

INTERMAR PROJECT WEBSITE – A BLENDED LEARNING TOOLKIT

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Abstract: This paper accounts for the final outcome of INTERMAR project (519001-LLP-2011-PT-KA2MP) – a course toolbox, available online on the Sorbonne platform, that is the result of collaboration between the naval and maritime institutions in 8 EU-countries that share an intercomprehensive approach to languages. With its uniquely designed modules, it is intended as a toolkit for successful practice of intercomprehension at sea by students in naval/maritime schools and adult learners in in-service training within a 60-hour blended course. There will be a brief description of the project itself and the project website, and also a focus on the innovative aspect of this project – the task-based learning materials.

Key-words: INTERMAR, blended learning, intercomprehension at sea, languages

1. INTRODUCTION

Blended learning or **B-Learning** is that particular type of learning that can be achieved through the use of both virtual and physical resources, by mixing them. An example of this kind might be the combination of technology-based materials and face-to-face sessions, working together for effective teaching.

In the broadest sense, it may be illustrated by any opportunity taken by an instructor to combine two methods to give important task instructions. Yet again, a better example would be to use active learning techniques in the physical classroom, and to add a virtual presence in a social web. Nevertheless, blended learning is a term that represents a major change in the teaching strategy.

As previously stated, blended learning involves both classroom and virtual activities; however, none of them should represent less than 25% or more than 75% of the activities in order to be termed as blended learning.

As for the usage of this term, researchers like Heinze and Procter have developed the following definition for Blended Learning that can be applied to higher education: “*blended learning is learning that is facilitated by the effective combination of different modes of delivery, models of teaching and styles of learning, and founded on transparent communication amongst all parties involved with a course*” [1].

In 2012 Heather Staker and Michael B. Horn from Innosight Institute suggested a definition for blended learning: “*a formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online delivery of content and instruction with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace and at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home*” [2].

Other authors mention “hybrid learning” (which is the most commonly used term in North America) instead of “blended learning”. However, all of these concepts refer more broadly to the integration (the “blending”) of e-learning tools and techniques.

Outside academia, blended learning is used in private companies, possibly because of its cost benefits recorded to traditional training methods, although there are no studies that demonstrate clear cost savings.

2. INTERMAR PROJECT

The above-mentioned project is set in the wake of other European Union - funded projects (as of 2000 up to present) which took the challenge to study the notion of intercomprehension (IC). It is the first of this kind since it attempts at introducing IC in formal educational contexts and resorting to one of the newest methodology – blended learning.

INTERMAR is a project designed to facilitate the reciprocal understanding and learning of languages through intercomprehension in a maritime context, or using its coordinator’s words “*a new asset in the professional world*” [3].

In this respect, it thrives to create a European community of naval and maritime institutions that share an

approach to teaching/learning foreign languages from the IC perspective.

It gathers under its umbrella: the Escola Naval in Portugal, the Public Language Centre of Vilnius and the Lithuanian Maritime Academy in Lithuania, the Åland University of Applied Sciences in Finland, the Universiteit Antwerpen and Antwerp Maritime Academy in Belgium, *Mircea cel Batran* Naval Academy of Constanta, Romania, Université de la Réunion, Université de Paris 3 – Sorbonne Nouvelle and Ecole Navale, Brest in France, Saarland University in Germany, Università Roma Tre in Italy, TA Group and Maritime Academy of Latvia, Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia and Escuela Naval de Pontevedra in Spain, and the Institute of Education and University of London, UK.

3. ABOUT THE WEBSITE

The project website contains informative and promotional items concerning the project. It is to be updated throughout the project period with information about events and results related to the project. The website is publicly accessible on the following URL [4].

This website, which was launched in September 2012, is only the very first step, and it evolved in the next few months.

The website contains the following information:

1. **Welcome to INTERMAR** - introduction to the project and backgrounds
2. **About IC** – introduction to the concept and backgrounds
3. **Work Plans and Outcomes** – details about project results
4. **Module Sections** – all work packages described
5. **News** - frequently updates all events

Navigation through the site is user friendly; just by running the mouse over each of the above-mentioned section it gets highlighted and drop-downs (to select more information) are displayed.

1. The **Welcome to INTERMAR** page encompasses the project **Aim, Scope, ToolBox** and **Target Group**. Then here come the **Partners** and **Contact** pages, where all partners are mentioned and, respectively, contact information about project coordinators.
2. From the **About IC** page one can find out that people who work at sea

are in a very favorable position to practice intercomprehension and to learn with a small effort and with many positive side-effects Intercomprehension (IC) is a “natural” form of communication, based on mutual comprehension. IC is passive language knowledge, it is focused primarily on understanding messages – not speaking (producing messages) and it is quick and transferrable. Its main objective is to *learn how to learn* languages. The mind map at the bottom of the page is intended to synthesize the *what, when, where, who, how and why* to practice IC. Finally, the ones who are interested in the concept are invited to explore it on **Intercomprehension Links**.

