

# PRODUCTION OF PROMOTIONAL VIDEOS IN A MULTILINGUAL CROSS-CURRICULAR CONTEXT: A COLLABORATIVE, LEARNER-CENTRED EXPERIMENT

Sílvia Ribeiro<sup>1,2</sup>, Ana Rita Calvão<sup>1</sup>, Anabela Simões<sup>1,2</sup>, Márcia Neves<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>ESTGA – Águeda School of Technology and Management, University of Aveiro  
(PORTUGAL)

<sup>2</sup>CLLC – Languages, Literatures and Cultures Research Centre, University of Aveiro  
(PORTUGAL)

## Abstract

Now, more than ever, teaching and learning foreign languages at the university level should be applied to students' professional future, by ensuring early contact with the effective communication needs of the marketplace [1]. On the other hand, it is also paramount to articulate the improvement of language skills with the field of computer applications to guarantee the concomitant development of digital skills [2]. With this premise in mind, Higher Education Institutions (HEI) are encouraged to create learning contexts that, based on motivating problems [3], allow students to further develop important skills such as i) the effective command of another language, ii) technical skills necessary to produce current and functional communicative media, and iii) soft skills, which are indispensable to graduates' professional (and personal) performance.

Thus, this article aims to describe an experimental project developed at the Águeda School of Technology and Management of the University of Aveiro (ESTGA-UA), over the last two academic years, within the first cycle degree in Office Management and Business Communication (OMBC). Besides explaining the options in terms of methodologies and technologies selected for this project, some perceptions of the students and teachers involved are also presented.

This activity, which was implemented in the 1<sup>st</sup> semester of academic years 2018/2019 and 2019/2020, emerged from a need of the surrounding local community. Located in Águeda, a city with a growing touristic sector, ESTGA-UA felt challenged to propose improved solutions for the dissemination of the municipality touristic offer. To present answers to this initial challenge, a hybrid approach to Project-Based Learning and Problem-Based Learning (PBL) was followed and an experimental, interdisciplinary project was designed. The carried out activities, which involved 72 students and 4 teachers (3 from the language department and 1 from the IT department), were developed within the 2<sup>nd</sup>-year courses *German Reception and Attendance* and *French Reception and Attendance* in articulation with the 1<sup>st</sup>-year course *Electronic Office Applications I*.

Students were challenged to create a short promotional video for the municipality of Águeda in groups made up of students from the two classes involved: whilst 1<sup>st</sup>-year students worked on the conception and production of the video, 2<sup>nd</sup>-year students were responsible not only for subtitling it in German or French but also for supporting 1<sup>st</sup>-year colleagues in the accomplishment of their task. Students used the *Powtoon* tool and complemented the work with other free content production solutions; 2<sup>nd</sup>-year students developed selection and adaptation of technical vocabulary skills.

According to students and teachers involved, this joint project i) strengthened the relationship with the surrounding community; ii) demonstrated how HEIs can respond to the needs and challenges of organisational partners with innovative solutions; iii) contributed to the development of technical skills in the field of design and production of audio-visual solutions; iv) helped students consolidate selection and adaptation of technical vocabulary skills; iv) contributed to the consolidation of group membership, and v) led to the development of important soft skills.

Keywords: higher education, cross-curricular projects, office management, business communication, foreign languages competences.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The importance of languages is indisputable today, not only for their facilitating role in the construction of knowledge but also because the command of a second/third language fosters understanding and dialogue with other cultures, as well as it plays a relevant role in the integration of citizens into the labour market, thus contributing to an individual's professional success [4]. Against some misconceptions, the impact of language proficiency on careers goes beyond professions strictly related to language services, a perspective that is supported by [5], who asserts that the command of a "foreign language and intercultural skills can increase both employability and opportunities for advancement in many apparently non-language-related centres". In the current global economic landscape, where organisations compete in an ever more evolving and challenging market, foreign language (FL) skills have significant strategic importance [6], precisely because "mastering a foreign language enables users to communicate and to better understand the culture of business partners or customers" [7].

