DEVELOPING AN E-LEARNING COMMUNICATION COURSE: FROM DESIGN TO IMPLEMENTATION

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Abstract: The Coronavirus lockdown rules and restrictions have substantially changed the way school should fulfill its function and accomplish its mission. Remote teaching has been introduced as the safest and best alternative to ensure more social distancing, while allowing students to continue their learning and education. The objective of these restrictions is to reduce students’ mobility, protect schools from becoming virus clusters, and contribute to the joint efforts in order to flatten the curve and save more lives. However, it should be noted that switching to distant teaching is a complex process that requires the use of new pedagogical approaches and didactic methods. Distance teaching brings about new learning practices and routines that redefine the roles and functions of both faculty members and students. The objective of this research paper is to revisit current e-learning practices, and provide practical guidelines for the design and implementation of e-learning courses in the language/communication classroom, which professors of other disciplines can always make use of to develop appropriate and engaging e-learning class content.

Keywords: Applied linguistics, E-learning, Instructional design, Didactic approaches, Communication

Introduction

The Coronavirus lockdown rules and restrictions have substantially changed the way school should fulfill its function and accomplish its mission. Remote teaching has been introduced as the safest and best alternative to ensure more social distancing, while allowing students to continue their learning and education. The objective of these restrictions is to reduce students’ mobility, protect schools from becoming virus clusters, and contribute to the joint efforts in order to flatten the curve and save more lives. However, it should be noted that switching to distant teaching is a complex process that requires the use of new pedagogic approaches and didactic methods.

Distance teaching brings about new learning practices and routines that redefine the roles and functions of both faculty members and students. The objective of this research paper is to revisit current e-learning practices, and provide practical guidelines for the design and implementation of e-learning courses in the language/communication classroom, which professors of other disciplines can always make use of to develop engaging e-class content.

There are many reasons why e-learning courses should be developed and implemented. First, e-learning is cost effective. Many organizations and institutions are using e-learning because it can be as effective as traditional education at a lower cost. Moreover, e-learning is inclusive and opens the door for more students to participate. E-learning is used to reach a wider target audience by engaging learners from underserved areas who have difficulty attending conventional classroom education or training. Finally yet importantly, e-learning provides more opportunities for personalized learning. E-learning can offer effective
instructional methods, such as practicing with associated feedback, combining collaboration activities with self-paced study, and personalizing learning paths based on learners’ needs (Ghirardini 2021).

The development of an e-learning course requires the use of technology and activities, involving professionals with different skills and competencies. Unlike traditional education where teachers have total control over course development, participation in e-learning projects requires skills in certain areas that are not essential in traditional learning settings. Instructional designers, subject matter experts, course administrators, technical support specialists and media editors team up to develop appropriate e-class content (Ghirardini 2021). Technology, simple or advanced, is required to produce and deliver e-learning courses. The use of Microsoft PowerPoint or even Word, for example, can be sufficient to create simple learning resources like a presentation or a tutorial. However, more sophisticated tools such as courseware authoring tools, learning management systems, and other learning platforms are needed to create interactive content.

1. Methodology

The present research study includes two major sections. Section one provides a detailed description of the ADDIE model with a particular focus on the steps used to develop distant learning courses. Section two describes the process of applying and implementing the ADDIE model to develop and deliver a course in Business and Professional communication at the ENCG Business School of Marrakesh.

The ADDIE model is usually used to develop e-learning courses. The model was developed by Florida State University for the military in the 1970s and was used as a guideline to create effective training and instructional materials. It includes five major steps.

Step 1: Analysis
Step 2: Design
Step 3: Development
Step 4: Implementation
Step 5: Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The ADDIE model for e-learning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Analysis</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Design</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Development</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Implementation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluation</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: The ADDIE model for e-learning (FAO elearning Academy 2021)
2. Theoretical foundations: The process of developing an e-learning course

Developing an e-learning course is a complex process that includes several steps that range from identifying course content to defining instructional methods and deciding on delivery formats strategies (FAO elearning Academy 2021).

