

Harnessing Open Source Technology to Address the Learning Needs of SMEs

Coventry University, U.K.
 © Rosario Kane-Iturrioz / Anne Dickinson.
r.kane-iturrioz@coventry.ac.uk
a.dickinson@coventry.ac.uk



Introduction

- Language and intercultural skills are needed for the internationalization of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) [European Commission, 2009].
- A need exists for the provision of attractive and affordable training for SMEs affected by the current financial cutbacks.
- Open source technologies provide the means to reduce the cost of learning.

E-TALIA Project (www.e-talia.net)

Aims

- Identify the specific training practices and the language and cultural awareness needs of SMEs in the Hospitality and Leisure sectors.
- Produce an integrated approach to language and intercultural training.
- Develop attractive and affordable blended e-learning courses building upon a training model used at the coordinating institution (Coventry University) [Kane-Iturrioz, 2009 & 2010].

Funded by the European Union (Leonardo TOI).

Needs analysis survey

- Undertaken in five of the six partner countries (Germany, Ireland, Poland, Spain & U.K.).
- Languages: English & German.
- Lack of understanding of intercultural issues.
- Pronounced differences in training culture and little exposure to e-learning.
- Preferred approach to training: Learning by 'doing' and grounded on practical experience.

Xerte Online Toolkits (XOT) – selected for the construction of learning objects because of ease of use and free access to technical support



Figure 2. Xerte Online Toolkit website (information and support)

Greater accessibility



Figure 8. Options for students browsing preferences

Opportunities for further practice



Figure 6. Example of a Webquest page

Moodle - selected as the course shelf through its wide use as a course management system and its compatibility with other open source tools

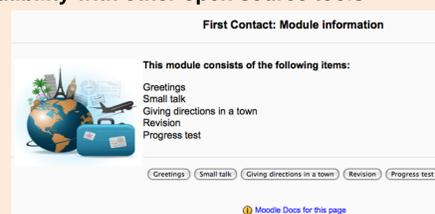
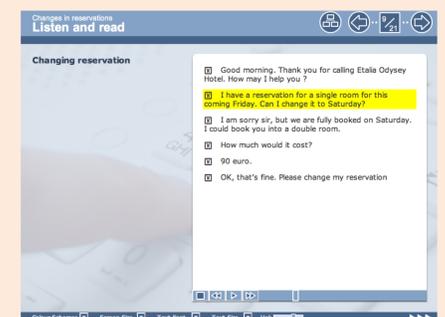


Figure 1. Module information display using Moodle Lesson (branching)

XOT templates - provide many features relevant to language teaching.



Figures 3 to 6 – examples of course materials

Open source technologies – structure of the courses e-learning template

iSpringFree – converts PowerPoint text and audio materials into Flash files accessible from mobile devices and PCs.

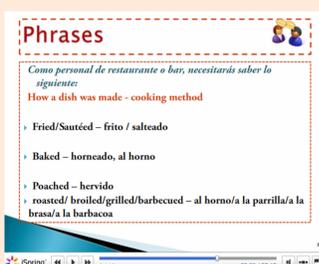


Figure 7. Revision materials in multimedia format using iSpringFree

Reflections on course development

Open source technologies – requested by the funding body and used as a means to provide the low-cost and flexible courses required by SMEs.

The blended learning approach includes a reduced tutor contact time driving down costs whilst supporting learner confidence and motivation.

The integration of language and intercultural training proved to be challenging.

Moodle has been very useful as the project document and materials repository in addition to forum and wiki-based communication among project partners.

The courses are undergoing piloting by SMEs and the preliminary feedback is encouraging.

References:

- European Commission (2009). *Internationalisation of European SMEs*. [online] http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/files/support_measures/internationalisation/internationalisation_sme_final_en.pdf
- Kane-Iturrioz, R. (2009) "Enhancing Blended Language Learning: Development of a new eLearning Template", [online], EUROCALL Review 15, March-September. Special Issue, pp 36-55. <http://www.eurocall-languages.org/news/newsletter/15/index.html>
- Kane-Iturrioz, R. (2010) *Effective Blended Learning for Languages: Learners' Experiences and Perceptions*. Proceedings to the Third International Conference on Innovation in Learning for the Future 2010; e-Learning, Istanbul, May, 10-14, 2010. TC Istanbul Kultur University Publication No: 125, pp 340- 350.