sciendo International Conference KNOWLEDGE-BASED ORGANIZATION
Vol. XXVIII No 2 2022

INTERNATIONAL IDEATION FOR HYBRID ESP TEACHING

Valentina GEORGIEVA

"G.S. Rakovski" National Defence College, Sofia, Bulgaria
v.georgieva@rndc.bg

Abstract: *The paper shares some of the experience gained in the ideation process of generating and designing tasks in Specialised Military English for a hybrid learning environment. The product of the ideation is targeted at military and security specialists and is the result of an international project under the EU's Erasmus+ programme N 2020-1-BG01-KA203-079117. Definitions of ideation, interactive activity/learning, hybrid learning, and ESP are suggested. The main phases of the HELPSec international ideation process of the project partners are presented and some techniques of this process are exemplified.*

Keywords: ideation, interactive activity, ESP, hybrid teaching/learning, HELPSec

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to share experience gained in the ideation process of designing Specialised Military English activities for a hybrid learning environment as the most important intellectual output of the Erasmus+ KA2 project #2020-1-BG01-KA203-079117 under the title of *Hybridisation of specialised English learning for security professionals (HELPSec).* The *HELPSec* inter-disciplinary project has been necessitated by the need to implement new IT technologies and up-to-date approaches in the English Language training of security specialists (military and civilian) at partner institutions -- Rakovski National Defence College (RNDC) from Bulgaria, the Military Academy of Portugal (MA), and the Swedish Defence University (SDU) -- especially in light of the COVID-19 global crisis. Project partners agree that modernisation, digitalisation, hybridisation, and internationalisation are inseparable in the present-day educational process. Security specialists from the three partner EU and NATO countries -- Bulgaria, Portugal, and Sweden -- need excellent specialized English vocabulary and terminology as well as communicative skills in order to be interoperable when performing their duties, participating in peacekeeping missions, safeguarding their countries and Europe and establishing a more secure environment globally.

Since the project is ongoing and scheduled to be finished on 28.02.2023, and the final product, i.e. the learning content for enhansing the Specialised Military English skills of the target group is in the design and trial stage, the paper focuses on the ideation phase of the design of the *HELPSec* learning content.

2. Definitions of the main terms in the research

It is necessary to define the main terms used in the presented research: ***ideation, interactive activity, hybrid teaching/ learning, ESP***.

DOI: 10.2478/kbo-2022-0068
© 2015. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-No Derivatives 3.0 License.

2.1. Ideation is defined as the process during which ideas and solutions are generated through sessions such as Sketching, Brainstorming and other ideation techniques [2].

In the context of the *HELPSec* project work, the ideation sessions have been conducted mainly online, during the monthly virtual meetings of the project members, as well as during the two transnational face-to-face meetings at the Military Academy in Lisbon (30.06-1.07.2021) and the Swedish Defence University in Stockholm (12-13.12.2021) when the English language teachers and the IT specialists would discuss the various issues related to structuring the learning content, defining rubrics of the activities, exploring the capabilities of the Wordpress Learning Management System which has been chosen as the project platform for uploading the learning content and designing the project website https://helpsec.eu, and trying to solve the numerous methodological, IT, and administrative problems.

2.2. Methodologists suggest the following definitions of **interactive learning:**

- Interactive learning is a pedagogical technique that engages students by having them actively participate with peers in lessons. The interactive approach to any given lesson plan encourages students to interact with each other and with the subject matter [3].
- Interactive learning is any sort of schoolwork or academic plan that uses computer technology in order to emphasise or teach specific material [4].
- Interactive learning activities are educational exercises that are designed to give students hands-on, direct knowledge of the topic. Interactive learning is also called experiential learning. Through interactive pedagogy, a student becomes involved in the process instruction instead of being a passive recipient of information as in the traditional lecture method [5].

The suggested definition of *interactive learning* for the purposes of this research is the following: **interactive learning is focused on encouraging students' interest by engaging them in the practical aspects of the subject matter while interacting with the other participants in the learning process and with the technologies**.

