The 8th International Scientific Conference
eLearning and software for Education
Bucharest, April 26-27, 2012
10.5682/2066-026X-12-076

EQUAL CHANCES THROUGH UNEQUAL OPPORTUNITIES: FACILITATING LANGUAGE LEARNING AMONG STUDENTS IN MEDICINE, NURSING AND NUTRITION THROUGH ELEARNING

Ioana CREȚU, Anca COLIBABA
"Gr. T. Popa" University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Iași, Romania
E-mail: ioana.cretu.2009@gmail.com, acolib@euroed.ro

***Abstract**: The paper explores the potential benefits of using Blended Learning (face-to-face and online) to teach languages to students at university level by analyzing the experience gained at "Gr. T. Popa" University of Medicine and Pharmacy Iasi in partnership with EuroEd Foundation Iasi. For the past two academic years, the face-to-face language instruction of junior students in Medicine, Nursing and Nutrition according to the core curriculum has been supplemented with optional activities using the ELSTI language training package online. Thus, the limited classroom experience could be targetted more clearly towards teaching and learning English for medical purposes. The online work was student-centered in the sense that, once logged on, students could decide which units/exercises to solve in which order, the entire process being driven by the students' own goals, interests and preferences. The statistical analysis takes into consideration attempts, times and scores for using grammar and vocabulary support independently, solving reading and dialogue-based tasks, playing games and simulations, etc. by each user, thus providing insight into how the students chose to engage with the different e-contents and instructions within and beyond the language they were studying in class.The online activity reports contain evidence of how the students have valued this opportunity of gaining skills in transversal areas such as foreign languages, enriched with cultural awareness, personal development and ICT skills.*

***Keywords:** language learning, Blended Learning, online platform, medical students, equal opportunities*

I. INTRODUCTION

a. Context and problem

While many Romanian students today begin their bachelor studies with a relatively high level of competence in at least one foreign language (most commonly English), we must acknowledge that this is not always the case. In fact, some students may feel at a disadvantage compared to their colleagues and objectively have less chances to access scholarships etc. specifically due to not having had the same opportunities to learn a foreign language such as English in their past. Therefore, in order to provide all medical students with equal chances at academic and professional success, we may have to provide some students with additional opportunities in transversal areas such as foreign languages, ICT skills etc.

On one hand, medical universities in Romania do indeed attempt to provide all their students with compulsory language instruction in their first year(s), making it optional later on. On the other hand, the medical curriculum cannot accommodate enough hours to make it possible for students to effectively evolve from one language level to a superior one only through face-to-face tuition. Also, grouping together students of similar language levels and needs often proves to be an impossible

administrative mission. Most often, the outcome of the scheduling effort is the formation of mixed-level groups of students who more or less want to study the same language.

It is in this general context that the language teachers at the "Gr. T. Popa" University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Iași, Romania, have begun to explore the possibility of providing flexible additional learning opportunities to students with different levels of linguistic competence and motivation towards language learning. The potential solution which constitutes the focal point of this paper has been to invite students to engage with Internet-based language learning opportunities in addition to the limited face-to-face tuition. While there are many resources and tools for language learning freely available on the Internet, we specifically needed an e-learning scheme which would allow us an insider's view and role for several purposes:

- with our students – to better adapt the course experience to individual needs and interests, to monitor and reward efforts and progress, to provide individualized feedback
- within our team – to gain professional experience and expertise in e-learning
- *within our field – to conduct research and gain a better understanding of what would be an appropriate place and effective format of online language learning in higher (medical) education*.

b. Quick overview of online and blended learning

The use of computers and the Internet in education bears a wide range of choices and practices reflected in the many acronyms summing them up: CAI / Computer Assisted Instruction, CAL / Computer Assisted Learning, CBT / Computer Based Training, CSCL / Computer Supported Collaborative Learning, eLearning / Electronic Learning, TEL / Technology Enhanced Learning, WBT / Web Based Learning, BL / Blended Learning etc. The parameters which feature in different combinations in all of these cases are assistance, blend, communication, space, time (such as synchronous vs. asynchronous training models), technology and use of media [Cantoni & Tardini 2006, page 177-180].

