Digital Language Learning Challenges in the Context of Inclusion

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Abstract

The increasing alterations in the social structure of the modern European societies due to the migratory flows that arise as a consequence of the destabilization of the political and economic systems from the West to the East are currently creating new forms of multi-faceted cultural and ethnic identities, as well as new forms of migration. Hence, the latest developments have led de facto to the creation of multicultural and multilingual conditions within European contexts. This research proceeds to summarise the main findings, citing general trends in the landscape of FDLL (free digital language learning) initiatives for migrants/refugees. This includes citing and describing key features of FDLL initiatives that were noted particularly for their role in determining the efficiency and/or effectiveness for migrant/refugee inclusion and integration. These features ranged from specific language and culture related models of FDLL initiatives to the extent to which they focus on recognition of learning and on communication and outreach to target groups. The research characterizes current FDLL initiatives by their approaches, including type of design (purely online resource, for example)..

Keywords: *Language learining, free digital language learning tools, inclusion, migration.*

1. Introduction

According to research findings, more than 50% of Europeans are either bilingual or live in an environment where they are confronted with two or more languages, especially people living in border regions, migrants and people whose parents speak a language other than the national language. Language acquisition and language enhancement gets more and more important for an intercultural dialogue in our society and for increasing job chances of individuals. Besides, from the perspective of migrants, the majority of sociological and linguistic studies indicate the necessity of learning a local language, in order for the smooth integration of the migrant into the new social context to be ensured.

The innovative character of the project 'From Alienation to Inclusion' lies on the activities related to a unique on-line environment which contains comprehensive training modules on social integration of migrants and refugees into EU societies, while seeking to eliminate all those social, linguistic and psychological barriers which prevent migrants and refugees from being integrated in the new environment [1].

Given that many researches indicate that digital learning is useful for migrants and refugees, the paper aims to analyse the free digital language learning (FDLL) tools specifically related to language learning as a means for the inclusion of migrants and refugees in Europe.

De Waard [2], Mason and Buchman [3], Moser-Mercer [4] indicated that FDLL tools should:

(1) have clear objectives and a clear target audience,

(2) be defined taking into account the needs of this target audience, including its skills, learning environment, learning needs, fragility and cultural context, and

(3) collect data about effectiveness of the FDLL to meet its objectives and address the needs.

This research summarises the main findings, presenting general trends in the landscape of FDLL initiatives for migrants/refugees. This includes citing and describing key features of FDLL initiatives that were noted particularly for their role in determining the efficiency and/or effectiveness for migrant/refugee inclusion and integration. These features of the tools concentrate on specific language and culture related models of FDLL initiatives as well as on recognition of learning and on communication and outreach to target groups. The research characterizes current FDLL initiatives by their approaches, including type of design (purely online resource, for example).

Knowledge of the host country's language is crucial for migrants' and refugees' integration. In this paper we argue that today migrants' and refugees' integration requires the acquisition of communication skills that have three important and increasingly indistinguishable dimensions: language skills, ICT skills and functional skills which are needed in everyday life in our society [5].

The methodology for the research included a literature review, a presentation of relevant initiatives featured in searchable websites and an analysis based on the content of the different profiles.

The classification of the collected FDLL tools is based on the qualitative content analysis.

1. Results
The total number of the FDLL tools investigated in the research consists of 32 learning cases. The classification of FDLL tools is based on the language teaching approaches. Overall 11 language teaching approaches have been identified.

In this section we classify only the most relevant language teaching approaches used in free digital language learning tools. Each language resource (FDLL) is classified according to the basic characteristics: 1) title, 2) publisher, 3) target language(s), 4) target group, 5) description, 6) methodology [6].

1.1. FDLL tools invoked by audio lingual approach
PHASE 6 HALLO GERMAN CHILDREN. Methodology: Audio-lingual approach. The user can select a specific topic (ex. at school, my hobbies) and has to listen and repeat expressions and sentences in German. Thus, the users learns vocabulary, constructing sentences, and, indirectly, a little grammar. EINSTIEG DEUTSCH. Audio-lingual approach. The user can select a specific topic (ex. at school, my hobbies) and has to listen and repeat expressions and sentences in German. Lexical syllabus approach: some of the most common words relating to different subjects (health, work, etc.) are taught. iTONGUE. Methodology: Overcoming intercultural barriers by bilingual audio literature. Online tool.

1.2. FDLL tools invoked by structural approach
REFUGEE PHRASEBOOK INTERACTIVE. Methodology: It uses the syllabus approach: a second language is taught by teaching words and expressions. REFUGEE CENTER ONLINE, LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSES. Methodology: Task-based, structural approach, direct method. EXPLORING NORWEGIAN GRAMMAR. Methodology: Structural approach, whereby the user acquires notions of grammar progressively, before attempting to produce a speech or communicate in the foreign language. Direct method, insofar as the course is delivered entirely in Norwegian (the target language). ESOL BRITISH COUNCIL. Methodology: Task-based, structural approach, direct method. DEUTSCH LERNEN MIT DEIAA ABDULLAH. Methodology: Structural approach: the learner is introduced to language via grammatical rules, which are to be learned one at a time in a set order.

1.3. FDLL tools invoked by communicative approach
DEUTSCH LERNEN FÜR ARABISCH-MUTTERSPRACHLER. Methodology: The app includes 100 lessons, which combine text and audio-lingual methods. The app is available in 50 languages. The app is intended to help asylum seekers integrate into German society. Uses short sentences and in situation dialogue to help learn the language. BABBEL. Methodology: Interactive lessons with practical conversation skills from the very first lesson.

