videos and podcasts and it is supplemented with instructions on how to collect information by doing interviews of doing surveys. The process section provides tools and instructions for processing information by, e.g. drawing lists and digital mind maps, steps for building arguments and materials for grammar learning. Finally, in the output section, students can find instructions for creating different types of output, e.g. presentations, vlogs, pitches, podcasts and reports. It may be pointed out that Smart svenska focuses on the learning process of three phases and gives instructions on how to work with various types of tasks. It does not include detailed language learning tasks as such and is well suited to be combined with tasks that one can find, for example, on the portal Swedish for higher education.

The second portal is a multi-disciplinary and open-access digital language learning portal called Svenskstudier för högskolestudenter (Swedish for higher education). The portal was created within the DIGIJOUJOU project, a national development project for digitalising second language learning in higher education in Finland financed by the Ministry of Education. The platform (https://svenskstudieribuffeformat.com/) caters for various activities, and it is designed to be used as an activity bank with activities and materials to be combined with institutional learning platforms or learning management systems where interaction, submission, discussion and evaluation take place. The activities are designed to cater for various branches of study. The platform implemented CLIL, CLT, TBL and flipped learning. Social learning is also considered in the design of the activities, but they also suit individual learning. Teachers may use the platform as course materials, and students might choose various activities for individual learning paths when completing institutional language learning requirements. The platform can also be used in blended learning in various combinations of online and class study. Naturally, virtual encounters and communication will cater for future work life competence and provide agility to cope with different electronic and other work environments. Additionally, if cross-institutional courses with multi-disciplined study groups are created, they serve as preparation for a future work-life where teamwork skills are required. Consequently, the learning has a social context as many of the activities are prepared in teams and at least presented and discussed in teams. This implies social learning, agility and taking quick decisions. The learning activities include flexibility and involve using and practising various skills.

Let us take activity of presenting innovations and inventions, activity *4.6 Inventions in my branch (*https://svenskstudieribuffeformat.com/aktiviteter/min-bransch/uppfinningar-inom-min-bransch/) in Swedish for higher education, where students are

required to seek and process information and present it. The activity and task are given in the Swedish for higher education platform online. The activity can be done, e.g. an online course in Swedish for art education and that has its own learning environment in a learning management system for interaction, syllabus, activities and submission. Students follow the task instructions and find links to learn about inventions in art and art education. They are encouraged to seek to Smart svenska and look for more resources, help in the process and finally, in the production part. In this example, students may do research on innovations on their own. They might also learn about presentation writing and speeches online. Then they discuss the planned presentation content and practice the language in class. Finally, they either give their presentations online or with video recordings to their peers in a virtual meeting.

The third case is a platform of online activities created while implementing the Erasmus KA2 project, "Interactive Digital Content Platform to Share, Reuse, and Innovative in the Classroom" (INDIE), financed by the EU. https://indieopen.upct.es/explore . The platform, was created by the project coordinator the University of Cartagena, caters for various activities, from mathematics to language learning. The aim of the project is to empower teachers to digitalise their teaching contents and create public digital learning units while applying learning methodologies like flipped classroom, blended learning, content-based learning, communicative learning, etc. The content created in the framework of this project is an example of a student-centred approach; the tasks were created to be done absolutely autonomously as well as the unit might be used as a blended learning method combining online and face-to-face learning. While interviewing students, the following advantages were highlighted: controlling the pace, controlling the time for learning, the convenience, the simple navigation of the unit and instant feedback. Therefore, the lack of interaction could be the downside of the unit.

The fourth case an online Moodle Finnish language course created while implementing a Nordplus Nordic Languages project, "Multilingualism as a Key to Enhance Students' Employability", financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The project is implemented by Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences and Kaunas University of Applied Sciences lecturers, and the objective is to create a virtual language learning course in beginner Finnish. The virtual course is designed for an online A1 level (3 ECTS) course of Finnish, which will be offered as an elective course at Kaunas University of Applied Sciences and Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences. The course consists of 4 units that might be learned absolutely autonomously or integrated as additional material in face-to-face learning. Each unit is followed by a self-evaluation quiz, and the course is completed by a final online test. This course focuses on communicative language learning (CLL) and flipped learning. The fact that the virtual course is finished by an intensive course in Finland is a very good example of a CLIL as it targets getting acquainted with Finnish culture. The course is currently in test use, and it has restricted availability.