2.1. Identifying course content

This part of the process of developing an e-learning course provides guidelines on how to define course content and organize it into a structure. It includes the following steps:

• Conducting course needs analysis
• Identifying course content
• Defining course learning objectives
• Sequencing course content

2.1.1. Conducting course needs analysis

Before designing an e-learning course, a needs analysis should be conducted to determine whether teaching/training meets the needs of the target learners and whether e-learning is the best solution to deliver the training. Not all learning problems can be addressed through e-learning. It is important to understand whether e-learning is appropriate for the identified/desired learning goals. Let us assume that a learning goal has been defined and e-learning has been chosen as an appropriate tool to achieve the desired goal. For example, the course goal could be “Improving communication skills and behaviors in the workplace”. At this stage, analyzing the target learner population is required to identify a variety of factors that will influence the course design. They include:

• Geographic area where learners reside
• Learners’ previous knowledge on the subject
• Learners’ computer skills and digital literacy
• The amount of time available for e-learning

2.1.2. Identifying course content

A course goal of a communication class, such as “improving communication skills and behaviors in the workplace”, provides an initial definition of the content and a focus for the course design. It is very important for the Instructional Designer to identify the detailed course content in order to achieve the desired goal. Depending on the learning environment, circumstances and course objectives, one of the following methods may be preferred (FAO elearning Academy 2021).

a. Task analysis is used mainly in courses designed to build specific job related or interpersonal skills.

b. Topic analysis is appropriate for courses that are primarily designed to provide information or achieve broader educational objectives.

Since the objective of ‘Improving communication skills and behaviors in the workplace’ course is to allow students to develop a set of transferable skills, ‘Task analysis’ would be the most appropriate method to identify course content.

2.1.3. Defining course learning objectives

A learning objective is a statement describing a skill or performance capability to be developed and acquired by the learner. For a better articulation and implementation of the course, the learning objectives should be appropriately specified. Learning objectives combine two main elements (FAO elearning Academy 2021).:
a. The expected level of performance (through an action verb, such as “describe” or “explain”)
b. The learning content (the type of knowledge or skills that must be learned, such as “effective communication skills and behaviors in the workplace”)

2.1.4. Sequencing course content

There are several methods that an instructor can use to organize and sequence the content of a course. The use of a particular method depends on the objective and nature of the course. In a job-oriented course (training course), the content can be organized to follow the order of the actions and skills that the trainee needs to perform and develop in the real job environment; whereas, in a non-job-oriented course (inform course), concepts can be organized according to their structural and thematic connections. The Zoom Principle is usually used when the curriculum starts with a more general overview, then focuses on specific topics and details. The Spiral Curriculum allows instructors to develop a curriculum that revisits the basic ideas, repeatedly building upon them until the learner understands them fully (FAO elearning Academy 2021).

2.2. Defining instructional and delivery strategies

This part of the process of creating an e-learning course includes the following steps:

- Defining course instructional methods
- Defining course delivery formats
- Defining course evaluation strategies

2.2.1. Defining course instructional methods

The design of an e-learning course involves using a combination of different instructional methods, including ‘Expositive methods’, ‘Application methods’, and ‘Collaborative methods’. Expositive methods emphasize the learning and acquisition of new information, using presentations, case studies, and worked examples. Application methods emphasize the active processes learners use to perform tasks and develop new knowledge through the use of simulations, serious games, guided research and project work. Collaborative methods emphasize the social dimension of learning, and make use of online guided discussions and peer tutoring to engage learners sharing knowledge and performing tasks in collaborative ways (FAO elearning Academy 2021).

2.2.2. Defining course delivery formats

When deciding on a delivery format, a number of factors must be considered, including learner-related factors (Internet connection, digital literacy), technology aspects (availability of technology, user-friendliness, support of an online facilitator), and organizational requirements (institutional decisions and terms) (FAO elearning Academy 2021). The objective is to make sure that the chosen delivery format ensures more interactivity and allows learners to practice. Most courses combine two or more e-learning methods, using different types of learning delivery formats such as

a. Learning management system (Moodle, Google classroom, Canvas)
b. Video-enabled platforms (Zoom, Google meet, Microsoft teams, YouCan)
c. Virtual classroom / Digital twin

The combination of animation and operational simulation and the use of learning games may ensure a good level of interactivity, but they can be time consuming and very often, they require the support of an online facilitator. The implementation of more collaborative methods such as discussion forums, e-mail, wikis, blogs and video conference allows for reflection,
socialization and knowledge sharing; however, there is always a need for an active support of an online facilitator to provide help and feedback (FAO elearning Academy 2021).

