

SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND LSP INTEGRA & TOOL TIPLS PROJECTS

INTEGRARE SOCIALĂ ȘI PREDAREA LIMBILOR STRĂINE PENTRU SCOPURI SPECIFICE PROIECTELE INTEGRA ȘI TOOL TIPLS

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Abstract. It is well known that language learning is best contextualised by cultural information. Teaching and learning languages in school has now long focused on integrating these two components to create a real life-like study background. Globalisation and migration of workforces have lately transferred this into real social inclusion needs: The aim of the **Integra** project (510258-LLP-1-2010-1-LTGRUNDTVIG-GMP) is to work together with social partners such as migrant communities and financial institutes to create a Europe wide network of relevant institutes in order to reach migrants in partner countries to improve their integration into local society by providing them with opportunities to gain language skills on basic financial matters. The aim of the **Tool TIPLS** project (LLP-LdV-TOI-2009-LT-0042) is to develop the tool to improve transparency of professional English language (as lingua franca) skills in the selected target sectors of the Hospitality industry. This will ensure future relevant levels of foreign language competences and their evaluation to people employed or seeking employment in this area.

Key words: social integration, language learning, online platforms

Rezumat. Predarea limbilor străine este perfect încadrată de elemente culturale și se bazează pe combinarea acestor două componente (limbă și cultură) pentru a oferi un cadru de studiu autentic, cât mai aproape de viața reală. Procesul globalizării și migrarea forțelor de muncă a transformat aceste aspecte într-o necesitate de incluziune socială. Scopul proiectului **Integra** este acela de a lucra împreună cu partenerii sociali, cum ar fi comunități de imigranți și instituții financiare, pentru a crea o rețea europeană care să aducă împreună instituții relevante cu scopul de a sprijini imigranții din țările partenere facilitând integrarea acestora în societate. Beneficiarilor le vor fi oferite oportunități de dezvoltare a competențele lingvistice specifice pentru domeniul financiar dar și resurse pentru o mai bună cunoaștere a culturii locale. Scopul proiectului **Tool TIPLS** este acela de a dezvolta un instrument pentru îmbunătățirea transparenței competențelor profesionale de limba engleză (ca lingua franca), în cadrul grupurilor țintă selectate din sectorul industriei serviciilor de turism și alimentație publică. Acest lucru va asigura pe viitor nivele relevante privind competențele de limbi străine, precum și evaluarea acestora, la persoanele angajate sau care caută un loc de muncă în acest domeniu.

Cuvinte cheie: integrare socială, limbi străine, platforme online

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INTRODUCTION

Never in the history of LSP has there been a more crucial need to integrate daily functionality with the language of communication. It is now that we need to consider the best alternatives to link day-to-day professional activities to the languages targeted by those professions. The high level of mobility requires that we update our society with individuals skilled not only in intercultural collaboration but also in offering concrete support to social integration. INTEGRA and TOOL TIPLS projects focus on developing foreign language skills accompanied by communication skills with regard to the field of hospitality and finances. Similitudes between the two projects stand in the practical approach to language teaching and the permanent direct link to the world of work where language „lives” through use and context.

It is vital that we, as a country aiming towards massive tourism development, are made aware of the great importance complementary offers carries. Mountains, pitoresque valleys and traditional restaurants may attract tourists but they will certainly not bound them to come back again and again. The exact same way, people living within the boundaries of the „immigrant status” will never become rightful citizens unless they are offered a helping hand and structured support. The above mentioned projects focus on these very aspects: they enhance foreign language learning including cultural elements and specific field information. INTEGRA focuses on integrating imigrants by offering language support related to the financial domain. TOOL TIPLS develops a portfolio to assess language skills in the field of hospitality.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The main action plan for both projects funded by the European Commission was the implementation of national level research then collated into an international research at the level of the partnership countries. In the case of the INTEGRA project, research was carried in the form of questionnaires distributed to imigrant beneficiaries. Responses were collected by each national partner, interpreted and presented internationally in the form of national reports. Based on this set of national reports the coordinators then elaborated the international overall report presenting the situation of migrant population at the level of the partnership countries. Following the needs analysis stage, the project develops on a set of materials for final beneficiaries which include language teaching and context information related to the field of finances. This is accompanied by the development of a methodology suitable for transfer of information and skills development at the level of the migrant population. Complementary to these activities are the efforts of the international partnership to collect examples of good practices in the project countries which illustrate practical ways to integrate imigrant population and thus enhance intercultural awareness.

