

INNOVATION IN TEACHING DURING THE PANDEMIC BEST PRACTICES CASE STUDIES 2021



Dear readers,

The Covid-19 pandemic made us aware that digitalization of every aspect of our daily life is no longer something of the future but an existing reality. This reality requires constant innovation and adaptation to a 'digital' generation that is growing and taking shape in the virtual world. Educators in general and particularly those of vocational education are preparing a generation of students favoring the use of digital technology. They become more active and perform better when interesting and attractive teaching methodologies are applied. This made the educators increasingly aware of the need for incorporating digital technology in the education process and active teaching/learning methodologies.

The 2020-2021 academic year, carried out mainly online due to the pandemic, highlighted this need even more. Supported by 'Skills for Jobs' to intensify the process of developing online teaching materials with a series of webinars for online learning and frequent meetings and discussions, a growing number of teachers in VET partner schools are applying innovative and interactive methodologies which make lesson more engaging and successful, as well as boost the interest for independent learning.

This publication introduces the experiences of 12 teachers as 12 best practices for applying such interactive and comprehensive methods. Through their testimonies, teachers introduce us to the context where they found themselves, the need for innovation, difficulties and challenges they encountered, the impact of their teaching and learning initiatives, lessons learned, as well as tips on how these methodologies and activities can be replicated by other teachers.

'Skills for Jobs' team believes that communities of practice and sharing of experiences among experts in the field are the cornerstone for teachers' professional development. Personally, I am convinced that sharing such experiences will serve teachers at other vocational schools and beyond, urging and inspiring them to reflect on their work and to continuously improve it. The vision is education process preparing a generation of professionals who will excel in a dynamic and to continuously improve it, for a teaching process that prepares a generation of professionals who will excel in a dynamic and ever-changing labor market.

Sincerely yours,

Fation Dragoshi
Project Manager



Dear readers,

The digital revolution has - and will continue having - a pivotal impact on Vocational Education and Training. Unavoidably, this introduces its set of challenges and also great opportunities. Technology-based education will become an 'essential' component for VET providers in the future. The VET system must adapt to such new aspects in its content, methodology and learning infrastructure. To this end, we need to provide opportunities that assist VET providers, educators, and students to become more innovative by increasingly using digital technologies.

By introducing new challenges in our teaching and learning settings, we aim to nurture a creative and innovative environment.

Special thanks to all those educators who have become VET success stories in this digital era.

Ejvis Gishti

General Director

National Agency of Vocational Education Training and Qualifications

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Case Studies 2021

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S4J addresses the main challenges of the Albanian Vocational Education and Training (VET) system by focusing on ensuring systemic change, capacity development and empowerment of key actors. Based on this approach, S4J supports partner VET providers in Albania in terms of employers' and partners' relations, diversification of VET offer, new ways of inclusive learning and quality, work-based learning in cooperation with employers, and organisational development.

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Student Engagement as an Important Element in the Validation of Teaching Materials

Edlira Brahimi, Commercial School, Vlora



Context and Need for Change

Developing quality and efficient teaching materials is one of the main pillars on which teaching and learning process relies on. In vocational education, lack of relevant textbooks for various subjects forces the teachers to rely on teaching materials that are provided to the students through notes (putting the latter in a completely passive position). This simply does not work! Students get tired easily, feel excluded, and show no interest in studying and learning such materials.

Edlira, a teacher at Commercial School Vlora was constantly facing this challenge. Students' opinions on such materials and their difficulties in using them made her see the need for developing tailored-made teaching materials. Presenting teaching materials in a video format, while a novelty, quickly turned out to be not enough, as they were not always efficient. It all started when she was showing a video as part of the teaching material, which caused reactions from students due to its length and made it difficult for them to pay attention.

Therefore, teacher Edlira decided it was time to undertake the initiative of validation of teaching materials by students themselves. The initiative aimed at increasing the efficiency of teaching materials and tailoring them to the educational profile of the students and their interests, for an interactive and innovative learning process.

Implementation

Once the need for reviewing teaching materials was identified, the teacher decided to dedicate a specific teaching hour to this process. Students would be introduced to the new teaching material, discuss it and give suggestions on how to improve it. To students it all came as a game, aiming at making them focus and get engaged; asking them to highlight what they liked about the material and what they thought needed to be changed.



PROBLEM

Students who get tired easily, feel excluded, and show no interest in studying and learning traditional teaching materials.

SOLUTION

Students themselves revising teaching materials, as an alternative for a traditional teaching/learning hour.

OUTCOME

Improved teaching materials, tailored to students' educational profile and their interests, for an interactive and innovative learning process.

A brainstorm session was organized and a pinboard was used for pinning down everybody's ideas, which by the students was experienced as a game. After the presentation of the teaching material, on post-it notes students wrote their opinions about its advantages and disadvantages, what they liked and what they did not. Everyone was engaged, even the most passive students, giving feedback and new ideas without realizing that at the same time they were increasing their level of learning.

Choosing new images or sounds, making the narrative text shorter, etc., were some of the adjustments made. Particularly of interest were students' ideas based on their apprenticeship in company, orienting the teaching materials towards their educational profile and the demands of the labour market.

"I strive to include what the students want, in order to make it easier for them to learn and to apply their knowledge in the company in the future. After all, this is important to them"

There were plenty of challenges to overcome. At first, some of the students were reluctant thinking they did not have to get engaged in such a process. Gradually, with a deeper understanding of the process and them becoming protagonists of the lesson, such hesitations melted away and the initiative began to give its positive effects. The process continues beyond the teaching hour too. Materials of various formats are sent to students via WhatsApp, to see how they appear on mobile phone devices and what can be changed to make them easily accessible and usable.

For the implementation of this initiative were used a variety of resources such as teaching materials, which were obtained, translated or adapted from various sources as well as laptops, video projectors, blackboards, post-it notes, etc. Nevertheless, the most important resource of all were the students themselves with their suggestions and ideas on how to improve and enrich teaching materials. They were also engaged in making videos for teaching materials.

Impact

The impact of the initiative for the evaluation and validation of teaching materials by the students during the teaching hours was quite positive in many aspects:

Improving teaching materials based on students' opinions, needs and interests

Based on students' opinions about teaching materials and their suggestions for improvement, these materials have been constantly adapted and improved in both their form and content, expressing students' point of view, wishes and needs, for a better and more efficient teaching process.

Refreshing and optimizing a teaching hour

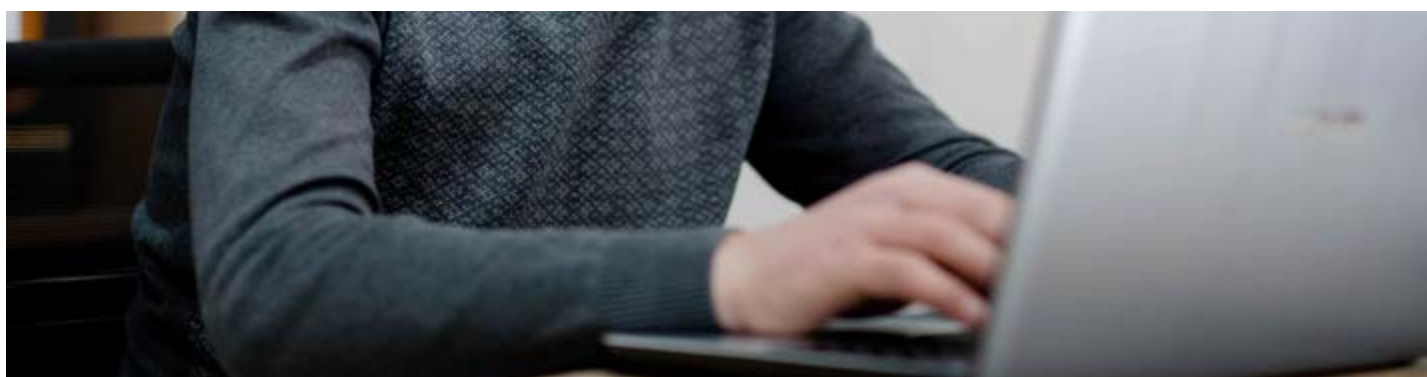
Thanks to the initiative, now the teaching process is carried out in a different way from a typical one. Students, often unknowingly, learn by getting engaged in discussions and by providing suggestions. This enables teaching of new knowledge, validation of teaching materials, and the evaluation of students through their continuous engagement.

Promoting various evaluation methods

In addition to students' evaluation by the teacher, this initiative also promotes peer-evaluation, students expressing own opinions on the ideas and suggestions of their classmates; as well as self-evaluation, students being engaged manage to understand own progress and shortcomings.

Students' continuous engagement

Organizing a teaching hour based on the evaluation and validation



of teaching materials by students allows space for all students, even for the most passive, to get engaged continuously by expressing their opinion concerning the form/format and the content of teaching materials.