In this context, it is assumed that "innovative policies and practices in language teaching must be implemented in European classrooms, schools, regions and countries – taking into account pedagogical shifts and ongoing societal trends" [8]. Aware of this need to respond, in an innovative way, to the demands of the labour market [9], Universities have sought to invest in policies and strategies that enable constant articulation with the surrounding communities and ensure close interaction between different disciplinary areas. Nevertheless, specifically in the field of FL teaching, and despite the progress made towards diversification and updating of pedagogical practices implemented in some contexts [3], "a shift from traditional, monolingual policies and practices to teaching and learning processes based on innovative, plurilingual pedagogies" [8] is still necessary.

From the different possibilities for pedagogical innovation, two experiential learning methodologies were brought together into a classroom activity: on the one hand, a mixed approach of Problem-Based Learning (Prob-BL) and Project-Based Learning (Proj-BL), which are often based on challenges that seek to provide an answer to the needs of the local communities, and, on the other hand, the integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in FL classes in Higher Education.

Both Project-Based Learning and Problem-Based Learning are innovative pedagogical methodologies that have been progressively applied to different scientific fields, at various levels of education. Both are student-centred teaching methodologies that take real-world problems as a starting point [10], thus allowing learners to become more motivated and active in the construction of knowledge while seeking the necessary answers. These are, therefore, approaches that place the student at the centre of pedagogical interaction and assign the teacher to the role of being the facilitator that accompanies and guides the process of finding a solution to the problem. The adoption of PBL methodologies (Prob-BL and Proj-BL) – providing that students, organised in groups, are challenged to solve authentic problems –, fosters the development of both technical skills and transversal skills such as autonomy, critical thinking, time and priority management and teamwork [3]. Thus, the rationale underlying the adoption of PBL in the experiment herein presented will be that "students would learn better if they were engaged in real-life problem solving" [11]. The difference between the two approaches, which is not always clear, lies, among other aspects, in the type of problem presented (which is less defined/concrete in the case of Prob-BL), the duration of the activity (longer in the case of Proj-BL), the role of the teacher (who is less intervenient in Prob-BL than in Proj-BL) and the type of end product (which tends to be more concrete in Proj-BL) [12], [13].

In the case of FL teaching and learning, the adoption of PBL methodologies (Prob-BL and/or Proj-BL) provides students with the means "to develop greater communicative, thinking and problem-solving skills [...] than with regular lecture-based education" [14]. In fact, and according to [3], several arguments justify the choice of PBL in FL classes, namely the possibility of learning a language in an innovative, active and significant context, which not only enables the appropriation of communicative competences adapted to the diversity of real-life contexts but also favours the development of important transversal competencies, such as problem-solving or critical thinking, contributes to the increase of motivation and student satisfaction. [15] also argue that resourcing to Proj-BL in the context of FL learning, "relies on the embedded combination of complex communication skills ranging from receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing), to processing skills (critical and creative thinking), usually in authentic or simulated situations".

Also according to [3], the introduction of PBL in FL classes, which ought to be phased and include several steps – i) presentation of the problem(s) to the students, who are organised in groups; ii) allocation of time for individual research in different sources; iii) organisation of teamwork and creation of an atmosphere that encourages the sharing of ideas, doubts and possible solutions to the problem; iv) presentation of the solutions created by the students and assessment of what they have learned –, cannot be successful in learning environments that do not integrate the use of technology.

Indeed, in recent decades, the integration of technology in FL classes has expanded rapidly and effectively around the world and is associated with the implementation of various methodologies and multiple activities. In reality, both information research activities and those related to understanding and production, both orally and in writing, benefit from the use of the various tools and solutions that ICTs make available today. It is assumed, therefore, that “in this era of digital ‘literacy’ the priority is that students learn through the use of different modes of communication so that they develop and use multimodal texts, PowerPoint presentations, web pages, videos, debates through social networks such as Facebook, etc.” [16].

The option for the use of ICTs to enhance and diversify FL learning gains even more prominence in contexts where skills are combined, i.e. situations based on the “articulation between several curricular units (CU) to develop main themes of the course in an integrated way” [17]. In fact, these contexts of structured articulation between two or more CUs (of the same curricular year or different years) may favour not only the interaction of knowledge and the complementarity of competences, but also stimulate, similarly to PBL, the development of several transversal competencies, namely communication, organisation and method, creativity and teamwork skills [18].