2.2.3. Course evaluation strategies

The development of an appropriate e-learning course requires the design and implementation of evaluation strategies to make sure that the desired learning objectives are met. It is very important to determine the purpose of evaluation. Evaluation can be:

- **Formative evaluation:** Evaluate the quality of the course to improve it before it is implemented
- **Confirmative evaluation:** Evaluate and review the effectiveness of the course after its implementation
- **Summative evaluation:** Evaluate an old course to see if it is still valid or needs any changes or modifications.

It is important to ensure that the assessment tests are aligned with the learning objectives. For this reason, it is advisable to start designing the assessment tests just after the definition of the learning objectives for each learning unit (FAO elearning Academy 2021).

3. Application and implementation of the ADDIE model

Sample e-learning course: (Business and Professional Communication 1)

3.1. Course needs

A needs analysis has been conducted to determine whether teaching/training meets the needs of the target learners and whether e-learning is the best solution to deliver the training. The course goal is “Introducing students to business communication in organizations”. The target learner population has been analyzed using the following factors: the objective is to identify and assess their potential impact on the course design. Table 2 provides a detailed description of course needs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographic area where learners reside</th>
<th>Students come from different cities in Morocco. Few of them from Sub-Saharan African countries. The Covid-19 pandemic has substantially limited their mobility and prevented many of them from attending in-person classes.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learners’ previous knowledge on the subject</td>
<td>Students have already been introduced to language and communication courses in S1, S2, S3 and S5. The target course is intended to give students at the ENCG Business School-Marrakech an advanced and more practical knowledge of business and professional communication with a particular focus on communication skills and behaviors in the workplace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners’ computer skills and digital literacy</td>
<td>Students have good computer skills. They use their own computers and benefit from a reliable Internet connection.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The amount of time available for e-learning | Same amount of time available for in-person learning. A 20-hour module, including ten two-hour weekly class sessions.

Table 2: Course needs

3.2. Course contents

Various aspects and themes of business communication in organizations are covered, including, but not limited to interpersonal communication, communication in organizations, intercultural communication, corporate image and corporate identity, and good customer relations and communication etiquette. Table 2 provides a detailed list of course contents.

| a | The communication process |
| b | Interpersonal communication |
| c | Intercultural communication |
| d | Communication in organizations |
| e | Mass communication in organisations |
| f | Planning and constructing messages for organizations |
| g | Corporate image and corporate identity |
| h | Customer communication and interaction etiquette |

Table 3: Course contents

3.3. Course objectives and outcomes

The English advanced course (ADA 3/ Business and professional communication 1: Introduction to business communication in organizations) is intended to give students at the ENCG Business School-Marrakech an advanced and more practical knowledge of business and professional communication with a particular focus on communication in the workplace. The class is taught at an upper-intermediate level and students should have an upper-intermediate level in English language proficiency and writing experience.

Various aspects and themes of business communication in organizations are covered, including, but not limited to interpersonal communication, communication in organizations, intercultural communication, corporate image and corporate identity, and good customer relations and communication etiquette. The course includes an intensive training in both written and oral communication skills to consolidate students’ technical knowledge and allow them to develop effective communication skills in the workplace.

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

| a | Demonstrate their understanding of the communication process. |
| b | Demonstrate their understanding of the flow of communication in an organization. |
| c | Demonstrate their understanding of how mass communication is used in organizations. |
| d | Demonstrate their understanding of how corporate image and corporate identity are developed. |
 Implement the different steps used in planning and constructing messages for organizations.

Develop effective communication skills in the workplace.

Develop Customer-communication routines and interaction etiquette.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>e</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>g</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implement the different steps used in planning and constructing messages for organizations.</td>
<td>Develop effective communication skills in the workplace.</td>
<td>Develop Customer-communication routines and interaction etiquette.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Course objectives and outcomes

3.4. Course content sequences

Since it is in a non-job-oriented course (inform course), themes are organized according to their structural and thematic contents and connections. The Zoom Principle is, therefore used to sequence the content of the course. The curriculum starts with a more general overview, and then focuses on specific topics and details. Table 5 provides a description of course content sequences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Less general topics</th>
<th>Specific topics and details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Interpersonal communication</td>
<td>• Planning and constructing messages for organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Intercultural communication</td>
<td>• Corporate image vs. corporate identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Communication in the workplace</td>
<td>• Customer communication routines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mass communication in organisations</td>
<td>• Customer interaction etiquette</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Course content sequences

Learners are first introduced to the process of communication. The objective is to allow them to learn more about key communication technical issues, including encoding and transmission, channels of communication, decoding and feedback. Students learn later about less general topics such as the key elements of interpersonal communication and the impact of intercultural differences on communication across borders. Then move on to address specific topics such as constructing messages for organizations and customer communication routines.

