

SOURCE: Teaching and visual methods for online instructors

KA220-ADU - Cooperation partnerships in adult education



SOURCE

WP5 R5.5 Policy brief



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Policy Brief:

Enhancing Digital Competencies on Adult Educators

Summary

The presented document is a policy brief for the SOURCE project focused on enhancing the digital competencies of adult educators. A strategic plan for the implementation of the policy brief is presented at the very beginning. The strategic plan emphasizes key initiatives such as the dissemination of the policy brief, stakeholder engagement, advocacy for digital competencies, and support for implementation.

The SOURCE project aims to support adult education teachers in acquiring competencies in delivering online courses. The strategic plan incorporates specific objectives aligned with the European Union's Digital Education Action Plan and emphasizes the importance of collaboration and knowledge-sharing among relevant stakeholders.

The document provides an overview of the SOURCE project's progress, objectives, and current achievements. It highlights the three dimensions crucial for successful online education: Technological, Content, and Pedagogical. The technological dimension involves equipping educators with technical skills, while the content dimension focuses on optimizing training materials. The pedagogical dimension emphasizes innovative teaching practices.

The project's results are organized into five work packages, each contributing to achieving the project's objectives. The challenges faced during implementation, such as timing issues, identify the importance of effective internal communication. Policy recommendations include investing in continuous professional development, providing technological infrastructure support, promoting collaborative initiatives, and encouraging ongoing research.

The document concludes by concentrating the SOURCE project's proactive approach in addressing the evolving needs of digital education. It outlines the significance of empowering educators to thrive in online learning environments and highlights the ongoing efforts to contribute to the establishment of an effective online learning ecosystem. Continuous collaboration and strategic investments are important for the sustained success of digital education initiatives.

Strategic Plan for the Implementation of the Policy Brief

On Enhancing Digital Competencies of Adult Educators

The strategic plan outlines the steps and actions necessary for the effective implementation of the policy brief. It is designed to ensure the dissemination of key information, gather support from stakeholders, and facilitate the integration of digital competencies of adult educators into education practices. The primary objective of this strategic plan is to raise awareness about the importance of digital competencies for adult educators and to advocate for the successful implementation of the SOURCE project's initiatives. The strategic plan focuses on maximizing the impact of the policy brief, reassuring collaboration among stakeholders, and promoting the adoption of best practices in digital education concerning adult educators.

Strategic Initiatives

1. Dissemination of the Policy Brief

The policy brief will be disseminated to key stakeholders, including educators and educational institutions. Various channels will be used for this matter, such as the SOURCE project website, SOURCE's social media accounts, and newsletters to reach a wide audience.

2. Stakeholder Engagement

Workshops (online or in present) will be organised, in order to identify stakeholders who play a crucial role in shaping educational policies and practices and to present the findings of the policy brief to solicit feedback from educators and experts.

The basic objective of this procedure will be to establish a collaborative platform for ongoing discussions and knowledge-sharing among stakeholders.

3. Advocacy for Digital Competencies

Partnerships will be fostered with educational associations and institutions to collectively advocate for the importance of digital skills in education.

4. Support for Implementation

Guidance and resources will be provided to educational institutions interested in implementing the recommendations outlined in the policy brief. This plan will be regularly reviewed and updated to align with emerging challenges in the field of digital education and with the timing of the SOURCE project.

To sum up, the strategic plan is designed to guide the implementation of the policy brief, ensuring a systematic and impactful approach to enhancing digital competencies of adult educators for engaging online learning experiences. By following this plan, the SOURCE project aims to contribute significantly to the advancement of digital education practices on a broader scale.

Introduction

The digital revolution has transformed the landscape of education, conducting in an era of online learning experiences. The SOURCE consortium partners, actively involved in providing structured and semi-formal training experiences, recognized the important role of educators in shaping engaging online learning experiences. The partners agreed that educators often lack the essential digital competencies needed to move beyond conventional online delivery methods, blocking the creation of dynamic and participatory virtual learning environments.

This policy brief aims to articulate the principals behind the SOURCE project and highlight its importance in addressing the digital skills that lack among educators. As the digital world evolves within the educational landscape, the focus on empowering educators becomes essential to ensuring the success of online learning experiences. This brief provides an overview of the current context, the objectives of the SOURCE project, and its progress till this stage of development.

SOURCE's aim

The SOURCE's project purpose is to support adult education teachers in acquiring and validating their knowledge and competencies in delivering online courses across three dimensions: technological, content, and pedagogical.

