REF2021

Institution: The Open University

Unit of Assessment: C23 Education

Title of case study: Supporting language teachers in Europe to teach online

Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2003-2020

Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:

Name(s): Ursula Stickler Regine Hampel Tita Beaven Sarah Heiser	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Senior Lecturer Associate Dean Research Senior Lecturer Associate Dean Student Tuition	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2002 - present 1999 - present 1992 - 2019 1999 - present

Period when the claimed impact occurred: August 2013 - June 2020

Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N

1. Summary of the impact

The research underpinning this case study developed and tested a comprehensive framework for the professional development of language teachers who teach online (from primary through to teacher education). This has resulted in an **impact on the practice** of 3,962 language teaching professionals in 27 countries by shaping the professional development agenda of those responsible for online language teaching and transforming teachers' understanding and practice of online language teaching.

2. Underpinning research

Within Europe, there is concern regarding both a persistent decline in language skills and the unpreparedness of graduates to work in the digital workplace. This has led The European Parliament and the Council of Europe in 2006 to recommend eight key competences for every citizen of the knowledge society. These include foreign language communication and digital competence. One consequence of high-level policy demands is that organisations responsible for supporting the professional development of language teachers are seeking ways to support the integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) into language teaching. There has however, been little evidence about what constitutes an effective professional development framework that can prepare language teachers for integrating ICT into their practice, particularly teaching online. Therefore, the aim of the underpinning research described in this section was to develop and evaluate a comprehensive framework for the professional development of language teachers who teach online or integrate online elements into their classroom teaching. Between 2003 and 2013 the researchers undertook two phases of underpinning research, comprising four separate but interlinked projects. The first phase scoped out the skills needed by language teachers in order to successfully teach online and what constituted successful language teaching online. The second phase developed, tested, and evaluated a framework for training language teachers how to teach online.

During the first phase of research, the focus was on testing three working hypotheses. Firstly, that there is not a discrete set of 'teachable' skills for online language teaching and that there are levels of skills that include the confidence to aspire to a particular level. Skills build on each other, not in a successive time sequence of training events but as a consequence of increasing competence, with the lower levels forming a solid, reliable foundation. Secondly, that opportunities for experiential learning would provide valuable learning insights. Thirdly, that enhancing the quality of one's teaching needs to be based on an understanding that learning takes place when the learners can explore a new environment and actively engage with it, supported by scaffolding in the form of carefully designed materials, timely constructive feedback, and available continuous peer support. Using a mix of questionnaires to tutors who delivered online tutorials and observation data from tutorials, examples of different skills being employed at different levels were identified and used to propose a model consisting of seven skills levels, including basic ICT

competence, specific technical knowledge, the skills to make pedagogic use of technologies, socialisation and fostering communicative competence, and it culminates in teachers being able to be creative and develop their own online learning style **[O1, O2]**. One study developed and evaluated a six-week online training programme that included a requirement to work in small groups and design an online collaborative activity. Twenty language tutors from two distance learning institutions took part in the programme and the success of the approach was assessed using a mixed methods approach involving analysis of online logs and forum posts, questionnaires, and interviews. The results indicated that embedding 'hands-on' experience of online collaboration into the programme exposed the teachers to the opportunities and challenges of collaboration in a virtual environment and that the teachers valued this opportunity **[O3]**. Another study analysed questionnaire and interview data drawn from online language tutors following their experience of a training programme consisting of five face-to-face workshops, which revealed a role for ongoing mentoring and peer support, particularly for novice tutors **[O4]**.

The second phase of the project adopted an action-research approach in two projects (DOTS and MORE-DOTS) to further develop and evaluate a framework for training language teachers how to teach online. Practitioners from 25 European countries (representing member states of the funder, European Centre for Modern Languages) were brought together to undertake a needs-analysis survey and contribute to the establishment of a ranked list of ten useful ICT tools for language teaching. Training activities were then created for these tools, trialled with 56 language teachers, and then adapted following feedback **[O5]**. The outcome of the DOTS project was an online training kit for language teachers, who can choose the tools they want to work with and then work through a series of bite-size activities that are designed to reflect all the levels represented in the skills pyramid. The outcome of the MORE-DOTS project was a self-sustaining online community of practice using the Moodle platform, with four components: (1) the constant mutual support provided by a community-of-practice; (2) best-practice examples linking pedagogy with online technology; (3) adaptations of the existing DOTS activities to informal/non-formal teaching tailored to the users' specific context; (4) bite-size templates enabling language educators to construct and upload new activities.

