

**SLEST (European Linguistic Standard for Professionals in
Tourism) SLEST 2.0**
Project No: 2013-1-ES1-LEO05-66445

Report piloting Italy¹

Introduction	2
Methodology	4
Special remarks from Dr. Ruiz	5
Questionnaire	7
Findings A: Course Evaluation	8
Findings B: Issues identified from Student Feedback	13
Conclusion	16
Recommendations	17

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Rome, June 2015

INTRODUCTION

UET is one of the partner organisations of the SLEST 2.0 European Linguistic Standard for Tourism Project and also its coordinator. Partners were requested to recruit groups and individuals to pilot the on-line language materials from February to May 2015. The piloting was to include a combination of tutored and independent learners to test the materials in the various languages. This report gives the findings of the piloting.

GENERAL INDICATIONS

Start: 16.02.2015

Duration: 10 weeks

End: first week of May 2015

Participants: 105 (tutored and not - plus a non precise number of participants, i.e. people who didn't send their names and email-addresses).

Languages requested by participants and their distribution on the professions:

	English	German	Spanish
hotel (reception)	27	9	
travel guide	26	14	7
travel agent	4	2	
waiter	16		
total	73	25	7

COMPOSITION OF PILOTING

UET, with the help of the external partner CESCOT Nazionale, recruited 105 learners for piloting from all over Italy. Those who choose the tutoring were accompanied by four different tutors (2 for English (one in Italy and one in Spain) and 1 for German from UET in Italy and 1 for Spanish from UMA in Spain). From the 105 students who enrolled for the tutoring, the better part dropped out

during the piloting period, mainly because lack of time (see also the interviews for rational motives).

The assisted learning consisted in:

- regular homework (mainly: students write emails, the tutor sends back the corrected homework with comments; 5 times during the piloting period)
- possibility to contact tutor by mail at any time during the piloting period (asking information, assistance, help etc.)
- telephone hotline every two weeks for two hours each to contact tutor directly (25/02, 11/03, 25/03, 01/04, 15/04, 29/04/2015)
- in some cases assistance directly on the phone (only exceptionally)

Note: Because of the exceptionally high number of participants it was not possible (as planned at the beginning) to offer also the possibility to talk in L2 with the tutor on the phone or via Skype².

² Talking only once for half an hour with each student would have meant more than 50 hours of conversation!

METHODOLOGY

Each of the tutored participants were given one tutored session per week for 10 weeks via e-mail or telephone talks; students were asked to select one profession of their choice. The tutors delivered the sessions with staff support in attendance for administrative and technical help.

In the absence of electronic assessment and tracking in the SLEST 2.0 software, students were given a self-assessment sheet to track their performance. The tracking sheet was used to:

- keep a record of completed units and exercises
- record hours spent using the e-learning materials
- give feedback on software
- give feedback on any other issues including language
- support overall evaluation at the end of the course

The course evaluation feedback and self assessment sheets were used for data collection and subsequent data analysis (see below).

Following the piloting, UET will revise the language learning materials to reflect the student feedback in conjunction with that of the project partners.

Specific remarks from Dr. Maria Isabel Romero Ruiz (University Malaga)

Dr. Ruiz from the University of Malaga as one of the partner organisations in the SLEST 2.0 European Linguistic Standard for Tourism Project was requested to assist an Italian group of learners during the piloting period from February to May 2015. The piloting was to include a combination of tutored and independent learners to test the materials in English. What follows are the findings of the piloting of 32 Italian students recruited by the Italian partner, including students going for the waiter course and for the hotel course. Of those 32 students, 17 went for the hotel course and 15 for the waiter course.

The piloting has taken place between the middle of February and the end of April, although some of the students have taken a little bit longer, finishing the units and tasks in the first week of May. Ms Ruiz first contacted all students, explaining the process and tasks and sending them questionnaires and forms. They had to do one task every two units and send them back by email every two weeks. She corrected the tasks and sent the feedback by email.