The SOURCE project is developing an online training course that meets the specific needs of instructors and educational experts. Via the MOOC format, the project aims to provide a high-quality and accessible online learning experience, fostering the acquisition of relevant skills and knowledge in the field.

The project concentrates on the use of Open edX, an innovative technology in the field of online education. Open edX is an open-source platform that offers a range of interactive features, collaborative tools, and learning analytics. This technology ensures that participants can benefit from an engaging learning environment, promoting active participation and knowledge acquisition.

SOURCE Project Objectives

Aligned with the European Union's Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027) and its objective to reshape education and training for the digital era, this project is dedicated to supporting the digital transformation plans specifically targeting Adult Education experts.

The project aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. Propose an online instructor profile based on EU policy instruments and frameworks, ensuring the alignment with established guidelines and standards.
2. Actively involve beneficiaries and stakeholders in all project activities, fostering collaboration, and incorporating their valuable insights and perspectives.

3. Implement a systematic approach to the instructional design process, ensuring a structured and effective framework for designing and delivering online learning experiences.
4. Create and develop Open Educational Resources (OERs) that prioritize engaging and participatory online learning experiences, fostering interactivity and active participation.
5. Enhance the digital technology skills and teaching methods of Adult Education experts through targeted upskilling and reskilling initiatives.
6. Empower educators to become "design scientists" who can independently drive their own learning and lead the digital transformation, encompassing skills, attitudes, and knowledge.
7. Provide policy recommendations for educational technologies, offering guidance on their integration and usage to support digital education initiatives at both national and EU levels.

Through these objectives, the project aims to contribute to the advancement of digital education in the Adult Education sector, aligning with EU policies and fostering the development of capable and digitally adept educators.

Project Results

A principal outcome of the project involves the development of the project's visual identity. This includes designing and developing the SOURCE website, logos, leaflets, newsletters, and social media accounts, all translated in all respective languages of the partners. These visual elements will be utilized throughout the project's duration to effectively communicate project information.

Six national info days are to be conducted, focusing on presenting all the tools and resources developed by the project. These info days serve as a platform to showcase the project's outputs and will also act as a pitching activity to attract participants to the SOURCE MOOC.

The SOURCE project produces also two short policy briefs that concentrate on the use of EU instruments such as DigCompEdu, e-CF, and ESCO. These briefs will demonstrate how these instruments can be used to identify skills gaps and recommend extensions or updates to the profile of online instructors.

Moreover, a digital repository, is created to compile and present trends related to educational technologies and innovative teaching or learning methods. This repository, called at this project the 'Innovation Watch', provides an easily understandable and digestible resource for accessing information in this field.

Overall, these results contribute to the effective dissemination of the project's outcomes, raising awareness, promoting collaboration, and facilitating the adoption of best practices in the field of online education.

The results of the SOURCE project are organized into five Work Packages (WP), each focusing on specific tasks and objectives.

The list of project results per Work Package and with their activities is as follows:

WP1: Project Management and coordination		WP2: Online Instructors - best practices, skills, and competences	
A1.1: Managing work plan activities		A1: The SOURCE Research Framework	
A1.2: Coordination and Communication		A2: Research on best practices and relevant profiles	
A1.3: Quality Assurance		A3: Design and development of a decision support tool	
R1.1: Project management handbook		R2.1: Terms of reference – handbook	
R1.2: QA reports		R2.2: Desk research report	
R1.3: Interim and final report		R2.3: Qualitative Research field report	
		R2.4: Recommendations – list of skills and competences	
		R2.5: The SOURCE Decision Support Tool	

Table 1. List of project results of Working Package 1 and 2.

WP3: Design and development of training material	
A1: Curricula development	
A2: Training material development	
A3: Assessment methodology	
R3.1: SOURCE MOOC design methodology	
R3.2: SOURCE training modules	
R3.3: Assessment methodology	

Table 2. List of project results of Working Package 3.

WP4: Pilot the SOURCE MOOC		WP5: Dissemination & Exploitation	
A1: MOOC development		A1: Design of dissemination and exploitation strategy	
A2: Beta testing and promotion		A2: Implementation of dissemination activities	
A3: MOOC piloting		A3: National info days	
R4.1: The SOURCE MOOC		A4: Innovation Watch	
R4.2: MOOC delivery report		R5.1: Dissemination & exploitation plan	
		R5.2: Visual identity	
		R5.3: Info days	
		R5.4: Innovation Watch	
		R5.5: Policy briefs	

Table 3. List of project results of Working Package 4 and 5.