Students' involvement in developing teaching materials

The process has exceeded the boundaries of a routine evaluation and validation of teaching materials. Students themselves are involved in the development of the materials, contributing by making numerous videos or animations. This outlines the profile of a proactive student, who is given space to demonstrate their skills.

Consolidation of soft-skills and life competences

This initiative enables students to consolidate a range of soft skills, such as: communication, collaboration, organization, expressing opinions and accepting different opinions, creative thinking, setting priorities, etc. They are trained and prepared to become better and accountable citizens, to become an added value for the society and well prepared for their integration into the labour market.

Increased interaction and communication

A higher level of teacher- student and student-student interaction and communication has been observed, making teaching/ learning process synergizing and entertaining.

Lessons Learned

According to teacher Edlira, as with other new initiatives, in particular this one being so complex, there were aspects for which could have been taken a different approach. She thinks that this alternative method of planning the lesson around the process of validation of teaching materials would have been even more effective if it had been carried out involving several groups of students of different grades instead of the students of the same class. Engaging a wider range of students with different levels of learning, their wishes, needs and perceptions on teaching materials, etc. would make possible the development of creative materials that are better tailored to students' profile.

The teacher insists on the importance of validating teaching materials with other colleagues as well, who may come up with valuable suggestions for improvement. Of particular importance is the involvement of business representatives in this process, who would help the developers of the materials to better tailor them to the demands of the labour market, as well as to enrich the materials with case studies of concrete examples from the apprenticeship.



Teaching Materials Focused on Students' Daily Situations and Apprenticeships - Analysis Phase of WAIPA Structure

Nertila Dundo, vocational 'Kristo Isak' school Berat



Context and Need for Change

Vocational Education in Albania is undergoing a process of continuous transformation, aiming at matching the demands of the labour market and increasing the employability of students. Rapid changes led to lack of textbooks for vocational subjects for various educational directions and profiles. This remains one of the major challenges the vocational education teachers are currently facing. In such a situation, there is urgent need for developing digital teaching materials as an important groundwork for increasing the quality of teaching/learning process and as a "mitigator" for the lack of textbooks. However, this is another big challenge for the teachers. They have to search various sources, select, edit and adjust teaching materials, aiming at developing quality and efficient digitized teaching materials. To make a teaching/learning material more comprehensive, a number of activities which indicate how learning objectives or learning outcomes are achieved should also be planned.

Nertila Dundo, teacher at the "Kristo Isak" school in Berat, was introduced for the first time with this approach called "Analysis Phase" during the training on the "Development of Digital Teaching Materials". Seeing the benefits of this approach, teacher Nertila decided to integrate it into all digital materials she developed, based on situations well known to students, in real situations and experiences, assumed or experienced by students themselves.

Using real situations related to students' apprenticeship, teacher Nertila puts the student at the center of the teaching material and tries to build a bridge between theory taught in the classroom and apprenticeship in company, as one of the axes on which the vocational education as a whole should rely on. mbështetet arsimi profesional në tërësi.



PROBLEM

Understanding the level at which learning objectives are achieved by having students to simply memorize the information does not ensure effectiveness.

SOLUTION

Incorporating in teaching materials the analysis phase, based on students' everyday situations and their experience during apprenticeship in company.

OUTCOME

Enhanced level of students' engagement and motivation and better understanding of how learning objectives are achieved.

Implementation

The process of developing teaching materials was carried out according to MAIPA structure, following all the steps recommended during the training on 'Development of Digital Teaching Materials' conducted by LerNetz Swiss experts. The analysis phase, which indicates achievement of criteria across all the components of any kind of student work and helps teachers to understand whether the teaching/learning process has been successful, requires special focus on preparatory work. As teacher Nertila indicates, in order to make it as vivid and concrete for the students, to inspire their involvement, as well as to serve the function it has - understanding the level to which learning objectives are achieved - the analysis was carried out based on contemporary methods and real situations.

Selecting the right methods enables the application of knowledge obtained by the students in real or similar situations from everyday life and their future profession. Thus, it enables learning by experience or hands-on learning, creating an already proven binomial: experience in service of teaching and learning in service of gaining experience. Teacher Nertila explains that initially the process of conducting the analysis, as well as structuring a comprehensive teaching material according to the MAIPA scheme, was not easy. It required time, reflection on students' level of knowledge and skills, constant confrontation with learning objectives and above all creativity and cognitive empathy attitude. With the passage of time, and accumulation of experience in adapting the structure and in carrying out the analysis, the difficulties faded away, while the implementation of this rubric during the lessons proves very efficient.

on the aspects that require improvement. Moreover, like all the components of the MAIPA scheme, the analysis phase also facilitates teacher's work in preparing daily teaching plan.

Lessons Learned

Teacher Nertila points out that one of the lessons learned during the process of developing teaching materials in general and implementing the analysis phase in particular, is the importance that should be given to each component of a teaching material, given that each of them has its distinct function and is closely linked to others. Conducting the analysis rubric requires research work, creativity and intuition to understand how to approach students by taking into account their interests or daily activities, as well as how to motivate them. Meanwhile, the collaboration with other teachers for developing digital teaching materials as well as the interaction with the business world increases the prospects for a much better product. Topic by topic, everything becomes clearer and easier for the teacher as well as for the students, who become familiar with such an analytical approach. To make the analysis phase as effective as possible, teacher Nertila suggests focusing on the defined learning objectives, continuous research using various information sources, the variety of cases and situations already used and the diversity of digital presentations formats, inspired by subjects already digitized on the MësoVET platform, as well as exchange of ideas and experiences with peers and business representatives.



W

Welcome



A

Activating
existing
knowledge



I

Inform



P

Process



A

Analyse

Impact

Implementing the analysis phase, like other phases of the whole structure, tailored to match students' world, their experiences and interests, is proving to be successful. Students are showing enhanced proficiency both during the lessons and during their independent work, thanks to the access at any time to the teaching material. Teacher Nertila underlines that now students are more interested, because they feel represented, enriching the discussions with their personal input. They are more engaged and active and do not hesitate to express their perceptions and ideas. Students are encouraged to develop their creative and critical skills instead of simply memorizing teaching materials. Therefore, students master better those competencies which are crucial for their life and profession. The teacher is also experiencing the positive impact of the initiative. She now understands better the level at which learning objectives are achieved, and can easily recognise their difficulties and shortcomings focusing

“For implementing the analysis phase were used a number of different methods, such as using real situations, methods with projects, simulation method, practice enterprise, etc. The selection of such methods enables the implementation of knowledge obtained by students in real or similar life situations and profession; meaning, it is a hands-on experience.”

Making Instructional Videos for an Effective Teaching Process

Velide Llanaj, Commercial School, Vlora



Context and Need for Change

Using traditional teaching approach, practically based on one single source – teacher’s verbal explanation in the classroom – has already been proven to be inadequate and does not ensure effectiveness. Using a PowerPoint presentation with “frozen” words and pictures is no longer a novelty and its impact on making students focus and increasing their interest is getting lower and lower. Teachers gradually recognized that what really attracts students’ attention is the digital technology, dynamics in the classroom and the diversity. Therefore, they are moving the teaching process and teaching materials towards innovative methods, based on the advantages introduced by the technology. The teacher of the educational direction of Hospitality-Tourism at Commercial School Vlora, Velide Llanaj, points out that she had long noticed that using traditional teaching methods did not attract students and their attention during the lesson was not satisfactory. Moreover, the specifics of the educational profile she teaches make it difficult for the students to understand teaching materials simply by talking or displaying static images. She realized that the only way to match the new concepts with a great variety of processes, techniques, models, etc., was to provide more demonstrations, so that the students could understand and apply such concepts and gradually develop the right professional skills.

Therefore, teacher Velideja took the initiative to make instructional videos aiming at introducing new information in a different way, more comprehensive and better tailored to the specifics of various topics or modules of the educational direction and at the same time, increasing students’ attention, satisfaction and engagement.

Initially, for the demonstrations were used ready-made videos aiming at enabling students to follow the processes and techniques step-by- step. Incorporating moving visual images, combined with subtitles and sound, of course was an advantage



PROBLEM

New information introduced to students in a “lukewarm” method, dropping their interest and attention.

SOLUTION

Making instructional videos tailored to the subject and the context, and channelling the education process towards innovative methodologies, very much liked by the students.

OUTCOME

Efficient presentation of the information, deeper understanding of specific techniques and processes, as well as greater engagement of the students during the lesson.

and increased students' interest. However, the content of ready-made videos did not always correspond with the topic or module or the learning objectives or intended learning outcomes. This is when teacher Velideja saw the need for tailor-made instructional videos.