The tasks were the following:

Units 1 and 2: Student's introduction

Units 3 and 4: Describe your hotel / restaurant facilities

Units 5 and 6: Write a customer's complaint

Units 7 and 8: Give directions from your hotel / restaurant to the city centre

Units 9 and 10: Write a conversation between yourself and the waiter / receptionist to order a meal / book a room

The deadlines for the units and the tasks were:

- End of February
- Middle of March
- End of March
- Middle of April
- End of April

In the absence of electronic assessment and tracking in the SLEST software, students were given a

self-assessment sheet to track their performance. The tracking sheet was used to:

- keep a record of completed units and exercises
- record hours spent using the e-learning materials
- give feedback on software
- give feedback on any other issues including language
- support overall evaluation at the end of the course

The course evaluation feedback and self-assessment sheets were used for data collection and subsequent data analysis. Of the recruited students, one dropped from the very beginning and of the 31 remaining, only 7 actually started doing the units and tasks going for the blended learning, and only one went for the self-study option. Of these initial numbers, only 4 doing blended learning finished all the units and tasks and completed the questionnaire in Italian (evaluation feedback) and the self-assessment sheets. Also the student going for the self-study modality completed all the units but not the tasks.

The questionnaires and protocollos are included in this report.

QUESTIONNAIRE

SLEST 2.0 PROJECT (EUROPEAN LINGUISTIC STANDARD FOR PROFESSIONALS IN TOURISM) COURSE EVALUATION

NAME:							
ORGANISATION:							
CONTACT DETAILS: ADDRESS EMAIL / TELEPHONE							
PROFESSION/STUDENT:							
DATE:							
PLEASE TICK AS APPROPRIATE							
INDEPENDENT LEARNER				GUIDED LEARNING (WITH TUTOR SUPPORT)			
TIME TAKEN TO COMPLETE COURSE	15 hours or under		16-25 hours		26-35 hours		Over 35 hours

Thank you for taking part in the piloting of SLEST 2.0 Project. In order to assess the learning materials and make any necessary changes prior to the formal launch, we shall be grateful if you could let us have your views. Please could you complete the following evaluation and feedback form and hand in to your tutor or return directly to us (as applicable).

LEARNING MATERIALS			
		Scale of 1 to 10 (Low to high)	Comments/suggestions for improvement
1	How would you rate access to the learning materials via the SLEST website?		
2	How user-friendly would you rate the learning materials?		
3	Are the materials structured in a way that was easy to follow?		
4	Do you think that there are enough variety of exercises?		
5	Do the scenarios closely reflect typical situations you would come across in your profession?		
6	Does the language content closely reflect typical situations you would come across in your profession?		
7	How much do you think your language levels have improved?		
8	Would you recommend these materials to a colleague in the industry?		

Any other general comments about your experience

--

FINDINGS A – COURSE EVALUATION for TUTORED STUDENTS

Comprehensive feedback was collected from the self assessment and tracking sheets. The feedback was wide ranging including general comments about the difficulty of exercises to issues with software or language. Given the volume of feedback, it is not possible to supply all the detail in this report, but the main issues are set out below.

Total of questionnaires received: 20

Independent learners: 8 with tutor: 9 (difference to 20: no answer)