3.5. Course instructional methods

The design of an e-learning course involves using a combination of different instructional methods, including ‘Expositive methods’, ‘Application methods’, and ‘Collaborative methods’. Table 6 provides a detailed description of adopted instructional methods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional methods</th>
<th>Use of Microsoft Teams / Google Meet / Zoom to deliver class content using presentation software, and the School Learning Management System (Moodle) to share documents and administer tests.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expositive method</td>
<td>The use of both synchronous and asynchronous teaching.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
method | synchronous teaching to allow students to complete class tasks and practice their learning (video-enabled platforms and discussion forums). Asynchronous teaching to complete assignments and project work (email / school LMS)

Collaborative method | Use of Zoom breakdown rooms. The teacher splits participant students into separate sessions, allowing them to collaborate and work in smaller groups when completing tasks. To ensure more interactivity, both synchronous communication (discussion forums, video conference) and asynchronous communication (email) are used.

Table 6: Course instructional methods

3.6. Course delivery formats

For a better organization and delivery of class content, the following factors have been taken into account. The objective is to make sure that the chosen delivery format ensures more interaction and participation. Table 7 provides a detailed description of delivery factors and formats.
### Table 7: Course delivery factors and formats

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>aspects</strong></th>
<th><strong>technology</strong></th>
<th><strong>tablet computer / smart phones.</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>User friendliness</strong></td>
<td>The chosen technology tools and platforms are easy to use. (Microsoft teams, Zoom, Google Meet and our school LMS – learning management system)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support of an online facilitator</strong></td>
<td>The absence of support from an online facilitator has sometimes made it difficult for some students to attend class.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Organizational requirements**  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Institutional terms and decisions</strong></th>
<th>Teachers are encouraged to vary e-learning methods, technologies and social media platforms to reach a greater number of students. Tests are administered using the school learning management system or any other reliable learning management system.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To benefit from a more reliable Internet connection, teachers can always deliver classes from their offices at the ENCG school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.7. Course evaluation

Two evaluation strategies have been conducted to review the effectiveness of the course, see if it needs any changes or modifications, and make sure that the desired learning objectives are met. Students were asked to fill in a post-course evaluation form to see if there are any improvements to make for future implementation. Both confirmative and summative evaluation show that some changes should be made to better meet the needs and expectations of learners. Students have expressed their preference for Zoom and the school LMS (learning management system). They want all their professors to use the same learning platform and learning management system because they think that using different platforms by different professors increases technical complications. Moreover, they insist that the school administration should provide them with hard copies of handouts for different courses, create PDF course documents and videos, and load them into the school website.

### Conclusion

Distant learning, whereby teaching is undertaken remotely using different digital platforms and learning management systems, has substantially changed education. Distant learning has provided immediate solutions to school closures due to the Covid-19 pandemic, allowing millions of students across the world to continue their education. With this unexpected and sudden shift away from the physical classroom, education professionals and
researchers raised questions about the appropriate pedagogical and didactic approaches to meet the needs of an alarmingly growing student population of ‘digital natives’, and ensure the same classroom dynamics that prevail in conventional teaching and learning environments.

The ADDIE model provides some help and allows teachers to develop e-learning class content; taking into account different factors that may impede class delivery and exclude disadvantaged students from active participation in the learning process. The ADDIE model provides essential steps to design distant learning courses and leaves enough room for teachers to innovate, use familiar educational technology, and add their personal pedagogical touch.

This sudden shift to remote learning, though unplanned and unstructured, has provided solutions for the pandemic lockdown restrictions and has substantially paved the way for the emergence of a new hybrid model of education with significant potential benefits. Transitions have already started in different colleges and universities across the world and some of them have already become success stories. However, there are challenges to overcome. The digital gap between the ‘wired’ and the ‘unwired’ should be addressed, and access to reliable Internet connection should be provided.

References