Implementation

For making instructional videos, the teacher started with an online search for finding suitable and free programs. Searching various sources, her overall understanding on videos, their content and components as well as the expectations of their impact changed entirely. She recognized the importance that every detail had in the final product. For teacher Velideja, finding the most suitable program for making videos was not easy. In the beginning she used the Flexclip program, which was extremely limited in the number of videos that could be made for free and time consuming for making, downloading, cutting and editing them to match the key concepts. Then she started using Biteable, an easy-to-use, unlimited-time program that allows finding and combining attractive images (slides) into video formats. But the fund of those images was limited and it did not allow making moving images. While she was working intensively for developing digital learning materials for the MësoVET platform, a colleague suggested using Powtoon, a program that teacher Velideja had seen before. Through Powtoon, which she is currently using, the teacher made many videos. Thanks to her tireless efforts, the teacher gained experience, mastering the conceptual and technical skills combined with those pedagogical. She pays special attention to each element, from drafting the script to the selection of the presentation method, the characters, the colours, the words and the music. Her efforts paid off! Over the time, she has made more and more quality videos, both in content and format.

As with any new initiative, teacher Velideja also faced many challenges. At the first steps of the initiative, the difficulties were greater as designing and making videos as well as putting together all the components, was not an easy task. Also, the price of the software limited some video features, such as colours or image clarity, while having some occasional problems with the internet connection. Thanks to the experience gained over time, she can now manage the challenges or dilemmas concerning the choices she has to make. However, for teacher Velideja there is an evergoing challenge, students looking for diversity and innovation. Therefore, every teacher should try their best to overcome such challenges.

Impact

The impact of the instructional videos is quite positive. Students watch them during the lesson as well as during their independent home work. Through videos, students get to know processes and techniques that cannot be implemented even in real working conditions; e.g., during the apprenticeship in the company. During the distance-learning period, due to C-19 lockdown, the

instructional videos were accessible by students in real time and, no doubt, they had a significant impact. Students watch the videos with curiosity and attention, make comments and ask questions.

Teacher Velideja is pleased to share that by using the instructional videos, the number of students being active during the lesson has increased. Nowadays students are quite familiar with digital technology and the innovation in general, making them good judges of the videos with their suggestions on certain elements such as images being used, how the text is incorporated, background music, etc. Input provided by students helps for further improving the videos, tailoring them even better to students' preferences. In addition, it encourages students to give their opinions on the videos and to assess them, to come up with new ideas and to develop critical thinking while also feeling useful. At the same time, adapting the videos according to students' suggestions rises their interest on a product about which they have contributed and this increases their level of concentration helping them to understand the information better.

Making instructional videos available on the online platforms, such as MësoVET, is a great advantage for the students as they have the chance to access and watch the videos anytime convenient to them and independently. Students can watch the videos as many times as they want until they understand the material presented on the video and further master the techniques, models, procedures, etc. Incorporating newly made or modified videos into digital teaching contents, enhances the quality of materials, making them more comprehensive and attractive; thus, increasing the interest to benefit from them via the platform.



“Students watch the videos eagerly, discuss their message as they perceive it and provide their suggestions for improvement. These are interesting teaching methodologies and they attract the attention of all students.”

Lessons Learned

Ever since teacher Valideja came up with the idea and made the first instructional videos, she has learned a lot, both in technical and pedagogical aspect. Gradually, her videos became better structured, more attractive and with clearer messages. Now, they are better tailored to the goal they seek to achieve as well as to students' preferences. Teacher Valideja suggests to use all the advantages of the digital world for enhancing teaching/learning process and no one should hesitate to make use of them because of the fear of failing or not being able to achieve what is aimed.

It takes enthusiasm for the novelty, passion, dedication, and patience to build the right experience while the advantages are great and the opportunities to make teaching/learning more interactive and engaging through the application of technologies are endless. Once the development of digital teaching materials is finalized, teacher Valideja will go on with drafting a manual on 'How to Make Instructional Videos', in which she will also include the advantages of using videos compared to other teaching methodologies as well as the positive impact of the videos on learning process.



Quizzes Incorporated into Digital Teaching Materials: Understanding Progress while Entertaining Students

Fabiola Grykshi, vocational 'Salih Çeka' school, Elbasan |
Ermira Mani, vocational 'Hamdi Bushati' school, Shkodra



Context and Need for Change

In the education sector in our country, integrating technology-based teaching/learning methods and benefiting from the advantages of such approaches was introduced relatively late and is progressing at a slow pace. Poor infrastructure, largely limited digital competences, as well as the prevalence of a novelty-resistant mindset, make blending of traditional with contemporary teaching methods a tangible challenge. Nevertheless, more and more new, motivating and attractive methods are sought after, aiming at placing the students at the center of the lesson, encouraging them to work independently and accordingly, strengthening the interaction in the classroom.

At "Hamdi Bushati" school in Shkodër, teacher Ermira Mani is working intensively for developing digital teaching materials for the MësoVET platform. According to her, it is imperative to continuously assess if the students have understood the information provided to them during the teaching hour. This can be achieved by incorporating assessing instruments throughout the teaching material, keeping in mind that they have to be easily applicable even during the lesson. While preparing such teaching materials, the teacher ensures to include frequent and quick questions, such as quizzes and games that often resemble a contest between students.

Meanwhile, in "Salih Çeka" school in Elbasan, teacher Fabiola Grykshi, once becoming familiar with digital teaching materials that teacher Ermira developed and uploaded on the MësoVET platform, started using them for her classes. For teacher Fabiola, who is new to the profession, the possibility of carrying out a lesson through the platform and using quizzes with students came at the right time and the right method. This approach best responds to the need for better organization of the lesson, for monitoring the level of knowledge obtained by students and for mastering the methodical approach tailored to students' performance.



PROBLEM

Students' low engagement during the teaching hour, which does not allow assessing at what level the new information is mastered just by asking a few closed-ended questions, as per the traditional approach used in the classroom.

SOLUTION

Incorporating quizzes into teaching materials as a form of entertainment and attractiveness to students, aiming at understanding at what level they have mastered the new information.

OUTCOME

Better understanding of students' progress in mastering new information; identification of gaps and difficulties, and increased engagement and interaction.

For both teachers, Ermira and Fabiola, incorporating quizzes into digital teaching contents and using them during the teaching hour allows to determine at what level the new information is obtained, and whether the learning objectives are achieved. In addition, it boosts students' engagement, increases the interaction and breaks the monotony of a narrative material and of a traditional teaching hour.

Implementation

From the conceptual point of view, teacher Ermira formulates the questions based on the learning objectives and on the key concepts of new information. The teacher tries to include a variety of questions into each quiz, such as "true / false", multiple answers questions, filling in the blank questions, etc. Such questions, of course, do not constitute traditional testing. Nevertheless, they are efficient because they indicate the level of knowledge the student has managed to obtain.

As the main resources for the preparation of quizzes, teacher Ermira mentions her theoretical knowledge on the preparation of test units, as well as the trainings organized by S4J project, training on "Basics of Didactics" in particular, in which she also contributed as a trainer. Trainings on how to use and benefit from MësoVET platform and the experience gained during the digitization of teaching materials have also been useful for preparing quizzes.

Teacher Fabiola too, incorporates quizzes into her teaching materials. She started using the platform for her teaching through Zoom program, video chatting with students for doing the quizzes. She has also successfully used quizzes intended for the repetition hour or session.

Incorporating quizzes into the teaching contents has its own difficulties. While teacher Ermira worked on preparing digital teaching materials she faced some challenges. Given that the initiative came in response to the abrupt switch from the

classroom education into the online education due to C-19 pandemic, the preparation of teaching materials was not easy task. Overloaded at school, the urgent need to quickly adapt to new teaching approaches and the overall emotional situation imposed by C-19 were significant challenges. More difficulties were encountered during classes, mainly related to technical problems. For instance, when the internet connection is slow, teacher Ermira uses a Smart TV for carrying out the lesson, while students use their mobile phones to take the quiz. In addition, there were difficulties in managing the time available within a teaching hour, as providing all the new information would not allow time for the quizzes. Over time and with some experience, it became easier to allocate time for quizzes.

Teacher Fabiola faced similar challenges in using the platform and the quiz section. She had difficulties using the teaching platform due to lack of experience. Gradually, using the platform and quizzes for each teaching hour, the difficulties were overcome and this methodology proved to be successful.

"Students have fun doing the quizzes, challenge themselves and at the same time assess their knowledge, learn through quizzes, recognize their shortcomings and try to improve."

Ermira Mani



Impact

Quizzes are an addition to a full package of components, a digital teaching material. In such materials is incorporated the “icebreaker” which allows the repetition and refreshing of previously acquired knowledge, introduction of theoretical concepts, presentation of images and illustrations, discussions on given topics, case studies, etc. Using quizzes in a teaching hour, in particular those quizzes available on the MësoVET platform, has a number of positive effects. Some of them are mentioned below:

- teacher manages to identify how attentive the student has been during the lesson; how s/he has understood the new information and how the learning objectives or outcomes are met
- quizzes help the teacher to think about the efficiency of the lesson, teaching materials and teaching methods, becoming aware of the needs for change and improvement
- student has teacher's full attention and is placed at the center of the teaching hour
- student becomes aware of own level of knowledge and of the shortcomings, being encouraged to improve, as well as learns from own failures
- student is more interested and strengthens own self-confidence
- teaching and learning process becomes more engaging and interactive, as everyone participates and shares opinions on the right answer
- all students are engaged, even the most passive and apathetic, as the lesson becomes more attractive and even funedhe argëtuese
- quizzes break the monotony of theoretical information, often voluminous and tedious
- quizzes being available on the platform allow and inspire the students to work independently, as they can test themselves anywhere and anytime, insisting on finding the correct answer, even for the sake of the satisfaction that the moment offers
- types of questions included in the test are short and take little time to answer. They balance, in a teaching material, the overload created by the open-ended questions

“Students are engaged and active throughout the teaching hour.”

