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Innovative teaching in eTwinning projects

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Abstract. This article examines innovative teaching strategies developed through three eTwinning projects—Learning Environments, Be My Digital Pal, and Time to Speak Up—which focus on enhancing students' creativity, collaboration, and digital competencies. The projects integrate both physical and virtual learning spaces, fostering engagement through a mix of traditional activities and Web 2.0 tools such as Padlet, Flipgrid, Canva, and CapCut. The methodology involved collaborative project-based learning, interactive digital tools, and cross-cultural exchanges among students from multiple European countries.

The findings reveal that students improved essential skills, including writing, speaking, and critical thinking, while also developing digital literacy and cultural awareness. The Learning Environments project encouraged participants to explore various learning styles—visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and reading/writing—through creative and practical activities such as music-based learning and outdoor tasks. Be My Digital Pal enhanced students' English language proficiency by encouraging pen-pal communication and content creation using digital platforms, while also raising awareness of online safety and digital citizenship. Time to Speak Up addressed communication barriers, helping students gain confidence in expressing themselves in English while fostering intercultural understanding through webinars and mentorship sessions.

The results indicate that these projects not only improved academic and linguistic outcomes but also strengthened interpersonal and intrapersonal skills such as teamwork, problem-solving, and self-discipline. The article highlights the value of eTwinning projects as a platform for blending formal education with experiential, creative, and technology-driven approaches, preparing students for real-world challenges and lifelong learning.

Keywords: eTwinning projects; Innovative teaching; Digital literacy; Cross-cultural collaboration; Project-based learning.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, teaching is part of a complex process at the end of which students need to have learnt more than the information provided by teachers; they must also acquire skills that will be used in real-life situations (Solvie & Kloek, 2007). Moreover, teachers need to find ways of encouraging them to express themselves and show their creativity in activities developed throughout the educational process.

It is widely known the fact that acquiring new information is, by far, more effective and enjoyable when it is done by experimenting with new situations. The first topic of this article will present my latest experience as an eTwinner, founder of the project Learning Environments, whose stages of development broadened the horizons of both teachers and students involved in it, and it will

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continue with two other eTwinning projects, which were rewarded with national and European quality labels (ANPCDEFP, 2024).

2. Research methodology

The methodology applied in these eTwinning projects was based on collaborative, project-based learning and the integration of digital tools to facilitate both academic and intercultural competencies (Nishat, 2024). The projects were designed to combine physical and virtual learning environments, encouraging students to engage through multiple learning styles—visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and reading/writing. A variety of Web 2.0 tools, including Padlet, Flipgrid, Canva, CapCut, and Google Classroom, were employed to promote creativity, communication, and teamwork. Activities were structured around monthly themes aligned with the English Language Teaching Curriculum, combining synchronous interactions (e.g., Zoom meetings and webinars) with asynchronous tasks such as poster creation, digital letters, and collaborative e-books. Teachers acted as facilitators, guiding students in experiential tasks that connected academic content with real-life contexts, while fostering digital literacy and social skills (Raducu, 2019). Data collection for evaluating the projects' success included observation of student engagement, analysis of final products (e.g., videos, posters, e-books), and feedback shared through internal discussions and online platforms.

3. Description of the manner in which the projects were conducted

3.1 Learning Environments

Learning Environments included physical spaces such as classrooms, schools, or workplaces, as well as virtual spaces such as digital platforms or blended spaces that combined both physical and digital elements. These were designed to encourage students to find benefits in each learning environment during different periods of their lives. According to some research, students typically learn best through four types of learning styles: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and reading/writing. Therefore, the project aimed to encourage students to experience all of these styles in order to better understand their own learning preferences. Most people are a combination of these four styles, but in many cases, they have a predominant learning style (Kolb, 1984).

Starting from these aims, the project enabled all participants to create effective learning environments, such as fostering creativity in students and helping them adapt the project activities to real-life situations. Another objective was to raise teenagers' awareness of the educational benefits they can gain from games, such as learning foreign language vocabulary, as well as developing life skills. Furthermore, open-space and practical activities were encouraged, such as adapting virtual realities to everyday activities, which helped students understand that spending time outdoors and collaborating with peers could be even more rewarding when it leads to a shared final product. Additionally, developing skills through activities like listening to music to discover specific information was another stage of the project.

The main stages of the project included activities such as Padlet, where all partners shared their experiences of The New Year's Gift Giving Ceremony, as well as student meetings where they exchanged ideas and discussed various topics such as leisure activities, thus developing cultural

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awareness. One example was the meeting held on the first of March, which was particularly appealing to participants, not only from the perspective of improving speaking skills but also due to the cultural information discovered during this international activity.

The idea of revealing traditions was present during December activities, in which students conducted research and created PowerPoint presentations and videos about customs and traditions. Technology was used to enrich almost all project activities. For example, student introductions were created using the CapCut app, while the Quizizz app was used for the January activity Learning through Music. The Boomwrite platform was employed to evaluate the January activities. Furthermore, Valentine's Day was celebrated by creating digital postcards with Giphy.