These Work Packages present various activities, research, development, and reports that contribute to achieving the project's objectives and ensuring the effective management, development, and dissemination of the SOURCE project and its outcomes.

The breakdown of the SOURCE project policy brief

The digital education is rapidly evolving, with distance learning becoming the prevailing norm. A survey conducted by the 'Times Higher Education' in 2018 revealed a consensus among leaders of major universities worldwide that, by 2030, a significant number of prestigious institutions would offer their complete courses online.¹ In this context, the SOURCE project (01/11/2022-31/10/2024, ERASMUS KA2) has emerged as a strategic initiative to equip educators with the requisite skills for effective online instruction.

Project Focus

The primary objective of the SOURCE project is to enhance the digital competencies of educators, empowering them to design and deliver captivating online learning experiences. The project recognizes three critical dimensions influencing the success of online education: **Technological, Content, and Pedagogical**. These dimensions collectively inform the project's objectives and guide its activities towards achieving tangible outcomes.

Technological Dimension

The SOURCE project aims to equip educators with the technical skills necessary to navigate digital tools effectively.

Recent achievements include the successful launch of the SOURCE website, which serves as a centralized hub for project information and resources. Additionally, efforts to enhance online visibility through flyers, newsletters, and Facebook publications have evolved the project's outreach efforts.

At this moment, the SOURCE project is in the phase of the Working Package 3, which includes the development of the curriculum for the SOURCE MOOC that is included in the Working Package 4. The partners, all experts in semi-formal training (online and in present) will gather appropriate material, after conducting successful desk research, in order to develop an effective chapter to be published as part of the SOURCE MOOC.

A piloting period will follow, targeting adult educators and learners in public and private institutions and after their provided feedback, the material will be adapted as needed. In this way, any emerging issues concerning the inadequate material are avoided.

Content Dimension

The quality and presentation of online training materials significantly impact learner engagement. SOURCE focuses on optimizing content structure, aesthetics, and visual appeal to ensure that the online learning materials are not only informative but also visually compelling.

¹ Times Higher Education (2018), 'Student Experience Survey 2018: The rising stars of higher education' https://www.timeshighereducation.com/sites/default/files/breaking_news_files/student_experience_survey_2018_full_results.pdf, <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/student-experience-survey-2018-rising-stars-higher-education>

Notably, the consortium partners are currently developing a digital online decision support tool and an innovation watch tool to augment the richness of online content.

The digital online decision support tool is a repository tool that obtains best practices from each partner country gathered concerning the categories of:

- Software Skills
- Teaching & Learning Techniques for Online Delivery
- Presentation Skills
- Foreign Language and Soft Skills
- Marketing, Time Management, and Leadership
- Innovative and Individual Skills, AI Tools
- Project-Based Learning, Assessment, Special Needs

The Innovation Tool consists of a repository tool as well, that presents the best practices concerning technological trends/tools that can assist better all adult learners and educators concerning a more effective online training.

Pedagogical Dimension

Effective teaching methodologies are important for creating an interactive and inclusive online learning environment. SOURCE emphasizes pedagogical approaches that promote openness, interaction, and inclusiveness. As part of this endeavour, the consortium is actively developing content for the SOURCE Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), which will provide educators with practical insights into innovative teaching practices.

Current Progress and Achievements

As of the current stage of the project, the SOURCE consortium has made important steps in advancing its objectives and achieving key milestones. The successful development and launch of the SOURCE website have enhanced project visibility and accessibility to various stakeholders.

Additionally, the dissemination efforts through flyers, newsletters, and the SOURCE's social media platforms have amplified the project's reach and engagement. The ongoing development of digital tools and the forthcoming SOURCE MOOC showcases the consortium's commitment to delivering impactful outcomes.

Training modules and resources are being developed to upskill educators in digital competencies, covering both technological proficiency and pedagogical strategies for online instruction.

Challenges and Lessons Learnt

The challenges encountered in the implementation of the SOURCE project have provided valuable insights. The most important obstacle faced by the consortium partners was concerning the timing. Meeting deadlines and respect the timing of other partners is a challenge that was overcome by facing the issue profoundly by written form on the platform (Adminpro) and via regular online meetings.

This challenges emphasized the importance of internal communication to address the evolving needs of the consortium.

Policy Recommendations

Taking into account the stage where the SOURCE project is at this moment and the challenges that the consortium faced so far, the policy recommendations that follow provide possible ways to enhance and bring the SOURCE project to the next level.

