E-Teaching - a Wild Card for Vocational Curricula

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Abstract

The paper investigates a) the characteristics of language courses for vocational curricula and whether they meet the real needs of people working in companies or institutions operating in international contexts, b) the reasons why ICT is the most effective tool to teach languages for special purposes.

People who speak a foreign language at work can be divided into three categories: low level employees, high level employees/managers and people working in a foreign country. As far as the contents and register of their pieces of writing or speech are involved, belonging to one category or another makes a remarkable difference.

The managers who travel in foreign countries and have high level contacts are not our target learners, as they obviously represent a minority, who left school in the distant past, and quite often do not need any course at all. For the same reasons, as school teachers, we are not interested in the people who work in a foreign country and will have the best opportunities to learn their second language. Yet, as the paper will show, almost all courses follow a long established tradition, are written with these two categories in mind and do not focus the real needs of people facing the problems of their first days at work.

The paper will analyse the linguistic competences needed by the greatest majority of our students, who after graduation have to find a job and start working in their own country. They will use their competences only with foreigners, not to speak to people who work in their very office or for companies located in their own country.

That makes a great difference in the contents of the materials to be used. On the one hand certain aspects of every day communication should be better and more deeply developed than basic, general courses usually do, on the other, a more specialized language is needed. Materials and documents obtainable from local companies or professional environments offer language and knowledge in specific areas, at a level unlike to be reached by courses prepared for a national, sometimes even international, audience.

In addition, lots of materials can be found in the Internet which offers a large range of flexible, updated information ready to be integrated with the materials from local companies and institutions.

Both in the use of the Internet and in the contacts with business people or professionals students will have an active role in building their own micro-syllabuses, which will be the most powerful motivator for learning.

Teachers will use their ICT competences to create flashcards, units or modules out of the materials that have been chosen together with their students.