

## NON FORMAL EDUCATION AND ITS EMPOWERING ROLE

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### Abstract

Nonformal education does not stand for the exact same content as formal education nor two should it be presented as an alternative completely undertaking the role of the later. The two of them need to be regarded as complementary instead of exclusive.

ESEDI project relates to this matter by envisaging a path between the two, at the same time addressing language learning and also contextualising it with international cultural variety.

It focuses on skill development, international communication and hands-on activities including students and teachers from several countries.

**Key words:** foreign languages, non formal learning activities, cultural variety, practical activities, skill development

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Life experience and the variety of contexts in which the results of learning need to be applied are much too wide for formal education to be able to provide the necessary input and also the necessary practice opportunities. It is no longer the time of controlled, teacher-centered education which can only cover a limited part of the transversal and transferable skills necessary beyond school.

On the other hand, informal education cannot always satisfy the needs of field specificities and if given the task of professional formation, it may fail to provide the relevant and cohesive input. Formal and informal education set the two extremes within education at the present moment.

Between them and perhaps the most liable to change in the sense of synergy between the above mentioned extremes, is non formal education.

Non formal education combines formal and informal education bringing together the structural approach of the first one and the adaptability and flexibility of the latter. Nonformal education focuses on the student but it also provides the teacher with numerous opportunities for professional development. Thinking out-of-the-box is a must within non formal education but structure and planning are still prerequisites of a successful teaching and learning.

Non formal methodologies adapt to the needs of the learner looking into ways and means in which the learner can be provided the necessary theoretical input but within a natural context which allows for direct use and implementation of the

newly gained information with regard to development of abilities.

It is not the information transferred that is being monitored but the use of this information, the intake and output of students.

In order for students to be provided with such materials and context, the teachers themselves must have the time and affordances to constantly recreate their own teaching. This is done through constant piloting of materials, update and research.

ESEDI project envisages such an approach to language teaching and learning while addressing two main categories of beneficiaries: students and teachers. Students are those in need of language training irrespective of the age category they belong to. The project looks into ways of developing synchronous teaching methodologies applied to various age groups. Teachers in the project belong to more than the field of linguistics. Teachers are representatives of language teachers but also drama experts. A partnership is set between two fields with the aim of developing a dynamic method and materials to suit it.

Studying languages must be taken outside the classroom but has to be as focused and as structured as prior formal education. At the same time, ESEDI develops on the idea of adaptability and flexibility within teaching and learning.

The European Language Stage (KA2 LANGUAGES - 511451-LLP-1-2010-1-ES-KA2-KA2MP) is a multilateral project which aims to improve teaching and learning foreign languages in Europe through a new didactic material: a

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multilingual theatre play. The play has five acts each of them corresponding to one of the project countries: Spain, Bulgaria, Romania, Germany and France.

The entire material of the play is bilingual being developed in the national language and Spanish. The project thus focuses on teaching and learning Spanish along with the mother tongue in each of the above mentioned countries.

The project looks into ways of motivating learners. The non formal education format builds on difficulties which appear due to language similarities or on the contrary. The fact that each event will be written and performed bilingually according to each country combining in all acts Spanish as the common language with their national language relates to the real life experience where most of the times foreign language contexts

do not provide students with means of formal interpreting. Each act will reflect different situations that highlight the linguistic and cultural variety of Europe.

ESEDI's main objectives are:

- to enhance students motivation towards foreign language learning;
- to promote language and intercultural skills to help students compete effectively in the global market;
- to development of personal fulfillment, social cohesion and active citizenship of participants;
- to highlight through real-life situations, the language learning difficulties and to offer solutions to overcome them.

