

Partnership



UICI, Italian Union of the Blind and Visually Impaired Florence (IT)



Centro Machiavelli Tandem Florence (IT)



Berufsförderungswerk Würzburg gGmbH - Würzburg (DE)



TANDEM Hamburg horizont dialogo e.V. - Hamburg (DE)



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Mobile Language Learning for Visually Impaired Students

Access and Inclusion
Promoting Language Teaching for All

The project MOLLVIS promotes German language learning especially among people who are blind and visually impaired. The German course and the planned German hospitality module will be provided for Italian, Dutch, Romanian, English and Turkish-speaking learners.

*Duration 24 months
January 2014-December 2015*



Project website: <http://www.mollvis.org>



Mobile Language Learning for Visually Impaired Students

Innovation

For a person with visual impairment (vi) language learning is the main road towards effective communication, social inclusion and job opportunity. The present economic trend shows the German economy is in a growing phase, and German tourists are still world-wide leaders in traveling abroad. Consequently, job opportunities in all fields based on verbal communication are a crucial factor in view of implementing social integration and job opportunities for people with vi in Europe. Unfortunately, mainstream publishers do not take students who are blind and vi into account when developing teaching materials. Since paper-based text books are not accessible, computer-based teaching material designed for students with vi provides real chances of learning a foreign language. In this context, mobile devices like smartphones and tablet computers can offer new ways of language learning. These devices are not only attractive to younger people, they also offer accessibility features for people with vi. However, existing language learning apps on these devices are not accessible. At the same time, these apps make no use of the communicative potential that these devices offer.

The Idea

The project MoLLVIS therefore plans to create German language learning apps for Windows, Apple and Android devices based on the results of the European projects ALLVIP, ELLVIS and VET4VIP that created computer-based language courses for learners with vi. As special education has to provide individual learning routes for students due to differences in the way blind and partially sighted study material, this system of flexible use of teaching content will have a considerable impact. As the user-interface is designed to be also attractive to sighted learners, the impact goes beyond the group of students with vi and will reach a wide audience.

Objectives

The main objectives of the project are:

- Specifications of an accessible user interface for language learning software on mobile devices for learners who are blind or visually impaired.
- Specifications of language learning activities that make use of the communicative potential of mobile devices (telephone, voice streaming, tandem learning, and other).
- Programming of an accessible user interface and communicative language learning activities for mobile devices.
- Programming of language learning apps for the mobile operating systems Windows 8, Apple iOs, and Android.
- Update of the ALLVIP German course (level A1) for Dutch-, English-, Italian-, Romanian-, and Turkish-speaking learners.
- Development of a job-oriented German language learning module for the tourism and wellness sector (hospitality module).

The Method

The language modules focusing on listening and speaking skills will fill a gap. They will be perfectly suitable for those learners who are at an early stage of Braille-training and/or who have difficulties coping with the Braille reading and writing in the initial phase. Furthermore, the course will offer the possibility to work individually while allowing the learner to define his or her own rate of learning. Last but not least applying an alternative method in the classroom will certainly help limbering up German lessons.

The modules will sensibly broaden the possibilities of language teaching to people with vi, opening access to all of the four domains of language learning, and especially to those sense organs that are rather neglected by traditional vi teaching methods. This way the modules will bring new motivational input to learners with vi.

Motivation for language learning will also be increased – especially for younger learners – by the use of mobile devices that have become increasingly popular among people who are blind or vi.

The innovative character lies in the fact that the products of this project will be fully accessible for students with visual impairment. The provision of further accessible apps for mobile devices has the effect that the existing Windows-based language courses can be used on several devices like a computer, smartphone and tablet of several operating systems. As in inclusive education you need to provide many individual learning routes for the students due to differences in the way blind and partially sighted get access to study material. This system of flexible use of teaching content can have a large impact. With the hospitality module, the consortium wants to implement activities that make use of the communicative potential of these devices, for example, via the TANDEM learning approach. TANDEM language exchanges are organised on a global scale; the point of origin or current place of residence for any language learner is becoming less important with direct communication technologies such as Skype or Twitter. Thus the project is going to take this approach a step further, in addition to the 'direct' idea of bringing two people of two mother languages together in a room and of helping them communicate here. A language module assisting TANDEM partners, as well as TANDEM partners assisting each other when taking part in a language course, online, and 'live', in real time, independent of resources such as classrooms and paper-based materials, is an innovation designed to succeed with the target group described above.

Conclusion

Mobile devices, especially smart phones and tablet PCs, are on the verge of becoming the standard lifestyle, business, training and communication gadget of our main target groups, namely young learners, professional language learners, university students and trainees. Language learning should adapt and could more and more profit from the opportunities this technology offers to all, not least to students with special learning requirements such as visual or other physical impairments, as these devices also offer accessibility features and are increasingly popular with blind and visually impaired people.

Last but not least, a computer-based language course that can easily be used by sighted AND visually impaired students, is not only innovative, but also an important step towards inclusion and language learning for all.