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Lessons learned from Creation of Digitally Competent Educators SLP

Innovative impact

This European Short Learning Programme involves virtual collaboration from different perspectives: On the one hand for all partners as the joint development of an international course took place virtually with only one face-to-face meeting. On the other hand, as virtual mobility for the course participants providing the opportunity to join the course from all over the world. In addition, the combination of the course being integrated into the regular degree programmes of all partner universities and at the same time course being open for educators and non-degree students provides an attractive constellation for participants.

We all know that piloting offers much greater freedom and more opportunities for trial and error, the established collaboration can be considered a great success. The embedding of the course in existing degree structures, the different regulations of all four partner universities, as well as the additional opening of the course for the non-degree students to enrich collaboration within the course proved to be a challenge. Nevertheless, it proved to be one that can be overcome and that has an innovative impact in the long run not only for cooperation but for organizational flexibility concerning joint programmes.

Introduction

Mismatch of competences and socio-economical results of this issue is recognized as an important problem for higher education institutes (HEIs) in Europe. To cope with this issue HEIs need to create new more flexible and modular structures. In this context, a European HEIs are encouraged to create micro-credentials and short learning programmes (Futures et al., 2020).

European Short Learning Programmes (E-SLPs) are one of these new and flexible structures suggested by an EU Project funded under Erasmus+ Programme, Key Action 3: Support for Policy Reform, Initiatives for Policy Innovation, "Forward Looking Cooperation Projects". SLPs have potential to respond to market needs and to reduce mismatch of competencies. At best they provide flexible and scalable building blocks for degrees, are open with non-stop enrolment and offer flexible learning paths with progressive accreditation.

As an output of the e-SLP Project, the short learning programme Digitally Competent Educators (DCE) was developed by University of Jyväskylä (JYU), Finland, FernUniversität in Hagen (FeU), Germany, Universidade Aberta (UAb), Portugal and Anadolu University (AU), Turkey between years 2019-2020 (Truyen et al., 2020). The SLP is based on the Digital Competence Framework for Educators (DigCompEdu) published by Europeans Commissions Joint Research Center (Redecker, 2017). It combines six competence areas of the DigCompEdu and aims to develop and foster educators' digital competences in teaching and learning. The competence areas of the DigCompEdu framework were combined in a new innovative way in three modules each addressing a specific level of expertise within the framework – from newcomer to explorer, from explorer to integrator and from integrator to expert (Redecker, 2017). To speed up the planning process, this modification of DigCompEdu competence areas was originally suggested for the partners by the University of Jyväskylä.

The DCE programme is targeted at the continuous professional development and lifelong learning for educators at various levels and several education areas. It comprises three modules, covers EQF levels 6-8, is cumulative, flexible, fully online, and scalable. Each module equals 5 ECTS with a workload of 135 hours and a duration of 8 – 10 weeks. The programme is embedded into an existing degree programme at each of the partner university. In addition, separate

Comparable examples

In the context of the e-SLP project, another course that was also developed following a model with some similarities to our pilot is the SLP "Climate Change: from global to local Action". This SLP, resulted from a partnership between 3 universities and was also offered to an international audience. In the case of this pilot, each of the four modules was carried out in a different LMS (from the institution responsible for the module). More information [here](#).

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modules can be completed individually or as certified SLP. In this paper, we present the lessons learned from a 2 years' experience of collaboration, communication, and administration of DCE short learning programme in an international setting.

From Planning to Implementation

Planning and ongoing communication is a key element while developing an international course. The first steps were focused on building a mutual understanding related to a set of aspects that are indispensable for the execution of the project. To facilitate decision-making processes, Microsoft Teams tool was chosen as a platform for communication. We met face to face only once in the beginning of the pilot, and rest of the communication happened in Teams. Objectives, learning outcomes, and learning activities of the SLP were designed together in Padlet. Discussion was active and forward-going within the virtual setting. A Teams channel for each module was created for specific contents of each module.

The second step was to decide who takes responsibility of which module. University of Jyväskylä was the main coordinator and responsible of the administration. The responsibilities for the content, pedagogical actions and guidance of each module were divided as follows: Module 1 FeU, Module 2 AU and Module 3 UAb. After this division, the decision had to be made whether we use one or several Learning management systems (LMS) when delivering the SLP to students. It was decided that the three modules were offered in the same LMS, Moodle of the University of Jyväskylä.

Following the guidelines of the E-SLP project (Melai et al., 2020), the third step was to start the preparations for the long-term and more established partnership. Each of the universities followed their own internal accreditation procedures for the SLP and defined the rules for integrating them into existing formal programmes.

It was also decided that each module was awarded a certificate (5 ECTS) by the responsible institution, with the university of Jyväskylä (coordinator) awarding the certificate for the entire SLP. This strategy made it possible to streamline the accreditation processes, following the particularities of each university, thus overcoming one of the problems that usually arise in these contexts (Dunn et al., 2020).

Running the Modules

Since the DCE Short Learning Programme is very much based on the exchange and collaboration between the participants, we found out that it is essential to group learners from different countries and cultural backgrounds. And as it reaches out for different proficiency levels of the learners, modules were built cumulative, from Module 1 to Module 3. In addition, each module was designed in a scalable way allowing an unlimited number of participants. This decision had implications at several levels. For example, the tutoring work would focus only on generic guidelines, without intervention in the discussion of the contents. Still, the teaching approaches and the pedagogies supported an inquiry-based and active learning approach of the

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students (Guàrdia Ortiz et al., 2020). Also, in terms of the design of the three modules, we created a clear learning path for the students, with a sustained progression and workload suitable for adult learners. In relation to the evaluation, we opted for diversified forms of assessment.

After piloting of all Modules, and analyses of anonymous student feedback and teacher experiences, we decided to implement a more collaborative approach between the partners. It allowed us to better gain a shared understanding of quality and quality development within the programme. Co-teaching was implemented in all three modules, including one teacher from the module developing partner and one teacher from the coordinator. Further development of each module regarding course design, content and pedagogy led to a more coherent overall picture of DCE.

Conclusion

It is crucial in international partnerships to create stable structures for collaboration and communication and have a clear division of labour and partner roles. In this sense, the planning and implementation of the SLP has been a very important and intense phase. Running the SLP in several rounds has further intensified our collaboration, by using and adapting Moodle as LMS, by developing model cross-partnership co-teaching that helped us not only to further develop the courses but also to get a coherent overall picture of DCE. Finally, the administration that is set at one place at the coordinating institution together with the LMS.

After the pilot phase of the SLP was completed, we made a very positive assessment of the work done and decided to move on to a new phase of consolidating the partnership: To have the SLP as virtual mobility anchored in degree programmes at each partner university. The cooperation agreements are signed, the programme committee including all four partner institutions is set: so the joint work can and will continue after the end of project.