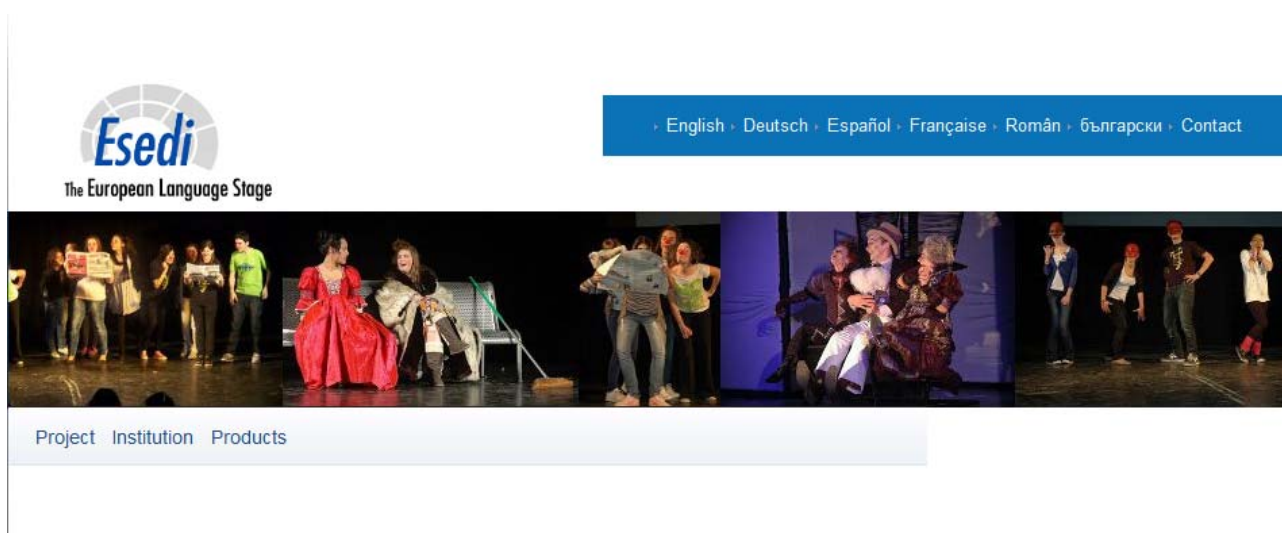


Figure 1 ESEDI website page [www.esedi.eu](http://www.esedi.eu)

## MATERIAL AND METHOD

ESEDI project implements a continuous-flow methodology which enhances transfer from one national beneficiary group to all the others participating in the project activities. This also ensures continuity at the level of material development and ensures coherence and cohesion of the training materials developed both for teachers and students.

First of all the international project partnership has developed research tools which they have implemented in each of the five countries contributing to the theatre play. Questionnaires have been applied to research, identify and illustrate the degree to which nonformal education is being used in the project countries and also to present the various manners in which this is being delivered to the final beneficiary, the student. Based on these results the partnership has then developed a common general approach to material development, training sessions and creation of the theatre play.

Secondly, discussions have been carried along the line of what nonformal education can enhance in the context of each country. Cultural differences, local specificities and educational approach make it different to have the exact same approach successfully implemented in all countries. For this reason the national partners have all taken on the responsibility of developing on the results of their national research or on the conclusions of the international needs analysis so that the project activities will correspond to the needs of their own country and not be a too generic transfer from one country to another. This is based not only on customisation but it also includes developing new material, different from the one used in other countries. Such a work approach builds into the richness of the project and is an added value to the overall project aim and achievements.

Another extremely important stage in the project is that of developing the theatre play with the five acts. Until this moment the Spanish team have presented their act. All acts are built on a

common pattern which at the same time allows all teams to update it and apply it to their own students and their learning needs.

Preparing the theatre play involves the following stages:

1. **Selection of collaborators**, students and teachers who will be learning, teaching, performing and supporting the project team with the implementation of activities.

This is done on the basis of a set of criteria commonly established by the partnership. As the project generally addresses learners who are in need of linguistic support each national project team selects participants from various group levels and with various linguistic abilities. This will add to the value of the play performance but it will at the same time build into the complexity of language training and drama initiation addressed to the end beneficiaries.

Even though the project involves use of a nonformal educative methodology there are still very well established approaches which the project team makes use of when training the final beneficiaries and preparing the theatre act.

Selecting beneficiaries on a wide range of ages increases the value of the play, the affordances of the acting activity in itself but raises the standards of linguistic training and drama preparations. This translates into more comprehensive and extensive training materials which will have to be easily adaptable and used by all age categories involved in the project. Learning styles is another aspect material developers are taking into consideration.