Fabiola Grykshi

Lessons Learned

Teacher Ermira admits that she recognized the importance of quizzes while preparing them for the platform, becoming aware of the value they would have if they were incorporated in the teaching materials. She also explains that the success in preparing the quizzes depends not only on the formulation of the questions or their variety, but also on how the material is presented on the platform (text, images, schemes, discussions, etc.). Questions should not be tedious for students but short and engaging instead. Thus, the advantage of taking the quiz on the platform would be accurately used, through the immediate feedback after giving the answers. According to teacher Ermira and teacher Fabiola, the limitations of the quizzes should always be taken into consideration, as they do not provide enough information for the assessment or evaluation of the students. Teacher Ermira says that she would like to receive more feedback from other teachers and students about quizzes, aiming at understanding better their level of difficulty or the need to integrate them more often, as well as for identifying most interesting types of questions. Both teachers have a need-based suggestion: to accompany the quizzes with a test at the conclusion of each topic, which would match the criteria for designing test units. Such an element would make digital learning materials more complete.



Teaching and Assessing Using Case Studies

Ermira Mani, vocational 'Hamdi Bushati' school, Shkodra



Context and Need for Change

Preparing a teaching material and organizing a teaching hour based on it, it is not an easy process. The teacher should take into consideration a number of aspects at the same time: both teaching material and teaching hour must ensure the achievement of learning outcomes or learning objectives, proper transfer of knowledge to the students, combination of theoretical and practical aspects of a topic, enabling the evaluation of the students based on the achievement level of the predetermined objectives and, at the same time encouraging the engagement of all students pushing them towards independent work as well as equipping them with key competencies and improving their soft skills. Despite the goodwill, often this multidimensional approach becomes a great challenge in terms of selecting the right approaches and methods to be applied and the learning activities involved. Therefore, teachers are often satisfied with the traditional approach of teaching and learning, based on teacher's explaining and reproducing new information. Meanwhile, the available instruments to enhance and make the education process more effective are endless.

At "Hamdi Bushati" school in Shkodra, teacher Ermira Mani is continuously incorporating case studies into the digital teaching materials she develops, as well as during the teaching hour.

Frequently including case studies aims precisely at providing a diversity of materials and lessons, making the student the leading actor. And, the process of gaining knowledge, competencies and professional skills goes beyond the ordinary boundaries, naturally covering situations, problems and experiences with which the students are familiar. The student, already a leading actor, is not satisfied with merely mastering the theoretical and technical aspects of future profession. S/he is also given the opportunity to think, analyse, assess and come up with creative solutions, as s/he would do in his future profession as part of the labour market and as a worthy and accountable citizen.



PROBLEM

Teaching hours and teaching materials based on the repetition of the theoretical and technical knowledge, with only few opportunities for students to make analysis, to assess their peer progress and to express their creativity.

SOLUTION

Introducing case studies which introduce familiar situations to students, through face-to-face discussions or via forums and individual or group work.

OUTCOME

Improved accumulation of knowledge based on real examples, development of students' critical and creative thinking and better achievement of learning objectives.



Implementation

Teacher Ermira points out that before finding and adapting a case study, it is important to understand and remember that including a case study into the teaching material is not an end in itself for every topic. Therefore, the first step is to assess whether a case study matches the content of the topic and its learning objectives. Only then, you can start searching for a case study. For teacher Ermira, the internet is the main source for finding case studies. The search is in English, entering the keywords in the search engine. In most cases, she uses Google Scholar, as it offers a host of interesting cases with a current focus. Priority is given to those cases which best suit our society, our job market, students' future profession and the everyday situations they face. She selects short case studies, not complex and not tedious for the students, aiming at their greatest possible involvement. A case study may be outstanding in its original version regarding the message and how it is developed or the questions raised; however, sometimes might be necessary to reformulate the questions or issues raised for discussion, to better tailor them to learning objectives or students' preparation level.

“When students become more familiar with a case study, they feel more confident about getting engaged in discussions.”

One of the advantages of relying on a case study is the flexibility on how it can be presented. It can come as a narrative or as a video, it can be presented in the classroom through an open discussion as well as online, through various forums. It can be assigned as either individual or group work, during the class or as homework, thus promoting the independent work of the students. Depending on the topic, it can be prepared as a presentation (gallery walk), allowing students to get to know each other's work, interact and provide feedback, and can also serve for the repetition hour/session, giving it even more time for discussions.

Teacher Ermira points out that finding case studies is not always easy. Some case studies are ready to use or just need little adaptation. However, in most cases, she has to develop them from scratch. Incorporating case studies into teaching materials, especially during the C-19 pandemic when a teaching hour was limited to only 30 minutes, was quite a challenge. When time does not permit, the teacher finds a solution. She turns to the teaching materials on the MësoVET platform and assigns the

case study as homework. Students' assessment for a case study can be challenging, as the answers are often subjective. On the other hand, the discussion on a case study may run the risk of not sticking to the topic; so, the teacher must carefully manage the situation and moderate the time.

Impact

There are a number of positive outcomes associated with the presentation of a case study by the teacher. This method creates multiple opportunities for encouraging students to get engaged. Students are set in motion; they are more active. It is an attractive method for all levels of students, as everyone has something to say. A "domino effect" is created; where it is enough to engage the first 2-3 students and the rest of them gradually feel confident and begin to get engaged.

Even the most uninterested students come up with interesting ideas and solutions, as they might have been in similar situations themselves or might know other people being in such situations. Without even being aware, students demonstrate the extent of their knowledge while consolidating their key competencies, such as the right attitude towards others. The spirit of discussion is also encouraged, especially in those case studies that pros and cons are outlined for teaching and learning based on interaction. Students are particularly active in developing case studies related to their apprenticeship in company. At the same time, case studies enable demonstration of the teaching content, achievement of learning objectives, inspire independent work, as well as teamwork when assigned as group work. At the same time, including case studies into teaching materials on MësoVET platform makes those materials more attractive to students and increases their interest.

"We strive to prepare the students for the labour market, so that they are ready to face various challenges and find solutions to the problems they might encounter."

Lessons Learned

Teacher Ermira explains that one of the main lessons learned is about pre-assessing how well a case study matches a topic and

its learning objectives. She also advises caution if it is planned to include the case study in the test, as students' perspectives, perceptions and experiences are different, opinions are subjective and it is often difficult to assess them. Case studies should be tailored to the reality and the context in which students live and work and, to be effective, they should be linked to their interests and activities. In addition, case studies are a great way to break the monotony of the teaching material, to make teaching and learning more attractive, as well as to avoid the traditional repetition of the information received. Various forms of case studies should aim at attracting the attention of all students, including those who are less interested. Therefore, they should not be long or complicated, and should match the level of the students. At the same time, even though it is student-centered learning, the teacher must be constantly watchful to monitor the discussions and give everyone the opportunity to express themselves; and, to nurture the debate with occasional questions and tips. Teacher Ermira suggests that case studies on the MësoVET platform should be organized as forums, where each student, when and where s/he wants or has the opportunity, may give opinions on the topic and feedback on others' views and ideas.



Moving Beyond the Traditional Way of Teaching Through Role Play

Entela Progri, vocational 'Salih Çeka' school, Elbasan



Context and Need for Change

The new standards used in educational institutions do not limit the evaluation of students' performance to just how well he or she has mastered the specific content of the curriculum. Instead, they aim to evaluate the extent to which the youngsters have mastered a broad range of knowledge and skills which they will need in the future. To this end, teachers must consider that today they are their students, tomorrow they will become the professionals needed in the labour market. In addition to profession specific knowledge and competences, the students will definitely need to master important competences such as teamwork, communication, critical thinking and flexibility - skills listed in every job vacancy.

Entela Progri, an ICT teacher at "Salih Çeka" School is focused on engaging all students in the class by implementing student-centered teaching methods. Hence, she is always looking for new teaching approaches that ensure achieving the objectives of a lesson. She indicates that if she had continued with the traditional teaching methods, in particular for the repetition sessions that are aimed for assessing how and at what level the given concepts have been mastered by students, it could have been hard to meet all her expectations and to transform the classroom into a setting where each student is given space to demonstrate his or her best, without hesitation and with confidence, expressing themselves freely as in a conversation with friends.

Teacher Entela chose group work through role play to help her students learn both professional and soft skills, as well as to manage their engagement in the teaching/learning process in a friendly environment where everyone can express themselves freely.