An initiative that allows students to work around a problem (especially a real-world problem or need identified in the surrounding community), whose solution can be found by following the steps and principles inherent to Proj-BL and Prob-BL while using ICTs in the context of FL learning – and, thus, enabling the aggregation of a wide range of competencies –, is an innovative approach, whose implementation benefits from being explained and analysed in detail. Hence, a classroom activity based on the production of promotional touristic videos for the city of Águeda that was developed in the context of a skills aggregation activity carried out within the CUs *German Reception and Attendance*, *French Reception and Attendance* (2<sup>nd</sup> year of the Degree in OMBC) and *Electronic Office Applications I* (1<sup>st</sup> year of the same Degree), taught at the Águeda School of Technology and Management of the University of Aveiro, in Portugal, shall be presented next.

## 2 CONTEXT

At ESTGA-UA, and specifically within the scope of the first cycle degree in OMBC, several innovative pedagogical initiatives have been implemented over the years. These have been anchored, among other strategies and methodologies, in the aggregation of competences between different CUs, as well as in the strong relationship with the surrounding community. These initiatives, in addition to the various advantages associated with them, which were briefly mentioned in the Introduction, are of particular importance to this degree, which, due to its multidisciplinary and strongly applied matrix, benefits directly and at multiple levels from this type of learner-centred activities.

The OMBC degree, besides including CUs from eight different scientific areas – Languages, Secretarial Studies and Business Communication, Social Sciences, Information Technology, Management, Legal Sciences, Mathematics and Accounting –, also allows students the opportunity to attend an optional CU from a scientific area of their choice. Moreover, it guarantees students a strong and permanent contact with the surrounding corporate environment, achieved not only through the CUs *Project in Organisation and Event Management* (4<sup>th</sup> semester) and *Internship/Project* (6<sup>th</sup> semester) but also through multiple initiatives carried out throughout each academic year, namely its Mentoring Programme. Based on a partnership established with the Águeda Business Association, this Programme ensures that each student is accompanied by a professional working in the field throughout the entirety of the degree duration (6 semesters).

Aware of the importance of mastering different languages in an ever more global and competitive labour market, the study programme in OMBC includes nine 60-hour FL courses – five courses of English (FL I, levels B1-C1 of the European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), mandatory for every student) and four courses of a second FL, which following students’ preferences can be French or German (FL II, levels A1-B1 of the CEFR).

In a similar vein of previous initiatives carried out within the OMBC degree (see, for example, [18]), another cross-curricular activity was implemented in academic years 2018/2019 and 2019/2020. Based on the aggregation of competences developed within the 2<sup>nd</sup>-year CUs *German Reception and Attendance* (GRA) and *French Reception and Attendance* (FRA) and the 1<sup>st</sup>-year CU *Electronic Office Applications I* (EOA I), the activity presented in the next section aimed at responding to a need of the surrounding region: the creation of promotional videos of the city of Águeda, which in recent years and as a result of various initiatives of the City Council and other local agents has gained great touristic projection at both national and international levels.

To develop this cross-curricular activity, principles inherent to Proj-BL and Prob-BL were adopted: from the former, the introduction to a concrete and well-defined initial problem, as well as the requirement for an oral presentation of the end result, i.e. the product that would respond to the initial problem. From the later, the interdisciplinary nature and the limited timeframe given for the assignment completion (2 weeks) [12] [13]. Thus, and given the hybrid character of the activity, it is assumed that it was developed within a PBL macro domain (Project and Problem-Based Learning).

By presenting this challenge to students from different CUs and curriculum stages, the objective was not only to reinforce their skills in the applied use of two FL and digital tools used in video creation but also – and above all – to introduce the participating classes to real needs of the local community while providing them with a context that promotes collaborative work and fosters the relationship between groups of different years.

By proposing this activity, teachers sought to contribute to the training of professionals with strong FL skills and high command of computer tools, which are two requirements highly valued when integrating these graduates into the labour market. On the other hand, the adoption of a PBL and competences aggregation approach aimed at developing/consolidating not only the set of technical skills inherent to each of the CUs involved but also several transversal skills, whose growing importance in such a global and interconnected modern workplace is ever more recognised [19].

The following section will describe the implemented activities, present some results and share teachers' and participating students' perception.