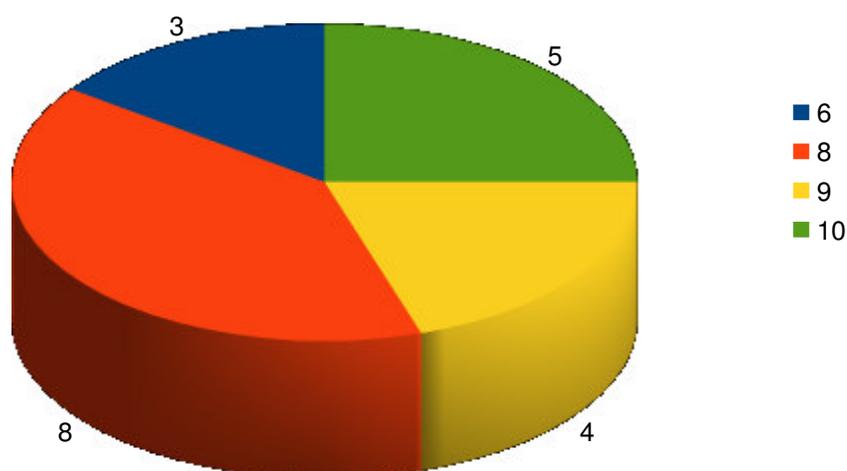
Hours spent to complete course

up to 15 hours: 7 / from 16 to 25: 4 / from 26 to 35: 1 / more than 35: 2
(difference to 20: no answer)

Questions 1 to 8 (statistical analysis)

Question 1

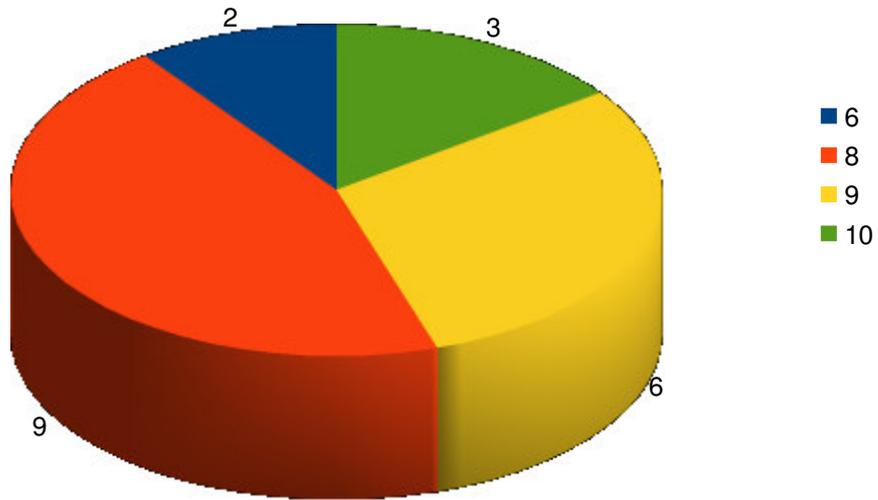
How would you rate access to the learning materials via the SLEST website?



$\emptyset = 8,4$

Question 2

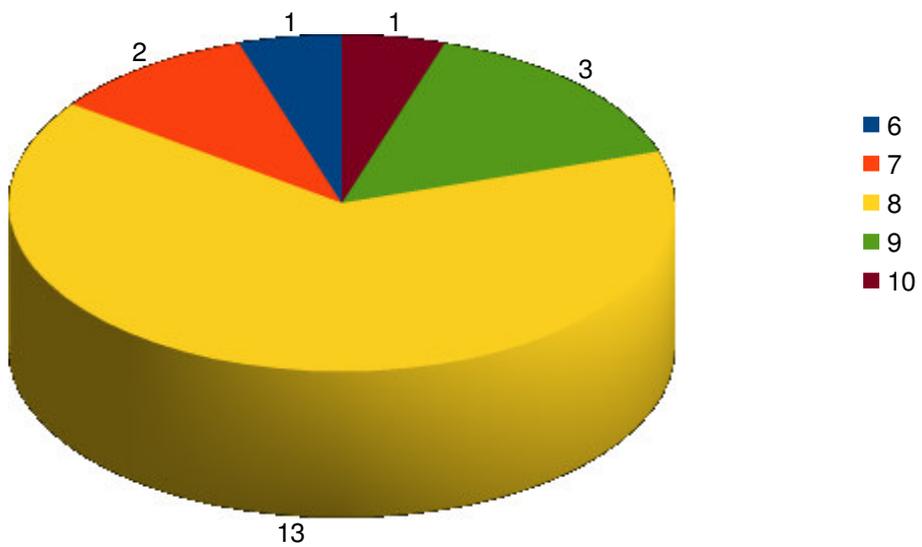
How user-friendly would you rate the learning materials?