PROBLEM

Difficult to assess at what level the students have mastered new information provided to them, in a "gloomy" environment, where there is no interaction and engagement.

SOLUTION

Using "Role play" for group work when carrying out the exam preparation hours in class.

OUTCOME

The creation of a motivating environment in class, where the students feel at ease to express their own opinions, and assess others at the same time, while developing their professional and soft skills.

“Like any other teacher, the involvement of all students in the learning process and in particular student-centered learning are my priorities. “These purposes make me always look for new ways to achieve these goals.”



Implementation

As part of the group work, especially during the repetition or review session, teacher Entela uses “Role play”. For this, she assigns a student with the role of the teacher and she herself sits in the back of the classroom, intervening only when any clarification of knowledge is needed. The other students are divided into three teams. Each of the teams chooses its own representation name, using key notions of the topics to be reviewed. For example, in one of the “Basics of ICT” review session, students named their teams after well-known hardware manufacturers: Intel, Accer, Apple. On a table in the middle of the lab, were displayed the hardware parts that would be discussed during the review of the topics. When a specific hardware part was mentioned and discussed, the team leader of one of the groups would identify and pick it up from the table. In other subjects, the teacher prepares the material herself with the key questions and the “teacher” student displays them on the SMARTBoard, one after the other, addressing each team in turn.

The questions always cover all three levels of knowledge. So, there are specific questions for the first level, in which the student should be able to identify each hardware device, i.e.,

the basic object is identified and its features are discussed. For the second level, hardware construction, which is based on a detailed explanation and discussion; for the third level, the comparison between various hardware and their best features, the most well-known manufacturing companies, etc., thus going into a detailed analysis which inspires students’ critical thinking. The student “teacher” asks questions for each team, patiently awaits response from all team members and feedback from other teams. This method allows everyone’s engagement, some doing their best to earn maximum points, some supporting their team to find and add information. Everyone aims to get to the top on the scoreboard, which the teacher presents on a flip chart.

Impact

Group work, presented to students as a “Role Play”, has many positive effects on them, which teacher Entela categorizes as follows. First, role play provides opportunities for inclusion; all students become active and feel they are an added value to the lesson. Second, the atmosphere in classroom helps students expressing themselves with no hesitation, sharing their thoughts and learning from each other. Third, peer assessment occurs very naturally, even unknowingly. In a game scenario, students forget they are participating in a lesson and do not hesitate to provide comments and feedback. Fourth, teacher Entela manages to make the best out of the lesson. She achieves the objectives set for the repetition session and at the same time assesses the level at which the students have mastered the information on the topic. She recognizes the difficulties her students face and plans how to help them overcoming such difficulties. Finally, as per teacher Entela’s opinion, the added value of this teaching method is the consolidation of students’ soft skills such as: communication, collaboration, articulation of ideas and thoughts, consensus, giving feedback to others, etc.

Lessons Learned

Teacher Entela recounts that throughout her long teaching experience, she has never separated from each other her two main goals as a teacher: first, students to obtain sustainable and scientifically accurate knowledge and second, to find the way to the heart of each of them.

She suggests to other teachers that during each teaching hour they address every student, communicate with them and especially evaluate them, even for a simple idea coming from them. For this reason, she suggests using “Role Play” for organizing a teaching hour, given that it provides opportunities for students to have more confidence in themselves, to give their feedback on peer answers, to have self-determination to express themselves with their peer “teacher.” Thus, all students will get engaged and will not hesitate to speak whenever they have something to say. From this experience, she has learned that students can be competitive and cooperative, achieving the best and managing to improve their group work competence, so much in-demanded in the labour market.

Teaching in a Digital Age: Implementing Flipped Classroom Methodology

Gjenovefa Xhakaj, Commercial School, Vlora



Context and Need for Change

Under circumstances imposed by C-19 pandemic, the education process in all vocational schools abruptly switched from the classroom-based to the online education and a teaching hour now lasting only 30 minutes. Teachers now facing a new reality, full of unknown situations, found themselves struggling to do their best. Pinpointing and implementing the right and effective teaching approaches, making the best use of a teaching hour, enhancing students' motivation and interaction and promoting independent work at the same time, became a great challenge. On the other hand, educational researchers and experts around the world strongly recommend going beyond the traditional approach and applying educational approaches and methodologies that place the student at the center of the education process and the teacher plays more of a facilitator role by relying on blended learning.

Teacher Gjenovefa Xhakaj, aiming at optimizing the time available for one lesson and intending to introduce a different approach to the learning process, is implementing the 'flipped classroom' methodology, for some of her classes, by having the students do preparation work at home, and work on live problem-solving during class time.

Implementing flipped classroom methodology, as teacher Gjenovefa explains, is intended to use a different method, where the student precedes the next lesson by working independently on a material (text, video, meaningful image, etc.). Students have to understand the topic and prepare the material, which is further elaborated with the help of the teacher during the teaching time. Such an approach aims at increasing students' engagement and improving their analytical, interpretive, assessment and creative competences. This methodology also increases the interaction during the class, due to discussions on what the students have managed to understand.



PROBLEM

Short teaching hours that do not always allow to organize an interactive, student-centered learning process.

SOLUTION

Using the 'flipped classroom' methodology for which students are assigned a text or an activity and they work independently. Then, they review the information with the help of the teacher in the classroom.

OUTCOME

A more effective teaching/learning process in which students are given more space and opportunities to be engaged and work together.

Implementation

Teacher Gjenovefa points out that for effectively implementing the 'flipped classroom' methodology, is required some preparatory work. First step is checking out the specifics of the topic in order to determine whether it is appropriate for such an approach. For an adequate judgement, the teacher assesses whether the given concepts are completely new to students or not, and takes into account the complexity of new information to be introduced. Once a topic is deemed as appropriate for the implementation of the 'flipped classroom' methodology, the teacher assesses what would be the most effective approach to give students some tips and raise their interest on the information that will be shared. According to the teacher, for the implementation of this methodology, the diversity is important and it serves the purpose. It is worth mentioning that digital teaching materials available on the MësoVET platform facilitate and make the implementation of the 'flipped classroom' model much more effective.

Often, the teacher invites students to read the text related to the topic that will be taught over the next lesson. Students, independently, at their convenience and pace, read the text on the platform and depending on the specific tasks given by the teacher, can identify the key ideas, identify the concepts which they find the most difficult to understand, make analysis of the information, etc. For the 'flipped classroom' model, the teacher uses also some videos uploaded to the platform. Students, at any time convenient to them, watch the video and sometime watch it repeatedly to better understand it. Then, they summarize the information on the video. However, the most in-depth knowledge and information is provided by the teacher. For this methodology are also used thought-provoking photos about which a discussion is set up.

Most certainly, relying on the 'flipped classroom' methodology is very challenging. Will the students be willing to work independently and at the same time testing and assessing themselves, knowing that the new information will be shared with them in greater depth over the next teaching hour? What would be the most interesting format to present the information to the students in order to motivate them? These are the questions that teacher Gjenovefa constantly asks herself, in an effort to ensure the highest possible effectiveness of this learning approach.



“Students are asked to see a picture, on the platform, of a damaged or inferior quality product that has been returned to the manufacturer. They think about the reasons why the product was sent back to the company. Over the next teaching hour, we discuss about it in detail and the students share their opinions on the matter. A photo provokes their thinking and somehow encourages them to get involved in discussions.”

Impact

Supporting the education process by using the 'flipped classroom' methodology, as teacher Gjenovefa indicates, has a number of benefits. E.g., students devote longer time to independent learning outside the classroom and, an improved structuring of the teaching hour. Students learn to work independently and recognize how important it is; thus, improving learning through reviewing, reflecting, conducting analysis and synthesis, etc. This boosts their motivation to work harder for deepening their knowledge beyond the teaching hour, as happens in many cases.

Knowing that the topic will be discussed in detail during the next teaching hour makes the student feel that learning is easy, almost like a game that starts on a personal cell phone or computer and ends in the classroom being assisted by the teacher. Making use of the digital technology is most certainly very beneficial on how the students perceive this process. In addition, the positive impact of the technology is obvious during the teaching hour too, which is mainly used to discuss about the key points of the text or the content of a video or photo and about the concepts which

students find hard to understand, needs for improvement, etc. The teaching/learning process becomes more interactive and boosts critical and creative thinking while strengthening debating skills. Such an approach helps students to see that learning is a very natural and continuous process supported by contemporary approaches and that has no limitations.

“If teachers limit their work with the traditional explanation on a topic and are satisfied with it, the same will happen with the students, they will be satisfied with the explanation provided to them and will not be motivated to work independently. The ‘flipped classroom’ methodology is one of the best approaches to encourage and motivate students.”

Lessons Learned

Teacher Gjenovefa points out that implementing the ‘flipped classroom’ model always requires a plan B i.e., a backup scenario for carrying out the teaching hour. According to her, even though you can plan a teaching hour in detail, you cannot always be assured that it will go according to the plan, given that everything depends on students’ independent work and how well they understand the new material or information. The teacher suggests to be flexible and prepared to change the strategy, if necessary. In addition, special attention should be paid to the selection of topics or themes to be used for the ‘flipped classroom’ methodology. The teacher should use own intuition and rely on the students’ level of preparation for determining where and when to use this methodology.