### 3 PRODUCTION OF PROMOTIONAL VIDEOS IN A CROSS-CURRICULAR CONTEXT: REPORT OF A PBL TRANSDISCIPLINARY EXPERIMENT

#### 3.1 Experiment description

The classroom activity reported here involved 72 students belonging to three different classes, as shown in table 1.

Table 1. Number of involved students.

<i>Academic year</i>	<i>EOA I (1<sup>st</sup> year)</i>	<i>GRA (2<sup>nd</sup> year)</i>	<i>FRA (2<sup>nd</sup> year)</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>2018/2019</b>	18	9	12	39
<b>2019/2020</b>	16	6	11	33
<b>Total</b>	34	15	23	72

The activity was preceded by a contextual analysis guided by the teachers involved (one teacher of Electronic Office Applications, one teacher of German and two teachers of French), who sought to identify in the surrounding community needs for communication products in both FLs. Thus, given the recent and progressive tourist projection of the city of Águeda and after assessing the local needs, students were challenged to create a short promotional video of the city. This decision took into account the fact that the activity would easily allow for the integration of the learning objectives formally defined for each involved CU, namely those listed in Table 2.

Table 2. *Electronic Office Applications I, French Reception and Attendance/  
German Reception and Attendance: course objectives.*

<b><i>Electronic Office Applications I (1<sup>st</sup> year, 1<sup>st</sup> semester): course objectives</i></b>	<b><i>French/German Reception and Attendance (2<sup>nd</sup> year, 3<sup>rd</sup> semester): course objectives</i></b>
<p>By the end of the CU, students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Efficiently resource to EOA to autonomously overcome obstacles;</li> <li>• Use EOA to produce professional texts and presentation documents, in desktop and/or collaborative environment;</li> <li>• Use electronic office tools to share, distribute, disseminate and present information and organise work.</li> </ul>	<p>By the end of the CU, students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates autonomy and discursive rigour in the use of technical terminology in simulated reception and attendance situations;</li> <li>• Produces simple oral and written texts that are coherent and appropriate for various reception and attendance contexts.</li> </ul>

The challenge was presented simultaneously to all students, who were in their respective classrooms with their teachers. After handing out a document with the assignment guidelines, each teacher presented their group the starting problem and explained the methodology and steps to be followed.

1<sup>st</sup>-year / EOA I students were divided according to their FL II option: those who had opted for French were placed on the right side of the room and distributed in groups of 2 or 3 students; those who had opted for German were placed on the left side, also in groups of 2 or 3. At this stage, their task consisted in drawing up a small script to serve as a basis for the video. This was followed by research and selection of information about the municipality of Águeda, as well as the capture of photographs of the city's most relevant landmarks and points of interest.

After a brief introduction to the computer tools to be used, students began the creation of their videos. At this stage, enough time was given to explore those tools and start the process of putting together the various objects (image, sound and text). In some cases, it was necessary to use image-editing and composition software to produce and/or improve some content. Text segments inserted in the video were written in Portuguese, firstly in the Microsoft Word application software, and then copied to the software chosen for the video creation.

The selection of the IT tools used in this project-work took two main aspects into account: on the one hand, the lack of experience of 1<sup>st</sup>-year students in using this type of applications and, on the other hand, the limited timeframe for the completion of the various tasks. *Powtoon* was the chosen video making software. This animation software works online, does not require installation on personal computers, and its friendly interface allows for the creation of animations/videos through the manipulation of pre-created objects such as imported images, text, music and voices in a fast, easy, intuitive way [20].

Simultaneously, 2<sup>nd</sup>-year students enrolled in GRA and FRA were equally distributed in small groups and asked to look for relevant touristic information, as well as terms that could be used in the creation of touristic promotional videos. Students analysed multi-format authentic documents made available by the municipality of Águeda and its cultural tourism office and resourced to various translation support tools, namely, *Linguee*, *IATE*, *ReversoContext*, *Pons*, *LEO*, *Beolungus*, among others.

Once this preparatory stage was completed, a joint class with students from the three groups involved was scheduled. On the defined date, 2<sup>nd</sup>-year students joined their 1<sup>st</sup>-year colleagues, who were in the IT classroom working on their videos, thus forming new, larger teams, grouped around 7 work stations according to the FL II each one initially chose to study (Fig. 1).