$\emptyset = 8,4$

Question 3

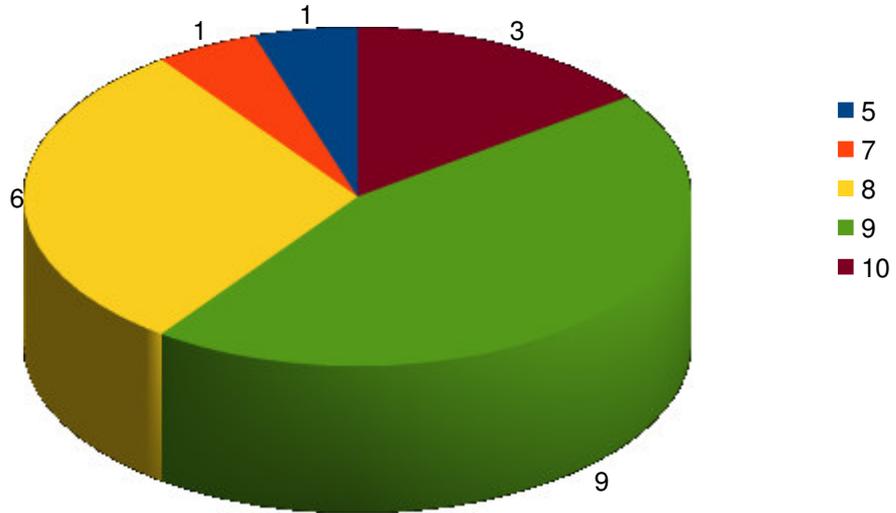
Are the materials structured in a way that was easy to follow?



$\emptyset = 8$

Question 4

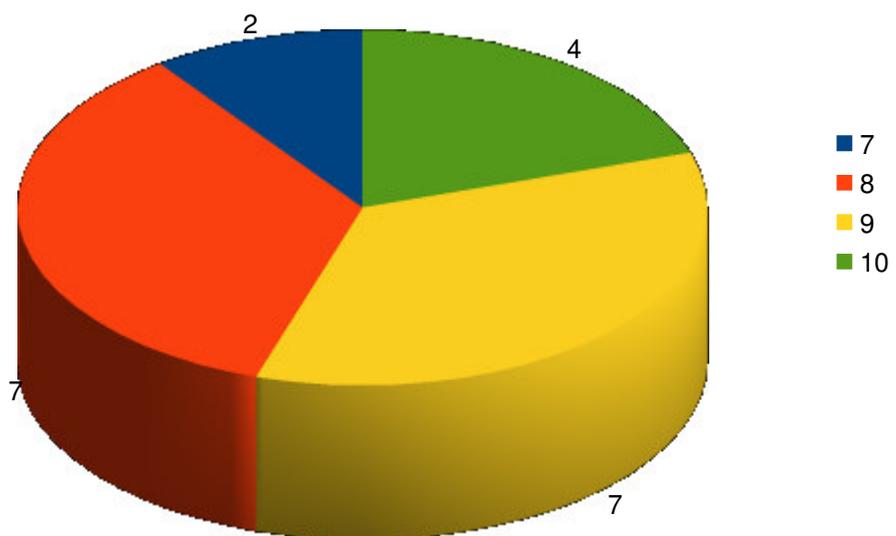
Do you think that there are enough variety of exercises?



