

DEAL Toi: A Second Language Learning Proposal through E-Learning Addressed to Deaf People

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Abstract

The DEAL Project was carried out with co-financing from the European Commission (Leonardo Da Vinci Programme). The objective was to create an e-learning model for teaching foreign languages to deaf individuals in professional education. The DEAL Project has created an e-learning model and course for learning Italian, Spanish and German languages aimed at deaf students enrolled in professional training programmes to become secretaries and who are absolute beginners in the target language. The Project has created educational paths for the insertion of foreign language in an enterprise environment keeping in great consideration the specific cultural environment of deaf learners. Started in October 2006, the project ended in September 2008. Just after its conclusion, it received the European Label 2008 for Innovative Projects in Language Teaching and Learning.

The application of methodologies inspired by the lexical approach (Lewis Michael, Implementing the Lexical Approach: Putting Theory into Practice, 1997) and enriched using sign language as a mediator in educational communication has produced an evident increase and amelioration in learners competences in the national and foreign written language, and consequently a higher integration with the local hearing community.

In October of 2009 was initiated the DEAL TOI, thanks to funding the European Commission for transfer of innovation.

The DEAL TOI project has two main objectives. The first is to transfer the educational model that has been tested by the first DEAL to the United Kingdom, thereby creating a course in written English for business. This will also use British Sign Language within the teaching interactions. The second objective is to test the DEAL courses thoroughly, so that they can become permanent elements of education for Deaf learners in the partner countries.

In this way an effective response to the needs of Deaf students for foreign language learning can be provided, in particular as regards learning for work purposes. This issue is still far from being resolved, as the research done through the first DEAL project confirmed: Deaf learners generally still cannot find tools, approaches, or materials for language learning that have been put together with regard to their educational needs and the learning resources available to them.

It is very important to create the right conditions for educational authorities to fully use the tools made available - organizations specifically for Deaf people and official bodies.

The decision to extend the project into English was in response to feedback from educational bodies, and national associations of Deaf people. The English language is now an essential element in vocational training for young Deaf people in European countries studying to work in business administration.

The main outcomes expected at the end of the project are:

- full functionality of the e-learning language tools for Deaf students;
- full functionality of courses in Italian, English, and Spanish for Deaf students;

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- a cohort of teachers in partner countries who have been trained in the use of these tools;
- the permanent inclusion of DEAL tools in vocational education for the target group;
- inclusion of these tools in the strategies both of associations for the Deaf and of official bodies.

The final objective is the complete incorporation of the DEAL project tools and courses within the educational systems of partner countries with the broad strategic aim of expanding the role of e-learning in language teaching for Deaf students.

The system is based on the utilization of ADA e-learning platform and a videoconferencing system. Opportune adaptations were studied and applied to meet the needs of the target group.

DEAL Project: <http://www.deal-leonardo.eu/>

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