

Integrated Approach to Italian Language Learning for Specific Purposes for University and Vocational Education Students

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Abstract

Throughout history, people have been expanding their borders, increasingly coming into contact with other cultures and languages. In recent times, the diffusion of culture and languages has been even more evident. This creates a need for a more effective communication among people of different cultures. Often this communication is related to vocational or business purposes. Learning a language is today a mean allowing each person to expand their contacts related to their field of interest or work. The type of language vocabulary and competencies needed for each sector is different.

Pixel is an educational institution dedicated to language education and training that should foster transnational cooperation between people and institutions.

Pixel helps facilitate effective learning processes through creating Italian language courses for specific purposes that are fully customized for the learners, through careful analysis of the learners' background, needs and expectations. Pixel does not have catalogue courses, each language course, and teaching material, is each time created to match the needs and interests of the learners according to a modular integrated approach.

The modular integrated approach is based on the possibility for the group of students, and their teachers, applying for the course, to create a personalized pathway to learning both language and culture that are related to their specific field of interest.

The modular integrated approach is organized to offer: language courses, other specific training courses related to the field of interest of the students, the possibility for the students' national teachers to deliver their courses in Florence in our classrooms, the organization of in-company visits, the organization of internships, the organization of cultural visits.

Pixel is currently forging cooperation agreements with universities, language learning institutions, and higher education institutions; the goal is to reach more people who are interested in learning Italian language and culture for specific purposes.

Introduction

This project is based on a new approach to language training that is developed to respond to the need of students to acquire language skills for specific purposes.

The reason why this project is needed is that today people have several opportunities to get in contact with other countries and to develop cooperation agreements with colleagues abroad. In order to exploit these opportunities it is necessary to acquire specific language skills that are related to the field of interest of each. Therefore if I learn a language because I am (or I am studying to become) a medical doctor and I would like to communicate with my patients or with my colleagues abroad I will need to learn at the same time as the basics of the language also specific terms related to medicine. On the other hand if I work in a museum (or if am studying art) and I am (or will be) in charge of art conservation I will need to learn terms that are very specific, also at an early stage in the language learning process.



The proposal made is therefore for learning a language for specific purposes such as: Italian for Business Managers, Italian for Cooks, Italian for Salespeople, Italian for Fashion designers, and Italian for Art etc.

Also, when we learn a language for specific purposes we may be interested in learning more about our sector of interest, so if I am a fashion designer and I am learning Italian I may be interested in getting to meet companies who work in the field and create the basis of possible future cooperation with them or simply find out how they work.

Target Groups

This project is therefore based on an integrated approach to language learning addressed to students who need to learn the language for a specific purpose.

The Integrated Modular Approach

To each group of students and teachers applying for our training initiatives we propose a number of modules that they can choose. Each module is independent from the others and can be delivered by itself or it can be part of an integrated approach.

Module 1) Italian Language Course

The language course program is completely customised for the group of students from the client University. The language course contents are developed in a fully customized way so as to focus on the acquisition of specific language skills related to a specific subject area that is relevant for the group of students. The course schedule is developed so as to respond to our students' requirements in terms of language learning objectives and time availability. The course teachers are selected on the basis of their expertise in the specific

Module 2) Other Courses

A number of other courses may be organized for the group of students. These can include, for example the following courses: History, Political Sciences, Literature, Cinema, Tourism Management, Art and Architecture, Graphic Design, Web Design etc. A number of practical studio courses may also be organized. These can include: Art Studio (e.g. Painting; Water Colour Painting; Painting of Textiles; Drawing; Photography etc.), Cookery courses; Wine Tasting.

All courses included in Module 2 may be delivered either in Italian or in English.

Module 3) Courses with Own University Teachers

Fully equipped classrooms are made available for the sending university's teachers in case they are willing to deliver courses to their students.

Module 4) Cultural Visits

Cultural Visits in Tuscany may be organized. This includes guided tours of Tuscan Cities, Museum visits etc. The visits are organized in one day.