$\emptyset = 8,5$

Question 5

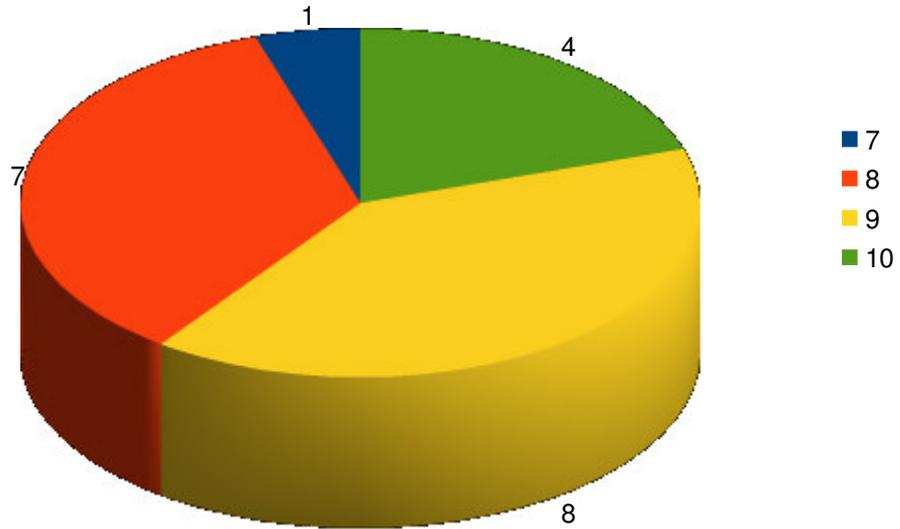
Do the scenarios reflect typical situations you come across in your profession?



$\emptyset = 8,6$

Question 6

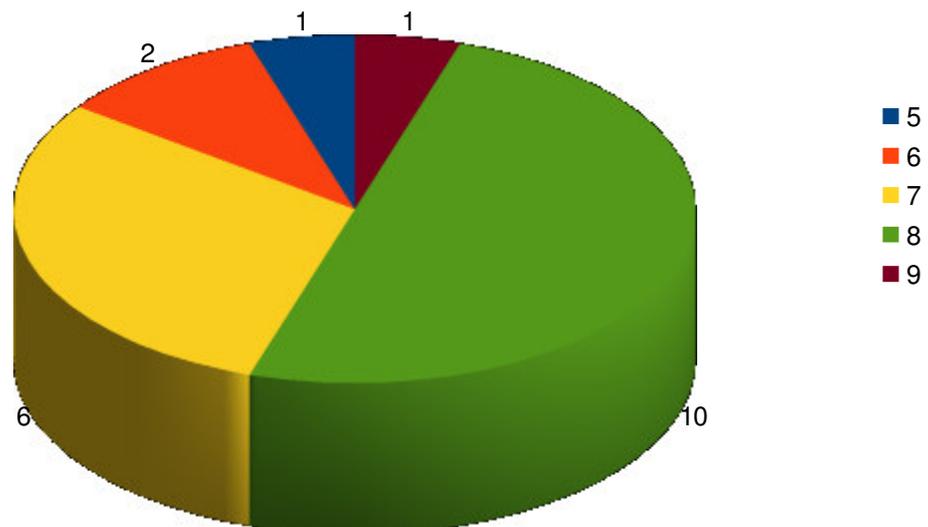
Does the language content reflect typical situations in your profession?



$\emptyset = 8,75$

Question 7

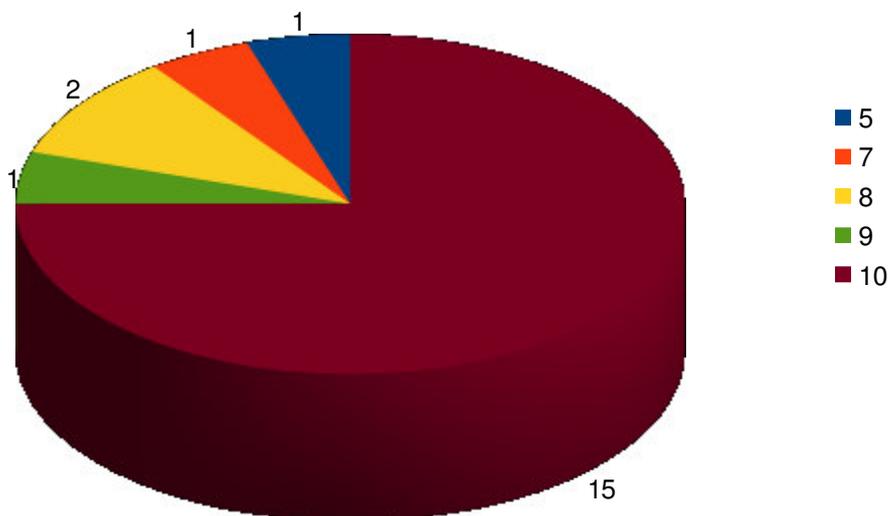
How much do you think your language levels have improved?