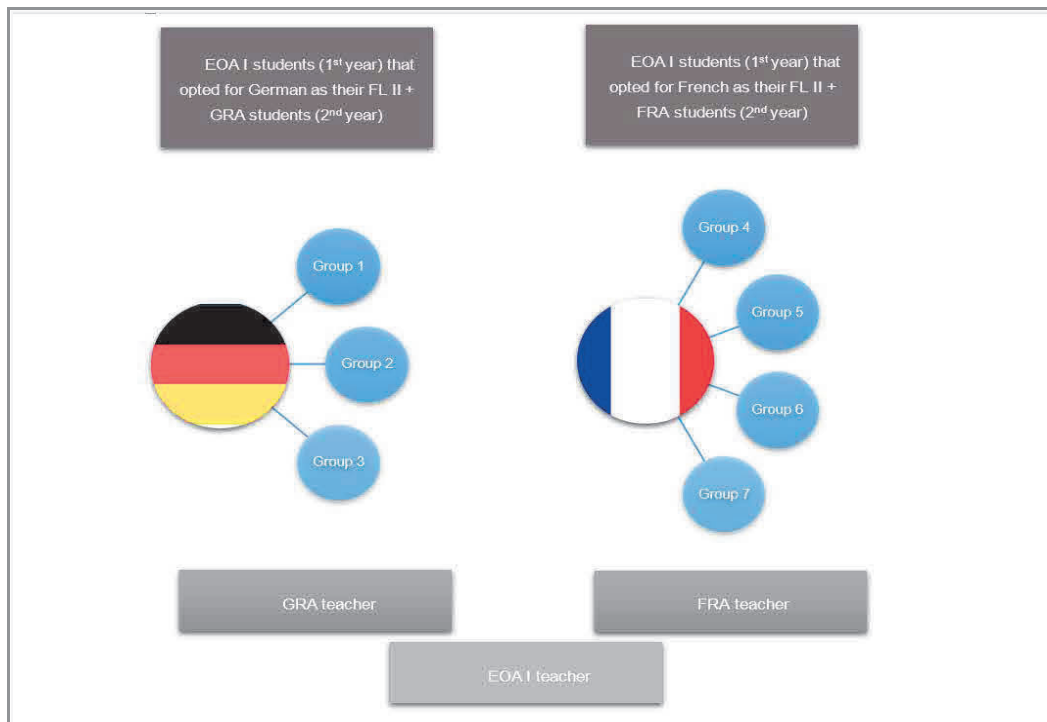


Figure 1. Classroom layout during the joint session.

During this joint session, each group was able to discuss and agree on the best strategies for structuring/organising information, as well as the most adequate and creative ways to present it. Once those decisions were made, G/FRA students were responsible for translating into German/French the text segments meant to be inserted in the video. It should be noted that 2<sup>nd</sup>-year students were already familiar with the adopted computer tools, which enabled them to help and guide their 1<sup>st</sup>-year colleagues with some features necessary for making their group's video.

In total, in the two academic years in which this transdisciplinary initiative was implemented, 14 videos were produced: 6 were subtitled in German and 8 in French; Fig. 2 presents screenshots of two of those videos. Moreover, these were made available through the YouTube platform, which allowed students to develop skills in the upload and management of videos in(to) social media.



Figure 2. Examples of produced videos: left frame - video produced by GRA/EOA I students; right frame - video produced by FRA/EOA I students.

The activity was completed with the oral presentation of each video, in the two foreign languages, thus ensuring the consolidation of oral communication skills of 2<sup>nd</sup>-year students.

Throughout the initiative, teachers took on the role of mediators and facilitators of learning, placing themselves at the disposal of the students to help them with the challenges generated and motivating them to move forward and overcome the difficulties. At the end of the activity, an overall assessment of the formative assignment was made based on the opinions and suggestions from students and teachers involved.

### 3.2 Students' and teachers' perception of the activities

Due to its innovative character, the implementation of an activity of this nature benefits greatly from a holistic reflection that considers the perspective of those involved regarding the options and practices inherent to this experiment.