Level of digital skill	Description
Basic digital skills	Related to basic computer literacy that refers to simple hardware, software and online operations.
Specialized digital skills	Allow online instructors to critically evaluate technology or create content, software or they are specific job-ready skills.
Advanced skills	Related to specialists in ICT professions and digital entrepreneurship.

Table 4. Digital skills relevant for the online instructors

Investment in Continuous Professional Development

Institutions and policymakers should prioritize ongoing professional development programs for educators, specifically focusing on digital competencies and online pedagogies.

With the wide dissemination of this policy brief targeted specifically to education institutions and relevant stakeholders, more people will get knowledge of the SOURCE project and be encouraged to adopt and adapt this policy brief to their institutions.

Technological Infrastructure Support

Adequate resources and support should be allocated to upgrading technological infrastructure in educational institutions to ensure a seamless transition to online learning.

The technological aspect is the principal aspect of the SOURCE project. The competency of adult educators on digital tools is the main direction of the SOURCE MOOC and to support this endeavour the piloting will be based on receiving the honest feedback of adult educators and learners in order to ensure an effective online learning programme.

Collaborative Initiatives

Encourage collaborative initiatives between educational institutions and consortium partners to share best practices and collectively address challenges in digital education.

The SOURCE project and its consortium partners effectuated significant research in identifying and presenting the best practices in many categories relevant to adult online education. These best practices are published to the SOURCE's project website via the form of tools to ensure better absorption of information.

Research

The consortium partners are in the stage of developing the SOURCE MOOC curriculum along with two digital tools that will also be available at the SOURCE's website and will serve as a 'source' in finding valuable tools in terms of various topics.

The consortium effectuated research in identifying the best practices concerning Software Skills, Teaching & Learning Techniques for Online Delivery, Presentation Skills, Foreign Language and Soft Skills, Marketing, Time Management, and Leadership, Innovative and Individual Skills, AI Tools and finally Project-Based Learning, Assessment, Special Needs.

Each partner was assigned with one of the above seven categories to provide an amount of recognised, verified and validated best practice examples. The best practice examples were gathered and analysed to create a repository tool, named the '[decision support tool](#)' to be easy to use from every adult learner/educator. With the access to the tool, the user enters chooses one keyword and sees the results corresponding to that keyword.

Another case where the consortium partners had to conduct research was similarly for the creation of a tool, but this time for the '[Innovation Watch](#)', which involves a tool that includes the best practice examples of the technological trends/ tools that are free of charge and simple to use. Each partner had to identify at least five best practices that address the topic. The Innovation Watch, similarly to the decision support tool works with the selection of a keyword by the user/learner and the result appears to the screen.

The development of the learning material of the SOURCE MOOC is the current stage of the SOURCE project. Each partner, according to their expertise and years of experience, is assigned to the creation of one chapter of the overall learning material of the SOURCE MOOC and one chapter among all (chapter 7: Identifying and assessing visual learning pathways) is a collaboration among all consortium partners.

There are in total eight chapters at the SOURCE MOOC:

1. Designing Visual Learning Environments
2. Assessment strategies for Visual Learning
3. Integration of Digital Storytelling into Curriculum
4. Visualisation of complex concepts
5. Utilizing tools for Visual teaching
6. Interactive Visual tools and enhanced engagement
7. Identifying and assessing visual learning pathways
8. Customizing Visual teaching

The SOURCE project respects greatly the Gantt chart of the management of the project and till now, no important delay has occurred in terms of deliverables.

Findings

The findings of the consortium partners' research so far, came up with thirty seven articles to animate the content of the decision support tool and thirty-five entries concerning the Innovation Watch and its technological trends/tools. The findings concerning the learning material will be identified on the next policy brief.

Conclusion

The SOURCE project, at its current stage, represents a proactive initiative in addressing the evolving needs of digital education, aimed at empowering educators with the tools and competencies needed to thrive in online learning environments.

The SOURCE project has distinguished three types of digital skills regarding the online adult education based on DigiComp Framework. The National reports and comparative analysis included in those reports provided by the partners presented a set of practical digital skills. In that way the skills are easily accessed by online instructors for the self-evaluation covering all levels of expertise for multiplying opportunities for the audience.

The SOURCE project has also distinguished thirty seven articles to animate the content of the decision support tool and thirty-five entries concerning the Innovation Watch and its technological trends/tools.

By focusing on enhancing the digital competencies of educators across key dimensions, SOURCE aims to contribute significantly to the establishment of an effective online learning ecosystem. Continuous collaboration and strategic investments will be important to sustaining this positive journey and ensuring the long-term success of digital education initiatives.