Taken as a whole, this body of research has developed a comprehensive framework for the professional development of language teachers who teach online which incorporates the following key elements: a series of activities designed to reflect all the relevant levels within the skills pyramid; opportunities for hands-on experiential learning; scaffolded learning supported by bite-size activities, collaborative group work and peer feedback; enabling teachers to choose the tools they want to use and the pedagogies they want to apply to the implementation of these tools and the tailoring of activities to users' specific contexts **[O6]**.

3. References to the research

The underpinning research has been funded by The British Academy and the European Centre for Modern Languages. O1, O3-O6 were peer reviewed.

O1. **Hampel, R**., and **Stickler, U**. (2005) New skills for new classrooms: Training tutors to teach languages online. *Computer Assisted Language Learning,* 18(4), 311–326. https://doi.org/10.1080/09588220500335455

O2. **Hampel, R**., and **Stickler, U**. (eds.) (2015) *Developing Online Language Teaching: Research-Based Pedagogies and Reflective Practices*, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan. Chapter 5. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137412263

O3. Ernest, P., Guitert Catasús, M., **Hampel, R**., **Heiser, S**., Hopkins, J., Murphy, L., and **Stickler, U**. (2013) Online teacher development: collaborating in a virtual learning environment. *Computer Assisted Language Learning,* 26(4), 311-333. https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2012.667814.

O4. **Stickler, U**., and **Hampel, R**. (2007) Designing online tutor training for language courses: A case study. *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning,* 22(1), 75–85. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680510601100176

O5. **Beaven, T**., Emke, M., Ernest, P., Germain-Rutherford, A., **Hampel, R**., Hopkins, J., Stanojevic, M., and **Stickler, U**. (2010) Needs and challenges for online language

teachers- The ECML Project DOTS. *Teaching English with Technology: A Journal for Teachers of English* 10 (2): 5-20. http://oro.open.ac.uk/23330/

O6. **Stickler, U**., **Hampel, R**., and Emke, M. (2020) A developmental framework for online language teaching skills. *Australian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 3(1), 133-151 https://doi.org/10.29140/ajal.v3n1.271

4. Details of the impact

Two main beneficiaries of the research reported in this case study are: i) organisations responsible for supporting the professional development of language teachers and ii) language teaching practitioners. A significant organisation that the research has impacted on is the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML). ECML is funded by the Council for Europe and representatives from the Ministries of Education of each of the member states sit on the Governing Board. The strategic mission of ECML is to act as a catalyst for reform in the teaching and learning of languages across 33 member states. In collaboration with ECML, the DOTS team has delivered a professional development programme underpinned by the research to language teachers working in schools, colleges, and higher education as well as teacher-educators and advisors. The research therefore has achieved an **impact on practice** in two key areas: it has shaped the professional development agenda of those responsible for online language teaching and transformed teachers' understanding and practice of online language teaching.

Shaped the professional development agenda of those responsible for online language teaching.