In higher education, there have been attempts at classifying the various types of eLearning experiences and arranging them on a continuum between two extremes:

- face-to-face teaching without any online addition or learning – the "traditional" classroom setting which is both syntopic and synchronous
- face-to-face teaching secondarily enhanced with technology such as use of software or online resources to illustrate/simulate various ideas
- reduced face-to-face teaching with substantial delegation of some contents and tasks online (mixed or blended mode)
- distance education with full delivery online (including enrolment and evaluation) [Lepori et al., 2005, in Cantoni & Tardini, 2006, page 181].

In the field of language learning and teaching, we frequently come across CALL / Computer Assisted Language Learning, OLL / Online Language Learning etc., which in practice can take the form of web-facilitated, hybrid/blended or entirely virtual course experiences which, more recently, look to exploit even the language learning potential of popular games such as Warcraft or Second Life. [Blake, 2011].

The idea of supplementing "traditional" classroom formats with online components instead of simply replacing the class with online contents is no longer new in the literature. In fact, Internet technology today is more advanced and more widely available than ever, making "traditional" classroom experiences appear limited or limiting at times, depending on the nature of a course and the setting in which it is delivered. To give only a few examples, information can be selected, managed and delivered differently in an online environment, practice exercises may focus on correctness or be timed to improve proficiency, while automatically feeding performance results into more efficient assessment, evaluation and (immediate) feedback processes, which in turn may better inform and guide both learner/students and tutor/teachers towards further learning. In short, "learning is still content-based, but the interactivity offers the user a much more engaging, real-time, feedback-influenced, self-paced learning experience" [Ryan, 2004, pages 235-239].

However, such features and benefits are not guaranteed, although expectations that they will are high, even though the dimensions, parameters and variables involved have not been sufficiently researched [Saade, He & Kira, 2007]. Interaction, for instance, is one aspect which has posed many challenges and raised concerns which, in turn, have lead to new answers and solutions. First, the issue of interaction is different when viewed from different angles (e.g. interaction between student and teacher, student and student, student and content, student and media) and it can work as a double-sided sword. On one hand, the physical distance between student-teacher and student-student often characterizing online educational experiences may contribute to a sense of isolation. On the other hand, the potential of Internet technology for interactivity may be used creatively to create experiences which can be even more engaging than face-to-face classes (e.g. online social media tools, audio/video streaming, drag-and-drop and numerous such applications etc.) [Richards, Dooley & Lindner, 2004, pages 105-106].

Even with such clever uses of technology, teachers should not make the assumption that the pedagogical principles which work face-to-face will automatically work in an online learning environment, nor that they will fail. So far, a constructivist view of learning appears to work best to accommodate features such as learner-directed goals, teachers as coaches, metacognition, learner control, real-world activities and contexts, reference to previous knowledge, knowledge sharing and knowledge (de)/(re)construction (including explicit thinking about errors and misconceptions), exploration, alternative viewpoints, scaffolding, problem solving etc. [Pritchard, 2007, page 25-26]. At the same time, it seems that there will always be a place for behaviourism in language learning, and ICT can spice it up with more fun interactions between learner and content via a more engaging interface for drills.

In the same line of thought, important adult learning principles also apply in e-learning contexts and deserve their fair share of attention and action within the process of course design:

- the learners' need to know – hence, the need for explicitly formulated objectives and opportunity for self-assesment
- the self-concept of the learner – hence, the need for control of direction on the part of the learner
- the prior experience of the learner – hence, the need to draw from, share and use the learners' previous knowledge and skills
- readiness to learn – hence, the need to provide learning which could be more readily applied
- orientation to learning – hence, the need for learner-centredness rather than content-centredness so that the learning may indeed be used to solve real life problems
- motivation for learning – hence, the need to foster inner motivation linked to competence, self esteem, job satisfaction, quality of life etc. rather than external motivation such as certificates [Richards, 2004, page 108].

In contrast to the face-to-face course format, online learning and teaching relies more heavily on ingredients such as learner self-direction. Several levels of self-directed autonomy are described in the literature which course developers should use in order to match the instructional to the psychological profile of the target learner: dependent, interested, involved and self-directed. These should be seen in a potentially dynamic and non-linear state in learners [Grow, 1991, in Richards, Dooley & Lindner, 2004, pages 108-110].

