An Overview of the European Commission Leonardo da Vinci (LdV) Programme Tranfer of Innovation Project: "MLARG – Mobile Learning for the young people at risk groups"

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Summary

Today the value of mobile connectedness has been recognized. Mobile technologies have been implemented in many fields such as business and trade. Recently, applications of mobile technologies have become a main area of interest and research in other fields such as education. The aim of this project is to implement mobile technologies in developing language skills and competencies, and to ensure the transfer of implementation to the field of lifelong learning. It is designed for young people who are referred to as less advantaged in terms of their socioeconomic status and equal access to educational resources (e.g., coursebooks, language learning software programs, videos, computers, …). Therefore, it is not only innovative in terms of the use of language learning technologies, but also inclusive as it takes into consideration the needs of young people at risk groups. The purpose of providing such risk groups with mobile learning (m-learning) facilities is to create a new learning environment for them and to better the quality of their social and economic life.

The project will be realized in two stages. The first stage will be fulfilled when the appropriate mobile infrastructures, the content and methodology for mobile language learning are created. Then the second phase will be completed when the designed content with the built-up system is implemented. At the end of the implementation process, the methodology and the content developed for mobile language learning and mobile learning infrastructures will be the major outcomes of the project.

The consortium will work in a cooperative way to analyze the needs of the young people at risk groups, and to develop e-learning materials and methodologies for mobile technologies. All of the partners participating in this project have a great deal of experiences in e-learning and developing programs for the young people. They will work as consultant partners in this project.

The contracting institution will develop the infrastructure for mobile technologies with the cooperation from KOSGEB (Small and Medium Sized Industry Development Organization) and engineering departments. The contracting institution will also get support from the consultant

partners to realize the needs of young people at risk groups, the content development, the methodology and the implementation of mobile technologies.

This project will be one of the pioneering mobile language learning projects in Turkey. This project will encourage other sectors (e.g. business) to implement and transfer this created platform to reach other risk groups and to take their needs into account to improve their social and business life. In terms of education, the youngsters at risk groups will learn and practise language and technological skills which will make them more qualified as far as their education is concerned. The project will take two years. It will be carried out with three European partners from Italy, Slovakia and Czech Republic.

Introduction

"MLARG-Mobile Learning for the young people at risk groups" is about the use and adaptation of mobile technology in language learning. It highlights the competencies and qualifications of young people at risk groups, and aims to integrate them to social and business activities. By creating an integrative and inclusive approach to support young people in risk groups, the project also combats the discrimination across young population. This project aims to raise the competence level of the participants of the study – i.e., infrastructures for mobile learning technologies will be developed and used and the competence level of participants will be revealed. The project will begin on the 1 November 2009 and finish on the 31 October 2011.

Why is this project important and necessary?

Today, mobile technologies have become major digital tools of communication and information technologies taking place of PCs day by day (Stone, 2004). One of the indications of this fact is the significant increase in the number of mobile phone subscribers. In the present project, mobile technology is taken into account and designed as a medium of language learning for young people (aged between 16-24) who are beyond the age of compulsory education. In this study, mobile technology is chosen as a medium to implement the project as there are studies and reports that indicate its benefits. On the basis of the results of an EU-granted project, Atwell (2005) found that mobile learning helps learners to develop positive attitudes towards literacy both in school subjects and technology. It also motivates learners to take part in activities in mobile medium of communication as it brings attractiveness through multimedia tools such as mediaBoard, portal page, clips and so forth.

He concludes that “mobile learning can contribute to attract the young people to learn, maintaining their interest and support their learning and development” (p.12).

Another major reason to adapt mobile learning for young people at risk groups is that mobile learning allows “anywhere”, “anytime” and “personalized” learning for everyone. For the target group in the present project, it is considered that using “anytime and anyplace” will give young people at risk groups a strong feeling of being taken care of, valued, and included in the society. The mobile medium of education will provide the target group with courses not in a fixed place or time but anytime and anyplace whenever they want. This allows them to personalize their way of learning.

In an already completed Leonardo da Vinci (LdV) project on mobile learning contracted by Erickson from Finland, it is reported and suggested that there is a need to adapt mobile devices to education and enhance learning environments. In the present project, these remarks are taken into account and outlined by taking into consideration the needs of young people at risk groups. The aim is to provide the content not in a fixed environment but in various possible environments such as PDAs, Cascading Style Sheets and Small Screen Rendering (SSR). In addition to enhancing learning environments with flexible tools, mobile learning also helps to raise its users’ self-esteem and confidence (Atwell, 2005). These are very important points when risk groups are considered.

The aims of the project can be listed as:

- To enhance language skills through new learning platforms,
- To develop methodology for mobile language learning,
- To develop needs analysis and strategies to expand the use of technology in language learning,
- To provide risk groups with lifelong learning opportunities,
- To give risk groups an access to the innovative technological implementation,
- To exploit emerging technologies to develop adaptability to new learning situations,
- To promote the contributions of young people in social interaction and harmony,
- To combat with discrimination and unequal situations when adapting mobile technologies to language learning,
- To improve skills and competencies of risk groups for personal and vocational development,

- To facilitate the integration of young people at risk groups to national and international labour market.

These aims go parallel with the priorities 4 and 5 as they are linked harmoniously to each other. When this project is actualized, the competencies and needs of young people will be revealed. This will affect the quality of their vocational skills and lead them in their business activities.

Type of transfer:

The transferred project is about creation of the Integrated Virtual Training/Consultancy System based on application of up-to date Information and Communication (ICOTEL ref no: SK/02/B/F/PP/-142261). The outcomes of the project are training modules so as to increase of the level of knowledge of ICT use in selected areas. The present proposal transfer the working methodology of the project ICOTEL, that is, designing needs analysis and providing training and diagnosing the problems in providing virtual modules. The platform is also transferred. ICOTEL mainly is based on e-learning platforms. However, understanding e-learning platforms will help to design IT and mobile technologies for scenario and content creation.

In terms of sectorial perspective, the transfer will be within the same sector yet, the successful outcomes will encourage to apply the process in other sectors.

In terms of geographical perspective, ICOTEL was applied in the context of Europe. This project will be implemented in Turkey with the experiences and assistance of European partners. The result is expected to create potentials and necessary infrastructures in a different geography, in the candidate country for EU membership. The other perspective is the technological one as the transfer will highlight the transfer of developing modules with ICT to the mobile technologies.

The rational behind the choosing ICOTEL project is to find out whether ICT can be starting point in developing content for training via mobile learning. In ICT applications, the content is virtual training modules (See the printed version of the content outline). Another reason to base on the project about ICT training modules is to adapt the technological infrastructures to the newly emerging applications such as mobile phones or blogs. Therefore, the continuum of the project life will be ensured by transferring ICT platforms, infrastructure and content to mobile learning. The project proposed will use the methodology of creating the training modules in the format of mini-course, and present if there is a real difference in terms of methodology of creating content built in ICT or mobile technologies.

The working plan of the ICOTEL[1] project will help to outline the needs analysis plan, implementation phases and presenting the methodology of mobile language learning. The added value of the project is that the platform of mobile technologies and content will be compared to the ICT platforms and content. This will result in two contributions: the transfer of the platform to provide virtual training and development of methodology for mobile language learning.

References

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Stone, B. (2004). The next frontiers: way cool phones. *Newsweek*, 7 June 2004.

[1] See the following web pages for a detailed explanation of ICOTEL project. http://www.fiit.stuba.sk/~truchly/icotel/m2_1/M.2.1-en-extended/index.html, http://www.fiit.stuba.sk/~truchly/icotel/m2_3/M.2.3-en-extended/index.html.