Collaboration process was demonstrated in many project activities, such as the Miro exhibition, where partners had specific tasks to complete. Each partner had a designated virtual space to add activities to the project. For instance, partner countries filled the virtual space assigned to them with activities developed during the project.

The pupils worked together in activities such as PowerPoint presentations and poster-making. For example, students gathered introduction videos made with the CapCut app and created posters featuring all the video introductions. Collaboration was also vital for producing the final product, an eBook entitled Collaborative Work, where each partner wrote a specific chapter. The chapters were submitted via email to the project coordinator, who compiled the final document in Canva. The project was integrated into the existing curriculum through activities such as Learning through Music and Living Habits, where students were tasked with discovering grammatical structures and incorporating them into writing assignments, such as opinion and argumentative essays.

The key competencies and skills developed among pupils during the project included writing skills, speaking skills, and critical thinking. The educational objectives were diverse, ranging from group work and collaborative projects to the creation of final products such as PowerPoint presentations and videos using different apps.

3.2 Be My Digital Pal

Another project, Be My Digital Pal, which is presented in the following paragraphs, was conducted between December 2023 and April 2024, involving five European partners and lasting four months. Each month was dedicated to a specific topic selected according to the English Language Teaching Curriculum. Students composed letters on the monthly topic and shared both written and spoken letters using FlipGrid, Padlet, GoPangea, and PaperSlide. A Google Classroom was created to announce topics and requirements, while Zoom meetings were arranged to maintain communication among project members. To disseminate the results, dedicated Facebook and Instagram accounts were created for the project. The progress of the project was assessed through pre- and post-activity tests conducted across all partner countries.

Be My Digital Pal aimed to create digital pen-pal friendships among students from Turkey, Italy, Romania, and Poland, enabling them to develop their speaking and writing skills. This was achieved by implementing Web 2.0 tools such as Padlet, FlipGrid, GoPangea, and PaperSlide. Each month, the coordinating teachers shared the topic of the month on Google Classroom according to the project plan. Participants shared their ideas in both written and spoken formats.

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Throughout the project, students engaged with English in interactive ways, practicing both writing and speaking.

The Be My Digital Pal project also sought to encourage participants academically, digitally, and socially. Students improved their academic skills in English, became self-conscious digital citizens capable of safeguarding themselves online, and enhanced their social skills. Academically, they applied their English knowledge in non-structured or semi-structured online activities, using digital platforms to communicate with local and international peers. In addition to academic development, students built abstract skills such as critical thinking, brainstorming, lifelong learning, and problem-solving, which they used when responding to monthly pen-pal prompts. Mastery of these skills allowed them to take responsibility for their work and become self-disciplined individuals.

Digitally, students became aware of online risks and learned how to protect their identities and personal data. They were trained to identify what information should not be shared online and to apply cybersecurity strategies to avoid potential threats. By the end of the project, they had become self-conscious digital citizens who could confidently and safely navigate online environments.

From a social perspective, students improved interpersonal skills such as verbal and non-verbal communication, teamwork, conflict resolution, positive attitude, effective collaboration, brainstorming, trust-building, and decision-making. In addition, they enhanced their intrapersonal competences by completing individual tasks as part of an international project. These experiences helped them become self-disciplined, confident, and productive individuals. Ultimately, participants developed into well-prepared and responsible young citizens.

By the end of the project, students had improved their English-speaking and writing skills, had become self-aware digital citizens who carefully manage their online activities, and had strengthened their social skills, including collaboration and problem-solving.

3.3 Time to Speak Up

Another project, Time to Speak Up, conducted in 2022, involved the high school and five partner schools from Turkey (Bunea, 2024). This project focused on encouraging students to overcome shyness and hesitation when communicating in a foreign language, in this case, English. Alongside expressing their thoughts, students learned new grammatical structures which, combined with their existing vocabulary, enabled them to produce meaningful messages. Expert teachers guided them through webinars, helping them deliver correct and coherent messages while supervising their progress. Students also benefitted from cultural exchange, building new friendships abroad and developing an interest in visiting Turkey to see the places mentioned in their discussions.

4. Discussion

All the projects mentioned above had results in the activities developed by students afterwards, as they could solve real-life problems by taking into consideration their project activities, such as

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Internet challenges, and interpreting the information acquired in the projects in a way that is applicable in their lives.

Moreover, these projects highlighted the importance of integrating technology and collaborative learning to enhance both academic and personal development. The use of digital tools not only improved students' language and communication skills but also fostered creativity, cultural awareness, and teamwork. Through the combination of traditional and modern teaching approaches, students were encouraged to take ownership of their learning process, developing autonomy and confidence. The projects also demonstrated that experiential and project-based learning can effectively bridge the gap between classroom knowledge and real-world application, preparing students to face contemporary challenges with critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

5. Conclusions

To sum up, collaboration between partners from various countries is by far the most effective approach when aiming for learning experiences in which students feel that they are part of the teaching process. This is achieved by giving them the freedom to choose the method through which they will create the final product, regardless of its form—be it an eBook, a physical object, virtual banners, or other creative outputs.

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