Other important features of the learning experience which may function differently online are enjoyment, excitement, novelty, engagement, development of work away from the computer etc. [Pritchard, 2007, page 119]. An example of a subtle but impactful way in which such differences can be successfully embedded and managed in an online course/component of a course is, for example, to chunk the online content and plan for online tasks and activities which do not take more than 10-15 minutes to perform before introducing a change of pace of some kind.

Fortunately, the field is reaching a level of maturity in terms of experience and research to enable guidelines for good practice to be distilled and drive the technology forward. Thus, Blended Learning as a combination of face-to-face and online tuition is emerging as possibly the more effective solution IF well implemented. This includes making good use of the teachers' interpersonal skills while concurrently using reliable, user friendly technology [Derntl & Motschnig-Pitrik, 2005]. On a

technical level, among the recommended features of eLearning tools we find: simple and clean user interface, quick and simple access to information and navigation, sticky and ping-pong sites (drawing the learner in), rapid downloads, suggestive branding and design etc. [Rosen, 2009, page 46].

All in all, a number of key themes resulting from the research conducted so far in the area of eLearning and specifically Blended Learning stress on the importance of:

- the vision behind implementation efforts (e.g. the "quick fix" instead of a longer term solution)
- the subordination of technology to education instead of the other way around
- the training of skills necessary to handle the online component and its links to the face-to-face one, as well as the additional technical support needed by learners
- the human factor, keeping in mind the role of motivation, enjoyment, engagement
- more comprehensive evaluation processes etc. [Harris, Connolly & Feeney, 2009].

II. METHODS

The situation described in the Introduction is typical at our university regardless of faculty or programme of study. Either most students in one group are "intermediate to advanced" and a few are "beginners to elementary", or it is the other way around. According to our knowledge of other colleagues' experiences, this also occurs in other Romanian universities providing education and training in medicine, engineering etc. In our case, a solution was found in providing additional support to students whose entry language level was lower than B2 / independent user from the Common European Framework of Reference and/or who were particularly intersted in investing time and effort into learning a widely spoken foreign language. The ELSTI online platform (http://www.eurobusinesslanguageskills.net) was used as a general, non-medical language learning resource complementing the face-to-face tuition, which could thus target specialized language and communication more efficiently.

The ELSTI platform is the main result of a series of EU-funded projects involving EuroEd Foundation also from Iasi and, as it stands today, it provides courses of English, French, German, Italian and Spanish for levels A2 and B1. All the courses are free of charge, but access is granted by a designated human administrator who also provides technical support upon course enrolment in addition to available tutorials. The courses, sub-units, explanations, situations, tasks, tests and (pre/post) self-assessment tools are calibrated to fit the CEFR descriptors while serving real life communicative functions set in a business context while promoting cultural awareness. In addition, they are accompanied by personal development and motivational modules.

Apart from standard website materials and texts (including dialogues and explanations of rules), the games and other interactive practice opportunities activities are very diverse and arranged in progression within each unit, grouped under themes and topics. To illustrate with the level B1 English course, the 10 units offer a wide range of games and activities related to *Culture, Grammar, Correspondence, In the Office, On the Telephone, Internet*: "True or false?", "Reach the finish line!", "Which one?", "Multiple choice", "The shock", "Drag and recompose", "Black balls", "Listen and select", "Now you see it… Now you don't", "The intruder", "Impossible words", "Guess the word", Switchover", "Odd one out", "Pathfinder", "Friendly cards", "Secret grammar", "Beat the clock", "Quiz", "Hidden words", "Match up", "Undo and reconstruct", "Fill in the form", "The magnet", "Empty spaces", "Reading comprehension", "Memory game", "The growing phrase", "Pairs", "Beat the computer", "Correct or incorrect?", "Three in a row", "Politeness game", "Pick a word", "The right choice", "Drag and drop", "Sentence builder", "The four suggestions", "Fill in the gaps", "Slot machine", "The right buttons", "Scrambled sentences", "One out of seven", "The cartoon", "Expanding sentences", "Reported speech", "Three in a row", "Undo and rewrite", "Inexistent words", "Scrambled letter", "Quick succession", etc.