Summing up, all four platforms were designed to be used absolutely autonomously by the students, which leads to their empowerment. The methods applied in the tasks are relevant and based on practical examples and related to everyday life or professional practice (CLIL, CLL, TBL). While completing the tasks, the students can manage their time and pace of learning individually, enhancing their motivation of learning, especially those students who study and work or need additional time to consolidate and/or practice their language skills. The first two cases were designed to develop students' Swedish language skills in Finland. The third case perfectly serves as an additional tool for students' self-study; the tasks are convenient for online learning and teaching when students' need to drill and consolidate the material studied in the classroom. The students can perform the tasks at any time and in any place, which is a good motivator for the students of younger generations of a digital age. The fourth case is similar to the first two cases. This course might be studied absolutely autonomously. The students take their time and responsibility to perform the tasks and later to take a final exam. The three platforms (case 1,2, and 4) are examples of absolute students' empowerment. The platforms include an entire self-study language course from the introduction to the final exam. The platforms are designed to have a cumulative assessment system. While performing the tasks on all four platforms, students become individually responsible for their academic results and achievements. To conclude the chapter, it might be said that learning online is a new reality that changes the role of a teacher, making them more as a supervisor of the course and empowering a student imparting them the autonomy and responsibility for the academic achievements and the skills.

Conclusion

The presented portals and learning environments have various approaches to learning but all cater for student-centred learning and stress autonomy. It may be stated that when using these learning environments, students become active content creators and owners of their learning. Provided instant feedback of the performed tasks provides students with the progress achieved and guides them to further development of their skills, students become more responsible for their learning. Students can study regardless of time and space, and they can control the pace of learning. The portals encourage students to seek and process information in various ways and finally, to produce appropriate outputs. Furthermore, students are encouraged to use a wide range of digital tools in the different phases, e.g. when processing information, learning vocabulary and grammar and creating and presenting the output.

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KALBŲ MOKYMO/-SI INTERNETU IŠŠŪKIS: ĮTRAUKIANTIS TURINYS IR MOTYVACIJOS STIPRINIMAS

Santrauka

Mokymasis ir mokymas nuotoliu nėra naujas reiškinys, tačiau, visame pasaulyje išplitus COVID-19, šis metodas ypač suklestėjo, įskaitant kalbų mokymą ir mokymąsi. Šis metodas pamažu keičia kontaktinį mokymą/-si. Daugeliui kalbų mokytojų tai tampa iššūkiu anksčiau taikytai metodikai. Metodai turėjo būti pakeisti iš į mokytoją orientuoto į studentą orientuotą mokymą, dar daugiau studijų turinio turėjo būti perorientuota į savarankišką studentų mokymąsį.
Straipsnio tikslas - pasidalinti keturių tarptautinių projektų ir kartu keturių internetinių kalbų mokymo priemonių gerosios praktikos patirties pavyzdžiais, siekiant prisidėti prie įtraukaus turinio ir motyvacijos didinimo mokantis internetu. Pirmasis pavyzdys – portalas „Smart svenska“ sukurtas įgyvendinant Aalto universiteto finansuojamą projektą „A!Ole“. Antrasis portalas - daugiadisciplininis ir atviros prieigos skaitmeninis kalbų mokymosi portalas Svenskstudier för högskolestuderande (Švedų kalba aukštosioms mokykloms). Portalas sukurtas įgyvendinant „DIGIJOUJOU“ projektą – nacionalinį plėtros projektą, skirtą antrosios kalbos mokymosi Suomijos aukštosiose mokyklose skaitmeninimui, projektą finansuoja Suomijos Švietimo ministerija. Trečiasis pavyzdys -internetinė platforma, ES finansuojamas Erasmus KA2 projektas „INDIE“. Ketvirtasis pavyzdys – tarptautinis projektas – Nordplus Languages „Daugiakalbystė kaip raktas į mokinių įsidarbinimo galimybių didinimą“, kurį finansuoja Šiaurės ministrų taryba.
Šiame straipsnyje pristatomos keturios mokymosi platformos ir aptariami jose taikyti nuotolinimio mokymo/-si metodai. Pateikiamos tolesnės teorijos ir praktikos sąsajos. Visoms analizuojamoms mokymosi aplinkoms būdingas bendras tikslas – skatinti mokinių savarankiškumą mokantis. Siekiama motyvuoti mokinius, suteikiant jiems daugiau savarankiškumo ir atsakomybės už savo mokymąsi, t. y. mokinių įveiklinimo.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: studentų mokymosi savarankiškumas, įtraukiantys kalbų mokymosi metodai, kalbų mokymasis ir mokymas internetu, kalbos mokymosi motyvacijos stiprinimas.

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