2.3. All the participants in the learning process have been in a challenging situation during the COVID-19 pandemic. The learning environment which used to be a physically shared space filled with spontaneous emotions and reactions, with special moments of success, discovery or failure, has been transformed into a shared virtual environment in which new rules and regulations have become a norm. As a result of the COVID experience and statistical data from the online learning, hybrid learning has been actively employed. The project partners agree with the more traditional definition of **hybrid learning** (Cf. [7], [8]) as a type of instuction which "combines face-to-face classroom instruction with online activities. This approach reduces the amount of seat time in a traditional face-to-face course and moves more of the course delivery online" [8]. As underlined by methodologists, hybrid courses "require a mix of online and traditional classroom activities where the instructor determines what activities are completed online and in the traditional classroom for students to attain knowledge transfer" [9].

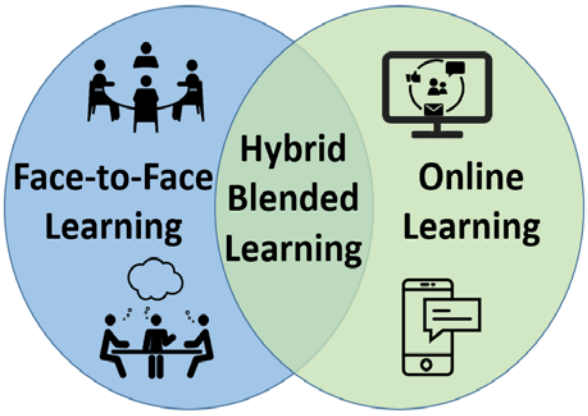


Figure 1: Hybrid (blended) learning
Source: www.eiu.edu/fdic/hybrid.php

The difference between hybrid and blended learning is in the ratio between the face-to-face and the online percentage of learning. Some of the researchers insist on 50/50 for the hybrid learning as opposed to blended learning, in which the ratio between traditional and online learning is 75/25, i.e. blended learning is mostly resident with some online instruction incorporated in the learning process.

It is important to stress that in the context of the *HELPSec* project 'hybrid learning' differs from the definitions which have become popular during the COVID-19 pandemic: in the latest definitions, hybrid learning is defined as "a synchronous training event that incorporates both a live classroom and virtual components. It creates an equal learning experience for both in-class and remote learners -- effectively expanding the classroom" [10].

It has been agreed by the project partners that the learning content of the *HELPSec* project is designed for 180 45-minute academic classes of which at least 50 % are to be studied online. The learners -- military and civilian specialists -- will be able to acquire the specialised terminilogy at the university (if they are full-time students) or from anywhere (if deployed on a mission abroad).

2.4. The last characteristic feature of the ideation process of designing interactive activities for the hybrid course of the *HELPSec* project is related to the fact that the learning content contains specialised military terminology, i.e. it is an **ESP course**. Unlike the General English learning, the main goal of the adult students who are the target group of this course is to develop and improve their English language skills in order to be able to fulfill their professional duties and to communicate in a multinational environment. For this reason, the learning content is aimed at learners with STANAG 6001 Level 2 [11] or Level B1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

3. The *HELPSec* international ideation: phase 1

As precisely stated, "You ideate in order to transition from identifying problems to creating solutions for your users" [12]. The experienced English teachers from the three partner institutions started articulating the *HELPSec* goals and objectives after careful consideration of the needs of their students, i.e. identifying potentially problematic areas regarding fluency in specific military subfields. Thus, one of the main objectives was formulated before the submission of the project proposal in the beginning of 2020: collaborative research, planning, implementation, and dissemination of the specialised English language curriculum and hybrid course modules for security professionals. The collaboration and cooperation of project partners was aimed at strengthening partners' relations so that the implementation of the project results is in the educational security systems of partners and beyond as a result of dissemination of good practices.

The phase of the identification of problems resulted in defining the *HELPSec* four main pillars.

3.1. The first pillar is **hybridisation of the traditional English language learning with interactive ICT activities.** It is necessitated by the requirements of the modern world in which security professionals have to improve constantly their communicative skills with the help of new digital technologies. These technologies allow them to update and enhance their specialised English knowledge not only while participating in traditional face-to-face classes but also on their own while having access to the learning content on the project's platform.

3.2. The second pillar is **transnational research and development of new specialised English language curriculum and course modules for security professionals.** This research is initiated with the goal to exchange good practices and experience between partner institutions.