From the learner's perspective, it is important to note that the learner is making the decisions regarding which language(s) to study, the degree of course completion, the order in which to approach the units, whether or not to view the rules before solving the exercises, the number of attempts and amount of time spent on tasks etc. This degree of control and flexibility is thought to allow personal learning styles, likes and dislikes, pleasure and satisfaction to feed into the learner's inner motivation to, ideally, remain interested and continue beyond external requirements and recommendations formulated by the teacher. With our students, a small percentage of their final grade could come from online work, the basic recommendation being to spend up to 10-20 hours online, depending on the status of the language course in the curriculum (compulsory or optional). Online work was also negotiated as a way to compensate for any unavoidable absences from compulsory face-to-face activities (e.g. seminars), particularly in the case of students who were employed at the time (e.g. mostly nurses working in local hospitals and seeking to further their education).

Last but not least, mention should be made that, while students were recommended the content, instruction and practice related to the language they were studying in class (English), they were given free access to all the other online language courses as well. Consequently, one additional question we had was whether or not the students would take advantage of the situation and attempt to learn French, Spanish and/or Italian, even if no requirements were issued in this sense.

The quantitative data to which we are referring in this paper has been collected and selected from our work with over 500 students in medicine, nursing, nutrition, pharmacy etc. at UMF Iaşi over the past two academic years. It indicates how popular, difficult, motivating etc. various types of online language exercises are among students for whom language is not the main learning interest but rather a vehicle and an advantage in academic and professional pursuits. From the perspective of inner vs. outer motivation, reliable quantitative data on overall times spent online would be most interesting and telling, specifically since the tracking mechanisms of the ELSTI platform do not take into account passive behaviour (logging on without doing anything in particular).

Following an initial viewing of the data in order to identify appropriate analysis, we concluded that descriptive statistics were compelling enough and could provide sufficient evidence as well as suggestive examples for the purposes of this paper as a first account and analysis of our experience in the literature.

III. RESULTS

The data showcased below derives from the individual activity reports generated every time a user (student) logged on, navigated and engaged with the ELSTI platform from the beginning until the end of his/her English course. Tables 1 and 2 illustrate the type of information the teachers were able to see in relation to each individual student.

Table 1

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY REPORT **1st year medical student, 2010-2011**		
English	**Quantity**	**Time**
Dialogues	80	9h20min
Games	121	7h45min
Rules	2	40min
Text	10	1h
Practice	129	8h
Simulation	45	1h30min
Website	6	10min
TOTAL	**393**	**28h15min**

Table 2

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY REPORT **1st year nursing student, 2010-2011**		
English	**Quantity**	**Time**
Dialogues	27	1h15min
Games	72	2h45min
Rules	-	-
Text	2	12sec
Practice	102	16h
Simulation	43	1h30min
Website	-	-
TOTAL	**246**	**21h30min**

Overall activity numbers result from the cummulation of such detailed individual reports. Tables 3, 4 and 5 below illustrate the times spent by groups of students from different faculties and specialities during the academic year 2010-2011 and in the first semester of 2011-2012 to practice the different languages and engage with the main types of interactive contents offered.

Table 3

OVERALL ONLINE TIMES **(academic year 2010-2011)**				
Language	**Medicine (Nm=199)**	**Nursing (Nn=140)**	**Nutrition (Nnt=24)**	**Pharmacy (Np=12)**
English	4352h	5532h	1086h	90h
French	70h	66h	7h40min	6h
Spanish	33h	32h	3h	8h30min
Italian	88h	85h	6h	85h40min

Table 4

OVERALL ONLINE TIMES (2011-2012) **NURSING ONLY (1st semester only)**		
Language	**Nursing (compulsory) (Nn/comp=150)**	**Nursing (optional) (Nn/opt=11)**
English	4172h45min	154h20min
French	98h	1h30min
Spanish	13h15min	45min
Italian	66h	40min

Table 5

SUMMARY FOR ENGLISH (2010-2011) **MEDICNE AND NURSING ONLY**		
English	**Quantity / Medicine (Nm=199)**	**Quantity / Nursing (Nn=140)**
Dialogues	8544	11809
Games	18330	21630
Rules	786	787
Text	1599	1701
Practice	22793	29011
Simulation	8025	8346
Website	890	736

In addition, it is also possible to monitor closely the students' actual performance as they attempt to solve the various tasks and exercises included in each course and corresponding units, as can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6.

