

Forum Insights

DIGILANGUAGES:

Enhancing Digital Literacies for Language Learning and Teaching

Overview of the project

In an Irish national setting, the urgent need to address the national language skills' shortage has been highlighted in numerous arenas, and in the context of the need for a continued economic recovery, language skills and proficiency are essential. Against this backdrop, this project aims to develop a digital literacies framework and accompanying on-line interactive resource for language learners and teachers in Irish HE, initially for the following languages: English for Speakers of Other Languages, French, German, Irish, Italian, and Spanish. Within the scope of this project the target user groups include first year students, study abroad students, and language lecturers.

Preliminary primary pilot research conducted in 2015 as part of the project identified a number of key areas where online flexible support is best focussed. Based on these findings and international research in the field, the aim of the project is to develop online resources and activities in three broad areas:

1. Digital Literacies for Language Development
2. Language Learning Strategies and Practices
3. Transitions to Third Level Language Learning Environments

The portal will be freely available, offering a range of OERs and will be scalable for use in other contexts. The contents and activities will afford integration into many programmes currently on offer in Irish HE.

The project has a strong research and evaluation dimension and the main research questions under investigation are:

- what are the main practical issues that students have when making the transition from secondary to third level language study?
- to what extent are digital literacies part of the curriculum at third level and what gaps do students and lecturers identify in this provision?
- what are the strengths and weaknesses of the emerging digital literacies framework for language learning (as identified through piloting and evaluation) and how can these inform the final design and implementation of the Digilanguages platform?

Partners

The following are the project plenary group members from each institution. Details of other team members can be found on our website.

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Key outcomes of the project

- Development and integration of a framework of digital literacies in Irish HEIs language curricula (none currently exists), as part of the national framework being developed under the All-Aboard Project
- An on-line open resource centre in the area of digital literacies for language teaching and learning in an Irish-specific context, which will be fully integrated into third level language and language teacher education curricula
- Language graduates equipped with digital literacies, which go beyond print literacy, and which will consolidate 21st century skills enabling them to fully participate in the knowledge economy (thus making them more employable)
- Collaboration and dissemination through hosting and participating in local, national and international events (see below)

To date, the project team has been very engaged in the following activities and has achieved the following outcomes:

- Agreed a detailed work plan, with associated responsibilities, timeframes and outcomes
- Set up an international advisory panel and solicited their expert advice (eight international experts across seven countries: Pierrette Bouillon, Geneva; Gavin Dudeney and Nicky Hockley, The Consultants-E; Francesca Helm, Padova; Fanny Meunier, Louvain; Robert O'Dowd, Leon; Steve Thorne, Portland State; Martin Walton, Pau)
- Undertaken a number of briefing meetings and consultations with colleagues across the partner institutions (and more forthcoming); consulted with partners on the All Aboard Project, and other relevant Irish and European Projects (see below)
- Conducted a large scale diagnostic and opinion-based survey with language students and teachers across the six partner institutions, achieving a response rate of 430 participants (355 students and 75 teachers)
- Technical development: created a web-site for the project, designed the architecture for the inputting, uploading, linking and displaying of the digilanguages framework and associated activities (OERs)
- Language material content development
- Presented at a range of events and has had abstract accepted for many other conferences/events (see below)

Outline how the project benefits the higher education sector nationally

The project responds directly to calls in national, European, and international policy documents and guidelines in relation to the pedagogically focussed uses of technology to enhance higher education. It does so within a specific discipline, which has been strongly advocated as the most appropriate and effective level for promoting and achieving effective change.

The project will provide a framework and appropriate content for the transformation of language pedagogies in line with recent developments in applied linguistics, literacy studies, and educational technology, through a) the up-skilling of language teachers in Irish HEIs, and b) the development and integration of digital literacies for language learning in teacher education programmes (pre-service and in-service).

It will provide a range of OERs and a community-based approach for accessing, discussing, developing and evaluating a range of innovative pedagogies and language teaching materials across six languages for a range of diverse student groups.

The project will also ensure that Ireland leads and participates fully in the growing international focus on the development of digital literacies specifically for language learners and teachers.

Outline how the project benefits students

Students will benefit from the benefits to higher education (outlined above), but in addition, direct collaboration with students is an underlying principle of this project and we are working with students across all the various aspects of the project development (diagnostics, development, piloting and evaluation, on-going development and integration).

The student survey (see above) has identified a range of difficulties that language students experience, as well as a strongly perceived gap in existing third level language curricula. The project aims to provide materials and supports to fill these gaps, as well as providing space for an on-line community of learners and teachers for further development.

Other national/international development work that complements this project

We are having on-going discussions with several other relevant projects including:

All Aboard Project (National Forum Funded)
Digital literacy for the teaching and learning of languages (ECML Funded)
CALLSLT (University of Geneva)
A range of Translex projects (<http://www.translex.ie/eu-projects/>)
Cambridge English Digital Framework for Teachers

More Information

www.digilanguages.ie