Although drama is a very open method which engages learners in a more natural learning manner it still requires very close attention of the part of the trainers and material developers.

ESEDI project team collaborates with professionals in the field of drama and also with language teachers with an extensive experience in the study of foreign languages through nonformal educative activities.

2. **Development of the training materials** is being done with support and input from the language teachers, from the drama specialists and also from the students themselves. This is a bottom-up approach which integrates theoretical input with a practical, hands-on practice of language abilities.

Training materials within ESEDI project address both students and teachers involved in the project activities. Students' training is developed prior the training sessions which happen in parallel with the rehearsals for the theatre play. This is mainly language training with complementary drama information and practice. Training students is aimed at getting them achieve higher language competency levels and also develop basic skills as actors.

Training for teachers is developed based on the the activity teachers have within the project. This means the final training material for teachers is finalised when national partners complete their theatre act. This converges more than one developmental stage. Training material for teachers implies observation, methodological research, monitoring of the work teachers do within the project, generalisation of the theoretical input with the practical activities. All these, customised at the level of each national partner delivers a well focused material which illustrates both theory and the practice from the project.

### 3. Development of the play scenario

The scenario of the theatre play is based on linguistic interconnections among the five languages in the project. From the perspective of the teaching materials the scenario presents the primary tool for languages training. It is based on linguistic confusions created by the use of false friends.

The first to step in scenario development is taken by language teachers who prepare the primary materials for the scenario by selecting the language aspects on which the entire action and topic of the play is going to be developed.

Once this primary material is selected and organised into a staged, gradual sequence, the story within the play can be developed. Students can contribute their own ideas into the play. This will enhance the feeling of ownership and it will motivate them to actively engage into the rehearsals in parallel with language training and intercultural raising awareness activities.

### 4. Play rehearsals and language training

ESEDI plans play rehearsals to blend in with language and drama training. Linguistic support is not structured in the form of traditional classes. The form of rehearsals places beneficiaries in a relaxed atmosphere. Communication barriers are lowered and participants in the play, the actors, feel much more comfortable with performing in front of their colleagues and also in front of the public.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results we will obtain with ESEDI in the short and long term are:

- Creating a multilingual play, based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) to define the levels of the five languages that will be used: Spanish, French, German, Bulgarian and Romanian;
- Representations bilingual acts of the play in five countries;
- Creation of a webpage and collaborative tool of content Wiki;
- Publication of the script of the theater play in five languages;

- Editing a DVD with the recording of all actions;

- Publication of a handbook of best practices used during the project;

- Creating a network for the collaboration for future exchanges of students and teachers.

ESEDI promotes interest in foreign language learning through an innovative way, appealing to students in both formal and non-formal education systems. It will promote multilingualism and cultural diversity within and outside the continent.

At this level, linguistic and theatre performance come very close together. A successful theatre performance implies a successful linguistic performance. Perhaps more than any other manner of language practicing, acting and performing in a theatre play engages beneficiaries in a natural communication context. Communicating with the public involves having at least A2 linguistic abilities. Theatre performance focuses on aural communication which allows trainers to do a lot of work on pronunciation and intonation. However, work is also being done on the grammatical and lexical aspects. This develops into a complex approach which brings in different perspectives and blends them into student and teacher training. ESEDI looks at vocabulary, grammar, linguistic interconnections and semantical confusions, performance within the play but also transfer of knowledge and skills to everyday life. Language dynamics are observed at national and international context within the bilingual play. Besides the language structures and their correct use, students who act in the play need to understand the intercultural connections which

create comical confusion very much valorised within ESEDI theatre play. This means that training of students also focuses on cultural elements and thus implements a holistic approach meant to equip participants with necessary background for a successful theatre performance.

## CONCLUSIONS

ESEDI project addresses learners and teachers in the field of language study using a complementary, holistic approach which includes cultural elements and drama as means of self-expression.

Resources used are those developed through practical activities which means they are closely related to the learner and have wide affordances which engage and motivate learners.

Outcomes of the project are nation-level developed and they illustrate the cultural specificities aiming for an overall standardisation.

ESEDI is present online at [www.esedi.eu](http://www.esedi.eu)

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