$\emptyset = 7,4$

Question 8

Would you recommend these materials to a colleague?



$\emptyset = 9,35$

global $\emptyset = 8,43$

FINDINGS B– ISSUES IDENTIFIED FROM STUDENT FEEDBACK

The first important result of the feedback is the fact that NONE was negative, at the contrary: the global average of 8,43 out of 10 showed the generally high satisfaction of the users with the online materials offered; furthermore, no question got an average evaluation below 8, besides question 7 (*How much do you think your language levels have improved?* - still way above intermediate), which is not surprising because it takes much more (in means of time and quantity of material) to improve ones language capacities in a sensible way.

Feedback from piloting in Italy

ANNA MARIA B.

Very positive. I do not have much time at my disposal, so this way of learning is perfect for me.

VANIA B.

Nothing to add, it couldn't be better.

If this experience will be repeated next year, I would be glad to have the opportunity to participate. Thank you very much for the possibility given to be part of this project.

CLAUDIO C.

It was not easy to find the “handbook” under “downloads” on the home page because one thinks that you have to look for it under “materials”.

I found the course interesting also because I could strengthen some concepts which I already knew.

Very interesting and enlightening the exercises regarding the slang, things I can use when talking to the clients of my hotel.

ALESSANDRA M.

Altogether it was a good experience. I recapitulated some grammar rules and idiomatic expressions which are quite useful for my work. I would have desired more vocabulary regarding history of arts and architecture.

FELICIA M.

To tell the truth this is the first time that I follow an online language course, but to me it seems that it proceeds without problem and its easy to follow. Nevertheless I have to admit that there is still much to do for me and I have to find my personal method, work on my vocabulary, and rectify my translations (especially regarding the German language).

GIUSI M.

I just started with the exercises but it seems to me that they are valid; I have removed the dust from my vocabulary and the exercises are quite versatile.

PAOLA M.

The materials are very useful, actualised and perfect for stepping-up ones linguistic and communicative competences

Furthermore, the possibility to repeat regularly the exercises, after having comprehended the errors made, permits to learn better the correct terms.

DANIELA P.

With the type of exercise where you have to complete a dialogue or a simulation of a guided visit with the use of words chosen by the learner without the help of a list of synonyms, sometimes - in my point of view - it seems quite difficult to find the word which is accepted by the software. When I enter a synonym instead of the word accepted by the system/ program, my choice is declared as an error where actually it is not when conversing with a foreign guest.

In the exercise in unit 5 where you have to fill in words into a list sometimes the program doesn't accept synonyms although they are correct. For example under the heading "museum" words like *guide*, *guided tour* etc. sometimes are rejected although they are pertinent.

ALESSANDRO P.

To me the linguistic materials are well structured; I would propose in some cases, though, small meliorations, especially regarding the expressive style (i.e. under "waiter", story 4, the wording "water *senza gas*" is not quite correct (you would say *liscia o naturale*) – to me it seems that this is a direct translation from German (*ohne Kohlensäure*).

Anyway, these are very small imperfections which do not compromise the general usefulness of the materials offered.

ILARIA P.

The idea behind these materials is very good; I would propose a more intense digital interactivity

between these exercises and the user.

MARIA R.

Very nice and useful, especially for someone on level B1. I would do it again.

GIULIETTA S.

I still have not finished it all, but I can already tell that for someone like me who has abandoned the grammar a long time ago it takes a lot of time to finish the exercises.

