



A Multi-Platform for a Better Learning and Teaching Experience

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Abstract

Learner-centered education aims at developing learner's autonomy and independence by putting the learning path in his hands. To do so, the teaching process needs to create an environment where the student will discover and strengthen his skills. In this environment the student is led to an independent problem solving and a lifelong learning. He is self-motivated, active and chooses what to learn, where and when.

At the same time, as the focus of instruction has shifted from the teacher to the student[5], the role, duty and task of the teacher has changed: he is not just an expert who transfers knowledge and facts anymore; he is a facilitator who focuses on the whole class results, as well as on every single student's performance.

What happens when learner-centered education meets new technologies and digital communication? The ability to effectively integrate with no effort and time wasting ICT and learning is now a resource for a higher quality teaching in the classroom.

The class has become digital, hypermedia, cooperative, project-based, interactive... It is now focused on student's learning experience and on teacher's need to monitor his progress and adapt his intervention to it.

As teachers, at Edilingua, we were dreaming of an enjoyable, motivating and effective teaching and learning process; of tools able to make students more independent, aware of their own learning path and always "on time" with assignments because free to study everywhere; we wanted a teacher involved in more creative activities, free from long homework corrections and therefore more focused on student's need.

So we had an idea! i-d-e-e, a platform that brings together a wide range of different educational technologies for teachers and students in a single learning environment.

What does i-d-e-e offer and why?

To students, the platform offers a didactics more and more fitting to their reality; cooperative and self-learning materials for the class; immediate feedback on exercises with automatic correction; progress monitoring through learning analytics that encourage both reflection and active responsibility for their own learning.

With i-d-e-e, administrators manage all aspects of the learning process; identify classes where results are above average and whose teachers could be professional resources for others.

As a LMS, i-d-e-e provides teachers with several digital tools for better educational choices, among which learning analytics, which we consider an essential tool: it leads to a better understanding of the teaching and learning process, while showing whether students are on the right track or in need of our intervention.

1. Origins of the project

Early 2000s language teachers started integrating technology into their classroom lessons.

Even though at first it was only an experiment conducted by pioneer teachers, in the last years, technology became a necessity for a better quality and student-centered teaching. In fact, the constant evolution of the digital world has been impacting nearly every aspect of our life transforming the way we communicate, network, seek help, access information and learn. [1]

Developing of new tools and their possible application to teaching was increased in the beginning of the millennia. However, most websites were offering either one tool only or way to complicated tools. Moreover, the first LMSs offered by several educational publishers were not helping teachers to easily integrate new technologies to teaching. Teachers mainly needed a learning environment including all necessary tools and materials for support and classes. In other words a multi-platform.



2. First steps

In order to provide the teachers with the specific and user friendly tools they needed, a long research stated to optimize tools and platforms.

The goal was to identify the most valuable aspects of available teaching tools, and to combine them into one single platform.

But this wasn't enough. We also needed to decide how the platform would work, who its users would be, and how they would interact between them.

That is when a long period of planning and designing the platform started. The editorial staff conceived the structure and functionality and then the developers gave life to the project.

3. i-d-e-e 1.0

In 2013 *i-d-e-e* 1.0 was born: the first educational multi-platform especially and exclusively created for teachers and students of Italian, who wanted to work in a 'blended' learning environment.

i-d-e-e offered higher quality teaching in the classroom. Teaching had become digital, hypermedia, cooperative, project-based and interactive. It is a learning tool that can be used either by teachers and students in a virtual class or by students for self-studying.