Module 5) In-Company Visits

Visits to Tuscan companies operating in the sector of interest of the group of students may be organized. Interviews with the company's managers and staff are held. These visits provide the students with the opportunity to have a direct touch with the European labor market as well as to develop practical skills that enhance their future employability. Visiting a number of Tuscan companies the students involved will also have the opportunity to understand the needs and expectations of companies operating in their subject area, also learning about different existing experiences and work methods in Tuscany. The students will find out how these companies organize their work as well as the specific skills and expertise their staff should have.

Module 6) Internship



Internship in Tuscan companies may be organized. Each internship has a duration of 1 to 6 months and it is carried out by the individual student in a company operating in his/her field of interest.

Choice of Modules

Every group of students can choose which of the proposed modules is interested in. It can be the language course for specific purposes only. It can be a training course on a topic of their interest (which in this case will be delivered either in English or in Italian). Or it can be the in-company visits only. Or, and this is usually the best and preferred option, it can be an integration among them.

Our Experience

Pixel is an education and training agency based in Florence (Italy), founded in 1999 by a team of professionals with over 10 years experience in the field of transnational cooperation for education and training, and in the organisation and delivery of Italian as foreign language courses.

From its start Pixel has focused on delivering customised courses for specific purposes.

All Pixel courses are highly personalised and flexible, responding to the specific needs of the learners in terms of training contents and time.

A careful needs analysis is carried out prior to the start of the course, during which course the learner is asked to specify the type of language skills that they intend to develop and in which professional sector they operate. This allows the teaching staff to design a completely personalised course that matches the learners' specific needs and interests.

The teacher is also chosen according to his/her specific skills and background, so as to be able to back up the teaching of the language with specific knowledge of the professional sector and/or themes of interest of the learner.

For this purpose, Pixel hardly uses printed Manuals, each course is supported by learning material (in the form of handouts) developed ad hoc, where the terminology used, the tests and the exercises (e.g. listening comprehension, reading comprehension, oral expression etc.) are tailored made to the specific issue of the course. According to a practical oriented approach, simulations role-play games, and conversation exercises are planned in order to plunge the learner in real situations connected to his present or possible future profession, or personal passion and area of interest.

A sample, not exhaustive and always being updated according to the requests coming from our learners, of the Italian language courses developed so far:

Italian Language Basic Course - Greetings and presentations; describing people and situations; everyday life communication; shopping; eating etc.

Italian language for business - Presenting one's own company; travelling for business; receiving business partners; participating in meetings; making presentations; business correspondence etc.

Italian language for marketing - Promoting one's own company; presenting a product; negotiation; sales; participating in a trade fair.

Italian language for tourism management - Written and oral communication and comprehension in a tourism-hotelier environment.

Italian language for art and architecture - Written and oral communication and comprehension in the field of the history and theory of art and architecture as well as for the practice of art and architecture.



Italian language for fashion - Written and oral communication and comprehension in the fashion sector, which therefore includes clothing; leather ware; accessories etc.

Italian language for cookery - Written and oral communication and comprehension for Italian cooking and eating.

Italian language for the medical sector - Written and oral communication and comprehension in the field of medicine, which therefore includes: communication between the doctor and the patient; social relations in the field of medicine; medical terminology etc.

The Italian language of Dante – Learn Italian through a direct contact with one of the most famous masterpiece “Divina Commedia”

As a natural consequence of this approach, Pixel started early to accompany its courses with special services, aimed at enriching the knowledge of the Italian language through an immersion in its cultural and artistic background, with the specific and diversified characteristics of its uses in different professional context, with a direct contact with Florentine every day life and finally not forgetting a glance (or better to say a taste) of the Italian food and wines.

Pixel's therefore can be described as a mosaic of different services, where the learner, duly guided by our experts can choose the different bits and pieces to create its own very personalised learning pathway.

Conclusions

To further develop our program, Pixel is now developing cooperation agreements with Universities, Higher Education institutions, and Language Learning Schools in order to spread its method to students and learners who want to learn Italian by getting in touch with Italian culture, everyday life, job market, and working environment.

The proposal is for a modular offer, of different services and solutions, to rely on to develop organic courses, designed to meet effectively the specific needs of different groups of students.