This allows English experts to enhance their knowledge and skills and develop new methods and teaching approaches and techniques to diversify their classes as a result of the application of hybrid modes of teaching. As a result of joining efforts, new topics for English language acquisition by security professionals which are of interest for all the project participants had been defined and prioritised in the new joint curriculum during transnational exchanges of numerous emails and a VTC before the project submission on 24.04.2020. The decision was that each partner designs, develops, and uploads learning content for two modules. Each module contains interactive activities for 30 academic classes: 15 for classwork and 15 for online self study. The following modules had been agreed:

RNDC: Module 1: Peacekeeping; Module 2: Counter terrorism;

MA: Module 3: Leadership in Military Environment; Module 4: Gender integration in missions and operations;

SDU: Module 5: On Operations (Planning, Reports and Returns); Module 6: Briefings.

3.3. The third pillar is **transnational training of trainees and teachers from partner institutions**. Both students and teachers are exposed to different types and modes of teaching and learning which add value to their overall practical experience.

3.4. The fourth pillar is **digitalisation of the study process** and it ensures the innovativeness of the *HELPSec* project because the new study content is uploaded both on the project's platform to be accessed from everywhere and in the e-book "English Course for Security Professionals" which can be dowloaded from the project's website https://helpsec.eu.

4. The *HELPSec* international ideation: phase 2

The ideation process continued during the monthly online meetings of the teams from the partner instututions after the approval of the project by the EU Commission and the start of the project work after 1.09.2020 in order to work out the solutions of the defined problems and achieve stated project goals. Since "ideation is about pushing for a widest possible range of ideas from which you can select, not simply finding a single, best solution" [13], the most common technique that has been used by the project members is **brainstorming**. During the meetings, each member has the opportunity to freely express their opinion, suggest a solution, argue, or praise teammate's suggestion. For example, during the 1st and the 2nd meetings in November and December 2020 the focus was on designing the joint curriculum for the hybrid ESP course and each team suggested a different draft – more detailed or shorter ones until the final structure of each module's curriculum was agreed during the transnational face-to-face meeting in December 2021. Similarly, lots of discussions and brainstorming sessions both within the teams and between the teams have been conducted to decide on the types and the titles/rubrics of the interactive activities to be designed and uploaded on the project's paltform until the final decision was taken in December 2021and they were unified as follows: Reading comprehension, Listening comprehension, Writing, Speaking, Vocabulary in context, Integrating skills, Meet the Expert, Grammar check. These examples prove the theoretical observations that "ideation facilitation is a challenging and complex task. It requires experience in understanding and managing teams, people dynamics, adaptability and flexibility and a range of other soft skills" [13].

Another technique which is used by the project members to have a successful ideation and generation of efficient solutions is **SCAMPER** – an abbreviation which stands for **S**ubstitute, **C**ombine, **A**dapt, **M**odify, **P**ut to another use, **E**liminate, **R**everse [13]. Examples for the

application of the elements of this technique are the following:

- ***Substitute***: the project members work hard to design different types of interactive activities which, however, have to be adapted to the template system of the Wordpress Learning Management System. In order to make some of the activities even more attractive for the learners, some of the already designed activities are substituted with alternative ones which might have the same content but its presentation is different, e.g. with the incorporation of H5P Content Collaboration Framework (https://hp5.org) types of activities. For example, instead of giving the new target word with its definition, *Dialog Turning Cards* are used in Module 1, Unit 4.1 both for presentation and practice of the new terms.
- ***Combine***: this is also applied by the designers of activities in order to maximise the effectivenes of the interactive tasks. For instance, the Wordpress allows for only a several types of quiz question types. Yet, they can be combined in a single quiz, so that the comprehension of the new target vocabulary by the students is checked and automatically assessed.
- ***Adapt***: This refers to the process of adapting the learning content of the interactive tasks for the level of the target group. In most of the cases authentic materials (texts, videos, documentaries, recordings of speeches) are used, but sometimes, especially when introducing or practising the target vocabulary, adaptation of the texts is done to match the level of difficulty.
- ***Modify***: The interactive activities designed for the *HELPSec* project's platform are modified in order to be included in the e-book "English Course for Security Specialists". The e-book is supplementary to the hybrid course and its aim is to be downloaded from the website and used even in case there is no available internet connection. The modification of some of the activities results in changing their layout and also adding an appendix to the e-book -- a folder with the recordings and the videos for the tasks.
- ***Put to another use***: The activities are designed for the students, cadets, and trainees at the parter institutions. However, the long-term goal of the project partners is to make the project products (the joint curriculum, the platform, and the e-book), available to military training institutions who find the learning activities useful for their trainees as well. That is the reason to present the project work at events and conferences organised by European military and civilian HEIs so that more security specialists benefit from the project deliverables.
- ***Eliminate***: The internaltional ideation is to include exchange and peer trial of the activities in the period June-December 2022. During this period, some of the activities could be combined, substituted, or modified, but some could be taken away if fellow colleagues advise to do so after trialling the activity with their students in a different educational context. This will prove the educational value of each activity when a positive feedback is received by both colleagues and students.
- ***Reverse***: This will be the last phase of the ideation process when the team members would ask the question "Do we need to reorganise the learning content so that the project's/module's/unit's goals and objectives are met?" If the answer is negative, the teachers-designers could be more confident that the newly-designed learning content for the hybrid English language course for security professionals is of high educational value.