PERFORMANCE REPORT EXAMPLES ONLY (Nursing, 2011-2012)			
English, level B1	**Worst**	**Average**	**Best**
Unit 1 / Culture / Practice: True or false?	0%	65%	100%
Unit 2 / On the telephone / Practice: Listen and select	20%	82%	100%
Unit 3 / Grammar / Practice: Which one?	18%	51%	82%
...etc.	...	...	...

IV. DISCUSSION

The discussion fueled by the activity reports illustrated above may be approached from several angles. For one, it is possible to look into and comment on the students' patterns of behaviour and preferences when given the freedom to choose between the different types of learning materials and tasks. For example, the medical student we have randomly selected here chose to take a close look at 2 grammar rules only and much preferred to play games and practice, spending a total of 28 hours and 15 minutes actively using the platform during the academic year of 2010-2011 (see Table 1). Somewhat similarly, one student in nursing also took advantage of the interactive tasks and avoided the rules altogether (see Table 2).

Thus, the 199 1st year medical students enrolled in the compulsory English course of 2010-2011 (comprising a total of 56 hours face-to-face resulting in 4 lectures and 10 seminars per semester) spent an average of 21.87 hours on the online English course, which amounts to 39.05% of their face-to-face time in the classroom and very closely matches the teachers' recommendation for online work (20 hours). In terms of preferences, these students were mainly attracted by the hands-on practice (for an average of 114.53 attempts at exercises/student) and games (for an average of 92.11 attempts at games/student), and secondly by the dialogues (for an average of 42.93 dialogue views/student) and the simulations (for an average of 40.33 simulation attempts/student). The least interesting seem to have been the rules (only 3.95 views/student on average) and the other website materials (for an average of 4.47 views/student) and texts (for an average of 8.04 views/student).

At the same time, the 140 1st year nursing students enrolled in the compulsory English course of 2010-2011 (comprising a total of 28 hours face-to-face resulting in 7 seminars per semester) spent an average of 39,51 hours on the online English course, which amounts to 141.1% of the face-to-face time and is double the recommended time of 20 hours! However, the pattern of choices was very similar to the medical students'. The nursing students were also drawn towards the hands on practice (for an average of 194.64 attempts at exercises/student) and games (for an average of 156.14 attempts at games/student), and secondly by the dialogues (for an average of 85.4 dialogue views/student) and simulations (for an average of 60.17 simulation attempts/student). The least attractive, again, seem to have been the rules (only an average of 5.7 views/student) and the non-interactive texts (for an average of 12.28 views/student).

Concurrently, the students' direct feedback to the teachers during classroom discussions pointed towards significant differences in attitudes and motivation between medical and nursing students. While the medical students were mostly concerned with time management issues (feeling

overwhelmed by the amount of information and studying required by various disciplines such as Anatomy) and language level issues (some feeling that the exercises were too easy for them and, consequently, boring), the nursing students were mostly appreciative and very pleased in their comments. The three factors we probed for and suspected were playing significant roles in this case were:

- the age difference – many 1st year nursing students were older and had more life experience than the ~19 year old 1st year medical students fresh our of high school
- the language level – many nursing students were A2-B1 users of English while many medical students were B1-B2 users of English
- previous exposure to ICT and e-learning – for many nursing students this was the first time to be invited to engage with online learning tools, which added to the novelty and attration.

Another analysis allowed by the database is between students enrolled in compulsory English classes (which cover both semesters and result in more credits) as opposed to students enrolled in optional English classes (one semester long and with fewer credits). According to the curricular difference in face-to-face time, number of credits and perceived stakes, we could hypothesize that the students enrolled in optional courses did not get as involved in the online work as the others. For instance, in the first semester of the academic year 2011-2012, the 1st year nursing students enrolled in the compulsory English course have already spent an average of 27.82 hours each on the ELSTI platform. During the same period of time, other nursing students who chose English as an optional course have spent an average of 14 hours online. While the difference may seem large, this number actually equals the face-to-face hours of an optional course at UMF Iasi, which may mean that these students have in fact doubled their efforts. If we look at the average time spent by students specializing in nutrition who also chose English as their optional course in the 1st semester of 2011-2012, the number is even more impressive: 23.11 hours/student spent online in addition to the 14 hours face-to-face.

