

Best practice in digital education

Dutch online lessons for Ukrainian refugees

Author: Lieselot Declercq

Introduction

d-teach online school is an international not-for-profit organisation and the first online school in Belgium with almost 10 years of experience in online teaching. Education services are tailored to individual needs, both at the level of primary and secondary education. Its traditional focus group consists of children of expats, who wish to keep the mastering of their mother language up to standards while preparing for a future re-integration in the traditional Belgian school system.

As part of its social responsibility, the school subscribes to the sustainable development goal on inclusive and equitable quality education for all. During the COVID-19 crisis it shared its expertise on digital teaching and learning skills free of charge with schools in Belgium, helping teachers to cope with new and urgent challenges in a most disruptive working context.

The overall context. Brief description of the practice

Triggered by the Russian invasion in Ukraine, the ensuing war and the exodus of Ukrainian refugees to other countries, and in line with its social responsibility strategy, d-teach online school provided an online module for Belgian teachers to support Ukrainian children in their classroom.

Learning a new language is best done when you are in contact with the language and practice it. That is why d-teach developed an online series of lessons for Ukrainians to learn the Dutch language. The aim of these lessons is to teach all Ukrainian refugees the basics of the Dutch language immediately after their arrival in Belgium in order to facilitate their (temporary) integration.

These online lessons are suitable for primary school level and require no prior knowledge. The first lesson is made available to everyone free of charge. Instructions and vocabulary have been translated into Ukrainian. This way, the student can go through the lesson independently. Those interested in better understanding how the tool works can watch the first lesson by filling in their name and e-mail address at the following link: <https://www.d-teachschool.com/learn-dutch-online-for-ukrainians/>.

The online module is divided in four themes: greeting; my family; where do you live?; counting till 10. The module provides immediate feedback and offers different forms of exercises, supported by visuals and audio: vocabulary, grammar, reading skills and listening skills. Questions are always visible in the Ukrainian language and in Dutch. There is also a repetition in the exercises. The visuals are made by d-teach's team of instructional designers, educational scientists and graphic designers.





[image link: FMKF05386.jpg]



A few reflections on the practice

More than 300 teachers in different local schools in Flanders (Belgium) downloaded the online module since the beginning of the war in Ukraine. It clearly answers a need because there is a lack of lesson material and also of teachers fluent in Ukrainian. The participating schools want to engage in further collaboration with d-teach.

The online learning modules are informed by the long research-based history of d-teach in online teaching. d-teach uses its social media accounts for networking and close interaction with local schools and teachers.

How is this relevant to other contexts?

Many teachers in different schools in Belgium asked d-teach to develop more online modules to continue with the learning of the Ukrainian children. It combines the needs of the Ukrainian children and the needs of the local schools. This approach could also be developed for other languages and other countries.

Apart from this, d-teach is also involved in a project where it gives online lessons in Dutch for Ukrainian adults. During 3 months it provides each week 2 lessons for a group of 12 adults online. This online synchronous approach is designed so the participants can speak basic Dutch after 30 lessons. The added value of this project is that there is also interaction with a teacher and the students can also interact with each other (community building).

With the increasingly large number of Ukrainian refugees all throughout Europe, their integration in the fostering communities has become extremely relevant. Language is one of the most evident barriers, and developing tools to tackle it can support a smoother transition into new environments.

Furthermore, while this practice and tool focuses on Ukrainian refugees, similar initiatives can be developed for other refugees as well. This practical, non-formal approach of learning a new language can be then, in the case of students, complemented with more formal initiatives, such as the [Council of Europe's European Qualifications Passport for Refugees](#) – designed to assess refugee's qualifications for which there is insufficient or missing documentation.





It is also possible to combine the asynchronous online modules with the synchronous online lessons (i.e. with a teacher), to ensure a more adaptable teaching and learning approach. Depending on the needs of the target group, the context, the available team and technology, a tailor-made solution can be developed.

Brief conclusion

d-teach online school combines a track record of personalised education to children of expats with a research-based framework which takes into account technology, content and pedagogy. These assets allow for developing new online teaching tools tailored to the specific needs of new and previously un(der)served audiences, such as refugees and internally displaced people. Online language teaching can be organised either individually or in small groups. Practice-based insights are crucial in making sure that teaching generates the best possible impact for students, allowing them to integrate smoothly in their (temporary) new living environment.

Developing easy to use online tools that support the initial integration of migrants in fostering communities can be extended beyond school level and be targeted (for instance) to adults. Providers of online modules / courses can look into ways to adapt their current offer to migrants in need, building on existing resources. In this particular instance, d-teach online school has a close collaboration with 'd-teach training' - an expertise center for online and blended learning. Their team includes instructional designers, graphic designers, learning designers, familiar with dedicated softwares for developing online courses. Since the development of online modules requires three types of expertise specialists (the didactical/instructional designer, the content specialist and the technology specialist) and these were involved in this particular instance, the online school could anticipate the needs of Ukrainian refugees. This allowed them to address those needs very quickly by developing online modules in close collaboration between the school and the training team. Besides the development of online modules, the training team provides resources for 'online teaching' to the school.

Not least, this model can be adapted and implemented in all European countries with growing populations of migrants, not only Ukrainians, at practitioners' level, with policy support through additional initiatives, such as the Council of Europe's Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants (LIAM) project.

References

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