5. Conclusions

The successful accomplishment of an international project's goals and objectives is impossible without ideation sessions during which lots of ideas are generated by the project members. The Erasmus+ project #2020-1-BG01-KA203-079117 experience of its team members who are exceptional

professionals with different educational and cultural background can serve as a good model for better organisation of such sessions and for application of effective techniques in order to design internationally recognised hybrid courses for ESP or any other subject.

Acknowledgements
In her capacity of the Project Manager, the author expresses her appreciation of the hard work, dedication, and professionals of the *HELPSec* project members who design the interactive learning content for the hybrid course: Col. Dr Petko Dimov, Dr Aneliya Hristova, and Tanya Netcheva from RNDC; Dr Sofia Menezes, Dr Olga Duarte, Isabel Caetano, Florbela Raabe, Ricardo Oliveira, and José Jacinto from MA; Karolina Karlström, Orla Maher-Fehrling, Lydia Sundh, and Diana Nilsson from SDU.

References List

[1] HELPSec. Hybridisation of specialised English learning for security professionals (HELPSec) [Internet]. Available from: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/eplus-project-details/#project/2020-1-BG01-KA203-079117.
[2] Dam R., Siang T. What is Ideation – and How to Prepare for Ideation Sessions. [Internet]. Interaction Design Foundation [2021]. Available from: http:// www.interaction-design.org.
[3] Renner R. Interactive learning. [Internet]. The classroom [2018]. Available from: http:// www.theclassroom.com /interactive-learning-definition.
[4] Beam J. What is interactive learning? [Internet]. Practical Adult Insights [2022]. Available from: http:// www.practicaladult insights.com/what-is-interactive-learning.
[5] Bright Hub Education. Designing Interactive Learning Activities: Unleashing Your Inner Creative Teacher. [Internet]. [2011]. Available from: http:// www.brighthubeducation.com.
[6] Tapscott D. Growing Up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation. New York: McGraw-Hill; 1998.
[7] College of DuPage. An Introduction to Hybrid Teaching. [Internet]. [2015]. Available from: http://www.codlearningtech.org/PDF/hybridteachingworkbook.pdf.
[8] The Pennsylvania State University. A Glossary of Terms related to e-learning and distance education. [Internet]. [2021]. Available from: https://weblearning.psu.edu/ resourses/glossary/.
[9] Ionas I. et al. Using Open-Source Tools to Design and Develop the Online Component of a Blended-Learning, Instructor-led Course. International Journal of Designs for Learning. 2012; 3.1: 12-26. Available from: http://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/ index.php/ijdl/index.
[10] MicroTek. The Complete Guide to Hybrid Learning. [Internet]. [2022]. Available from: https://www.trainingindustry.com/content/uploads/2017/07/the-complete-guide-to-hybrid-learning.pdf.
[11] Bureau for International Language Coordination. Overview of language proficiency levels. [Internet]. [2019]. Available from: https://www.natobilc.org.
[12] Interaction Design Foundation. What is Ideation and How to prepare for Ideation Sessions. An Introduction to Design Thinking Process Guide. [Internet]. [2022]. Available from: https://www.interaction-design.org.
[13] Mind Tools. SCAMPER: Improving Products and Services. [Internet]. [2022]. Available from: https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newCT_02.htm.