



New Opportunities for Young People to Fight Unemployment: The “Digital Competences for New Jobs” Project

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Abstract

The article is based on the European DC4JOBS project (under the Erasmus + programme - 2017-1-DE04-KA205-015273), which joins the efforts of the European Union to promote digital literacy among young people and fight skills mismatches and young unemployment. The project introduces its interactive and dynamic platform for young people with fewer opportunities in order to up-grade, up-skill or re-skill their digital competences to meet the needs of the labour market. The paper presents a summary of the project’s objectives, activities and outputs. It also gives insights into its six learning modules and into an ICT training course aimed at facilitating young people’s transition from school to work as well as re-skilling and up-skilling their digital skills and career guidance. The modules enable young people to improve information and skills in information and data literacy, digital communication, digital content creation, safety, soft skills and problem solving. The paper centres on the analysis of the feedback received from participants in the training course and aims at exploring their views on the content of the course and the project’s platform. The feedback shows clear strengths of the DC4JOBS training course and platform which were appreciated by participants as opportunities to exercise their independence in learning and to use state-of-the-art technology.

Keywords: *ICT training course, digital literacy, communication, young people, jobs.*

1. European context

Considering the challenges education faces today the European Commission has repeatedly asked all its member states to join their efforts and harmonise their educational strategies with the unprecedented development of technology, which will facilitate young people’s transition from schools to work. Introducing programmes meant to develop and improve young people’s digital skills required on the market would undoubtedly enhance their chances to find a job and have a decent life [1, 2].

2. The DC4JOBS project: objectives, partnership, target groups and main activities

The DC4JOBS project promotes digital literacy among young people and gives solutions to the existing skills mismatches between education, training and the world of work. Its main output is an interactive and dynamic platform, which enables young people with fewer opportunities to upgrade, upskill or reskill their digital competences. The project directly addresses young people aged 16-24 years, with fewer opportunities such as NEETs (young people who are not included in education, employment or training), young people from a migrant background, newly arrived immigrants, young refugees, early school leavers etc. The indirect target group is the labour market: employers and organisations.

The project consortium consists of organisations (NGO, NPO, SME in ICT, VET Provider) from six European countries with diverse expertise and sharing a special interest in the European initiatives in the field of youth and education. The DC4JOBS partners achieved the project’s objectives through a range of activities, outputs and results, including research through a desktop survey, an interactive training platform as well as an online and offline training course on digital skills acquisition [3].

3. The project’s main outputs

The research which investigated young people’s current digital skills acquisition for employment as well as their digital employability needs helped the partnership design the Digital and Employability



Competence Charter and the corresponding Open Badges system. The Digital and Employability Competence Charter and the Open Badges system defined the standards against which young people's digital competences were to be evaluated and enabled partners to devise a plan of intervention meant to meet young people's digital needs as identified by the research.

The plan of intervention centred round an online training course. Its five modules are organised in accordance with the indicators established in the Digital and Employability Competence Charter: Module 1, Information: identifying, locating, retrieving, storing, organising and analysing digital information, helps participants to use the internet browser and effective search techniques correctly online, to evaluate received information and to use web tools to organise and store online information. It also helps young people to develop search skills on the internet. Module 2, Communication: communication, sharing resources through online tools, linking with other online users, collaborating through digital tools, provides information on different aspects of digital communication. Young people get information as to how to share resources through online tools, link with other online users, collaborate through digital tools, interact with and participate in communities and networks etc. Module 3, Content-creation: creating and editing new content (from word processing to images and video). The module provides information on different digital contents (text, graphic, video, audio, more), their elements and structure and also supplies tools to create appropriate visual content for the digital field. Module 4, Safety: personal and data protection, security measures, safe and sustainable use. It provides information on different aspects of safety with regard to risks, measures, copyright and social media security. Module 5, Problem-solving, helps students to develop the competence of identifying needs and problems and solve abstract problems in digital environments. It also helps them build interpersonal skills to improve the ability to work with others.

The training course is provided with assessment tools. Thus, participants can validate their learning process by having badges issued corresponding to their level of digital skills acquisition. The Digital Badges, an automatic certification system, are indicators of one's accomplishment, skills, qualities or status. Badges can serve different functions depending on the activities with which they are associated. These badges have been used for setting goals, motivating behaviours, and representing and communicating achievements in many different contexts, education being one of them. The platform is completed by an e-Manual with instructions and guidelines for the implementation of the platform.