Moreover, a result we found most intriguing and worth mentioning here refers to some of the students' choices to explore the other language courses available on the ELSTI platform (for French, Spanish, Italian and, more recently, German) although there were no formal requirements in this sense (see Tables 3 and 4). Understandably, not all the students took advantage of the opportunity, but some engaged with these contents and activities, mostly for Italian and French.

Last but not least, the available data also features certain limitations which should be taken into consideration. To name one, the scores exemplified in Table 6 also include non attempts at solving the various tasks – interactive exercises, games, simulations and quizzes (e.g. a student accessed a quiz and then immediately quit it without actually trying to answer the questions). This is a technical reason why the average scores are not necessarily indicative of the students' performance levels. For example, the overall average scores obtained by medical and nursing students for solving all the tasks are very similar (64.84% for the medical students and 71.10 for the nursing students), despite the notable different in language level between the two groups. These averages hide the scenario indicated by null scores in which more medical students skipped more tasks (150 out of 327 to be exact) but did better in the ones attempted than the nursing students, who hypothetically tried more tasks (there is evidence of 115 skipped tasks out of 327) but obtained slightly lower scores. However, even with such shortcomings, it is possible to extract telling conclusions and implications, as well as formulate recommendations for future research, development and practice.

V. CONCLUSIONS

These results point to the user-content interactivity of the ELSTI platform as one of its most interesting and attractive assets from the learners' perspective, who are less inclined to spend time reading through explanations of rules and other such texts regardless of which programme of study they are enrolled in (e.g. medicine or nursing). On average, the medical students kept their online work times close to those negotiated with the teachers, while the nursing students got particularly involved

and chose to continue to work online well beyond the agreed number of hours, suggesting more nuanced differences in the generally positive attitude and increased motivation, if we corroborate the quantitative data with direct feedback from the students.

The exposure to eLearning and opportunity to develop ICT skills, the increased flexibility and controlled freedom deliberately embedded in the courses added significantly to many students' determination to continue well beyond set requirements, as well as to their overall enjoyment, autonomy and empowerment. Moreover, we find the data to be indicative of these students' high level of interest and motivation in learning languages other than English in the wider context of work migration, as countries such as Italy, France and Belgium are commonly known in Romania to accept professional health carers from abroad (Romania included).

Nevertheless, while voices of national and international authority in medical education today recommend the transversal curricular integration of key transferable competences (such as related to language, communication, thinking, ICT, ethics etc.), delivering a language course for medical students which does exactly that for all the unique individual learners in a group is easier said than done. There is a fine line between Internet use and abuse in education as well as in other fields, with mixed influences on the moral atmosphere of the classroom and the underlying messages sent to students. As the language teacher introduces students to online learning tools, tasks and resources (e.g. interactive language learning platforms for general or specific purposes), particularly if assignments and evaluation criteria takes online work into consideration, these new coordinates may trigger a plethora of reactions and side-effects ranging from negative feelings and various forms of academic misconduct to genuine empowerment and significant growth. This raises the stakes of the face-to-face dimension of a course and makes it all the more important that the teacher acts as a gentle facilitator, flexible negotiator and balanced moderator of reflection and discussion, thus fostering the harmonious development of multiple tranversal competences in an integrated way, rather than one at the expense of the other.

Equally worth noting is the fact that fully online courses as well as hybrid/blended ones give rise to new vulnerable and at-risk categories of students. Before submitting to the pressures of mass education and the administrative advantages of eLearning in this respect, we need to critically consider the ways in which the added online dimension may make it more difficult for some learners to adjust to university life and manage all their other personal, academic and professional responsibilities. In this respect, our experience is somewhat paradoxical, since many of our 1st year nursing students have jobs and families to attend to but still exceed our (and their!) initial expectations in terms of online work. This is, however, congruent with cognitive psychology research highlighting the added value brought into learning by engagement [Quinn, 2005, page 14].