The project plans to enhance and support a series of aspects as follows:

- the basic language skills of migrants living in partner countries, specifically relating to financial matters
- migrants' potential for mobility within the EU labour market
- intercultural learning and empathy in migrant communities for international communication in different countries
- self-confidence among migrants

- ability to break personal and cultural frontiers

TOOP TIPLS project started off from the idea that the European Framework of Reference cannot always be successfully applied when it comes to assessing language skills in a more specialised field like that of hospitality. Starting from EFR and adding to it skills and abilities directly related to the above mentioned field, structured on very well delineated professions, the partnership has built on an alternative for the EFR to be applied in restaurants, hotels etc. The prototype has been piloted through international collaboration. Direct beneficiaries were involved in the process and collaboration was both synchronous and asynchronous, via an online platform. Teams were created so as to illustrate collaboration between clients and service providers in various situations thus providing a great number of contexts and opportunities to test the structure of the new portfolio. Each session, online and face-to-face was accompanied by a feedback from the participating students and facilitators. All feedback was collected into a final report, again delivered at national level and suggestions for improvement were made by each member of the partnership.

Activities included in the project workplan focus on the following general aspects:

- to develop vocational skills through professional foreign language knowledge, specifically in relation to the Hospitality industry;
- to enhance young peoples' potential for mobility within the European labour market;
- to encourage intercultural learning and empathy in the Hospitality industry for international communication in different countries;
- to integrate professional language learning in theory with practical application within specific occupational sectors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The project plans to:

- to analyse their needs in terms of basic local language knowledge in relation to financial matters, financial terminology, basic financial documentation as well as specifics of financial systems in partner countries in order to fulfil everyday needs
- to compare good practice used for introducing basic local language on financial matters and basic country specific financial operations in old EU member states (members before 2004) as well as in new EU member states (joined EU in 2004 and later)
- to collect materials for the development of an essential Kit for migrants, which will consist of financial terminology, financial glossary and guide with main information on financial institutes or information sources in partner countries' and migrants' languages corresponding to migrant needs
- to organise and implement trainings together with language professionals and financial experts to representatives of migrant communities in order to cascade that training to ultimate beneficiaries-migrants of the partner countries.
- to collect materials to create and develop an active web portal with the support and direct involvement of social partners

Attracting social partners in the early stages of the project benefitted both the partnership and the end beneficiaries in a number of ways:

1. The partnership had the opportunity to present the objectives of the project from the very beginning and thus select those participants interested in the activities planned for the project
2. It offered the migrant population more time to internalize the new information on the project and thus better understand what their personal gain can be within this project
3. It allowed (migrant) associations the time to plan ahead and possibly come up with new approaches which would benefit the migrant population they represent

The research carried out on the begging of the INTEGRA project clearly illustrated the following findings:

Regarding the age groups which the research has involved: there was a majority of young people, under the age of 20 (47 respondents), a slightly smaller percentage of people aged between 21-30 (36 respondents) and a minority of people aged between 31-40 (3 respondents)

This illustrates on one hand the large number of young people migrating to Romania for educational purposes and their interest in improving their language and cultural knowledge on the country they have migrated to. They could be the ones to benefit the most from this project because their minimum stay in Romania is for the duration of their studies (4-6, 10 years)