4. Advantages of using a multi-platform in teaching foreign languages

4.1 For students:

- identification and improvement of students' language skills
- development of students' autonomy and independence
- problem solving and lifelong learning
- self-motivation
- active participation
- flexibility – students choose what, where and when to learn
- access from any device (PC, tablets, iPad, smartphones) 24/7
- participation in blog discussions
- teaching adjusted to students' reality
- materials for both cooperative work in class and self-studying
- automatic correction of the exercises with immediate feedback
- combined skills (text and image, audio and video)
- focus on specific aspects of the lesson (i.e. vocabulary) [2]
- lesson adaptation to students' needs and knowledge level [2]
- more interesting and original activities to increase students' engagement [2]
- progress monitoring through learning analytics to encourage reflection and active responsibility
- low costs: digital books are less expensive and more eco-friendly

4.2 For teachers:

- Access from any device (PC, tablets, iPad, smartphones) 24/7
- Involvement in creative activities
- Save time from long homework corrections
- Students' greater punctuality in the assignments' delivery
- Adaptation of teaching materials (available on the platform) according to needs [2]
- Monitoring of students' progress and focused intervention
- Learning analytics

5. Research

ICT is an essential part of modern and contemporary learning environment, [3] although it may present some difficulties to users:

- Using ICT in language learning not only does involve pedagogical changes for teachers, but it also involves practical and pedagogical changes for students who are traditionally used to face-to-face learning in classrooms [2]
- Although many teachers are accustomed to innovation, others are not quite open to new ideas [4]
- ICT as a teaching aid is may be demanding as it requires specific users' skills [4]



All above considered, we decided to distribute to students and teachers a questionnaire to explore users' satisfaction. Moreover, we collected hundreds of e-mails from users who needed our support over the last two years.

The feedback was largely positive and helped to bring some specific issues to the surface.

6. i-d-e-e 2.0

In these two years we have kept improving *i-d-e-e* thanks to the users' precious feedback and in July 2015 *i-d-e-e* 2.0 was born. The new *i-d-e-e* combines the basic features of the previous version with a completely redesigned interface and many important improvements:

- More clear, modern and user friendly interface
- Improved stability and speed
- New control panel for teachers and schools for a quicker and more intuitive usage
- 'Responsive' design that adapts automatically to your PC, tablet or smartphone screen
- More practical and easy to use Gradebook
- More intuitive quiz and game editor
- Smarter automatic correction to increase students' motivation

6.1 Gradebook and learning analytics

In the Gradebook teachers and schools can see students' performance. They can check the results of tests and games; they can see if students completed their homework; they have access to detailed results and, thanks to several statistic tools, they can compare both the entire class' performance, and each single student's.

In fact we consider analytics an essential tool: it leads to a better understanding of the teaching and learning process, while showing whether students are on the right track or in need of teachers' intervention.

6.2 Assignments

Thanks to the gradebook and the analytics there is now the opportunity of accurately monitoring students' progress and understanding their learning needs. This is why it is important for us to give teachers the chance of assigning homework both to the entire class and to single students.

6.3 My results

Apart from having an immediate feedback on exercises with automatic correction, students can monitor their progress through learning analytics. This is essential to lead students to autonomy and independence, as it encourages both reflection and active responsibility in learning.

6.4 Tests and games

Teachers can create their own archive of interactive tests and games using a creator that offers a vast choice: following simple instructions, teachers can easily create their own materials, store them in the archive and send them to single students or to entire classes.

6.5 Edilingua's library

Teachers can also find an archive of existing tests and games, created by our authors and editorial staff related to the books they use: progress tests, final unit tests, games and tests on vocabulary and communicative skills, etc. Teachers can easily adapt them to their specific needs, syllabus and students' progress.

6.6 Blog

This is a great tool to encourage collaboration, creativity and project based learning. Teachers can enrich their Text with non-verbal languages: they can add photos, embed videos and audio files. These way students, apart from communicating with each other using the foreign language, can also improve their comprehension and production skills and carry out common projects.

7. Conclusion

i-d-e-e is the result of years of constant work, study and experimentation and *i-d-e-e* version 2.0 is now a new beginning.

Practically we are going gather users' feedback to understand if the changes we made on the features were successful. We are also going to collect new suggestions from teachers, schools and students and try to implement them.

Our continuous research aims at constantly improving and upgrading the platform in order to offer to teachers and students all the tools they need in a single learning environment.

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