A New Learning Culture: Using Interactive Smartboard in the Classroom

Alda Palla, vocational 'Salih Çeka' school, Elbasan



Context and Need for Change

Education nowadays is somewhat at a crossroad. Many teachers find it difficult to explain to their students all new concepts and knowledge using only traditional methods and outdated technology. Students have meanwhile grown up in a 'smart' world, with constant access to dynamic digital technology and services. Obviously, it is hard for them to be attracted to a piece of chalk and a blackboard. The advancement of the technology has come to the aid of education, enabling effective and creative presentation of a topic by using 'smart' technologies in the classroom. One of such technologies is the SMARTBoard, an interactive projector that displays the output of a computer or device to which it is connected. Organizing a teaching hour in a traditional classroom lacking such devices, it is very difficult for the teachers for reasons such as the limitations of a blackboard, students' low interest during the traditional explanation process, low interaction and engagement, etc.

Fortunately, in "Salih Çeka" school in Elbasan, the ICT laboratory, where teacher Alda Palla teaches her classes, is equipped with a SMARTBoard. As an ICT teacher, her lessons should be very interesting for the students and this is why she decided to use a SMARTBoard for almost every teaching hour.

The main goal of this initiative is to improve the quality of a lesson, as well as to switch from a traditional lesson to a more interactive, engaging and interesting lesson for the students.

"At present, there are a number of new technologies that come to the aid of both teachers and students, aiming at making the very best out of a teaching hour."



PROBLEM

Students growing up in a 'smart' world, with little interest in traditional teaching methods and obsolete technologies.

SOLUTION

Using 'smart' technologies in the classroom (SMARTBoard) for an interactive learning process.

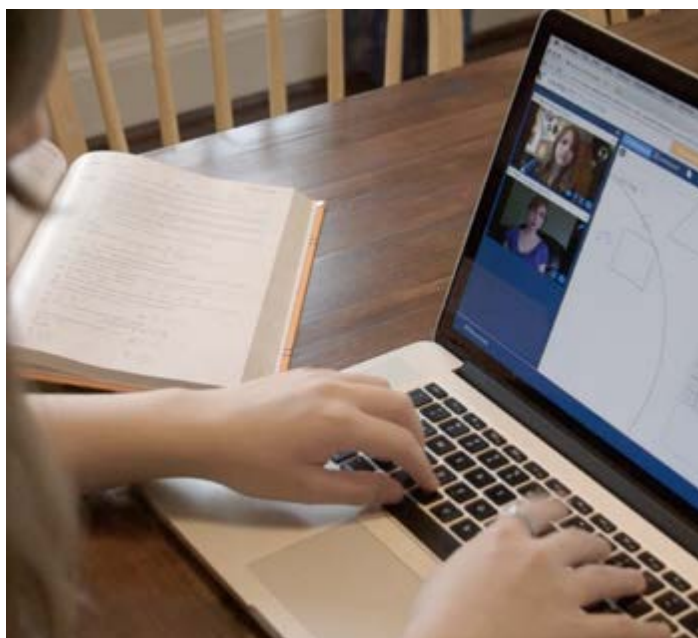
OUTCOME

Enhanced student-centered teaching methods, boosted students' creativity, engagement and motivation.

Implementation

Using a SMARTBoard in the classroom is very simple, just have at hand the right resources. It works by connecting an interactive whiteboard, a computer, a projector, and a SMARTBoard software. Once mounted on the wall, it connects to the computer or laptop via one or more usb cables. Before using it, some drivers need to be installed: SMARTBoard comes with a disk, which is very easy to install. This is how we can write, take notes on the screen and interact with it.

To use a SMARTBoard, teachers must have basic knowledge of computer. For more info on how to use a SMARTBoard and how to organize a learning activity using it there are many tutorial videos available on YouTube.



Impact

Technology is changing teaching and learning process. By changing the process, it is also changing the outcome. Using SMARTBoard in the classroom positively effects students' attitudes; they feel motivated and show more self-confidence. In addition:

- SMARTBoard increases students' interest on the subject matter
- reduces learning time
- offers opportunities to learn through a non-traditional approach
- enhances students' motivation and attention
- helps with understanding better what has been explained
- boosts students' creativity
- assists students with different conceptual skills as well as students with special needs, to faster grasp new concepts

Teachers too, enjoy the benefits of using SMARTBoard in the classroom. They have the opportunity to accommodate various alternative methods. Students learn by watching, listening and interacting with the board through the touch screen. This enables teachers to be creative and innovative in sharing knowledge. Information to students goes smoother and faster, without boring them. The touch feature allows teachers to navigate faster through the content as well as to add notes while explaining. Also, the SMARTBoard allows combination of theoretical part of the lesson with the multimedia, enhancing students learning experience.

"My greatest satisfaction is when I see the enhancement in the quality of teaching and learning process."

Lessons Learned

By combining the technology with the right education approach, the teacher ensures better integration and utilization of technologic devices in the classroom, supporting the learning process with necessary instruments for student-centered methods. While working with SMARTBoard, the teacher manages to learn all its functions, to master its use and to integrate it in various ways. During this process, in addition to the teacher, the student also learns about new technologies and how to access them. Teacher Alda is convinced that integration of technology in the classroom would be even more beneficial if all teachers could be given the chance. This is true not only for the ICT teachers, but for all the teachers. There are a number of software that can be downloaded for free and can be integrated with a SMARTBoard, depending on the subject.

There are many forums and websites that help teachers with various activities which can be implement with the help of a SMARTBoard, as well as many videos on YouTube explaining in detail how to use it. There are many methods how to use a SMARTBoard in the classroom, as it comes with various features, such as a camera, drawing, screen sharing, etc. The camera option allows you to take a screenshot along with the notes taken during the lecture and to continue it the next time exactly where you left off. The drawing option allows to make additional notes on the screen during the explanation. The screen sharing option allows keeping two parallel screens at the same time. The teacher can use this option for many purposes; for example, in one screen is written a certain question and on the other the answer. Teacher Alda suggests exploring all the options to best suit the specifics of the subject and the teacher's vision for organizing a lesson.

Interdisciplinary Projects: How to Make Math Concepts Interesting?

Ardita Uka, Technical-Economic School, Tirana



Context and Need for Change

Vocational Education in Albania is constantly evolving, both in terms of educational profiles as well as from a curricular point of view. The new curriculum strongly emphasizes establishing links between various subjects which are called interdisciplinary links. Thanks to the identification of connecting bridges between different subjects, the student manages to better develop the competencies for each subject as well as the overall fundamental competences, while understanding the interrelationship that exists between various fields, both in theory and in practice. Through interdisciplinary projects, especially those combining a vocational subject and a general subject, students manage to recognize the importance of each subject and to learn more about them.

Ardita Uka, a Math teacher of Business Economics educational direction at the Technical Economic School in Tirana, has constantly seen a low level of interest of some of her students for the subject of Math. This is because of a sceptical attitude towards general subjects in general and, because of the difficulties students face in learning Math. Given the emphasis that the new curriculum places on subject integration, **teacher Ardita has decided to implement, from time-to-time, interdisciplinary projects that link Math with Economics. The main goal is to increase students' interest and level of awareness on the importance of Math, thanks to some converging points and interdependence of this subject with Economics, field for which they are studying.**

SHKOLLA TEKNIKE EKONOMIKE TIRANË

PROBLEM

Students' sceptical attitude towards Math and the difficulties in learning its concepts.

SOLUTION

Implementing interdisciplinary projects which help students to explore the converging points of Math concepts with the professional field they are studying for.

OUTCOME

Students increased interest in studying Math and better awareness of its importance for their studies and future profession.



Implementation

The teacher began to implement such interdisciplinary projects ever since the implementation of the new curriculum started. When developing an interdisciplinary project, the first step is to determine the subject with which the connection will be made. Afterwards, teacher Ardita contacts the teachers of the respective subjects, consulting with them on the topic of the project and on the converging points between the subjects. Interdisciplinary projects are carried out as a group work. Once the topic is selected, the tasks within the group are assigned. One of the projects that teacher Ardita singles out as the most favourite for students is the one linking Math with Accounting, aiming at pointing out the relationship between derivatives, profit maximization and marginal costs when selling a product. After working in groups to find the relation between these elements, each group presented its project in the classroom. An important element of the presentation phase is the discussion by the students about the work of each group. At this stage, teacher Ardita puts herself in a secondary role, allowing students to assess each other's work, intervening only when she has any remark that encourages critical thinking.

Selecting the subject and the topic with which the link will be made is quite a challenge. Nevertheless, through proper collaboration with teachers of other subjects and understanding the interests and needs of students, the teacher manages to overcome the challenge. At the same time, the difficulties that students face in learning new Math concepts fade away because of the project-based learning and group work.