Between 2013 and 2019, ECML funded the researchers (with other European and Canadian partners) to run national workshops for key local disseminators in ECML member countries with the aim of cascading the DOTS framework. This pathway to impact was called 'ICT-REV', and ICT-REV workshops implemented the DOTS framework for the professional development of language teachers who teach online that had been developed over the previous ten years of research. Typically, an ICT-REV workshop would be requested by a representative from a Ministry of Education (i.e. a member of the ECML board) who would then take responsibility for convening the workshop within their country. Between August 2013 and November 2019 43 professional development workshops were run in 21 member countries (e.g. Sweden, Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Croatia) with 740 participants; and a further 4 non-member countries (United Kingdom, Spain, Italy, Belgium) with 102 participants **[C1]**. An independent evaluation of the ICT-REV project in 2014 concluded that a clear benefit of the ICT-REV impact pathway "*is the cultivation of multipliers together with the establishment and maintenance of a dynamic digital collaborative resource for future on-going sharing and networking*" **[C2]**. The Head of Administration at the ECML testifies that the ICT-REV workshop is one of the most popular workshops that ECML offers its members and that it is highly regarded by the governing board who: "*constantly send us extremely positive feedback about the workshops that have taken place in their different countries [...] we do get it first-hand from people who are working in Ministries of Education, and that's very important for us*". He also testifies that one key consequence of the partnership that ECML has developed with the ICT-REV is that it has worked with them to build: "*an inventory of ICT tools, a set of Open Educational Resources, which is very popular both within the workshops and just for people looking for good quality tools to use in their teaching*" **[C3]**. The Deputy Executive Director at ECML testifies that: "*very few projects have had such long-standing and continuous involvement with ECML which highlights the longer-term relevance of the current ICT-REV activity in the context of promoting quality language education in Europe*". They add that "*on the website we also monitor the 10 most-frequently accessed tools, and the ICT-REV inventory is currently number 1*" **[C3]**. Between January 2019 and January 2020, the inventory was accessed 155,522 times. An ECML board member testifies that they drew the ICT-REV inventory to the attention of a European Commission working group that was developing a set of recommendations for a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages. The value of the inventory as a model for supporting continuous professional development for language

teachers across Europe was endorsed by this working group and incorporated into one if its recommendations (no.19) **[C4, C5]**.

Testimonials from Members of the ECML board who requested and convened ICT-REV workshops, comment on how participants were inspired not only to change their own practice but to change the practice of others **[C4]**. A member from the National Centre for Education in Latvia writes that ICT-REV materials are published on its website, that ICT-REV training has fed into new content that has been developed and that 50 German language teachers attended two ICT-REV workshops. This, combined with localised cascading of what was learnt in the ICT-REV workshops, means that: "*the training has been undertaken by the vast majority of German-language teachers in Latvia*". The Director of Education at the Swedish National Agency for Education testifies that demand for the ICT-REV workshops was high and that participants in two ICT-REV workshops held in Sweden were inspired to cascade what they had learnt through in-service training for their colleagues. They conclude: "*The workshops were really influential because they enabled teachers to build on their previous experience and take ownership of the pedagogy to apply to their particular situations. Many of the teachers said after the workshop that they were more confident in the use of ICT on teaching and would use it more in teaching*". A member from the Institut National Des Langues in Luxembourg testifies as to how staff who were usually resistant to change within their organization were persuaded, through engagement with the ICT-REV workshops to change their practice. They also comment on a "snowballing" effect where many of the tools and ideas were being formally and informally passed on to other teachers. A member of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport in the Republic of Slovenia testifies as to how the two ICT-REV workshops which their department convened "*left a very positive impression*" and inspired attendees to replicate the training framework in further professional development initiatives.

There is also evidence of impact beyond the ECML community. For example, a freelance consultant testifies as to how they have utilised resources from the DOTS project within their activities. Of their work as a consultant, they report how content from the DOTS project is included: "*in the reference materials for and embedded in the activities of a number of our CPD course activities for in-service language teachers and educators from a range of EU countries. We have been able to run 3 courses specifically involving references and activities related to DOTS materials, thus reaching some 40 EU in-service teachers*" **[C6]**. The success of the European focused ICT-REV workshops has led to invitations to train practitioners in China (n=120) and Jamaica (n=40). In August 2017, the team led a blended workshop in China. 120 English teachers at all levels from different parts of China attended the workshop face-to-face; around 27,000 people followed the event through a live stream, and about 5,000 subsequently viewed recorded webcasts. The convenor of the workshop in China and Dean of the Institute of Online Education at the Beijing Foreign Studies University, testifies that the success of this workshop convinced them to convene a second workshop in 2019. They write: "*I would say that ICT-REV enhanced not only our beliefs, but also our practice in teacher development*" **[C7]**.

Transformed teachers' understanding and practice of online language teaching.

