

The future of language education in the light of Covid - lessons learned and ways forward

Case study on experiences of foreign language teaching during the Covid pandemic

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- A. *Please write briefly about a memorable language teaching experience, either particularly challenging or especially successful, as an example of your practice during the pandemic:*

What is the national context? What kind of institution? Who were the language learners?

Title: insights from a hackathon Challenge as an opportunity to upskill language teachers during the pandemic

Our initiative refers to upskilling and to professional development of pre-service language teachers during the pandemic. For many years the module “creation of plurilingual and pluricultural activities in language education” was offered to university teachers/ future language teachers carrying out a master’s degree at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Suddenly in 2020 due to the pandemic, the closure of the university campus (lockdown) urged us to find ways to deliver the course in a way that would still allow students to collaborate in small groups (as it was the case of the face-to-face modality before the pandemic), breaking away from a top-down series of online lectures on the topic. We thus decided to adopt a novel approach and to run the course in the form of a hackathon Challenge.

Hackathons are time-constrained events that bring together volunteers to address a problem or challenge, often with a social purpose (Gutiérrez, 2018). We joined the DigiEduHack hackathon, which is the annual event European initiative of digital education with a “disruption twist”. We thus hosted the challenge “Put language learning in the service of a social purpose!” as part of the 2020 DigiEduHack hackathon (<https://digieduhack.com/en/thessaloniki-citizenscience-inos>)

What were the aims of the session/lesson/project?

The aim of our hackathon challenge was to offer professional development opportunities in the current pandemic by exploring novel practices in pre-service teacher education contexts and by emphasising future teachers’ skills and digital readiness. We involved 22 university students (pre-service teachers of languages) at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, as part of their university curriculum.

Adopting an action research approach (Colpaert, 2020; Luo & Gui, 2019), we carried out a study which focused on examining the student perceptions as well as the challenges in the design of a hackathon as a pre-service teacher training facility that took place in November 2020. The opportunities and drawbacks of pre-service teacher education (Hauck, 2015; Borg et al, 2014) through novel remote collaboration and co-creation possibilities are being analyzed, as well as implications resulting from the integration of open innovation initiatives (as hackathons are) in standard university curricula and degrees.

Please write a brief description – the ‘story’ - of what you did/what happened that made this an especially memorable experience:

Two mentors (university lecturers) provided conceptual and technical support throughout the process. The hackathon Challenge targeted the creation of plurilingual and pluricultural resources for L2 with an emphasis on digital activism and social participation. Groups in teams of 4 and 5 persons were engaged in this process using a variety of technologies (Slack, Google Drive, Zoom) to achieve their goals and all results were made openly available on the DigiEduHack website (cf. Solutions).

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There is a conference presentation available: Zourou, K. & Mousouri, E. 2021. Designing a Hackathon Challenge of L2 content creation for university students of Digital Language Education. JALT conference, June 4-6, 2021. https://fr.slideshare.net/Web2Learn_eu/designing-a-hackathon-challenge-of-l2-content-creation-for-university-students-in-digital-language-education-249079366

What lessons might there be in your experience for language teaching in general beyond the pandemic?

Online collaboration in teams happened well before; in our initiative we wanted to adopt a more open approach (all results ("solutions") by teams are publicly available https://digieduhack.com/en/thessaloniki-citizenscience-inos#_solutionsTab . We also wanted to encourage pre-service teachers to bring to the forefront their creativity, imagination and resilience during the pandemic.

- B. *In your context, how have teachers and other colleagues supported each other's professional practice during the pandemic?*

A very strong collaboration in small teams- we used Slack, Zoom and skype intensively for 10 days.

- C. *The pandemic has now lasted almost two years and is not over yet. How is it affecting your professional practice at present?*

Collaboration possibilities opening up new ways for knowledge building and sharing are possible; informal learning, ownership, creativity are concepts that we put in practice and which worked very well in the context of professional development.