Impact

The interdisciplinary approach helps students to better understand the converging points between different subjects, perceiving learning process not as the summary of knowledge on different subjects, but as a well-integrated and harmonized process. Such approaches also enhance students' perception about general subjects, while choosing vocational education. These subjects become more interesting and important in their eyes, increasing their determination to study them. One of many positive effects is on how the vocational education students perceive the general subjects, now they recognize that general subjects are very important for their vocational education, helping for being better prepared for the labour market. At the same time, implementing and presenting such interdisciplinary projects breaks down the boredom of a traditional lesson, offering students a different learning model. Therefore, students become more motivated and more productive. Identifying the links between different subjects through the projects they implement, makes students more enthusiastic about learning process as a whole, as well as strengthens their self-confidence. All students feel engaged and do not hesitate to express themselves. During the presentation of the project, even those very timid and less interested students have managed to excel.

According to teacher Ardita, the implementation of the interdisciplinary projects improves students' soft skills. This is more obvious for the communication and collaboration skills. Students are increasingly open to new ideas and constructive debate. Teacher Ardita points out that the implementation of the interdisciplinary projects has a positive effect on herself too. Getting to know more about the Economics enables the teacher to make better choices when selecting the topic and activities for a specific project (exercises, case studies, etc.).

Lessons Learned

During the implementation of various interdisciplinary projects, teacher Ardita noticed that hands-on work is more beneficial to the students, it is easier to absorb and stays longer with them. Teacher Ardita suggests that all teachers, especially those teaching general subjects, should focus their attention and efforts on developing and implementing interdisciplinary projects. They are an efficient methodology for transferring knowledge to students, giving them the chance to work independently and interacting with each other, as well as helping them to see the value and importance of general subjects, both in terms of their professional training and of improving their competencies for life.

“One of many positive impacts of the interdisciplinary projects is on changing the perception of vocational school students about general subjects. Students start to realize how important general subjects are for their education and for getting better prepared for the labour market.”



Extracurricular Activities as an Alternative Learning Methodology

Adriana Prenga – vocational 'Kolin Gjoka' school, Lezha



Context and Need for Change

Teachers and students' perception about a lesson or a teaching hour is constantly changing. The teaching hour no longer represents simply a "window" of time within a physical classroom, which the teacher uses to repeat and convey theoretical knowledge to the students. Gradually, the organization of a teaching hour has been diversified and the activity-oriented learning allows students to put in practice the knowledge they have obtained, making learning more efficient and attractive.

Adriana Prenga teaches the educational direction of Hospitality -Tourism at "Kolin Gjoka" school. She has long realised the need for introducing innovative methods in the teaching/learning process, aiming at applying in practice theoretical knowledge by using innovative methods which boost students' interest and motivation. Extracurricular activities organized as contests are very rewarding.

Implementing such initiatives aims at helping students to improve their current skills as well as to develop new competences by putting in practice their theoretical knowledge. Also, it boosts students' motivation and engagement through alternative learning methodologies.

Implementation

One of many interesting activities organized by teacher Adriana is the one planned and organized for the apprenticeship program during the C-19 pandemic lockdown, when students could not go to the company. The teacher came up with the idea that students could practice at home. Under the attractive title "I'm Cooking my Grandmother's Recipe" each student would cook a recipe using ingredients available at own home. Students would record, film or photograph, their demonstration step-by-step, thus documenting their apprenticeship carried out in a different way. Gradually, the idea evolved towards organizing a cooking contest with the best recipes prepared by students. The contest was organized with the support of chef Alfred Marku, in-company instructor for the students who have their apprenticeship at "Rapsodia" restaurant,



PROBLEM

Monotonous teaching hours, largely based on traditional approaches and traditional activities, with low motivating and engaging impact.

SOLUTION

Organizing extracurricular activities in the form of student contests, as well-defined activities for the learning process.

OUTCOME

Greater opportunities for students to put in practice the knowledge they have learned in theory in the classroom, to develop work competences, foster creativity, and enhance motivation.

and chef Arbër from “Jolly” restaurant. About 30 dishes were prepared and presented during the contest. The contest also achieved the goal of evaluating the students and assessing how learning outcomes were achieved.

Another contest conceived by teacher Adriana was the one for the Aesthetics and Marketing class. Struggling to teach specific topics of this subject only in theory, she planned and organized ‘Setting a Buffet Table’ mini-contest with the students of two different classes. Students were divided in three groups and within each group they shared the tasks and roles. Group number 1 was tasked to buy the necessary items for the contest, group number 2 to set up the classroom for the contest, while group number 3 to observe the competitors and ask questions. Each group selected a leader, who would organize the work and manage the group. The contest lasted for three teaching hours. Groups presented two different models of a buffet setting, over which there were lots of discussions.

Teacher Adriana admits that developing and implementing such projects is not easy at all, both in terms of formalizing and implementing them. Lots of preparatory work is required to present the project idea. A series of supporting documents outlining the project, how it will be implemented and its impact on learning process, must be submitted to the school management for approval. Organizing a contest also takes a lot of time and dedication, from both teachers and students. When a contest is organized in school premises, where no basic infrastructure, equipment or funds for purchasing necessary items exist, challenges are greater. On the other hand, students who did not have apprenticeship in the company, due to C-19 restrictions, lack their practical skills. And, this is another challenge that teacher Adriana had to overcome by inspecting carefully the preparations for the contest and monitoring students’ progress. In addition, the young age of the students and the euphoria that comes with it as well as any of unexpected issues required watchful management by the teacher. She indicates that such challenges are unavoidable. Nevertheless, with the help of a very supporting staff and with students’ great determination to participate in such activities, she managed to overcome all the challenges.

Impact

Teacher Adriana explains that such activities aim at helping students to practice knowledge and skills learned in the classroom as well as ‘reviving’ the learning process. Students feel more at ease when they are given the chance to learn out of the box. They are blown by such activities and do not have the usual pressure of a typical lesson. Such projects boost students creative thinking and they become active and more courageous. Even the most passive students get engaged, who, although in theory may not have scored high - sometimes due to their shy personality - have demonstrated that they have developed the right work competences. During the contest, competition is also encouraged between students as individuals, encouraging them

to show their best. The participation in the activity of celebrity chefs and the prizes awarded by them were ‘icing on the cake’ for the students and also very beneficial for the teachers, who refresh and enhance their knowledge. In addition to professional competences, students have the opportunity to consolidate their soft skills such as: time management, taking responsibility, communication, group work, etc. At the same time, students’ chance to put in practice knowledge gained in theory helps teachers to better assess their students’ progress and to evaluate them as objectively as possible.

“Students simply embrace the new initiatives. All it takes is to encourage and get them engaged. Try not to convey the message, not even to imply, that the new initiatives would serve as instruments for their evaluation; instead, make them feel they chose to participate.”

Lessons Learned

Organization of such contests reinforced teacher Adriana’s conviction that for specific subjects or topics such as cooking, despite the efforts to properly teach theoretical knowledge in the classroom, ultimately, the practical work is crucial for developing the fundamental skills. Such activities have shown that even those students who may appear passive in the classroom, may very well surprise you when given the opportunity to practice. At the same time, the teacher is now better aware of the importance for introducing new initiatives which support students and their professional development while they have fun implementing them. The teacher suggests that such activities, although demanding, should be organized continuously and in consultation with students. Discussing with them to better understand their shortcomings, needs and interests is a good start. It is imperative to develop and implement projects in which all parties willingly get engaged.

E-Portfolio: A New Approach to Benefit from MësoVET Platform

Lorena Gjonçaj, Commercial School, Vlora



Context and Need for Change

In Albania, use of technology in education for supporting teaching and learning process was not introduced until recently, in particular in vocational education. This is due to a number of factors such as lack of infrastructure, lack of students and teachers' digital skills and, the reluctance of teachers to introduce alternative teaching methodologies for the implementation of which the technology comes to aid. Using the technology in education process increases the efficiency of the process, enhances teacher-student communication and interaction, enriches teaching contents, and boosts independent and personalized learning.

At the beginning of 2019-2020 academic year, with the support of "Skills for Jobs" project, Commercial School Vlora launched a series of teacher training on how to use and benefit from MësoVET platform, in the context of implementing new teaching/learning methodologies. Designed to help educators develop their own personalized online courses, this platform enables a variety of functions and features which make the digital contents and teaching hours interacting and engaging. Lorena Gjonçaj, math teacher at Commercial school, decided to use the platform for her math classes.

Aiming at developing a database that would prevent overloading from written assignments of students' portfolios, that allows sharing accessible information at any time and promotes students' motivation and engagement as well as a more efficient learning process, teacher Lori came up with the innovative idea of creating e-portfolios on the MësoVET platform.



PROBLEM

Portfolios overloaded with students' worksheets and a process lacking interaction and creativity.

SOLUTION

Creating e-Portfolios on the MësoVET platform, as a new learning approach and for increasing students' engagement in the learning process.