4. Piloting the training course

There were 21 participants, aged between 17 – 30, who came from disadvantaged environments (rural areas, disadvantaged social background, low level of education, unemployed etc). In recruiting the group the following aspects were taken into consideration: the specific target group of the project (young people); the specific characteristics of the target group (fewer opportunities); a homogeneous group for a better interaction.

The participants were told that it would be a professional ICT training for young people aimed at facilitating the transition from school to work and focused on re-skilling and up-skilling of their digital skills and career guidance. They were also given the outline of the guide and asked if they had any preferences. They replied that all five modules were interesting and agreed that they would like to go through them all. During the pilot testing, each day started with the introduction of each module and students gave feedback at the end of each day. The training course was organised in 5 days, 6 hours per day, 30 hours in all. Each module had an initial self-evaluation test which raised trainees' awareness about their strengths and weaknesses. In addition, participants took a final evaluation test on whose completion they were awarded a badge as evidence of their successful performance.

4.1. The questionnaires

The questionnaire for participants (Table1) assessed their perception and feelings about the training by asking them to grade using a scale 1 – 4 (4 - the highest).



Table 1: Participants' questionnaire

1. The quality of the overall training	1	2	3	4
2. The training was helpful and informative.	1	2	3	4
3. The DC4JOBS Moodle Platform	1	2	3	4
4. The trainer's knowledge and expertise Communication with the trainer Trainer's support, guidance and encouragement	1	2	3	4
5. Trainer's support, guidance and encouragement	1	2	3	4
6. Methodology	1	2	3	4
7. Training facilities – equipment	1	2	3	4
8. Internet access	1	2	3	4
9. Suitability of venue / room; safe and hospitable environment	1	2	3	4
10. Support materials, printouts	1	2	3	4
11. Training session Overall training, organisation and logistics The length of the sessions The structure of the session The interaction between the trainer and the trainees	1	2	3	4
12. Impact of training Did you improve your digital competences? Did this training help you to improve your professional effectiveness? What did you like most about the training? What did you like least about the training?	1	2	3	4
Please share any suggestions you might have for improving the next training				

Participants were also asked to answer open ended questions about suggestions they may have for improving the next training.

4.2. Questionnaire results and analysis

The participants' feedback shows clear strengths of the DC4JOBS course. 95.5% of the participants found the course clear and easy to understand, grading it highly (scores of 4); they appreciated the quality of the training as being helpful, informative and engaging their interest. Some of them (3%) said that even if some content was well-known they had the opportunity to perceive it from another perspective or to explain it to their peers, which was a good way to revise. As for the platform most of them (81%) graded it highly whereas 19% complained about the long time needed to approve their requests to log in.

As regards the trainer the participants highly appreciated his knowledge and expertise, his support, guidance and encouragement as well as the open interaction between the trainer and the trainees. An important feature that stands out from students' feedback is how much they appreciated the dynamism, the interactive nature of the course, having to work in teams, collaborating, which helped them learn from each other and also made learning fun. All students appreciated the opportunity to exercise their independence in learning and to use state-of-the-art technology. The participants agreed that although the content was quite basic there were still lots of things they learned (e.g. they created their LinkedIn account, which may be useful when looking for a job). They suggested the course be held during the school year and address a greater number of trainees. Some of them held that the course needs more practical tips and tasks related to daily work.

The training was particularly important for all participants involved in the project in terms of their professional development. The transnational learning mobility helped them broaden their horizons and extent their capabilities. All participants stated that they felt comfortable during the course having access to excellent equipment and being provided with useful materials; they appreciated the pleasant, collaborative atmosphere of the course. They all agreed that the course offered positive learning experiences in improving their digital competences and could help them find jobs online.



5. Conclusions

The DC4JOBS project offers participants plenty of opportunities to upgrade their ICT skills in new areas. The training also encourages the exchange of good practices, new synergies, new ideas etc. The young people acquire or improved their digital and employability skills in order to meet the needs of the labour market. Their career orientation can be improved and the skills gap (economy, market, education) can be bridged, as they will be more aware of the current and future needs of the economy [4].

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