In both academic years (2018/2019 and 2019/2020), participating students expressed convergent opinions when they pointed out that the developed project-works facilitated the approximation between students of the two years, fostering thus an easier integration of 1<sup>st</sup>-year students, who had recently arrived at ESTGA-UA. They were also unanimous in pointing out the advantages of this initiative in terms of the development of transversal skills, especially creativity, initiative, communication skills and time/priority management. It should be noted that 2<sup>nd</sup>-year students also pointed out the benefit of putting into practice and consolidating previously developed knowledge and skills whilst supporting their younger colleagues.

For 1<sup>st</sup>-year students, this experience provided them with a real learning context and the opportunity to use several computer tools, allowing them to perceive, in an objective and immediate way, the great potential these tools have. Furthermore, 2<sup>nd</sup>-year students pointed out that this initiative encouraged them to autonomously explore various information search and translation support tools, ensuring a real context that allowed for the use of their FL II, both in written form and orally. Both classes highlighted as positive the possibility of learning in a more playful and interactive way, which brought them motivation, and a sense of emotional involvement while working in a pleasant environment.

It should also be noted that 2<sup>nd</sup>-year students who participated in 2019/2020 were particularly pleased with the initiative, as they were able to experience it as EOA I students (as 1<sup>st</sup>-year students in 2018/2019) and as G/FRA students, which gave them a fairly complete perception of the work carried out and allowed them to improve aspects of their performance and that of their group, based on the experience of the previous school year.

Although students made an overall positive assessment of their experience, some aspects to be improved were also identified, namely, in the 2018/2019 academic year, the need to allocate more time to the completion of the assignment and to improve the guidelines initially handed out. Students involved in 2019/2020 also signalled the importance of giving groups more time to complete the different tasks and referred to the possibility of diversifying the initial challenge, by proposing other real contexts for future promotional videos.

The four teachers who accompanied the activities are unanimous in considering that these clearly contributed to increasing students' motivation, while simultaneously allowing academia to get closer to the nearby community through the creation of products that meet their real needs. Teachers also consider that the different tasks of the project-work allow for a differentiated, stimulating and creative context for the development of technical skills associated with the different CUs. Moreover, they also feel – as students do – that this initiative has contributed to the development and/or consolidation of several transversal competencies, namely autonomy, critical thinking and the ability to work in teams and support each other. On the other hand, the initiative also contributed to students' awareness, in a more concrete, palpable way, of the role they may play in society, of the products they may develop, and of the way that they may contribute to solving real-world needs of the communities they are part of.

As aspects to be improved over time, teachers agree that groups should be allowed more time to respond to the initial challenge and are open to looking for new problems, thus avoiding the duplication of the same theme in two successive academic years. It should also be noted that the teachers involved, already aware that the documentation associated with the first edition of this initiative (in 2018/2019) needed to be optimised, developed new guidelines in 2019/2020, thus responding to one of the aspects mentioned by the groups involved in the first edition of this cross-curricular initiative.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

Integrated in a degree where the adoption of innovative pedagogical methodologies and tools has been long consolidated, the activity reported here differentiates itself by its transforming character. Several aspects contribute to its distinctiveness: i) on the one hand, by being based on an aggregation of competences between CUs from different curricular years, on the other hand, ii) by starting from a

real problem and a need identified in the surrounding community, and also iii) by being based on the increasingly necessary and unavoidable approximation between FLs and ICTs.

Overall, those involved, both students and teachers, identify multiple benefits, namely in terms of motivation increment and emotional involvement with the whole learning process and setting. At the same time, the described activity also allowed – through the adoption of a PBL approach and an aggregation of competences model – for an easier, more playful and interactive real acquisition of the various technical skills inherent to the CUs involved, as well as the consolidation of transversal skills of extreme importance, such as autonomy, creativity, critical thinking, and the ability to work in teams, among others.

Although these project-works have met the expectations of those involved and the link with the surrounding community and its needs was strengthened, there are still aspects that need to be improved, precisely those mentioned by the students: i) allocation of more time for product development, so that all the stages of the process are experienced more fully and in depth by the students; ii) diversification of the proposed problems. For this reason, with the aim of identifying new problems to be presented to 2020/2021 classes, preparatory work is already being done in conjunction with the Águeda Business Association.

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