OUTCOME

Very efficient process for developing and evaluating students' portfolios; students increased engagement and motivation as well as upgraded digital skills.

Implementation

It all started with the development of the “Mathematics 10” course on the platform. This course was developed considering the needs of the students and the objectives set for it by teacher Lorena, enriching it further with theoretical content, exercises and quizzes. After trying out various features of the platform, the teacher decided to use it for the 3-month online projects assigned to her students. She assisted them in completing their portfolios. Initially, she downloaded the ‘Evaluation Standard’ on the platform, a document divided into sections with relevant assignments, submission deadlines and evaluation points.

Every month students themselves could check their assignments, how they were evaluated and the points obtained, reducing the time for any explanations by the teacher. Typically, at the beginning of each academic year, teacher Lorena shares the evaluation document with the students in the classroom. This year she did it via MësoVET platform.

The “ Basics of the ICT “ course and the computer lab were an added value to this process. Students could work individually using computers in the informatics lab to access and master the use of the online platform. Given that very few students had a personal computer, special attention was paid to the use of smartphones for accessing the platform. Intending to monitor students’ progress and improve the process, teacher Lorena conducted a survey asking students about their experience in using the online platform and the challenges they were facing.

Creating e-portfolios, a new approach for both teacher Lorena and her students, took dedication, determination and time from both parties. Nevertheless, once the students realize how important and beneficial is to use the platform for building their portfolios, other related tasks become easily manageable and efficient. Students have the chance to submit assignments in various formats, such as PowerPoint, images and videos, allowing them to create a comprehensive portfolio and to get engaged in forum discussions. Assignments can be submitted at any time convenient for students. On the other hand, the teacher can make the evaluation in time and have it documented for herself and for the student to see. The process had its sets of challenges, one of them being the low level of students’ digital skills. With continuous support from teacher Lorena, students managed to progress quickly.



Impact

All the efforts and extended time that teacher Lorena devoted to the process of creating e-portfolios paid off, the impact on students’ overall progress was great. It enhanced the spirit of collaboration and sharing experiences among each other. Frequently, teacher Lorena took on the role of the facilitator for this process, focusing on students with sharp digital skills who, on the other hand, helped out their peers by instructing them how to access the platform and how to benefit from the online sources of information, videos, apps and presentation methods. Seeing each other’s work, students were inspired to get engaged and give their best. The teaching and learning process, both in the classroom and online, became more engaging and interactive. While preparing their assignments, students further improved their creative competences and consequently, the outcomes were very satisfying. In addition, this initiative prepared the students for the online teaching/learning period due to C-19 pandemic lockdown. They encountered no difficulties, as they had developed the necessary digital skills to successfully cope with distance learning challenges.

Lessons Learned

Once teacher Lorena mastered the use and enjoyed the benefits of the MësoVET platform, her perception on using the technology for the advancement of teaching and learning process has changed a lot. She realized that the flexibility that such platforms provide, for both the educator and learner, so many available choices for presenting educational materials and, the increased efficiency are some of the advantages that should be used. According to the teacher, although students’ interest for Math, generally speaking, might be low, combining it with the available technology makes the math more engaging, more fun and, therefore, easier to learn. The teacher suggests that both teachers and students, give due importance to the online platforms and trainings on how to use them, for implementing an effective learning process and achieving desired learning objectives.

“I will go on trying to keep my students engaged by using methodologies that give everyone the necessary self-confidence that they can very well use the platform and that help them see that this is a fun learning approach.”

Global Education Programs: Enhancing Students Learning Experience and Providing a Market Oriented Curriculum

Nilson Ibraj, vocational 'Gjergj Canco' school, Tirana



Context and Need for Change

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is probably the fastest growing industry in the world, constantly introducing innovations with great impact on various economic sectors and in our daily life. In addition, it is responding to the needs of those sectors that are headed towards digitalization of business processes and transactions. Therefore, the labour market demand for ICT experts is growing. Given the situation, the vocational education institutions that are preparing future workforce for the labour market, should strive to adapt to the new dynamics, both in terms of curriculum design and how a teaching hour is implemented. They should also encourage students' independent work.

Teachers of the ICT department at "Gjergj Canco" School in Tirana admit that the content of the curriculum, for a significant number of modules, is outdated and does not enable students to keep up with developments in the ICT sector. Lack of teaching materials for these modules makes teachers' job - to teach their students most adequate information- very challenging. Although resources are plentiful, it is not easy to select and tailor information, let alone constantly update it.

Teacher Nilson, a CISCO certified instructor, is using CISCO NetAcad for some of the modules he teaches, using the standardized and constantly updated curriculum in the field of ICT, as well as the endless options that this virtual academy offers for students to practice the knowledge learned in theory.

SHKOLLA TEKNIKE GJERGJ CANCO

PROBLEM

Outdated curriculum; modules and teaching materials that are difficult to be develop and constantly updated by teachers, in a rapidly evolving field such as the ICT.

SOLUTION

Relying on CISCO NetAcad curriculum as a set of standardized teaching materials, designed by the best experts in the field and with the finest combination of theoretical and practical aspects.

OUTCOME

Teachers that provide efficient and updated teaching contents which support very productive teaching hours; and, students that are totally engaged in practical work processes learning enthusiastically about their future profession.

Implementation

CISCO NetAcad represents a global education program on information technology and network security, and, among other things, it brings together a large number of educational institutions. This academy offers a rich and standardized curriculum, with a large number of courses in the field of computer networks, devices, programming languages, operating systems, etc. Striving to provide his students with the best quality of the teaching materials that provide the theoretical basis (rules and protocols) and practical basis (exercises and projects), teacher Nilson relies on CISCO NetAcad for the development of some of the modules he teaches to the students of 12th and 13th grade. He tries to be rational about the time he allocates for explaining the theoretical concepts, in order to leave as much time as possible for students to practice. Using CISCO NetAcad teaching materials and the CISCO certified lab, furnished with all necessary devices, enables teacher Nilson to implement practice-oriented lessons, using two complementary modalities:

- using a simulator, a program with a variety of equipment and devices where students practice on how to build networks, configure computer systems, create complex schemes, etc.
- using devices of CISCO lab, enabling students to practice in real working conditions

Using a simulator through CISCO NetAcad also enables the development and implementation of projects. Teacher Nilson constantly includes such projects in the learning process, as part of the evaluation and self-assessment, helping students to better understand their progress and needs for improvement. Once students complete their projects, discussions about them take place in the classroom or via Zoom.

Teacher Nilson points out that using CISCO NetAcad as a source for the development of the curriculum and for the organization of a teaching hour, is not always easy. One of the main challenges is the low level of English proficiency of some of the students. Given the specifics of the ICT field and to be able to make use of the materials provided online by CISCO, involves a good command of English language. On the other hand, the limited number of devices available in the lab does not cover the wide range of processes that CISCO NetAcad offers to practice, mostly because this program is constantly updated. However, teacher Nilson tries to overcome such unavoidable changes by continuously monitoring students' progress, understanding their difficulties and supporting them to implement complex work processes, thus alleviating the impact of shortcomings in skills and equipment.

Impact

Using CISCO NetAcad is very beneficial for both students and teachers. Students are offered free access to an international curriculum, designed by the best experts in the field and

constantly updated. Using it, students develop the most in-demand professional skills by learning the fundamentals, i.e., the operation rules in the IT field, which they can apply anywhere in the future, regardless of the company. At CISCO NetAcad, students can find everything they need for their theoretical and practical training thanks to a large array of teaching materials (texts, videos, exercises, quizzes, etc.), accessible at any time. The possibility of simulating work processes through CISCO NetAcad is also an advantage, because the students get to know and use devices that may not be available in reality, both in terms of their specifics and their wide range. Also, thanks to trainings provided by CISCO NetAcad, students are highly competitive in the labour market, both at home and abroad, given that it is a well-known platform.

The impact on teachers is enormous too. Since the current ICT curriculum is outdated and does not provide students with recent innovations in the ICT sector, CISCO NetAcad comes to aid by enabling teachers to work with a standardized, well-structured curriculum that enables the organization of a practical lesson and rich in activities, combining theoretical concepts with videos, photos, practical demonstrations and various evaluation instruments.

Lessons Learned

While using CISCO NetAcad, teacher Nilson initially noticed that if the students get engaged into practical work, everything becomes easier for them to learn. According to him, when students get engaged in work processes, just as they will do in the future when they become part of the labour market, they are more productive, have more self-confidence and tend to do their best. He suggests that every teacher, in particular those who are teaching dynamic and applied sciences such as the ICT, should give their students chances to apply in practice their theoretical knowledge. According to him, it is equally important to keep in mind the young age of the students, their perceptions on the learning process, as well as the challenges that some of the students face, trying to adjust the learning process and moving at the right pace.

“The impact of CISCO NetAcad is amazing on facilitating teachers' job. In addition, students benefit a great deal as they understand better the new concepts and consolidate the most sought-after competences in the current market.”



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