Chapter IX

EOI Online Inglés: A Fully Implemented and Operative Online English Language Course

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Abstract

This chapter outlines the rationale and design of an online English language course as an alternative to the traditional attendance language course and distance-learning course offered by the Escuelas Oficiales de Idiomas (EOI) in Spain. It describes the goals of the EOIs, and explains how these vocational language courses are organized and structured. The authors offer a full description of the unit structure and course materials designed and developed: topics, communicative functions and situations, linguistic skills (reading, speaking, reading and writing) and language levels (phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and basic pragmatic features) dealt with. The chapter then presents some preliminary conclusions highlighting the benefits of the project as well as drawbacks, focusing on how to profit from this experience in ongoing work.
Introduction

This chapter starts with a brief description of the aims and philosophy of EOI — publicly run vocational language schools with a unified 5-year syllabus — and explains how these vocational language courses are organized and structured.

The main thrust of the chapter is towards the outline, rationale and design of an online English language course — EOI Online-Inglés — as an alternative to traditional attendance language courses and ongoing distance-learning course That’s English offered by EOIs throughout Spain.

The first course performance of EOI Online-Inglés was carried out during the academic year 2003-‘04, and students were invited to anonymously assess the course by means of an online questionnaire. The results are displayed and discussed in order to improve course contents, structure and interface in forthcoming editions.

The main objectives of this chapter concentrate on: 1) the need for time-flexible, distance language-learning courses, such as online ones; 2) the significance of continuous online tutoring by highly qualified language teachers; and 3) the importance of designing and structuring online language courses offering optional attendance sessions to practice oral skills (listening and speaking).

In brief, this chapter puts together the challenging experience carried out by the EOI of Murcia in designing and implementing an online distance-learning language course with exactly the same syllabus and course contents as its equivalent attendance-learning course, to ensure the same official recognition. However, the main motivation for this online course was to give response to 1) the high number of people who, year after year, find it impossible to access the EOI of Murcia as demand clearly exceeds the actual offer; and 2) people who either live in remote or rural areas or who have a rigid working schedule and cannot attend the EOI of Murcia.

Background and Motivation

In Spain, there are 203 EOIs, within which most European languages, including Spanish for foreigners, are taught together with Arabic, Japanese and Chinese. The present system of official Language Schools was established in 1979 as one of the first education measures of the first Spanish democratic government. The four most-studied languages are English, French, German and Italian, with English covering nearly 60% of all the students attending lessons at the EOIs. Students’ ages range from 14 and older, yet 70% of all the students are adults between 18 and 40 (university students, young professionals, teachers and housewives). The average fee to attend classes is 60€ a year, which means virtually free, state-covered studies. We teach, certify and occasionally give refresher courses for teachers. The advanced-level title enables holders to teach the certified language in primary and secondary schools.
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