On the other hand the fact that there were only a few respondents within a higher age category is illustrative of various aspects:

1. They are not grouped in associations, therefore they are more difficult to reach and involve as individuals
2. They have a tight work schedule
3. They do not have previous experience with this type of collaborations

Our aim was to involve a wide range of nationalities so that we could collect data on the needs and attitudes towards language use of a wider category of future potential beneficiaries. We were able to collect data from people coming from the following country of origin:

- 16 people from Israel;
- 15 people from Tunisia;
- 9 people from France;
- 5 people from each of the following countries Nigeria/China/Morocco;
- 4 people from each of the following countries Portugal/Norway/Greece;
- 2 people from each of the following countries South Africa/India/Palestine;
- one person from each of the following countries Ireland/Somalia/Sweden/UK/Kenya/Pakistan/Mauritius/Albania/Sri Lanka/Madagascar/Canada/Lebanon.

Differences in language proficiency and interest in further cultural development could be traced back (although not as a rule) to levels of education.

We involved people with different levels of education to identify whether there was a clear need for language and cultural education for all these categories starting from basic education to university education.

We addressed:

- 32 people with bachelor degree;
- 24 people with secondary education;
- 15 people with non-university higher education;
- 2 people with basic education/vocational education;
- 6 people haven't answered to this question.

About the level of language barriers the respondents were faced with, as a result of lacking a good command of the new language, the majority stated they encountered medium (29 people, 34% - choice 3) or rather high (25 people, 29%, choice 4) level difficulties.

On the language they use within their families a majority of 74 people (82%) answered that they currently use their mother tongue; 12 people (10%) answered that they currently speak other languages (English, Jordan, Arabic, Norwegian, Urdu, French and Spanish); 10 people (8%) answered that they currently speak the local language (Romanian).

This shows that there is a need of having these people more involved and active within the local community so as to offer them with more opportunities for Romanian language use, outside their family. It is almost certain that, if the majority of the family members do not speak Romanian (not native or not with a very high level of language) the entire family will use another language. To balance this they need to be offered more varied opportunities to use and improve their Romanian within very concrete contexts. It is also very important that they are presented with language and approaches that they can afterwards easily transfer to daily life to ensure continuity.

Feedback on the piloting process in TOOL TIPLS project underlined that:

- levels of language need to be adapted accordingly to the language functionality of the respective profession;
- language use must be alliniated to

The specific objectives of the project are:

- to define the levels of skills developed using existing VET curricula in each project partner country;
- to prepare the tool of descriptors of professional English language skills and competences(TOOL) based on CEF and ECVET;
- to implement international piloting in partner countries;
- to consult social partners–potential employers and professional consultants to implement the final improvement of the TOOL;
- to disseminate and valorize the project products via local, regional, national and international networks, via a project conference and other means as opportune.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Evaluator and tutors need to consider the level, contexts, frequency and purpose of communication when assessing foreign language skills in a specific field of activity;

2. Lifelong learning can support integration of migrant communities especially when support is delivered from representatives of those communities;

3. Language learning and assessment of language skills need to be determined firstly by the learners need and practical usage of the language in relation to concrete daily life activities;

4. General linguistic and cultural support – basic knowledge of language and culture should be the starting point to help new comers better integrate themselves and then plan their future development in this direction.

5. Support for specialized contexts – The results of the analysis show that beyond the need of basic cultural info and linguistic abilities, migrants need to be able to deal with daily financial matters and they need to be trained in this direction as well.

6. Relevance - all the information and training need to be contextualize so as to bridge the gap between theory and practice and equip beneficiaries directly with the skills and information they need in daily life.

7. Appropriateness is another key factor referring both to language level/ cultural information and personal learning needs of the beneficiaries.

8. As communication in any language is an extremely complex process, all 4 skills need to be addressed and developed on to equip beneficiaries with a holistic experience which would later on ensure their successful performance in different linguistic circumstances.

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