1.4. FDLL tools invoked by text and audio lingual approach
REFUGEE SPEAKER. Methodology: The application comes with written medical translations with accompanying audio recorded by native speakers and organized into medical chapters to facilitate conversations. GERMAN FOR REFUGEES. Methodology: The app includes 100 lessons, which combine text and audio-lingual methods. The app is available in 50 languages. The app is intended to help asylum seekers integrate into German society. Uses short sentences and in situation dialogue to help learn the language.

1.5. FDLL tools invoked by real life scenarios and structural approach
NORWEGIAN ON THE WEB. Methodology: The user studies different real life scenarios (ex. taking a taxi, arriving at the hotel, etc.) and also learns the grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary associated with these contexts. NORWEGIAN LANGUAGE RESOURCES. Methodology: Immersive: the user is presented with video examples from real life situations (ex. at the university canteen, at the university library) where language is at play. Interactive MOOC. BLENDIN. Methodology: It includes useful information on basic topics, such as communication, finding a job, taking care of one's self and staying safe, an attempt to support young migrants in their first days in the host/ receiving society. MOVING LANGUAGES UK. Methodology: Designed to cater to different levels of linguistic competence, this application will also be useful for people who have already been living and working in their new home country for some time. The content of the mobile application covers topics that are essential during the

first steps of living in the host country. More than 4000 illustrated vocabulary items for easy concept recognition. L-PACK. Methodology: The L-PACK course consisting of 60 short videos with dialogues related to everyday life supported by grammar and comprehension activities had a big success and the materials, available on Youtube, Wikibooks and Soundcloud, were consulted in 146 countries by 120.000 learners. Short videos with dialogue.

1.6. FDLL tools invoked by blended approach

LANGUAGE SUPPORT FOR ADULT REFUGEES. Methodology: A mix of communicative (group discussion, etc.), visual (activities with pictures), task-based methodology (the user is required to plunge into real-world situations such as seeking work, accommodation, etc.), community language learning (ex. via ice breaking activities).

FALK. Methodology: Visual map of health care system developing and upgrading language skills on medical issues.

ROSETTA STONE 6. Methodology: Users can study grammar and vocabulary intuitively that grows their speaking and reading abilities.

EUROPEAN CATERING & HOSPITALITY LANGUAGE TRAINING COURSE. Methodology: This web-based language course will enable the student to learn vocabulary and to practise communicative skills for placement abroad in a kitchen or restaurant. Realistic interactions with an animated chef and manager are the main ingredients of this course.

DANISH WITH KHALED. Methodology: The user is introduced to Danish vocabulary, grammar (ex. adjectives, conjugations, adverbs) via a set of on-line videos available for free on YouTube.

1.7. FDLL tools invoked by game based, gamification approach

DUOLINGO. Methodology: Duolingo has a freemium business model and it uses advertising in both its Android and iPhone apps. Duolingo courses include periodic advertisements which users can remove by paying a subscription fee. To earn money, Duolingo originally employed a crowd sourced business model, where the content came from organizations (such as CNN and BuzzFeed) that pay Duolingo to translate it Duolingo mimics the structure of video games in several ways in order to engage its users. There is a reward system in which users acquire lingots, an in-game currency that can be spent on features such as character customizations or bonus levels. There are public leader boards in which people can compete against their friends or see how they stack up against the rest of the world. The level system that Duolingo uses is XP (experience points), a numerical system that represents a user's skill level. Badges in Duolingo represent achievements that are earned from completing specific objectives or challenges. LINGVIST. Methodology: Lingvist enables users to grow their vocabulary and learn a language fast, via cutting-edge tech. Real time gamification. BUSUU. Methodology: Speaking and writing exercises corrected by native speakers. Community led language app, part gamification, part community powered. QUIZLET. Methodology: Education and flashcard app that makes studying easier. MONDLY. Methodology: With Mondly, language learners can explore language exercises for reading, listening, writing and speaking, enhanced with a dictionary, verb conjugator and state-of-the-art speech recognition technology. Gamification, interactive exercises. SHOPLANG 2.0. Methodology: The project uses the informal environment of the supermarkets in order to provoke interest in the target languages, help people develop some partial skills in understanding basic information and encourage them to take up further language learning. Learn through shopping gamification.

1.8. FDLL tools invoked by audio-visual approach

POLYGLOT. Methodology: It is composed of online modules whose purpose is to give effective tools to educators and parents in order to promote bilingualism in the school and family context.

1.9. FDLL tools invoked by on-line chat approach

HELLO TALK. Methodology: Online chat connecting users with native speakers of other languages.

1.10. FDLL tools invoked by tandem, (virtual) language-café approach

METIKOS. Methodology: Informal learning methodologies (language café, tandem, virtual language café) adapted for migrants.

1.11. FDLL tools invoked by visual approach using pictograms

REFUGEYE. Methodology: Refugeye is a solution that helps people communicate using simple pictograms. Refugeye also allows you to draw quickly over these icons for a better communication and understanding. Interactive app. Visual method using pictograms.

Conclusions

Language learning is one of the most important challenges for integration, as language skills are necessary for effective functioning in the community and the workplace.

During the investigation overall 11 language teaching approaches have been identified: 3 tools invoked by audio lingual approach, 5 – by structural, 2 – by communicative, 2 – by text and audio lingual, 2 – by real life scenarios and structural approach, 5 invoked by blended approaches, 5 – by game based and/or gamification approach, 6 – by audio-visual, 1 – by on-line chat, 1 – by tandem, (virtual) language-café, 1 invoked by visual approach using pictograms.

It is expected that more investigations will be available in the future, following implementation and evaluation of these initiatives.

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