

Developing E-Learning for Basic Skills

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Presentation required (20 minutes)

Abstract

Amazon, e-bay, YouTube, Flickr, MySpace, E-Mail, Online-Banking, Online-Ticketing, Online Conference Registration, Bus and Train Tickets for mobile phones and PDAs, etc. – As more and more procedures in the workplace and everyday life are being conducted using computers and the internet, this still ongoing and accelerating digital (r)evolution affects everybody's life.

Consequently OECD identified – amongst others – the “ability of using tools for interacting effectively with the environment” such as information technology as a key competence.

Especially people with basic skills difficulties are confronted with a growing pressure of improving their skills and competencies in order to keep up with rapidly changing and growing demands. Thus implementing ICT in basic education is a priority task for basic education programme providers. A way of combining the training of ICT-skills and basic skills can be the development and implementation of comprehensive E-Learning-Systems that deliver basic skills training thus combining the media literacy and the promotion of reading, writing and Numeracy.

On behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research the Swiss company AVALLAIN developed a customised version of its Learning Content Management System (LCMS) to enable an end-to-end online-literacy-learning-portal.

E-learning for individuals that can not read and write? It is obvious that E-Learning for Basic Skills requires a special approach on all levels in terms of project design (Considering not only the technical production but additional tasks as well as the promotion of the E-learning, tutor training and technical support etc.), didactical concept (creating a curriculum, defining learning methods and translating them into exercises, etc.), technical applications and high-end software requirements (Text to speech software, animations, simulations, audio communication, etc.).

Not only the “front end” of learning has to be considered but also the “back end” with all roles of tutors, authors and administration and their special needs for modes of interaction within the system (for tutors: correcting exercises, giving feedback, (re)arranging individual curricula; for authors: editorial workflow, easy interface for creating and editing exercises; for administration). Hence 4 portals and their interoperability had to be developed and implemented.

For the German literacy-portal the development of a front-end-interface (highly intuitive, as little written text as possible, as much image and audio support as possible) that meets the special requirements of the target group was just one obvious hurdle that had to be considered during the project. The possibility for anonymous online-learning (for learners who are not

enrolled in literacy courses) as well as the possibility to use the online-portal in literacy courses and provide both user-groups with intense online-tutoring imposed special demands on the concept and design. Linguistic algorithms for automatic evaluation had to be implemented, etc.

ich-will-schreiben-lernen.de (I want to learn writing) went online 2005 and is currently used by 15.000 learners (with a majority of 9.000 anonymous learners not enrolled in literacy courses) and 900 tutors who support the learners in their courses who are learning online. For comparison: 20.000 adults are enrolled in literacy courses in Germany at the moment (With a total of 4 million adults being considered to struggle with literacy difficulties).

The majority of users who access the E-Learning-Portal stays for at least 3 months and improve their skills at least for one level within the six-level-stepped curriculum. Some learners have stayed since the launch. A lot of learners report how using “their” internet-platform that also offers chat, e-mail, forum, news and other applications typical for the internet has improved their self confidence and self-esteem. The learners find it supportive to have a “safe environment” as a “digital training field” that helps them to develop the confidence to approach challenges in the workplace or everyday life (like operating a cash machine).

The portal is currently expanded for sections on Numeracy, Basic English and workplace related skills introducing scenario based learning (e.g. realistic simulations for “conducting a job interview”).

The vision of providing everybody with the possibility of unfolding and pursuing his/hers capacities and talents requires maximum educational efforts. The mobilisation of advanced technology and the development of new approaches can support education following that goal.

The authors will present the e-learning project ich-will-schreiben-lernen in detail and discuss the insights that are relevant for any e-learning initiative in the field of Basic Skills.

Further informations at:

www.avallain.com

www.ich-will-schreiben-lernen.de