Participants who have engaged in the ICT-REV workshops have testified to an impact on their practice. For example, a six-month follow-up questionnaire was sent to 138 participants from Lithuania, Austria, Sweden, Spain, Ireland, and Bulgaria who had attended ICT-REV training in 2015. Results revealed that: 63.62% indicated that they were using ICT tools and activities with more confidence and on a more frequent basis in the classroom; 72.72% indicated that they were using ICT tools, activities and ideas presented in the ICT-REV workshop, when teaching; 54.54% indicated that they were using the ideas and concepts promoted at the event to identify and apply appropriate ICT tools in their teaching and/or teacher training, and 63.63% indicated that they had acted as a multiplier to promote the use of ICT tools and activities to others in the field **[C8]**. A follow-up questionnaire sent to participants from Serbia, Armenia, and Latvia who had attended ICT-REV training in 2016-

2017 revealed that 46% intended to integrate ideas learnt during the event into their work practice **[C8]**. A follow up survey of 77 participants who had attended ICT-REV workshops between 2013 and 2019 revealed that following the workshop: 73%[n=75] had used the resources introduced in the workshop; 68% [n=75] had gone on to develop their own materials using online tools and 82%[n=73] had worked with others to develop teaching materials and 82% [n=58] and delivered training related to the DOTS framework to others **[C8]**.

Interviews conducted in 2017 with workshop participants evidence a change in their confidence, awareness, pedagogy and use of tools; as well as a motivation to disseminate to other colleagues **[C8]**. A participant of a workshop held in Ireland said: "*I think it [confidence] has increased [...] helped me actually to teach less and less and to create situations for learning more and more*". A participant of a workshop held in Croatia said: "*Yeah, it [my practice] has changed in the way that DOTS gave us some guidelines in how to choose ICT, and how to choose appropriate tools for the classroom. I think that was the most important thing. And I also organised three seminars about using DOTS in the classroom. [...] For a start I talked about the ECML and the different projects. And then we focused on DOTS projects. And so, I gave them the information, the website, showed them the tool. And then we […] tried out different tools and presented them to other groups.*" A participant of a workshop in Bosnia-Herzegovina testifies how, following the workshop, they, and a colleague "*delivered a 90-minute-long lecture-cum-workshop for 200 EL teachers from the Sarajevo Canton in which we talked about the ICT-REV workshop we had in Sarajevo, showed specific ways in which ICT can be used in ELT […] and finally directed them to the ECML's repository of ICT tools & OER*". A Latvian workshop participant said: "*It had an immense impact on me, because I was totally ignorant [...] I remember that Moodle was mentioned quite often and then I went home and immediately I asked for my school administration that they […] download Moodle to our server. And then my first job I think was making a Moodle course […] And those first years were very successful.*"

The COVID crisis forced language teachers across Europe to take their teaching online. In May 2020, the DOTS / ICT-REV team, through ECML, ran a series of free webinars (live and recorded) for language teachers of English, French, and German to show the basics of online language teaching. The live event was attended by 2,850 participants, the majority of whom were from Greece, where the Ministry of Education had recommended the webinar to language teachers. Subsequently, in June 2020 the team received four requests for four follow-up events: including one from the education authority in East Macedonia **[C1]**. Evaluation evidence from 135 participants indicates that attending the workshop had increased their confidence to teach languages online by 30%. 50% reported that since the webinar they had used tools introduced in the webinar in their teaching practice **[C8]**.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact.
C1. Training event data. Impact on professional development agenda of those responsible for online language teaching/teachers understanding and practice.
C2. Evaluation report. Impact on the professional development agenda of those responsible for online language teaching. Independent consultant.
C3. Letters. Impact on the professional development agenda of those responsible for online language teaching. Two senior managers at ECML.
C4. Letters. Impact on the professional development agenda of those responsible for online language teaching. Members of ECML Board.
C5. Policy Document. Impact on the professional development agenda of those responsible for online language teaching. European Council.
C6. Letter. Impact on the professional development agenda of those responsible for online language teaching. Owner of TELL Consult, Netherlands.
C7. Letter. Impact on the professional development agenda of those responsible for online language teaching. Dean, Beijing Foreign Studies University.
C8. Survey and interview data. Impact on teachers understanding and practice. Participants of ICT-REV workshops.