It would have been extremely useful if every single exercise would have been recorded in order to be able to listen to the words (the best would be to be able to register also one's own voice and listen to it!).

In any case I suppose that when you go on with the exercises these problems might decrease.

I like the idea to have the possibility to repeat the exercises after having done them once, in order to memorize the contents and to preserve in the meantime what one has learned.

CONCLUSION

The experiences made with the tutor-assisted online language course put into evidence the importance of a blended-learning approach when following a CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) approach; working alone with the sole help of online materials seems to be quite ineffective and unsatisfying.

The tutors in Italy experienced a quite enthusiastic starting time by the learners, but the engagement of many of them diminished constantly over the weeks. The feedback received after the end of the piloting was very positive, so the quality of the language learning materials cannot be the problem. The participants, mainly professionals working in hotels or as tour guides already for some years, more or less 30 years of age, generally never participated (or many years ago) at a (specific) language course, even less online. Some use memorized standard sentences when communicating in a foreign language, others speak or write in quite a basic way regarding more or less always the same situations. (For more information regarding the reasons for dropping-out see the statements made in the interviews.)

Those who participated more or less regularly emphasized the good quality and the usefulness of the SLEST 2.0 online language learning materials. As it has been underlined right from the start, they represent NOT a structured language course but loosely connected exercises to practice ones L2-knowledge, and as this it has been accepted and appreciated. The users apprised the possibility to strengthen their vocabulary, to overcome “gaps” in the grammar still present or to learn new, useful, and sometimes difficult specific expressions for their profession.

Based on our findings the piloting was very successful. Accessibility and use of the materials was good, but there are some inherent problems, as stated, with software which are beyond our control. Thorough analysis has enabled us to move forward and develop the materials on order to produce a high quality learning resource.

RECOMMENDATIONS

All findings from the piloting outcome underline the fact that commitment is the key, but also that online (language learning) activities need *necessarily* individual support in order to be successful, and equally important seems to be some pressure from the outside (= by the teacher / trainer / tutor) to reach the learning objectives, perhaps because for most people the intrinsic motivation is not strong enough to follow an online (language) course from the beginning to the end regularly and in a well self-organized way.

Nearly always learners prefer lessons with a teacher, or in the traditional way or at least in blended-learning form, as underlined for example by learners who participated in a survey carried out by the author at the end of two language courses at the Bank of Italy in 2014 (one only classroom, the other only online): it showed a clear preference of the participants for lessons with a teacher, or in the traditional way or at least in blended-learning form. In fact (and as mentioned before), with only online courses we can observe a very high drop-out rate. The main reasons for this are probably the following:

- lack of support
- lack of printed materials
- dislike of the computer medium

The observations described are confirmed by the outcomes of a series of interviews carried out on the phone after the end of the piloting period of the SLEST 2.0 project in June 2015.

Explanations given for dropping-out from the online language learning activities were (listed in sequence of importance)

- no or little time (*by far the most important explanation*)
- the project materials were not what the person expected
- the level was too simple

All these observations lead to the conclusion that it seems important to offer the right amount of guidance and support to suit the needs of each student.

So what is the consequence of all this? When it comes to language learning and teaching, it is a sheer illusion to think that a language learner could arrive at a somehow satisfactory mastery of a foreign language by only following online courses or activities. What they need instead is a

combination of various approaches, and online learning activities can only be ONE of many propositions, amongst which we can recite

- connection of learners amongst each other (especially outside the classroom)
- connection of face-to-face phases with online activities outside the classroom
- combination of various forms of learning: collaborative, individual, product orientated, ...
- clear presentation of learning tasks
- regular feedback

And regarding the work with the SLEST 2.0 online language learning materials, all users should be aware of the fact that the exercises on the SLEST 2.0 homepage should be used (and/or)

- a) as support in a wider language learning environment
- b) connected with a blended-learning course
- c) connected with traditional classroom activities
- d) together with the support of a teacher / tutor
- e) as a brush-up of mainly already existing knowledge