In order to "get the *blend* right", a deeper understanding of learner motivation and support needs is required, as different case-studies in the literature also indicate [Sloman, 2007]. Thus, a model for profiling students according to their ability to control technology, their expectations of managing their own journey within and beyond the respective study period etc. may help universities map, anticipate, avoid or prepare for various types and degrees of risk and vulnerability in learners [Holley & Oliver, 2010]. In our case, the body of collected data allows for further investigations to be carried out and the results we have obtained so far invite us to probe deeper into the students' own perceptions and attitudes beyond standard course evaluation practices, with the help of qualitative methods of inquiry.

Last but not least, the teacher's perspective on the development and use of Online and/or Blended (Language) Learning, too, raises a number of implications and complications. For one, the "mismatch" between the time and effort spent by the creator(s) of online components/courses and the actual "reward" – unless the development work was financed via a project of some sort – is very much real and has been mentioned in the literature. Then, another common reality in higher education is that no difference is made financially (nor otherwise) between the teaching staff who use Blended Learning in their work with students and those who do not [Ryan, 2004, pages 244-245]. In such circumstances, universities rely heavily on the views and ethics of the teaching staff to redefine professional roles and responsibilities in order to address issues of equality and not only as they decide if and how to incorporate eLearning in their approach.

Acknowledgements

We greatly appreciate the ongoing support received from EuroEd Foundation in Iaşi - Romania, coordinator and partner in the series of EU funded projects which have lead to the creation, maintenance and further development of the ELSTI platform. We also extend our gratitude to the international partnerships and the European Commission for investing time, energy and finances into the laborious design of online language learning resources calibrated to the Common European Framework of Reference.

References

[1] Blake, R., 2011. Current Trends in Online Language Learning. *In Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 31.* Cambridge University Press. Pages 19-35.

[2] Cantoni, L., Tardini, S., 2006. Internet, Routledge. New York.

[3] Derntl, M., Motschnig-Pitrik, R., 2005. The Role of Structure, Patterns, and People in Blended Learning. *In Internet and Higher Education*, 8. Pages 111-130.

[4] Harris, P., Connolly, J., Feeney, L., 2009. Blended Learning: Overview and Recommendations for Successful Implementation. *In Industrial and Commercial Training, Vol. 41, No. 3.* Emerald Group Publishing Limited. Pages 155-163.

[5] Holley, D., Oliver, M., 2010. Student Engagement and Blended Learning: Portraits of Risk. *In Computers & Education, 54.* Pages 693-700.

[6] Neumeier, P., 2005. A Closer Look at Blended Learning – Parameters for Designing a Blended Learning Environment for Language Teaching and Learning, *In ReCALL, Vol. 17, No.2.* Cambridge University Press. Pages 163-178.

[7] Pritchard, A., 2007. Effective Teaching with Internet Technologies: Pedagogy and Practice, Paul Chapman Publishing. London.

[8] Richards, L., Dooley, K., Lindner, J., 2004. Online Course Design Principles. In Howard, C., Schenk, K., Discenza, R. (eds.), *Distance Learning and University Effectiveness: Changing Educational Paradigms for Online Learning*, Information Science Publishing. Hershey.

[9] Quinn, C., 2005. Engaging Learning: Designing e-Learning Simulation Games, Pfeiffer. San Francisco.

[10] Rosen, A., 2009. eLearning 2.0: Proven Practices and Emerging Technologies to Achieve Real Results, AMACOM. New York.

[11] Ryan, R., 2004, A Strategy to Expand the University Education Paradigm. In Howard, C., Schenk, K., Discenza, R. (eds.), *Distance Learning and University Effectiveness: Changing Educational Paradigms for Online Learning*, Information Science Publishing. Hershey.

[12] Saade, R.G., He, X., Kira, D., 2007. Exploring Dimensions to Online Learning. *In Computers in Human Behavior, 23*. Pages 1721-1739.

[13] Sloman, M., 2007. Making Sense of Blended Learning. In Industrial and Commercial Training, Vol. 39, No. 6. Emerald Group Publishing Limited. Pages 315-318.