3. The **Work Plan and Outcomes** page includes **Launch of the Module at Maritime/Naval Academies, What’s on in 2013?, What happened in 2012?, Åland Maritime Academy Experiences – Finland.**

These pages inform us about the fact that INTERMAR is/was used for the first time between December 2012 and May 2013; the experiences of the teaching/learning during this period will be evaluated and discussed at a work meeting in June (in Paris), and then the materials will be revised and re-launched at the Final Event in Lisbon in September 2013, to which representatives of all European Maritime and Naval Academies are invited. There is also information on the

project meetings and an account of the experience of students in Åland Maritime Academy that have experimented with IC in maritime contexts.

4. The **Module Sections** page contains the actual outcome of this project - a 60-hour course (3 ECTS credits), devised with a view to developing plurilingual competences to facilitate the acquisition of Maritime English. This course addresses students from naval and maritime institutions as well as navy personnel and seafarers. It comprises 6 modules that can be covered both under teacher guidance and/or online.

The course modules are the following:

Module	Nº of hours	Learning modalities
Icebreaker (compulsory)	4	Blended learning
Intercultural Awareness (compulsory)	4	Blended learning
Interproduction (compulsory)	4	Face-to-face
Maritime English	20	Blended learning
Romance Languages	28	Blended learning
Germanic Languages	28	Blended learning
Baltic Languages and Russian	28	Blended learning

The **Module Sections** page has been broken into:

4.1 Icebreaker - an introduction to intercomprehension.

This is the first part that the students will work with, before the other sections. It is intended to be clear and inspiring, with a cruise on the Mediterranean and Black Seas as its main theme.

4.2 Intercultural Awareness

This is an important module since besides the language constraints (sometimes) involved, virtually everything can have different meanings in another culture: words, symbols, gestures, glances, postures, dress, proximity, etc

4.3 Maritime English

The objective of this module is *not* to develop a learning tool for Maritime English but to develop *intercomprehension skills* and promote *learning strategies* which will facilitate the learner’s ability to learn a language, in this case Maritime English.

4.4 Germanic intercomprehension (Dutch, German, English, and Swedish)

Thanks to the fact that English has become a world-wide language, more than a billion people is familiar with Germanic family of languages. Hence it is not difficult to start to make sense of the other languages of this family.

4.5 Baltic/Russian intercomprehension (Russian, Latvian, Lithuanian)

The choice of these language families was made due to the fact that Latvian is spoken by some 1.5 million people in Latvia and Lithuanian by some 3 million. Russian is the first and second language of more than 260 million in Europe and Asia, mainly in the former Soviet Union area.

4.6 Romance intercomprehension

Here the Romance languages include the five national languages: Portuguese, Spanish, French, Italian, and Romanian (and in many ways also English with almost half of its vocabulary of Latin origin).

The **Assessment tools** include Learning Portfolios that will show students’ progress and reflection

5. The **News** page advertises the **Trial Runs at the Academies** The INTERMAR modules are being tested at present.

The Intermar 3-credit module has been tested from December 2012 till May 2013 at the eight maritime and naval academies. The learning is blended (meaning that students work in class with a teacher and outside of class individually or in small groups with or without Internet connection).

The materials have been produced by the language teachers and experts of the consortium. It is available to all participants at the collaborative platform of Sorbonne 3 in Paris. The students are also producing presentation materials of themselves in their own languages (light version) as an INTERCOMPREHENSION appetizer for their fellow students in the other countries – **and as a starting point for getting to know each other.**

For the 60 hour-course, institutions will choose the compulsory modules (12 hours) and complete this with two of the other modules, according to the specific needs of their students and of local syllabi.

Progression in IC competences is to be based on the structure of the course. Students will start with the **Icebreaker module**, followed by the Intercultural Awareness module. This will enable the development of minimum skills in IC and Intercultural Communication, which will support the Interproduction activities that will immediately follow. After this first approach to IC, students will take at least one module of a specific language family.

In each module, the scenarios are built in such a way that they facilitate progression in an upward spiral, i.e. each activity is based on the acquisitions that have been previously made. This means that students will always be working in their “zone of proximal development” [5], actively building their competences with the help of the teacher or of peers. The competences that will be built in the specific language family modules may be re-used in the Maritime English Module.

on metacognitive processes and personal styles and motivations and formative and summative tests to be used

in each module. Marking criteria and keys for expected answers are also available.

4. FUTURE FUNCTIONALITY OF THE INTERMAR WEBSITE

The INTERMAR public website acts as a place to make publicly available its content, software, tools, services and other deliveries, and publicize presentations and publications such as papers and articles at seminars and conferences, in scientific or technology journals, etc.

5. CONCLUSION

We may conclude that the INTERMAR website and additional materials will represent the public portal for the INTERMAR project, in which all updates and project results are stored, concentrated and presented in an attractive manner.

The project website targets a broad audience and has for that reason to offer a vivid content, which will be updated frequently. The materials within will be available and downloadable for free at the project website by September 2013.

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The website will be updated regularly, to make it lively and attractive. News items about, or related to the project, will be communicated through the website.

For now, this is only a static site that provides basic information about the INTERMAR project; however, in the future, it will be enriched and will have more dynamic capabilities, such as forums, richer photo and video galleries, etc.